Tikkun

POLITICS • SPIRITUALITY • CULTURE

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SPRING 2016

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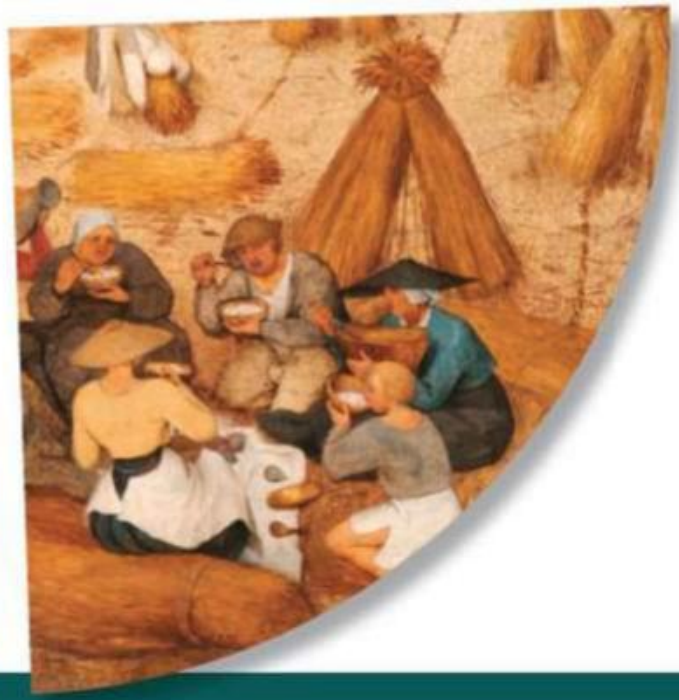
FOOD POLITICS



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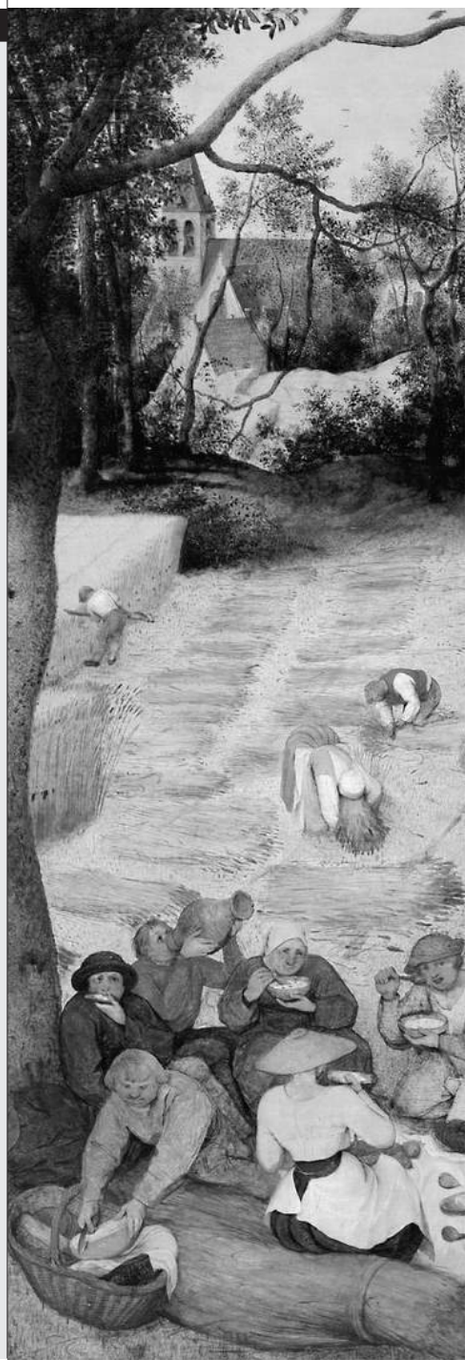

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Tikkun is not just a print magazine—visit our blog at tikkun.org/daily and our web magazine at tikkun.org. Each has content not found here. Our online magazine is an exciting supplement to the print magazine, and the daily blog brings in a range of voices and perspectives.

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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.

CONGRATS TO *TIKKUN*

Thanks in part to the efforts of *Tikkun*, other Jewish progressives, and—to be sure—many others, AIPAC endured an unexpected defeat. More significantly: the world is somewhat safer due to the negotiations with Iran. If all goes according to plan, nuclear proliferation will be curtailed for a decade or more. Critics of the deal are not clear on alternatives: war advocated by some Lukidniks and our domestic hawks might well have proved catastrophic for all involved.

Unfortunately, the jeremiads of nuclear abolitionists are ignored regardless of their prestige and credibility. In his last public speech at Brown University, McNamara advocated for abolition. And General Lee Butler, former Supreme Commander of the Supreme Air Command, became an abolitionist.

This victory shows what those of us on the margins can do—with a little help from our friends.

—Ron Hirschbein, *Chico, CA*

TRANSFORM THE LAW

I was pleased to see two discussions of restorative justice in the Summer 2015 issue of *Tikkun*: in Peter Gabel's visionary essay, "The Spiritual Dimension of Social Justice: Transforming the Legal Arena," and in Al Hunter's reviews of two new books on prison abolition. Restorative justice has played a major role in transforming the criminal justice system in countries such as New Zealand, and it is making an impact in jurisdictions throughout the US. But it is more than just an alternative approach to crime and punishment. Restorative Justice is an international movement for social transformation.

Embracing this paradigm shift is particularly important in America's urban centers where the widespread disenfranchisement and despair wrought by mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline is most keenly felt.

There are networks and coalitions of restorative practitioners and supporters working tirelessly in states and cities across the country to build broad-based support for restorative practices. The Restorative Justice Initiative in New York is among them. By linking the restorative justice movement to more visible movements for education and criminal justice reform, we will begin to see substantive change. All successful social movements embrace a variety of tactics and strategies, but there is no substitute for the mutual recognition, empathy, and healing that can result from face-to-face dialogue. This is the unique contribution of restorative justice.

—Mika Dashman, Lead Organizer, Restorative Justice Initiative, *Brooklyn, NY*

I would like to respond to the wonderful article by Peter Gabel called "The Spiritual Dimension of Social Justice: Transforming the Legal Arena" in your summer 2015 issue. For many years I have been working with the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA) to promote the study, dissemination, and ratification of the Constitution for the Federation of Earth, and am currently president of the WCPA.

Peter Gabel's analysis for the framework of our legal institutions in this country is very much on the mark. The historically "liberal" assumptions that inform the US Constitution and our legal system derive from certain seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social contract thinkers like John Locke who assumed that we are isolated individuals following our self-interest with individual a priori rights vis-à-vis one another and the government that we create to protect those rights.

As Gabel points out, the consequences of these assumptions influence criminal law, tort law, contract law, and property law to the point where the law itself militates against establishing loving and harmonious communities. In such communities, people who break the law are not alienated and ostracized but brought back into the community through compassionate mediation, loving restitution, and the embrace of a larger social justice framework. The social contracts in which we participate, and through which we place people in power to promote social justice and the common good, should not be contracts of isolated individuals defending a priori rights competitively and antagonistically, but rather social communities in which people need to cooperate economically, politically, legally, and culturally to live together in harmony and freedom.

The prophets declared that we are commanded to establish God's reign upon the earth. We need the vision of a "practical utopia" as a guide toward that divinely inspired end. The Constitution for the Federation of Earth envisions a planetary justice-as-love correcting that which revolts against love. Let us affirm the "spiritual dimension of social justice" for our entire planet. The success of "transforming the legal arena" within the US is fundamentally linked to our capacity to transform the legal arena for the earth. It will be "one world or none," as philosopher Errol E. Harris declared. If we do not create "one world," it is likely that we will have none.

—Glen T. Martin, President, World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA); Professor of Philosophy, Radford University, *Radford, VA*

*Editor's note: To read the full text of this letter and other responses written in reaction to Peter Gabel's article, visit tikkun.org/gabel.

DE RIGUEUR

In stark disagreement with my conclusions, Rami Shapiro characterizes Nancy Abrams' book as "rigorously scientific." Shapiro notes

MORE LETTERS

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that, "the God that Nancy Abrams found is different" from the host of imagined Gods on which people project what they desire or need. Abrams' God is not an "echo of desire" but a "necessary condition of an evolving universe."

What puzzles me is that no scientific theory has said, or can say, that God is a necessary condition of the universe. So, whether Abrams means God has been found to be the necessary condition or that the necessary condition *ought* to be called "God," neither statement is scientific.

—Alan Soffin, *Doylestown, PA*

Tikkun magazine is . . .

. . . a vehicle for spreading a new consciousness. We call it a spiritual progressive worldview. But what is that?

What Do You Mean by "Spiritual"?

You can be spiritual and still be an atheist or agnostic. To be spiritual, you don't have to believe in God or accept New Age versions of spirituality. You don't need to give up science or your critical faculties. We use the word "spiritual" to describe all aspects of reality that cannot be subject to empirical verification or measurement: everything pertaining to ethics, aesthetics, music, art, philosophy, religion, poetry, literature, dance, love, generosity, and joy. We reject the notion that everything worthy of consideration to guide our personal lives and our economic and political arrangements must be measurable.

What's a Spiritual Progressive?

To be a spiritual progressive is to agree that our public institutions, corporations, government policies, laws, education system, health care system, legal system, and even many aspects of our personal lives should be judged "efficient, rational, or productive" to the extent that they maximize love, caring, generosity, and ethical and environmentally sustainable behavior. We call this our New Bottom Line.

Spiritual progressives seek to build "The Caring Society: Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth." Our well-being depends upon the well-being of everyone else and also on the well-being of the planet itself. So we commit to an ethos of generosity, nonviolence, and radical amazement at the grandeur of all that is, and seek to build a global awareness of the unity of all being.

If you are willing to help promote this New Bottom Line for our society, you are a spiritual progressive. And if you are a spiritual progressive, we invite you to join our Network of Spiritual Progressives at spiritualprogressives.org.

Tikkun

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EDITOR-AT-LARGE Peter Gabel
ART DIRECTION Olivia Wise
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Gil Anidjar, Bradley Shavit Artson, David Biale, Paul Buhle, Aryeh Cohen, Arnold Eisen, Jill Goldberg, Roger S. Gottlieb, Josh Healey, Deborah Kory, Mark LeVine, Ana Levy-Lyons, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, Or Rose, Aaron Hahn Tapper, Phil Wolfson, Cat Zavis, Stephen Zunes

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NETWORK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVES
Cat J. Zavis

INTERNS AND EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS
Abby Madan, Andrew Petonak, Yeshe Salz, and Martha Woolverton, (editorial); Aram Kamali and Kristin McCandless (web); and Arif Qazi (art).

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Leila Shooshani at 510-644-1200 or leila@tikkun.org

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Obama Says to Fight ISIS with Ideas

In a speech to the United Nations on September 29, 2015, President Obama acknowledged that military pressures will be insufficient to beat ISIS (also known as Daesh, ISIL, or the Islamic State): "Ideologies are not defeated with guns. They are defeated by better ideas—a more attractive and compelling vision."

Unfortunately neither Obama nor any other Western leader has such a vision. They can't allow themselves to understand that the selfishness and materialism built into the neoliberal worldview and embedded in the daily practices of global capitalism are precisely what people are protesting when they move toward various forms of religious or nationalist fundamentalisms.

The only way to defeat these fundamentalisms is to create what we at *Tikkun*'s Network of Spiritual Progressives call the Caring Society: Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth. This isn't just a slogan, but a movement for building that reality. You can't fight the longing for higher meaning and purpose in life, or the desire for community and connection. Many of these fundamentalist communities not only talk about these needs, but actually deliver—though only for their own members. Yet, this higher meaning and purpose is specifically ignored when politicians talk about "equal opportunity to compete in the competitive marketplace" in a capitalist-shaped world in which a fractional percentage of the population owns a vastly disproportionate amount of the wealth and is wrecking the environment to accumulate yet more wealth. These are not the values of the Caring Society, and they cannot possibly appeal to people around the world who have already experienced the emotional, spiritual, and economic devastation this marketplace delivers.

The first steps toward overcoming capitalist values would be for Obama or the next US President to convince the people of the United States that "homeland security" is best achieved through generosity rather than domination, and then to convert the military into an adjunct and nonviolent overseer of a Global Marshall Plan (you can find and share details of our plan by downloading the full brochure at www.tikkun.org/gmp). When Western societies are viewed as caring more about human well-being and environmental sanity than about accumulating wealth and power for their corporations and richest individuals, we will have a leg to stand on in the ideological battle against the Islamic State, which is horrendously cruel to outsiders. In this contest, we want the West to win, but that will happen only if the West goes through a monumental process of *tikkun* (healing and transformation) of its economic and political institutions in accord with our proposed New Bottom Line (www.tikkun.org/covenant). We urge those who seek a caring society to join our movement.

Safety through Generosity

After ISIS bombings in Paris, Beirut, and Baghdad, many of us rightly feel the need to take steps to protect ourselves, our neighbors, and our country from extremist violence. Barring refugees is not a reasonable step, but performing security background checks is. Having security guards ask people to reveal their backpacks or briefcases before entering public spaces where many people gather and using metal and bomb detectors in those places are reasonable steps; invasive body searches are not. But it is an illusion to think that we can fully protect ourselves from people determined to cause harm, as the Israelis learned this past fall, when Palestinians stabbed Israeli civilians at random in an outbreak of despair at the continuing harassment and oppression they face living under the Occupation.

Yet historically, whenever people become focused on these short-term steps, they almost always lose sight of the underlying problems—in this case, our own role in creating or sustaining a global system of oppression. This role is not limited to the US-led destruction of Iraq's national infrastructure or the failure to support the nonviolent opposition to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. Nor can US oppression be reduced to simply the torture centers we've operated. It also includes the seemingly endless humiliation we've brought on people whose communities of meaning and purpose have been undermined by the selfishness and materialism that our global capitalist system brings to traditional societies, as well as the economic and environmental devastation that capitalist globalization requires for "development."

So here are four things that the West could do to change all this:

1. Adopt the Global Marshall Plan to end global and domestic poverty, homelessness, and inadequate health care and education, and clean up the environmental destruction generated by

150 years of reckless industrialization in capitalist, socialist, and communist countries. Implement the plan with full commitment to replacing the current strategy of domination with a new commitment to the strategy of generosity, and make sure that we give adequate resources to training everyone involved. Make sure that all teachers and education workers in our schools feel supported by a new spirit of open-hearted love and that they understand their important part in implementing the Caring Society.

2. Adopt the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the US Constitution (ESRA), which would ban all monies, except public funding, from state and federal elections, and would require corporations with incomes over 50 million dollars to prove to a jury of ordinary citizens every five years that they have been operating with a satisfactory record of social and environmental responsibility. This jury would receive information and testimony from people all around the world whose lives have been affected by the operations of corporations seeking renewals of their charters.

3. Adopt the *biblical jubilee* so that every fifty years all wealth is returned to a roughly equal distribution for everyone on the planet.

4. Adopt the *biblical sabbatical* year so that the vast majority of people would have a full year each seventh calendar year in which they would not have to work and would still receive adequate food, health care, and basic necessities; at the same time, give the 10 percent of the population that might still need to work to provide those necessities a year and a half of paid leisure during the other six years, on a rotating basis. If we begin the jubilee in 2017 and try this approach for twenty-five years, we'll quickly see a dramatic decline in the popularity or support given to extremist groups inclined to violence.

Unlikely to happen? Not as unlikely as the notion that the various measures of militarism, restrictions to our freedoms, and repression of those we suspect of being potential terrorists will provide us with effective protection from the fanatics. ■

Adapting to the Climate Crisis

Although the media and political leaders want to pretend that what came out of the Paris climate talks is a huge advance, those with more understanding of the actual realities of the environmental crisis facing the human race realize that those steps seem visionary only in comparison with what has been deemed realistic in the past, but not when compared with what actually must be done to prevent global catastrophe by 2070 or 2080. This point is argued well by Steven E. Koonin, director of the Center for Urban Science at New York University and former Department of Energy undersecretary for science during Obama's first term. Sadly, Koonin and others also argue for learning to adapt to this reality rather than heading it off, offering only scant acknowledgment of the human disaster they appear willing to accept. This adaption may mean climate wars, military measures to keep tens of millions of displaced climate refugees from coming to the United States, and widespread misery elsewhere. No doubt, we will see the rise of fascistic military- and police-state tactics in the United States, implemented to protect the gated communities of the rich from the outrage of the suffering masses.

A better alternative would be to stop the madness of relying on fossil fuels, diminish the huge amounts of waste created by the competitive market societies (including China and others in the global East and South that are rushing to develop the same capitalist-style consumption and production that has been so environmentally destructive), and create a global economic and political system that gives equal priority to the well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants. Viewed in light of this goal, our proposed Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the US Constitution (ESRA, www.tikkun.org/esra) looks more like a modest first step than a utopian fantasy dismissed by political "realists." Actually, the real utopians are those that think we can continue going in the direction we're heading with only the paltry objectives outlined in the Paris agreements to protect the well-being of the human race in the coming decades. They suffer from delusion after delusion after delusion. ■

The Empathy Tribe

What a Spiritual Progressive Approach to Israel/Palestine Might Look Like

No lasting peace will be possible between Israel and Palestine until there is a dramatic change of consciousness comparable in depth to the kind of change that took place in the United States as segregation was dismantled; as the women's movement put patriarchy on the defensive and dismantled many (but not all) aspects of sexist oppression that predominated for 10,000 years in much of Western society; or, more recently in the United States, as the LGBTQ movement fought to achieve marriage equality—all changes that were dismissed as "unrealistic" in the first decades of those struggles. A similar change of consciousness in Israel-Palestine will require a strategy of nonviolence, compassion, and empathy.

Such a strategy requires the development of a powerful movement that at once critiques both the Israelis and the Palestinians, and at the same time tries to convince each side that it is through generosity toward the other that something might change. Each side, of course, will tell you that they've already tried this approach and that it didn't work. In this, both sides are deluded, and they can be taught to see things differently.

Rabbi Arik Ascherman of Rabbis for Human Rights, who campaigns to stop demolitions in the West Bank.

Palestinian violence toward Jewish settlers did not start in 1967 or even in 1948. It was there from almost the start, when Zionist settlers began arriving in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and was mobilized more fully by the Mufti of Jerusalem in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as by other nationalist and fundamentalist extremists. Likewise, Jewish violence against Palestinians did not begin with the conquest of the West Bank, but was already present in the expulsion of some Palestinians from their land in the 1920s and 1930s. Jewish violence became a major factor in the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem from 1947 to 1949. Neither side has clean hands, and we who seek peace must be able to critique both sides, even as we assure both sides that a satisfactory mutual peace agreement is possible.

Yet none of this can even begin to be heard until we approach those with whom we disagree—on both sides—with a spirit of generosity, a commitment to nonviolence, and a strategy of compassion and empathy: everyone must feel that they are being heard. We need to train a massive force of empathic and compassionate activists, people from around the world who can begin to teach such skills to both Palestinians and Israelis. But since they are likely to be blocked from entering Israel-Palestine in large numbers once the Israeli Right understands our strategy, Israelis and Palestinians themselves must also seek this kind of training.

Let's call this united set of activists the Empathy Tribe. The Empathy Tribe must be built in Israel and Palestine, and in every country where peace-oriented people are willing to become ambassadors for reconciliation in Israel and Palestine. It must also arise from the many supporters of Israel or Palestine in the lands of their dispersion around the globe. And this approach will have to include, for those of us who support the Israeli peace movement and oppose the policies of many of the settlers and of the Israeli Right, the very difficult path of developing empathy for the Right and for the settlers, even as we oppose their policies. Some of this work is already being done by the Parents Circle-Families Forum, by Mubarak Awad and the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence, and by several other groups. But to work with millions of Israelis and Palestinians, the Empathy Tribe needs to train thousands of people for this essential work.

Eoghan Rice, Trocaire / Wikimedia Commons

Progressive Thought in Action

An example of this kind of thinking was exhibited in Israel this past October 2015 by Rabbi Arik Ascherman, the president of Rabbis for Human Rights in Jerusalem. Arik was among a group of peace-oriented Israelis trying to protect Palestinian land from a group of Jewish settlers who sought to steal olives from Palestinian land and burn Palestinian trees. Rabbi Ascherman was assaulted by one of these Israelis who kicked him, threw rocks, and drew a knife. The incident was captured on video and shown on the website of the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. The Israeli attacker was in position to kill, with his knife raised, ready to plunge it into Ascherman. But he didn't. Instead, he got up and ran away.

Here is what Rabbi Ascherman wrote about this moment:

> I would like to think that this moment in which my attacker was an instant away from becoming a murderer caused him to ask himself how he came to be on a hilltop in the occupied territories, so angry that the Israeli army had protected Palestinian farmers harvesting their olives, that he was driven to lash out.
>
> I hope he has spoken with his fellow "hilltop youth," explaining his change of heart. Perhaps his *teshuvah* [repentance] will have ripple effects reaching the communities that cultivate extremism, those who look the other way or "understand" them, and all those who have turned our shared belief in the sacredness of the Land of Israel into idolatry by raising it above all other values.
>
> We founded Israel correctly vowing "never again." We must have the power to ensure that Jews will never again be helplessly slaughtered and persecuted, as we had been for 2,000 years of statelessness. There are still those who would "throw us into the sea" if they could. We are not yet in a messianic age in which the Jewish people can survive without power . . .
>
> We should never, even once, oppress others as we were oppressed (Exod. 23:9). We now exploit our power to take from others. The Midrash teaches us that the hand that strikes the non-Jew will eventually strike the Jew as well. The violence against me is the inevitable outcome of the civilian and state violence directed at Palestinians on a daily basis. "The sword comes into the world because of justice denied and justice delayed" (Pirkei Avot). Our sages didn't justify the sword, but understood that injustice brings it upon us.
>
> We could pin all the blame on the handful of settlers who are extremely violent and the larger settlement community that fosters them and turns a blind eye. However, all of Israeli society has to engage in soul-searching. Too often even Israelis who oppose settlements act towards the lawless and violent culture that has sprung up with equanimity, resignation, a polite "Isn't it terrible," or the feeling that extremists must be appeased in order to hold Israeli society together.

This way of thinking and acting by Rabbi Ascherman is a manifestation of what we mean by a path of nonviolence, compassion, and empathy. It is not passivity, but an insistence that we put ourselves in the mind of others, to see what might be motivating them. So join our Network of Spiritual Progressives at spiritualprogressives.org/join and help us develop an Empathy Tribe (we also want to invite JStreet, Jewish Voice for Peace, and other organizations aimed at peace and justice in the Middle East to offer similar trainings to their members).

Transformation could take decades. But it could happen much more quickly than any of us might imagine, the way marriage equality suddenly became possible, once we have a large and effective Empathy Tribe working in Israel, Palestine, and the countries to which they have been dispersed—including the Palestinian refugee camps.

The details of a peace agreement are more likely to become relevant and not simply be dismissed as utopian fantasy once the Empathy Tribe has made serious inroads toward transforming consciousness in Israel, in Palestine, and among their respective diasporas. Our *Tikkun* plan for a two-state solution is presented in my book *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, which you can order at www.tikkun.org/eip. I've also outlined the plan in a shorter form in my essay in *Tikkun*'s Winter 2014 issue—subscribers and current members of the NSP have access to our online archives, where they can read past issues. Please let us know if you encounter any problems, including forgetting your username or password for reading *Tikkun* articles online. Simply contact leila@tikkun.org with your questions.

Meanwhile, 2016 marks our thirtieth anniversary. Please log on to www.tikkun.org where you will find information about how to celebrate with us. ■

Arif Qazi / cargocollective.com\arifqazi

Among the various movements for social justice today, few struggles are as complex and intersectional as the new food movement. The climate crisis, rising economic inequality, and the neoliberal political agenda known as "free trade" have led progressives to scrutinize the production and consumption of food as never before. From opposition to factory farms led by animal-rights and environmental activists to the return of local farmers' markets in communities across the United States, contemporary food politics have become an inspirational model for progressive change, even as food safety, poverty and hunger, lax regulations, and the environmental impacts of corporate agriculture continue to pose new challenges.

Tikkun has convened a forum on Food Politics that take stock of the successes and dangers of contemporary food politics. The essays that follow touch on Jewish veganism, indigenous peoples' resistance to big agribusiness, the hidden externalities of low food prices, the sexual politics of meat, and much more. We received many more responses to our call for critical thought on the food movement than we were able to publish in these pages. The forum continues online at tikkun.org/food. ■

Two Stories about American Food

BY JOHN BRUEGGEMANN

Toast or cereal? Pop-Tarts or fruit? Every day starts with a decision. For a few at the crossroads of history, like Rosa Parks, a single action is defining. For the rest of us, life is comprised of numerous little decisions that add up to something significant. Culture is constituted both by rare, big choices and common, ordinary activities. Either way, we all play a part in constructing society. And for that reason, the way we start each day matters.

Each meal is a moral statement. What other elemental, biological act involves such a public expression about ourselves and our relationship with the world? What we put in our mouths literally shapes who we are. We are *what* we eat. But we are also *how* we eat: the content and process of our consumption help define us.

Eating recklessly has consequences. But consuming consciously is no simple matter. Issues of health, nutrition, sustainability, labor, politics, profits, availability, affordability, taste, and religious observance together constitute a kind of culinary maze that has become known as *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. The title of Michael Pollan's excellent book highlights one part of the problem.

We members of a species that can eat many different plants and animals have enormous flexibility that constitutes an internal dilemma. But the external context is highly varied for humans: some who live in abundance have too many choices; some who live in scarcity have too few.

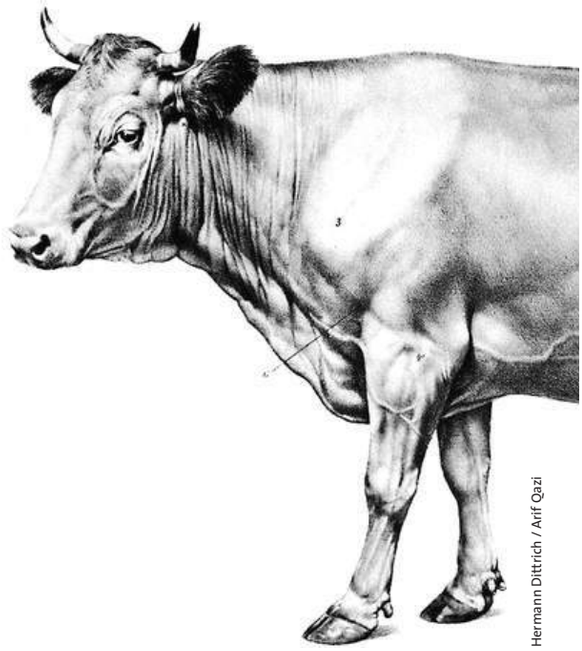
With that in mind, there are two stories about food worth pondering: one ugly and one beautiful. The ugly story is old, familiar, and powerful. The beautiful one is new, fresh, and inconclusive. For a lot of us, these two stories are in tension. But we must decide which will guide us through the moral maze of eating.

The Ugly Story

First, the ugly one. The logic of the capitalist market has pushed beyond the appropriate boundaries of the economic sphere to every part of society. There is little time when Americans are not thinking about their jobs, paychecks, portfolios, shopping, or consumption. The result for some is abundance, which leads to other kinds of less acknowledged problems, including workaholism, overscheduling, anxiety, stress, marital disruption, narcissism, and waste. For others, this expansive market culture results in familiar problems of scarcity, which ripple throughout their lives. Recent research suggests that material scarcity involves such a heavy psychological burden that it generally leads to intellectual and emotional scarcity. Ironically, in the most prosperous country in human history—one that produces and consumes more calories than we collectively need—some 49 million Americans do not have a reliable source of healthy food, let alone abundant options.

The ugly story is constantly polished for our consumption. We are inundated by the efforts of savvy advertisers who know that reaching young people is a winning strategy. American children annually view some 40,000 advertisements, Juliet Schor estimates in *Born to Buy*, and the average first grader can identify 200 brands. It works. "I love Pillsbury!" my daughter exclaimed when she was seven. Although generally a healthy eater, this bright kid, who is now twelve, remains a devoted disciple of the doughboy.

Children in low-income families face the same consumer pressures as affluent kids. In the absence of fresh produce or



Hermann Dittrich / Arif Qazi

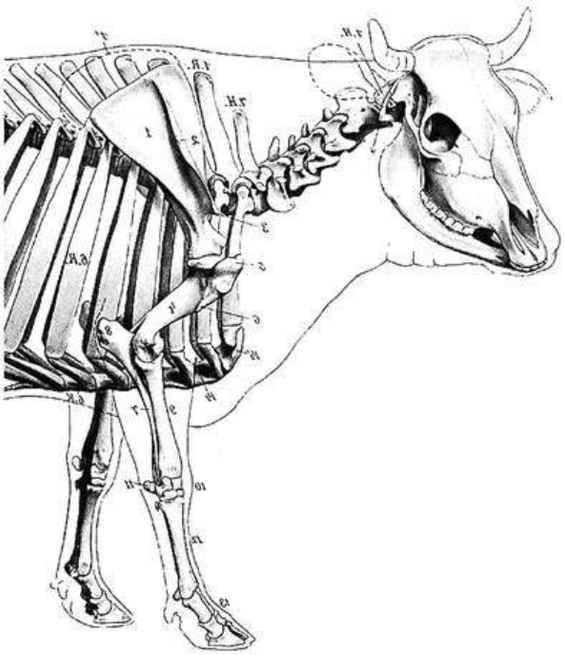
JOHN BRUEGGEMANN teaches sociology at Skidmore College. He is the author of *Rich, Free, and Miserable* and is currently working on a book with his father, Walter Brueggeman, entitled *Social Relationships in Ancient Scripture and Contemporary Culture.*

sound medical care, however, the effects of such pressures related to food are inordinately damaging—not least because the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly described as "food stamps") was reduced by some $8 billion through the Agricultural Act of 2014. This same Farm Bill continues the longstanding corn subsidies that brought us high-fructose corn syrup and other processed foods that contribute to our nation's obesity epidemic.

In the ugly story, the value of food is based on whether you can get people to buy it, not whether it serves a human need for nutrition, or even taste. "Those on the left backed by NGOs will say that access to air is a human right," Nestlé CEO Peter Brabeck declared in a moment of candor. "However, oxygen is just like anything else. It's a commodity. People want it. And a market value should be ascribed to it."

This logic is partly how we ended up with beef from corn-fed cattle—the production is environmentally harmful and the consumption is nutritionally dubious. The ultimate problem with this ambitious form of runaway commodification is that it puts a price tag on human beings. If you have no value—no capacity to buy or sell—then you are not worthy of investment.

Since it is not easy to put a price on an empty stomach or contaminated air, these things don't matter. So it's not surprising that, as Natasha Gilbert reported in *Nature*, recent research indicates that the global food system is responsible for as much as a third of all human-induced greenhouse gas emissions. Our consumption thus contributes to extreme weather patterns, including heat waves, storm surges, and other effects that are deleterious for a broad range of species, including humans.



The Beautiful Story

That is the ugly story. But there is another story, a beautiful one. Every once in a while, seemingly against all odds, good things happen. What can I do? How can I help? How can I make a difference? These are questions I hear all the time from students in my classes, parishoners in my church, and neighbors in my community.

In the actual history of making a difference, someone always started with one of these simple questions. And the asking was sometimes contagious, as it has been for me. As a result, I recently found myself standing somewhere I never thought I would be: the organic section of the grocery store.

I grew up in a family energized by conversation and social justice. But we never talked about the value of animals or the viability of natural resources. Like most American families, we weren't concerned with where our food came from. Yet somehow, during the last decade, I became more aware of how people, plants, animals, air, water, and the sun are all connected. Hence my arrival in the organic section.

And I wasn't alone. Lots of other Americans—some enlightened for much longer than suburban latecomers like myself—developed this same consciousness. Some are just pragmatic. We don't want to eat garbage. Health and taste matter.

It didn't just *happen*, though. This young social movement has been led by prophetic voices like Pollan, Wendell Berry, Bill McKibben, and Andrew Weil. And it has been advanced by other social movements (including the environmental, consumers' rights, children's rights, vegetarian, and labor movements), health organizations, schools, religious organizations, and other nonprofits. Although this story is still being written, its substantial momentum is unmistakable. Analytical evidence throughout our economy indicates that the market is responding in all three phases: production, distribution, and consumption.

Shifts in Production

Even among the big guys, production is shifting toward more responsible processes. Organic food sales have leaped from under $3 billion in the early '90s to nearly $40 billion in 2014. What "organic" really means with respect to bureaucratic regulations, manipulative marketing, and corporate dissembling, is complicated. But at the very least, the symbolism indicates that certain ideals used to apply pressure—by consumers and the social movements that inform and motivate them—matter. Organic production involves a concern for the long-term well-being of natural resources and the communities they feed.

More significant is the move toward local sourcing. The USDA reports that the number of locally oriented farms grew by 17 percent between 2002 and 2007, and another 5.5 percent between 2007 and 2012. Community gardens and

urban gardening are on the rise, too. Local enterprises use less fossil fuels for transportation and are more accountable to those who buy their products. It's hard to imagine producers selling toxic products to their neighbors and staying in business for long.

New and Revived Modes of Distribution

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is an ancient concept. Tribal cultures often had a certain division of labor which involved shared resources, bartering, and reverence for their agricultural practices and rituals. In the United States, the first modern CSA organizations were started in the 1980s. Today there are thousands.

Farm-to-table programs are also growing in schools. The USDA reports that in 2011-2012, about 40 percent of American schools had such a program. This new form of distribution affects production by drawing from farms that generate fresh foods, and it changes consumption habits by improving students' choices. It provides the most basic foundation for learning—a stomach full of nutritious food—and thereby represents a powerful response to the devastating effects of food insecurity. It's not a comprehensive solution, but a meaningful intervention.

Farmers' markets are also proliferating. The USDA's directory of self-reported listings numbered 1,755 in 1994. By 2013, that figure had reached 8,144. A precise count is difficult, because the definition of a farmers' market is evolving. Does the vendor have to be a farmer? Does the product have to be organic? Local? What is local? What do you do about nonorganic farmers, local potters, or nonlocal fish mongers? What role do other stakeholders in the community have in shaping their farmers' market? What does a local, grassroots farmers' market do about corporate farmers' market chains setting up shop nearby? How do people who know about soil, weather, crops, and livestock negotiate all these questions? None of this is easy, but it reflects something central to the beautiful story: these thorny questions result from communities' active concern for their natural and human resources.

These new (or in some ways old) forms of distribution represent a triumph of the neighborhood. CSA relies on a transaction among neighbors who are accountable to one another. Mobile food providers bring nourishment to food deserts. Farmers' markets involve a new sense of the commons: our land, our market, and our relationships. In this sense, every time the opening bell rings at 9:00 AM on Saturday morning in my town's farmers' market, something subversive and empowering unfolds. For people who find it easier to envision the end of the world than reigning in corporate power, this is big.

Changing Patterns of Consumption

Nutrition scientists keep tabs on the Alternative Healthy Eating Index (AHEI), an aggregate measure of how healthy our population's diet is. Research now shows that the AHEI is actually improving. We are eating less fat and sugar, and more grains and vegetables. This is predominantly true for affluent families who have the time and money to devote to such concerns. Like wealth, the distribution of healthy calories is intensely unequal, which is why the obesity epidemic is getting worse at the same time.

But the concern for healthier consumption is spreading. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that daily consumption of soda by children in Philadelphia dropped some 24 percent between 2007 and 2013. What are they drinking instead? Good old water. In response to this concern for healthier consumption, fast food chains are making forays into healthy foods. Inroads made by Chipotle and other restaurants with healthier and more environmentally sound ingredients are reshaping the market.

Don't get me wrong. Agribusiness and food corporations command vast resources and are not about to disappear. But if I were an executive at McDonald's, I would worry about parallels between Big Macs, seat belts, and cigarettes. For a long time, safety didn't matter. And then it did.

Change Through *Possibilism*

The dominant tale of our time, the ugly story, is biased in favor of market-based themes of efficiency, profit, consumption, individualism, competition, and short-term thinking. The alternative narrative, the beautiful story, entails the resurgence of different moral aspirations: a concern for meaning, need, creation, community, cooperation, and long-term thinking.

Meaning is made by neighbors involved in new forms of distribution, as their transactions encompass nonmonetary relations and mutual concern. *Need* is addressed through farm-to-food programs in schools as well as urban agriculture, community gardens, cooperatives, and other innovative programs. *Creation* becomes an intimate encounter for anyone who puts their hands in the earth or pays close attention to where their food comes from. *Cooperation* is unavoidable for any group devoted to protecting its natural and human resources. Likewise, *long-term thinking* is evident in any expression of stewardship.

These values are not categorically correct compared to the market-based themes. It is a matter of balance. The beautiful story is about a growing concern for such balance and doing what we can to achieve it in each decision—and at every meal.

The desire to effect progressive change is often bound to an aspiration for comprehensive transformation, not a change *in* the system but a change *of* (*continued on page 64*)

BRUEGGEMANN *(continued from page 12)*

the system. Nibbling on the edges, according to this radical view, only protects the status quo. Genuine change requires a break from the past. Anything less is probably selling out and is doomed to failure. In advanced capitalist countries, this suspicion is of course resonant because the establishment has a remarkable capacity for absorbing, co-opting, and even profiting from attempts to reform.

However, the problems with "ruptural transformation," as Erik Olin Wright calls it, are substantial. For starters, the historical record of social revolution is covered in blood and full of unintended consequences. In addition, our current moment reveals little indication of social movement activity that is sufficiently radicalized to affect total system change. Needless to say, an ambitious, countercultural narrative for social change must be nurtured. We have to be stewards of imagination. For some, however, including many of my colleagues in the academy, the failure to generate a cohesive and viable theory for such ambitious change has proven to be a rationale for standing on the sidelines.

So, what is the alternative? The current reframing of food politics in the West brings to mind what the polymath Albert O. Hirschman called "petites idées." They are, he explained, "small ideas, small pieces of knowledge. They do not stand in connection with any ideologies or worldviews, they do not claim to provide total knowledge of the world, they probably undermine the claims of all previous ideologies." They are feasible and promising, here and now.

After extensive experience in facing genuine challenges—including the horrors of Nazi Germany and failed efforts to foster development in Latin America—and a lifetime of reading widely, from Machiavelli to Marx, Hirschman was neither uninformed, naïve, nor disinterested. Over time, he became attracted to what he called "possibilism," which is "the right to a non-projected future."

A lot of what is going on in the sustainable food movement fits this bill and is comprised of small ideas. "Better than any argument," says Wendell Berry, "is to rise at dawn and pick dew-wet red berries in a cup." ■

CANTRELL *(continued from page 22)*

True Costs

The next time you see chicken breasts on sale for $2.99 per pound, perhaps you will recognize that the money you pay is merely the tip of the iceberg—the slaughterhouse worker with tendonitis and PTSD; the chicken whose miserable, short life was taken; and the community giving 300,000 gallons of water per day to the slaughterhouse paid the true price.

The ultimate irony is that the very people buying these "cheap" products will wind up footing the bill for externalized costs. Taxpayers underwrite billions of dollars in government subsidies that provide steeply discounted feed for animals on factory farms. While corn, soy, meat, and dairy are all subsidized, fruits and vegetables are deemed "specialty crops" that receive less than 3 percent of all federal subsidies. Thus, taxpayers are forced to fund a system that will cost them trillions of dollars in health care and environmental costs while ensuring that large parts of the population cannot afford or access healthy, sustainable foods.

Meanwhile, agribusinesses use their surplus profits to lobby the government to ensure that they will not have to pay for any of their externalized costs. In addition to politicians who vote according to the desires of big-ag trade groups, a "revolving door" exists at all levels of government—from factory farm managers sitting on state Boards of Agriculture, to former lobbyists for Monsanto and the Cattlemen's Association holding positions of power at the FDA and USDA. The results are often staggering regulation failures, such as factory farms' exemption from the Clean Air Act.

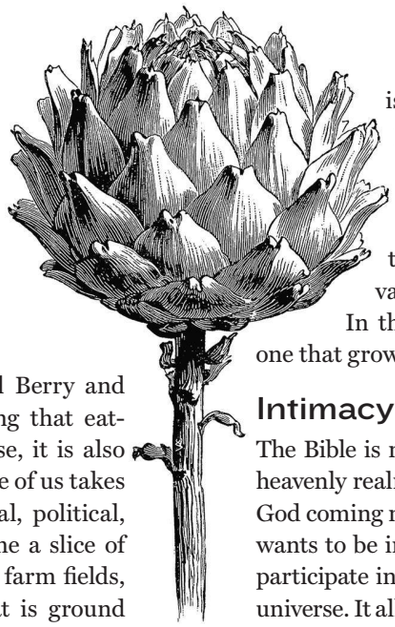
Some propose market-based solutions to the environmental crisis of our modern food system, such as a "sin tax" on meat or cap-and-trade regulation of methane gas from factory farms. Each of those plans has its own merits and drawbacks, but the unfortunate reality is that they are irrelevant in our current political system. Until we get money out of politics, it will be impossible to muster the political willpower to take on one of the most influential lobbies in the country.

So where does that leave us? It is certainly important to call your representative when the next Farm Bill negotiations roll around in 2017. Supporting legislation that limits the influence of corporations, such as the "Move to Amend" the Constitution to overturn corporate personhood and Citizens United, could eventually lead to a political system that works for the interests of people rather than those of corporations.

In the meantime, perhaps the most hopeful sign of change is the millions of dollars in venture capital now flowing to plant-based food start-ups. Innovative companies like Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods, Hampton Creek Foods, and New Harvest are striving to create the taste and texture of animal products without any of the animal suffering, cholesterol, manure runoff, or methane. As Hampton Creek Foods CEO, Josh Tetrick, says, "We just have to make it ridiculously easy for regular folks everywhere to do the right thing." By making plant-based foods accessible, delicious, and cheap, these companies might be able to circumvent political and regulatory gridlock to make factory farming obsolete. ■

Food Justice as God's Justice

BY NORMAN WIRZBA



Thanks to writers like Wendell Berry and Michael Pollan, people are learning that eating is an agricultural act. Of course, it is also more than that: the moment any one of us takes a bite, we also chew into ecological, social, political, and economic realities as well. To consume a slice of bruschetta is to be in touch with the soils, farm fields, and sunshine that produce the grain that is ground into flour. It is to taste the skill and sweat of those who grow and pick the basil and tomato, and to wonder if farmers and farmworkers are being paid a just wage. It is to savor the cheese that began its life in the soil, made its way through plants and cows and goats, and now has been warmed into the flavors that delight our taste buds. And if one believes that life is a gift and a miracle, it is to taste God as the source of life's animation and health. This means that eating is also, and ultimately, a deeply spiritual act.

Eating is so profound and all-encompassing because it takes us deeply and intimately into the world. I say "intimately" because with each bite we literally take the life and death of other beings into our bodies. This is both a wonderful and a terrifying thing. Eating brings us as near to another creature as is possible—so close that we become one flesh—while also bringing that creature's life to an end. And it's not just us. Everything that lives eats, which means that the whole world is a place of membership and intimacy, but also life and death. Which raises the question: How do we become worthy of receiving the life and death of the creatures that become our food? Or put a slightly different way, if eating is the embodied action of intimacy with other creatures, how do we stand before these creatures without shame? I ask this because one of the most helpful ways to talk about justice is to say that we are in just relation with others when we can stand before them without shame, knowing that in our action we have sought their well-being.

Today's dominant, industrial mode of food production is saturated with shame. Soils are pummeled with poison, plants are genetically designed to be infertile, animals are brutalized in confinement operations, farmworkers are often consigned to slave-like work conditions, minorities and the poor are deprived of access to nutritious food, unhealthy food is served and promoted to children, and people around the world are being subjected to diets that put corporate profits ahead of social and ecological well-being.

Do faith traditions have anything to say to this? I believe they do. Their responses are varied, and we have much to learn from them. In this short essay I will give one response—one that grows out of Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Intimacy with Creation

The Bible is not a manual for the soul's escape to some heavenly realm. It is instead an extended meditation on God coming near to be with creatures in this world. God wants to be intimate with this world so that all life can participate in the love that God is and that sustains the universe. It all begins in a garden where God is presented as the Essential Gardener who holds soil so close as to kiss it and breathe into it the life that creates people, plants, and animals. The first human is an earthling, *adam*, from *adamah* (the Hebrew word for soil), who is charged with taking care of the garden. This is important because it signals that humans are called to join with God in the nurture of all creatures. Doing so, they can learn what creative love requires (practically speaking), and that all life is precious. They can discover that savoring life requires that people learn the skills of attention, care, and celebration. Gardening is the foundational human vocation that puts people in the flow of God's gardening ways with the world.

This foundational story sets the stage for so much of what follows in the Bible. It signals, for instance, that one of the most important ways that God shows God's love for creatures is by feeding them. Food is not a commodity or a fuel. It is, instead, God's way of communicating something like, "Receive this food as an expression of my love for you." Food is God's love made nutritious and delicious. And the work of growing food is not a curse, but rather an ongoing invitation to explore and appreciate the mysteries and the blessings of life. The whole of the material world is God's love variously made visible, fragrant, auditory, tactile, and nutritious. There is not one element in it that is superfluous or unworthy of respect and care.

God's love for all creatures is further communicated when God establishes a covenant with them, promising that never again will creatures be destroyed by God (Gen. 9:9–10); it is expressed when God extends Sabbath rest to the land and its creatures (Lev. 25); and it is revealed in the prophetic promise to end the languishing of the earth and its creatures by creating a new heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17), a peaceable kingdom in which violence between creatures has come to an end (Isa. 11:1–9). These passages reinforce again and again

NORMAN WIRZBA is Professor of Theology and Ecology at Duke University's Divinity School. He is the author of several books, including *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* and *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World.*

Vilmorin Andrieux / Olivia Wise

that the flourishing of human life goes hand in hand with the flourishing of all creatures. It makes no sense, theologically speaking, to exempt people from caring for other creatures.

In the Christian scriptures, this trajectory continues with God proclaiming that, through the ministries of Jesus and in his self-offering life on the cross, "all things in heaven and on earth" are being reconciled (Col. 1:15–20). As the earliest Christian communities tried to make sense of Jesus, they realized that his significance extended to every creature in the universe. Jesus was not presented as the savior of individual souls, but as the one who brings nurture and healing and companionship to everyone and everything. In him, it was said, the whole universe holds together. And last, at scripture's end, we are presented a startling image of God descending to live among mortals (Rev. 21). There is no escape to another world. Instead there is the healing and redemption of all creation, because God's love now suffuses and animates everything that moves.

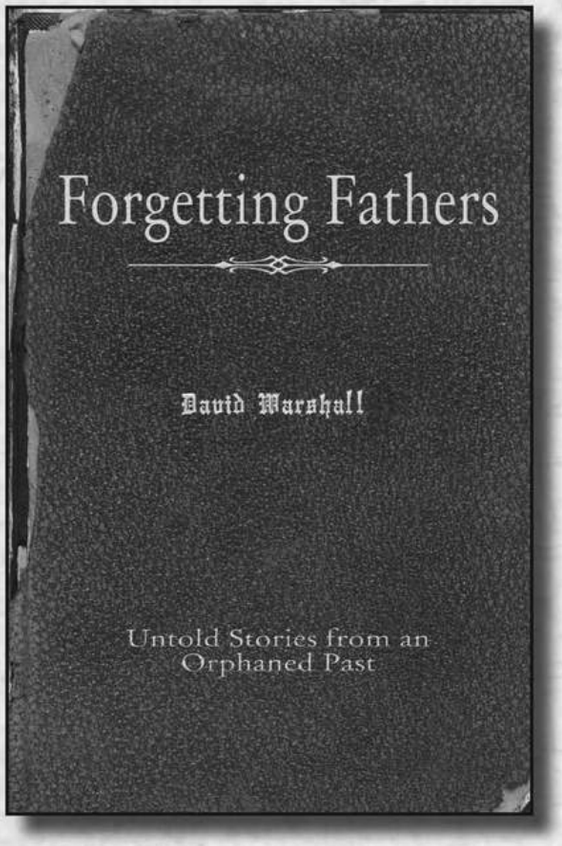
Love and Liberation

It is important to rehearse, however briefly, this biblical trajectory, because it is the basis upon which God's justice stands. God's justice is not confined to the human realm. It extends to the whole universe and is applicable to every creature. To live rightly before others and without shame is, therefore, to want to extend God's love to them, love that does not coerce but instead liberates them into the fullness of their lives. God's love is at root hospitable because it makes room for others to be welcomed, nurtured, and then empowered to realize all the potential that is uniquely theirs.

The growing, preparing, and sharing of food are among the most practical and regular ways in which people can discover and exercise this divine love. The question to constantly bear in mind is this: How does our growing of food, our gathering, distribution, preparation, and sharing of it bear witness to God's hospitable ways with all life? God's love goes to work when we cultivate soil by feeding it plant and animal manures rather than poison, and when we respect animals by enabling them to exercise their God-given traits and eat the food that is appropriate for their nutritional systems. God's love becomes manifest when the producers of food are valued as the workers who are closest to God's own gardening work in the world. And this love bears healthy fruit in lives that are fed nutritious food, food that enables them to live their lives with all the vigor that is uniquely theirs.

None of this is easy, especially when we recognize that to live we must consume the lives of others. All creatures must. Our only option is to figure out ways to do this mercifully and with grace and gratitude. And the way to do that is to stop reducing food to a commodity that is strictly subject to market demands for low cost, convenience, and maximum yield. Going forward, it is crucial that we name and remember food for what it really is: a precious gift, the embodiment of God's love, meant to be cherished and shared. ■

An eloquent personal reflection on the fascination of family history and the desire to both discover and escape origins.



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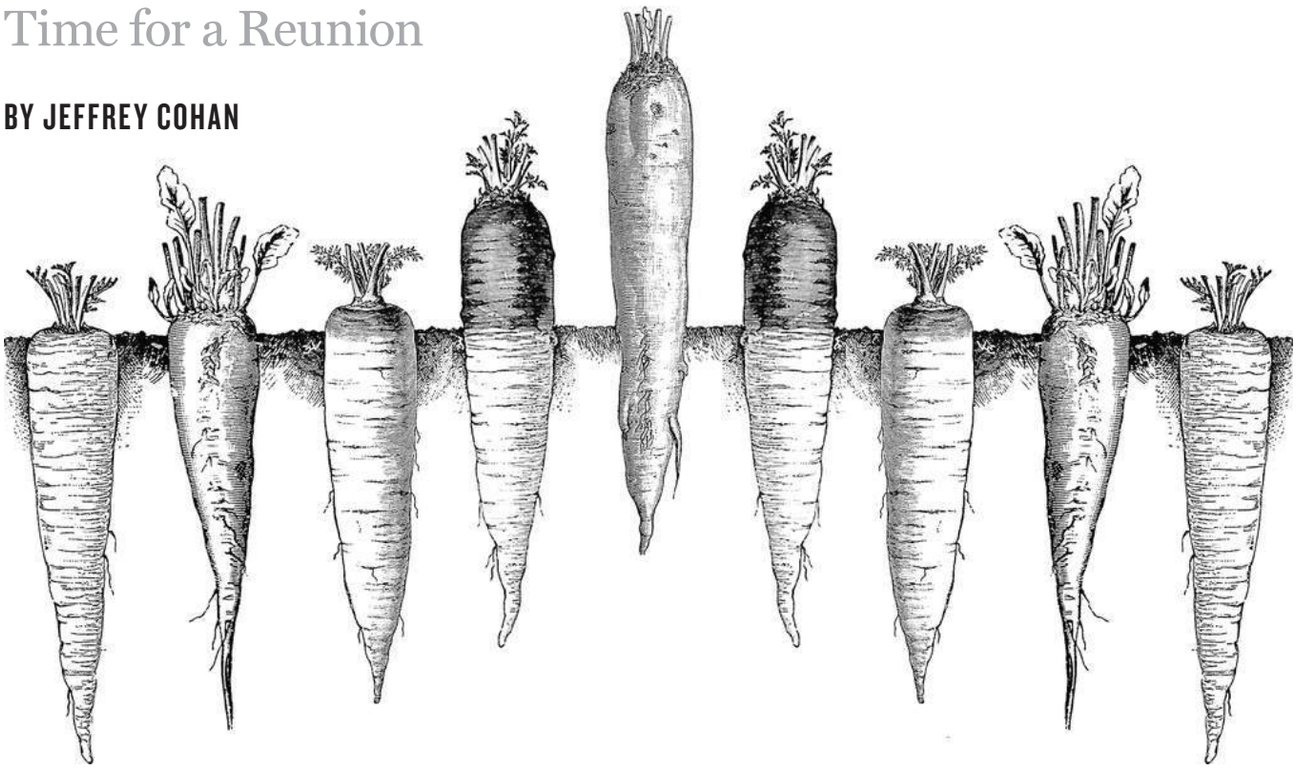
Judaism and Veganism

Time for a Reunion

BY JEFFREY COHAN



A DIVINITY STUDENT from a Presbyterian seminary approached me one day and made a surprising comment. "I'm so impressed," he said, "with the emphasis that Judaism places on treating animals with compassion."

I didn't know whether to *kvell* (feel pride) or to cry. *Kvell*, because all levels of Jewish texts, from the Torah on down, express incredible sensitivity for the welfare of animals. The divinity student knew something about Judaism—on paper. Cry, because concern for animals is almost totally absent from Jewish communal discourse, while literally billions of farm animals are suffering in abysmal conditions.

We have a Torah that clearly and repeatedly establishes the ideal of veganism and that calls upon us to show great concern for the comfort and well-being of animals. Yet most Jews continue to blithely consume meat, dairy, and eggs as if the welfare of animals were irrelevant.

I say most Jews, but by no means all Jews. In fact, a disproportionate number of rabbis have adopted vegetarian or vegan diets. Their ranks include such prominent rabbis as Lord Jonathan Sacks, the former chief rabbi of Great Britain; Rabbi David Rosen, the former chief rabbi of Ireland; and Rabbi David Wolpe, the spiritual leader of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, one of the flagship Conservative congregations.

Food and the Torah

These rabbis understand that when it comes to something as fundamental as how we eat, the Torah expresses God's intentions in no uncertain terms. In Genesis 1:29, in the very first conversation with Adam and Eve, God tells them that plant-based foods are theirs to eat—period.

Just in case we didn't get the message the first time around, God sustained the Israelites on a vegan diet—*manna*—to prepare our ancestors for the Revelation. And at the risk of being redundant, the Torah twice describes meat eating as emanating from human lust rather than from the divine will, in Numbers 11:34 and in Deuteronomy 12:20.

JEFFREY COHAN, executive director of Jewish Veg, invites *Tikkun* readers to get assistance in moving toward a plant-based diet at JewishVeg.org/Pledge.

Vilmorin Andrieux / Olivia Wise

The kosher laws in Leviticus obviously permit killing animals for food, but place a variety of highly restrictive limits and conditions on eating meat. For example, pigs and shellfish are off-limits, meat may not be served with dairy products, and even some parts of a cow are not kosher. By contrast, all fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, and legumes are permitted. The purpose of the kosher laws is not altogether mysterious: by making meat eating inconvenient at best, they clearly convey moral consternation over the killing of animals.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, the revered founder of America's Modern Orthodox movement, wrote, "There is a distinct reluctance, almost an unwillingness on the part of Torah, to grant man the privilege to consume meat." It is hardly coincidental that the easiest way to keep kosher is to be vegetarian or vegan. We have no need for separate plates, utensils, or dishwashers to keep meat and dairy apart from each other.

After all, the vegan ideal speaks to the very essence—the raison d'être—of Judaism. Why did God give Jews the Torah if not to bring the divine attributes of mercy, compassion, and morality into what was—and in many ways what remains—a brutal, savage world? For thousands of years, the strong have heartlessly exploited and oppressed the weak. The Torah arrived to save the world from humanity itself. Jews should be especially sensitive to this dynamic, for reasons of both theology and history. Have we not been exploited and oppressed over the millennia?

Compassion or Oppression?

So what do we do when we encounter animals, sentient beings who are at our mercy, whose care God entrusted to us? What do we do when we're in the position of strength?

Tragically, we cram chickens into cages so small they can't lift a wing; we brand and often castrate cows without pain relief; we send living male chicks into grinders and steal newborn calves from nursing cows. Then, after subjecting them to lives of abject misery, we slit their throats. And for what reason? Because we like how they taste? Because it's the conventional thing to do? Because non-Jews are doing it too?

As Jews, we should be expanding our circle of compassion, not narrowing it. We should be setting an example, not following the lead of a decadent society. Precisely because God and our sages recognized the human tendency to oppress the weak, they liberally sprinkled the Torah—writ large—with commandments to treat animals with kindness. For instance, in Exodus 23:5, we're told to help a donkey who is struggling to bear his load, even if the donkey belongs to our sworn enemy. We are forbidden in Deuteronomy 22:10 to yoke an ox and ass to the same plow, for neither one would be able to proceed at its natural speed. This conveys exquisite sensitivity about respecting the nature of animals. Animals are even to be given a day of rest on the Sabbath, per Exodus 20:9. Collectively, the many verses in the Torah dealing with our treatment of animals are referred to as *tza'ar baalei chayim*, the prohibition against causing an animal to suffer.

According to the Shulchan Aruch—the authoritative, sixteenth-century codification of Jewish law—we are not only prohibited from inflicting pain on animals but also obligated to relieve their suffering. Modern factory farming—which is where more than 90 percent of kosher meat comes from—makes a mockery of these beautiful teachings. Accordingly, the aforementioned Rabbi Rosen has asserted that virtually all meat should be considered non-kosher, due to the egregious contrast between Jewish law and contemporary animal-agriculture practices.

We should not delude ourselves that the laws of *shechita* absolve us from complicity in this widespread cruelty. For one thing, the laws of kosher slaughter apply only to slaughter, not to the suffering imposed on the animals before they're taken to the slaughterhouse. And second, it is virtually impossible to strictly apply the laws of *shechita* in modern abattoirs, where the sheer number of animals killed in a single day is often in the hundreds or even thousands. These laws were written in and for an era when a *shochet* might slaughter one or two animals in a day or a week.

It seems God anticipated this. The divine wisdom is truly awe-inspiring.

The Torah prescribed a vegan diet for us, and as it turns out, a vegan diet is better not only for animals but for our own health, too. Have you ever known anyone to develop heart disease, diabetes, obesity, or cancer from eating blueberries? Or lentils? Or broccoli?

Fortunately, as veganism continues to grow in popularity, a whole host of vegan substitutes for meat and dairy products are widely available, even at regular supermarkets. Many of them are much lower in fat and completely free of cholesterol.

You don't need to become a vegan overnight. Start with one meal a day and take it from there. Or try a vegetarian diet first, then move toward abstaining from all animal products. We all have an opportunity to bring Jewish and ethical values into our daily lives by eating in a way that aligns with the ideals and compassion of the Torah. And maybe someday soon I can look that theological student in the eye and just *kvell*. ■

Mustard Seeds and Mountains

BY TERESA MARBUT

When i was little, I was enthralled with "The Parable of the Mustard Seed." I knew what a mustard seed looked like, as my mother and grandmother spent many an hour each summer canning dill pickles; quite often I was allowed to sprinkle in the mustard seeds before adding the requisite stalk of dill. In my child's mind, I wondered why we are called to have faith "the size of a mustard seed." With faith this size, we are told in Matthew's Gospel, we have the potential to move mountains. *Why must faith be compared to something so tiny, so insignificant?* At the time I reasoned that faith should be more like a bulldozer or a tractor if one was indeed to "move mountains." It was not until I was in my late thirties that I realized the beauty, the joy, and the strength that is truly housed in something so very small.

For a while now I have been haunted by the notion that in our modern day seeds are sown not just for food. They are now used as emblems of power or blessings of resistance. In one such instance, we find the Ponca Nation dotting the Nebraska landscape in the path of the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline with sacred Ponca red corn seeds. Up until the spring of 2014, with the first planting in opposition to tar-sands removal, red corn seed had not been planted in the rich Nebraska earth—the original homeland of the Ponca People—for close to 140 years. These sacred seeds are now termed "Resistance Corn." These are seeds the Ponca people brought with them along the Ponca Trail of Tears from Nebraska to Oklahoma in 1877. The Ponca people know that one cannot dig a pipeline where the sacred red and blue corn seeds are sown, so they resist by sowing and reaping these sacred crops. Their acts defy those who wish to harm the earth and her natural resources as much as they are acts of faith in the sacred power held within a single kernel of corn.

Kernels of Resistance

Corn is not only a resistance crop used to fight oil exploiters; it is also at the center of a Genetically Modified (GM) crop debate in Mexico, a country that up until the twenty-first century relied solely on native maize seeds. In late 2009, the federal government of Mexico allowed small-scale experimentation of GM corn, directly in opposition to an earlier mandate. One of the reasons behind this action centers around declining Mexican corn revenues on the world stage due to cheaper US-subsidized corn flooding global markets. However, Demanda Colectiva Maíz, a community of people organized to support the legal defense of native corn, squashed a GM experiment in September 2013 with a lawsuit claiming that biodiversity is a human right. In support of their claims, the then-presiding Judge Jaime Manuel Marroquín Zaleta stated, "If the biotech industry gets its way, more than 7,000 years of indigenous maize cultivation in Mexico would be endangered, with the country's sixty varieties of corn directly threatened by cross-pollination from transgenic strands."

> **"If the biotech industry gets its way, more than 7,000 years of indigenous maize cultivation in Mexico would be endangered."**

Yet the fight progresses onward. In late August of 2015, even though the collective won the lion's share of almost 100 separate legal battles thrown its way, primarily by Monsanto and Syngenta, Judge Zaleta's 2013 ruling was overturned. Since then the lobbying group AgroBIO has been heavily petitioning for transgenic GM crop cultivation, particularly of corn, to recommence in Mexico. But the overturned ruling has also prompted many chefs and other food activists to join with Demanda Colectiva in speaking out and rallying against GM corn and the havoc it would inflict upon the nation's staple maize economy.

Many Davids, Six Goliaths

When six corporations hold the patents for almost all of the commercial seeds in the world, how many countries, how

TERESA MARBUT is the author of *Spiritual Foodways: An Ecofeminist Perspective on Our Sacred Journey with Food* (Common Ground, 2015). When not writing and lecturing on food ethics and social justice, she can usually be found in the kitchen.

Art by Prasad Kusaram, taken from *Signature: Patterns in Gond Art*, Copyright Tara Books 2010

many lawsuits, and how many of us will it take to band together to slay this modern-day Goliath? I am plagued with many questions: Do we have a sacred responsibility to the earth and to all her inhabitants? Should we stand with our brothers and sisters in Nebraska and Mexico? How do we fight against Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta, Dow, Bayer, and BASF—our modern-day food Goliaths? Is this a fight behind which people of all faiths should rally? Above all these questions, the greatest one remains: What would God have us do?

As people of faith, we are often told that pure faith comes from believing in that which we cannot see, what we cannot know for certain. Faith in the "Age of Monsanto" and unethical agribusiness practices means more than pure unadulterated belief; it must be belief coupled with action.

Many of the lessons we learn in the Torah, particularly in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, call on us to be good stewards of the earth. Leviticus 25 reminds us that one should sow and reap for six years, but the seventh year is to be a "complete rest for the land." This understanding of a "Sabbath of the Land" is not limited to the Abrahamic faiths; for thousands of years, farmers all over the world knew the importance of leaving fields fallow so as not to strip all of the nutrients from the soil. This is the proper design of sustainable subsistence farming, and it is what we are taught to do religiously and culturally as part of our best practices. But with Monsanto and other agribusiness giants leading the way, farmers have been told that they must plant, every year, in the same mineral-depleted soils, acres upon acres of one type of plant. They have also been told to plant seeds that have been altered to conform to human-made ideals of what the plant ought to be, even if studies have proven that GM seeds are harmful to both the earth and those who dwell upon it. Is this part of God's design for a right relationship of human to the earth?

In one of my favorite passages from the Qur'an, we are eloquently reminded that the seed and the powerful complexity held within its tiny walls belongs to no one but God:

> It is Allah who causes the seed-grain and the date-stone to split and sprout. He causes the living to issue from the dead, and He is the One to cause the dead to issue from the living. That is Allah: then how are you deluded away from the truth?

To rephrase the question for the modern context: Why, then, do agribusiness giants delude us from the truth? Since the late 1940s, farmers across America have been systematically

forced into abandoning historic knowledge on biodiversity and crop rotation in order to plant just one crop at high yields for lower profits—such as corn, wheat, or soy—and to use the herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers that agribusiness corporations sell in order to maintain those crops. This is "agripower" at its finest—or rather, its worst. It is a system that works not for conservation, but for power.

Agridollars vs. Health

In his classic work, *The Unsettling of America*, environmentalist and writer Wendell Berry expounds upon this notion:

> "Agripower," it will be noted, is not measured by the fertility or health of the soil, or the health, wisdom, thrift, or stewardship of the farming community. It is measured by its ability to produce a marketable surplus, which "generates agridollars." . . . The income from this increased production, we are told, is spent by the farmers not for soil maintenance or improvement, water conservation, or erosion control, but for "purchase inputs."

Agribusiness and the power it commands are not in keeping with God's stewardship design. As laid out in Deuteronomy 14, the faithful are called to "set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field." Nor is agribusiness part of the agrarian ideal, which would allow food for all, especially those who are poor and hungry.

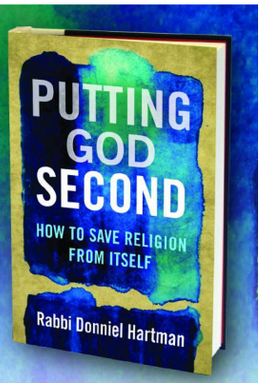
A proper, ethically, and sustainably understood model is one that feeds us. As the physicist and world-renowned environmental activist Vandana Shiva notes, "Biodiversity-based measures of productivity show that small farmers can feed the world. Their multiple yields result in truly high productivity, composed as they are of multiple yields of diverse species used for diverse purposes." For far too long the rich have been getting richer and we no longer have the ability to take care of the poor from the surplus of our own properly tended crops. We have taken sacred dominion out of the hands of God and placed it firmly in the grasp of Monsanto, a corporation determined to make of itself a new God—one that patents seeds and thus owns them all. Food justice activists have told us for years that the one who controls the seeds ultimately controls the people. So the question we are left with is simple: Are we children of God and in His power, or are we pawns of agribusiness? Our collective answer should be found in the proper care, cultivation, and value of everything from a kernel of corn to that faithful grain of mustard seed.

People of all faiths must not only begin an authentic dialogue with one another in order to protect what we *all* have been given, but we also must get involved at a local level with our dollars and with our hands. With each meal we have the ability to support either agribusiness corporations or our local farmers. Our food choices are always ours to make. They are not owed to or owned by Monsanto and the like unless we allow them to be. Websites such as www.localharvest.org and www.gracelinks.org are invaluable tools for getting people involved in local food movements, and they can easily be incorporated as part of an ethical stewardship program in one's local congregation.

A corrupt government now marshaled by GM lobbyists can be counter-maneuvered successfully by a people set firmly on the path of resistance. Thomas Jefferson understood this in 1785. He writes, "Was the government to prescribe to us our medicine and diet, our bodies would be in such [a sorry state] as our souls are now." Like Jefferson's yeoman farmer, we must be willing to get our hands dirty in the proper care of our souls and of the earth. Holding interfaith events on such things as gardening, raising chickens, or how to stock up the pantry come harvest time are small ways in which we all can move forward for the health of the planet and ourselves.

Now is the time for us to listen to the sacred stories of seed and harvest, of blessed dominion and right propagation. We must remember that corn, and all earth's seeds, have already been designed for optimum results, with biodiversity in mind, and are created with the intention to give us both physical and spiritual nourishment. All that remains, then, is that we be willing to listen to the song of the seeds and to join with our Hopi sisters and brothers in the belief in *Um Hapi Qaa'öniwti*, that "people become corn." We must allow our faith to be as mighty as that tiny and glorious mustard seed so that we can move the mountains of powerful agribusiness firmly out of the way. ■

WHY HAVE THE MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS FAILED TO PRODUCE SOCIETIES THAT LIVE UP TO THEIR ETHICAL IDEALS?



"Paints **a portrait for religion in the modern world** and makes the case for a view of religion in which love of persons and an affirmation of their dignity, integrity, and worth stand at the center of religious faith."
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A Fred Meyer grocery store in Portland, Oregon.

Lyzadanger / Flickr Commons

The True Cost of a Cheap Meal

BY KATIE CANTRELL

While perusing the items at a quaint antique store, I happened upon a catalog from the 1920s advertising farm-fresh food. It featured cabbage for two cents per pound, a dozen eggs for forty-four cents, and a half-gallon of milk for thirty-three cents. The shop owner told me that he was perplexed by the prices because, adjusting for inflation, it should cost roughly four dollars for a dozen eggs and eight dollars for a gallon of milk in today's dollars. Consumers today pay less than half of what we would expect to pay based on historic prices.

The antique store owner, like most Americans, didn't realize that we currently spend a smaller percentage of our income on food than ever before. While on its face that may seem beneficial, this system of cheap food relies on billions of dollars of externalized costs that are kept hidden from consumers.

Externalized costs are negative effects of producing or consuming a good that are imposed on a third party and not accounted for in the sticker price of an item. Among food products, there is no greater discrepancy between printed cost and true cost than with animal products. When we take a closer look at meat, dairy, and eggs, externalized costs become apparent in four primary areas: animals, health, social justice, and the environment.

Animals

Although we use terms like "pork" and "beef" to obscure the origins of meat, by now most adults know that their farmyard friends are ending up on their plate. But few people realize just how many animals are killed for food or how drastically the lives of those animals vary from the cheery songs we sang as children.

Nine billion land animals are raised and killed for food every year in the United States. Of those billions of animals, 99 percent are raised on factory farms. Technically known

KATIE CANTRELL is the founder and executive director of the Factory Farming Awareness Coalition, US program manager for Green Monday, and is on the advisory council of the Jewish Veg. Visit www.ffacoalition.org to learn more or to schedule a presentation.

as "concentrated animal feeding operations," or CAFOs, factory farms are defined by dense quantities of animals kept in intensive confinement for their entire lives.

A single facility will house tens of thousands animals, often in cages or crates so small that they cannot even turn around. The animals are unable to engage in the most basic of natural behaviors; the only time they see sunlight or breathe fresh air is when they are shipped to slaughter. Increasingly, even brands that label themselves "organic" or "cage-free" raise thousands of animals in factory farming conditions.

Surveys show that 95 percent of Americans believe that farm animals should be treated well, but 99 percent of farm animals are raised in conditions that closely resemble a horror movie. Recognizing this disparity, agribusiness corporations go to great lengths to hide the unsavory truth from concerned consumers. In response to a string of shocking undercover investigations—revealing "downed" dairy cows jabbed with forklifts, chickens laying eggs on top of rotting corpses of cagemates, pigs beaten with metal poles—agribusiness began lobbying for so-called "ag-gag" laws. Rather than improving conditions and increasing inspections, agribusiness pushed to criminalize unauthorized photography and videography at food production facilities, a change that would make felons of undercover investigators and whistleblowers. Almost thirty states have introduced some variation of these bills, and eight states have passed them (although Idaho's was recently struck down as unconstitutional).

However, these bills have had an unintended consequence; formerly oblivious consumers are forced to question, "What are these corporations trying to hide?" People are beginning to realize that the bucolic label and low price on animal products hide some unsavory truths.

Health

Animals are not the only ones suffering and dying as a result of the enormous amount of meat that Americans consume. Every day, over 3,500 people die from heart disease, stroke, and cancer—as many fatalities as if six 747 jets crashed and killed everyone on board. While people would stop flying if six jets crashed on a daily basis, we have come to accept it as a matter of fact that thousands of people will die daily from preventable diseases.

A study of over 6,000 adults, published in the journal *Cell Metabolism*, found that people with diets high in animal protein were 74 percent more likely to die before the end of the study than people with diets low in animal protein. The study also found that people with high protein diets were four times more likely to die of cancer—the same mortality risk as smoking cigarettes.

Several studies have shown that vegetarians are approximately one-third less likely to die of heart disease, diabetes, or stroke. If a pill were shown to make these causes of premature death 33 percent less likely, it would be prescribed by every doctor in the country. Yet there is an even simpler, less expensive solution, one without any negative side effects.

Luckily, the health care world is beginning to take note. Kim A. Williams, the president of the American College of Cardiology, lowered his own cholesterol levels by adopting a vegan diet, and now hopes to put the ACC "out of business" by recommending a vegan diet to all of his patients. Kaiser Permanente recently advised all of its doctors that, "Physicians should consider recommending a plant-based diet to all their patients, especially those with high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity."

Health professionals are increasingly warning patients that the "value meal" isn't so cheap when you factor in long-term health care costs.

Social Justice

While the personal health impacts hit close to home, the other human costs of factory farming remain hidden from view.

Slaughterhouse workers face the most dangerous job in the country. Their injury rate is thirty-three times higher than the injury rate of other factory workers, yet they usually have no health insurance or job protections. Many suffer from cumulative trauma injuries that cause lifelong debilitating pain. Often, workers are undocumented, leaving them vulnerable to sexual harassment and wage theft.

On top of this, they face a deeply disturbing job. Many slaughterhouse workers develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from seeing so much suffering and death on a daily basis, much like soldiers returning from war. Since they have no access to basic health care, let alone mental health care, many turn to alcohol or drugs in order to numb the pain. Domestic abuse and sexual assault rates are higher among slaughterhouse workers; researchers theorize that this is due to the desensitization to violence and mental illness caused by the job.

If we could not bear to slaughter an animal ourselves, why pay someone else to do our dirty work for us?

In addition to impacting workers, factory farms and slaughterhouses also have dire impacts on local communities. Factory farms are almost always located near low-income communities of color, resulting in what is deemed "environmental racism."

One study found that people living within one mile of a pig factory farm were three times more likely to carry MRSA, an antibiotic-resistant staph infection. Families near factory farms also suffer from asthma, heart palpitations, and migraines, among a myriad of other health problems, as a result of continually breathing fecal matter and toxic gases wafting from 20-million gallon manure lagoons. A must-watch video on YouTube entitled "Spy Drones Expose Smithfield Foods Factory Farms" recently revealed this

Meat production accounts for up to a third of all freshwater use worldwide.

environmental injustice firsthand, with elderly neighbors describing a rain of pig feces deluging their homes.

These frontline communities must bear the brunt of our food choices; they are the ones paying the true cost.

Environment

California's ravaging drought and raging wildfires have become the recent face of environmental disaster. As citizens struggle to find solutions, many bemoan the fact that fracking and bottled water are stealing the public's ever-dwindling water supply. Those are, of course, serious issues; yet few realize that the single largest consumer of water in California is the meat and dairy industry.

When we go to the supermarket, there's no sign saying that one gallon of milk requires 600 gallons of water to produce. When we go to a restaurant, there's no footnote on the menu advising that eating a veggie burger instead of a hamburger would save as much water as skipping a month's worth of showers. The true water cost of food, rather than being made apparent to consumers, is often kept hidden.

Food Empowerment Project, a Northern California–based food justice nonprofit, wanted to learn how much water was being used by a local Perdue chicken slaughterhouse. The government refused to release the information, so FEP filed an open records request and learned that in 2012 the slaughterhouse was using more than 312,000 gallons of water per day. To put it in perspective, the slaughterhouse was using as much water in a single day as a typical household uses in three years.

Not only are consumers thus being kept in the dark about the true impacts of their food choices, they are also left footing the bill. At a time when families can incur fines of up to $500 per day if they don't meet mandatory reductions in water use, the city of Petaluma is set to approve an expansion of the water-guzzling slaughterhouse.

California is emblematic of the growing global water crisis. One in seven people worldwide lacks access to clean drinking water. Globally, as well as locally, animal agriculture plays a large role. Meat production accounts for up to a third of all freshwater use worldwide. That figure will only grow as the demand for meat increases in newly industrialized countries like China, India, and Brazil.

Unfortunately, the global population is also growing, placing increased strain on limited resources. Add environmental degradation, and you have a perfect storm. Growing meat consumption will limit the land and freshwater available for direct human consumption. Research suggests that crop yields will begin to decline as soon as 2030 due to increased heat and shifting weather patterns from climate change. We have lost half of all the topsoil on earth in the last 150 years as a result of monoculture farming, deforestation, and overgrazing (much of which can be traced to animal agriculture).

Luckily, there is a feasible way to ease this crisis. "Sustainable and healthy diets will require a move towards a mostly plant-based diet," said Colin Khoury, a biologist at the Colombia-based International Centre for Tropical Agriculture. The Stockholm International Water Institute warns that we must limit meat consumption to just 5 percent of total calories (it currently comprises 30 percent of Americans' total calories) in order to avoid severe global food and water shortages.

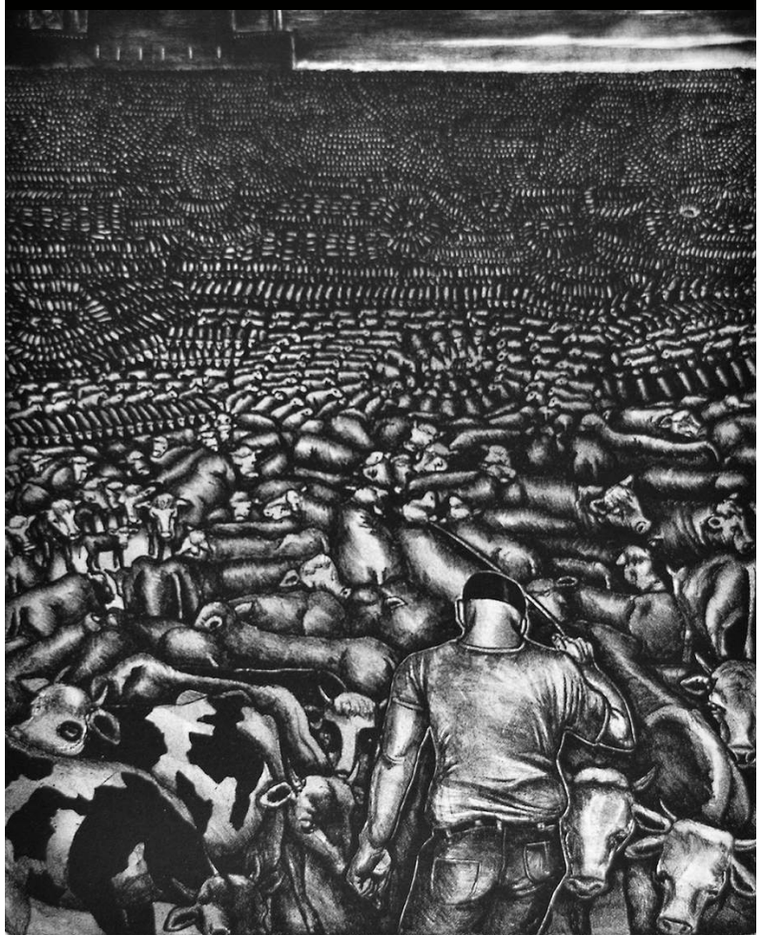
Reducing meat consumption would have the added benefit of curbing climate change. A report from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization revealed that animal agriculture emits more greenhouse gases than the entire transportation industry—more than all planes, trains, and cars in the world combined.

Scientists agree that if we are to avoid global catastrophe, we must limit global warming to no more than 2°C. Climate modeling has shown that the only way to meet that target is by incorporating diet change as well as renewable energy. Two recent peer-reviewed studies found that by 2050, agriculture emissions alone (chief among them, animal agriculture) will use up all our carbon budget, requiring zero carbon use by every other sector. Since that is "impossible," according to a report by the independent UK policy institute Chatham House, "dietary change is essential if global warming is not to exceed 2°C."

Often sustainable/local/humane meat is touted as the answer to factory farming—an ethical panacea that allows environmentalists to continue to enjoy their meat. However, the problem is a matter of scale. Factory farming arose as an efficient way to produce enough meat for people to eat animal products at every meal. It is impossible to meet the current demand for meat sustainably. There is not enough pasture in the United States for 9 billion animals, and ecosystems across the West are already suffering from overgrazing, even from the tiny percentage of animals that are currently raised on pasture. The only diet that is sustainable on a global scale is one that is primarily plant-based.

This solution can be empowering on an individual level; our daily food choices have a tremendous impact. If everyone in the United States were to abstain from eating meat and cheese just one day a week, it would save carbon emissions equivalent to taking 7 million cars off the road. While convincing millions of people to never drive again is unlikely, convincing them to not eat meat one day a week is increasingly feasible; over a quarter of Americans currently report participating in Meatless Mondays.

(*continued on page 64*)



Feedlot by Sue Coe. Copyright 1991 Sue Coe.
Courtesy Galerie St. Etienne, New York

Sue Coe / graphicwitness.org

The Scent of the Field

BY ANDREW BERNS

After breakfast one morning last March, I walked into a cavernous, high-roofed barn in eastern Washington State and watched a stillborn calf get flayed. It lay on a butcher block stained with blood. The calf's tongue extruded beyond its teeth; its eyes stared ahead; and its neck declined toward its chest at an unnatural angle, as if in sacrificial supplication. Ranchers skillfully sliced and sawed their way through this animal. Their charge was to excise a perfectly intact hide.

Only a few days before, at an identical hour, I sat down to a very different postprandial labor: grading midterm examination essays. I teach history at the University of South Carolina, and my students had written about the eighteenth-century Jewish philosopher and savant Moses Mendelssohn, and assessed his vision of Judaism's future. When Mendelssohn arrived in Berlin from his childhood home in Dessau at age fourteen, he entered the city through a gate reserved for Jews and cattle. Premodern Jews knew where their meat came from; their descendants often do not. That knowledge meant that they led lives in consonance with natural processes. It also made the stories of the Bible and classical Jewish literature, which took place in a preindustrial world, easier for early modern scholars like Mendelssohn to understand. As I observed the flaying of a calf, I realized how lucky I was to visit the inland Northwest during calving season: I sensed my time there would help me understand the world in which Mendelssohn lived, as well as a much more distant Jewish past. A German Jewish philosopher of the eighteenth century, the biblical patriarchs, and American ranchers in 2015 are divided by many things, but they are united by an intimate knowledge of food production.

Life on the Farm

My sister is married to the son of a cattle rancher whose property is near Spokane, Washington. Well aware of my attraction to the countryside, she urged me to spend spring break with her and her family. Sensing an antidote for my sedentary life as a professor, I leapt at the chance. The Belsby ranch sprawls over 9,000 acres in Washington. Besides sprouting hay, alfalfa, a bit of winter wheat, and the odd cluster of apple, cherry, and plum trees, the ranch gives the Belsbys their living through its animals—some 700 head of cattle and two endearingly out-of-place geriatric water buffalo, old gifts from a rancher friend. Inside the house itself, calving paraphernalia was everywhere: sacks of milk powder slumped on the floor; syringes and vials of probiotics cluttered every surface; drying esophageal tubes hung from the backs of chairs; and rinsed bottles, recently separated from their plastic areolae, dripped into the sink and onto counters. Outside the house, vistas are expansive, and the openness of the landscape invites gales of wind and a nourishing sun that bestows its blessings all day. The men and women who work there are hearty and hale; the cows content; and the dogs, with huge bales of bound hay to leap over, livestock to bark at, and bubbling springs to quench their thirst, are in their own terrestrial paradise.

On my first afternoon I cruised around in an all-terrain vehicle with a seasonal worker: an eighteen-year-old Brigham Young University–Idaho student named Kelsey.

ANDREW BERNS is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of South Carolina. He teaches and writes about Medieval and Renaissance Europe, and the history of the Jews.

Kelsey and I journeyed through muddy flats up and down precipitous hills to reach water holes guarded by clusters of willow trees, where heifers sometimes retreated to give birth in peace. One of our jobs was to find newborn calves, mark them by piercing their ears with plastic tags, and, in cases of postpartum constipation, inject them with laxatives, all the while fending off solicitous mothers irked at the approach of humans bearing syringes. Another responsibility was to lead cows from pen to pen, which meant wrestling and shoving them. Expectant moms are kept in a heifer pen until they give birth to their calves. Subsequently, mother and calf must be led, sometimes across a considerable distance and often against their wills, to the neonatal pen, where the other cows are used to the young and where there is less risk that a ten-minute-old calf will be trampled by her ruminating and absent-minded aunt.

During calving season on the ranch this is all routine, albeit a routine far removed from my cave-like, windowless, and stale-smelling university office where I spend many days pecking at a keyboard and squinting into an eleven-inch screen. The ranch thrilled me and thrummed with energy. Humans scurried about with purpose, cows plodded around knowing their parts, and the smells and sights of new life were everywhere: placentas dangled from swollen bovine vaginas and inflated in the breeze like sails, falling limp and fluttering to the ground, wafting their syrupy scent. Though I didn't know it yet, I had journeyed in time as well as in space, and I was about to enter not only the world of the Old West, but that of the protagonists of Genesis.

Two Surrogates

After breakfast on my second day, Gary, the septuagenarian patriarch of the ranch, entered the house, knocked clumps of fecal dirt from his boots, and grumbled, "Time to graft." This was the reason a stillborn calf had been flayed that morning. Gary is a tall, gangly man of Norwegian stock. He walks with a slight limp. His glasses sit askew on the bridge of his nose, three-day stubble shadows his face, and his Wranglers are riddled with holes. One of his ranch hands once said of him that he is "not the kind of man to give up on a garment on account of some wear." The phrase stuck and is often repeated, in good humor, around the table at meal times. As for "time to graft," everyone but I knew instantly what this meant, and I detected a gleam of excitement in my sister's eyes, mixed with concern for her brother's fragile professorial constitution.

From snatches of table talk, I pieced together what grafting was and why we had to do it that day. The night before, a heifer had given birth. The birth was bloodier than normal, and the birth wound, redolent of dinner for any carnivore, attracted the attention of a band of coyotes who fell upon the stricken mother, plunging their gnarling jaws into her sanguineous and swollen pudenda, feasting on flesh and opening an even larger wound that ended the poor cow's life. At the site of the coyotes' attack, a blood stain on the ground and some shredded organs were all that remained of mom—except her infant. My nieces assume responsibility for naming the calves, and they named this orphan Barbed Wire. There she stood, only one night old and in need of nourishment, comfort, and raising. In short, in need of a mother.

"From snatches of table talk, I pieced together what grafting was and why we had to do it that day."

Barbed Wire was being bottle-fed in the mud room of the Belsby home. But formula feeding is expensive and inconvenient: it requires at least thrice-daily human energy, attention, and investment. Gary had a plan. Another cow, Sue, had lost her calf two days before; the calf was stillborn. Sue needed a calf; Barbed Wire needed a mother. It was a match made in, well, a barnyard. The solution was this: since a cow will not give suck to any creature that isn't her own, you have to trick her, and the trickery entails skinning the hide from the dead calf, perforating it, and tying it to the interloper, in this case Barbed Wire. Heather Smith Thomas, author of *Storey's Guide to Raising Beef Cattle*, writes that "a first-calf heifer is often the easiest to fool, since she is inexperienced . . . The oldest trick," Thomas informs us, "and the one that works best, is to skin her dead calf and put the hide on the substitute calf." My brother-in-law looked up at me, grinning as he finished his bowl of Captain Crunch, and said, "Goes all the way back to the Bible, doesn't it?"

Indeed it does. Most of us remember the story. Isaac, growing old and blind, was duty-bound to bestow his blessing on Esau, his eldest child. Esau was a hunter, a "man of the fields," ruddy-skinned and hairy. His brother, Jacob, was a "dweller in tents," a peaceful boy beloved by his mother Rebecca. Favoring Jacob as the heir, Rebecca hatched a plan: Jacob would slaughter a he-goat, she would cook it up as Isaac liked, and they'd use its hide to disguise Jacob's hairless arms and neck so that the blinded patriarch would think he was Esau. And it worked, but not, in the Bible's telling, because the stew was so scrumptious, nor, as many assume, because the hair was convincing as a tactile ruse, but because when Isaac called Jacob near and kissed him he smelled "the scent of the field." That was what convinced him and drew out the blessing, which, once uttered, was irrevocable. So when Esau came along and the ruse was exposed, Isaac was beside himself with grief: he had given away his firstborn's birthright to his imposter son. All because of "the scent of the field." (*continued on page 65*)

Food Justice

Are We Solving a Problem or Reimagining a System?

BY ORAN B. HESTERMAN

Library of Congress

THE TERM "food desert" captured the public imagination from the moment it entered the conversation. From Main Street to the White House, it provided an evocative shorthand for the messy realities of poverty and dwindling economic opportunity affecting rural and urban communities across America. While criteria for what qualifies as a food desert vary, it is primarily defined by long distances from or low concentration of healthy food retailers in urban and rural areas, each of these imagined to diverge from some ideal number.

I first heard the term when researcher Mari Gallagher published results measuring the distance from every Chicago block to the nearest grocery store and fast-food restaurant. This report was followed by deeper dives into other cities, such as Detroit.

While I grew up on the West Coast, I have called Michigan home for the past thirty years—first as a sustainable agriculture professor at Michigan State University, then as a program officer with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, launching a new grant program that would help seed the local food movement with more than 200 million dollars in investments, and now with the nonprofit I founded, Fair Food Network (www.fairfoodnetwork.org). I joined the 2007 "Detroit Stranded in the Food Desert" Forum with a mix of emotions: hope—that we were finally coming to terms with an issue that had plagued our food system and many low-income neighborhoods for years; and skepticism—that by definition, identifying food deserts is an attempt to use a quick-fix solution (grocery stores) to solve a much more gnarly issue (lack of access to affordable, healthy food).

Transforming the Approach to Food Deserts

Over the years, the phrase "food desert" has spurred some tangible wins. Leading up to the 2008 Farm Bill, several Members of Congress, led by Chicago's Bobby Rush, mounted an effort to include language about food deserts. When the Farm Bill was signed into law that year, it included funding and instructions for the USDA to conduct a national study on the issue. That study in turn led to additional policy action that included the Healthy Food Finance and Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive programs in the 2014 Farm Bill—true bright spots in national food legislation that would likely not have been possible without the earlier galvanizing focus on food deserts.

ORAN. B. HESTERMAN, PHD, is author of the book *Fair Food: Growing a Healthy, Sustainable Food System for All*. He is a national leader in food systems and sustainable agriculture and currently serves as president and CEO of Fair Food Network. He can be reached at ohesterman@FairFoodNetwork.org.

But there are still serious issues behind this overly simplistic term.

First, it ignores on-the-ground realities. Detroit, for example, has a vibrant farmers' market network—including mobile markets—that reaches deep into the city's most underserved neighborhoods, as well as a strong tradition of smaller, independent food retailers, not to mention the more than 1,500 community and school gardens spread throughout the city. What's more, the issue of who has access to healthy, affordable food is also about who has access to the *resources* it takes to produce, process, and distribute that food. There is a well-worn proverb that if you give a man a fish, he eats for the day, but teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime. In today's food system, the issue is more about who owns the pond. Without access to the source, all the fishing knowledge in the world cannot be put to use. And in many low-income communities in the United States, which often are also communities of color, access to the pond of resources for food system revitalization (land, capital, markets) is limited.

Lack of access to healthy food in traditionally underserved communities is not a problem to be solved but a symptom of a food system in need of repair and transformation. And you don't get to transformation by solving problems one at a time: you get there by reimagining the system and designing models and policies that cause the symptoms to dissolve.

Of the many systems in our world today that need to be reimagined, none is more important for our future than our food system. Indeed, food connects us like few other things. It reflects our cultures, traditions, and rituals, and is our most profound and basic connection to the earth. It nurtures, sustains, and heals us, and its lack or excess creates disease. Food touches everything. Globally, the manner in which we produce and transport food impacts our climate, soils, and water. Nationally, the food system contributes three-quarters of a trillion dollars to the economy. Locally, it can divide communities between those who have food and those who do not.

While we can and should focus on the food we consume, we cannot eat or shop our way into a better, fairer food system. What is needed now is bolder and more holistic action that reaches beyond our plates. Specifically, we need programs and policies that create simultaneous wins for families, farmers, communities, and the environment.

Signs of System Change

Promising signs are all around us, including efforts such as Fair Food Network's healthy food incentive program, Double Up Food Bucks (http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/what-we-do/projects/double-up-food-bucks), which matches the value of federal nutrition benefits spent at participating farmers' markets and grocery stores, helping people bring home more healthy fruits and vegetables while supporting local farmers. Evaluation has shown that families are eating more healthy food while farmers are gaining new customers and making more money. In this way, this program simultaneously addresses affordability and access, as well as supply and demand for healthy food.

Library of Congress

Since 2009, Double Up has grown from five farmers' markets in Detroit to more than 150 sites across the state, including grocery stores in one of the first pilots in the nation. Double Up's strong track record and unique statewide scale were also key to helping inspire the 100-million-dollar Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grants programs in the 2014 Farm Bill. Fair Food Network is now working with partners across the country to bring this proven model to their communities.

Programs that improve access to healthy food for low-income Americans while supporting family farmers take us beyond the passive simplicity of food deserts. Indeed, they represent an opportunity in which those most vulnerable in our society can become active agents in building vibrant local food systems and economies.

In this way, food systems work manifests the great Jewish tradition of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, for the world cannot be repaired without reimagining our food system. This belief drives my work and is fundamental to the programs and policies we support at Fair Food Network.

The time is now to move beyond conversation and overly simplistic terms. What can each of us do, individually and as a progressive collective? Let us claim the responsibility of helping the most vulnerable among us and seize the potential of such work to build a more equitable and just food system for all. ■

Ghosts

BY JO-ANNE McARTHUR

A sow separated from her piglets. Sows are impregnated and give birth up to eight times before being sent to slaughter. Sweden.

I PLACE ANIMALS INTO three categories. The first category could be called "pets," or "companion animals." We know them well: dogs, cats, small domestic animals with whom we share our lives, even our food and our beds. The second category we know as "wildlife": the charismatic megafauna we see on the covers of *National Geographic*, whose beauty and strength we revere from a distance but whose lives have little to no bearing on our own. We donate money to organizations that save them; we put photos of them up on our walls.

My work doesn't focus very much on these animals. I am interested in the third category: the rest of the world's animals. The invisibles. The ghosts. They are the animals with whom we have the most intimate relationship, and yet we *don't really see them*. We barely give them a thought. When we *do* see them, it's in parts. We call them spare ribs instead of pigs. We call them leather instead of cows. Honey garlic wings instead of chickens. Filets instead of fish. We wear these animals; we ingest them many times a day; we use products and medicines that are tested on them; and yet they remain, as individuals, absent from our line of sight.

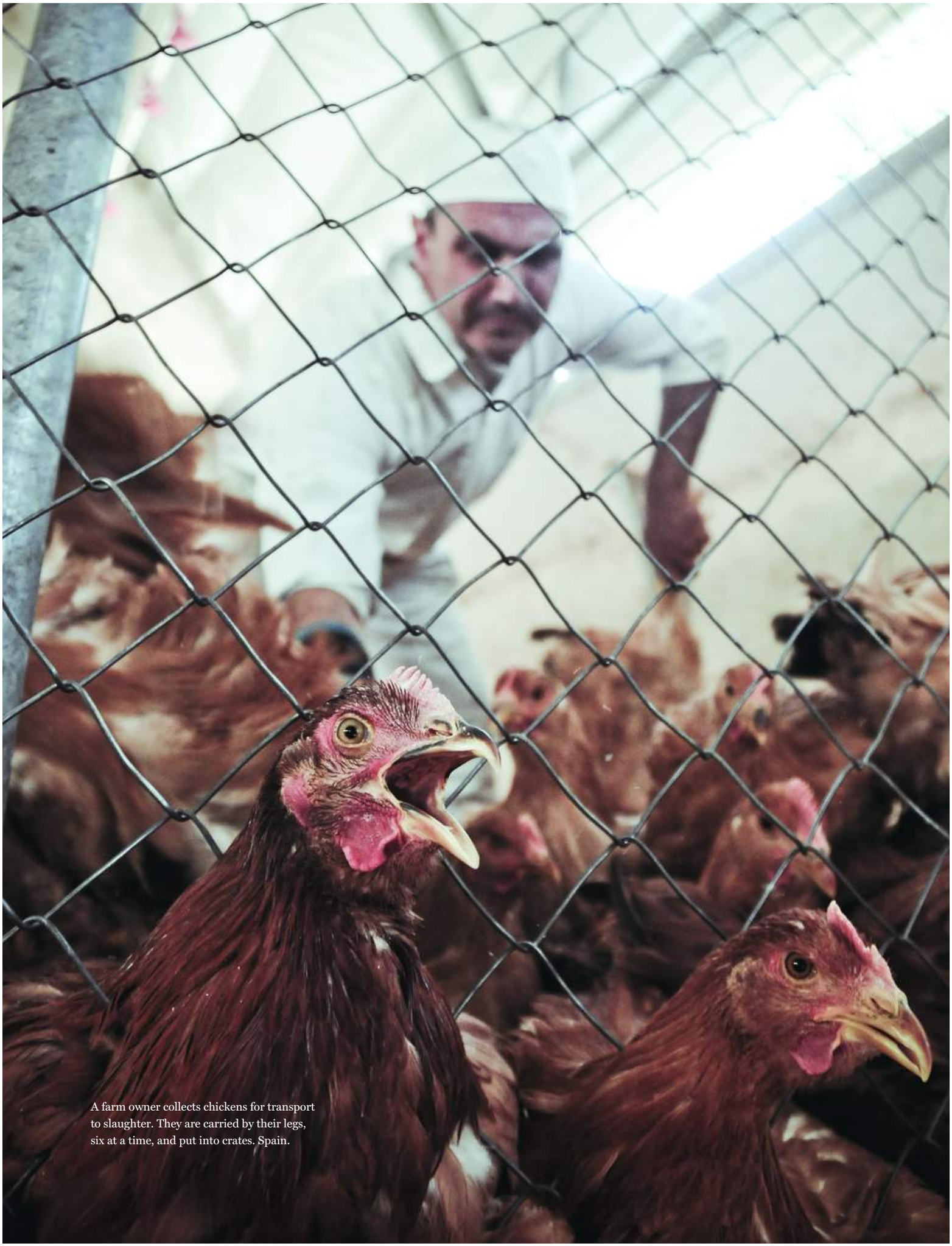
It's this third category, the ghosts, that I show to the world. So few photojournalists are looking at this issue of hidden mass abuse. Billions of animals suffer at our hands each year. The problem is worldwide, and access to these industries ranges from difficult to impossible. My hope is that if we can see and understand how these animals are used and abused, if we can see how they live and how they die, then we can make more informed, kinder decisions about how we consume them.

There's a beautiful quote from Edgar's Mission Farm Sanctuary in Australia, and I share it often. It reads, simply: "If we could live happy and healthy lives without harming others, why wouldn't we?"

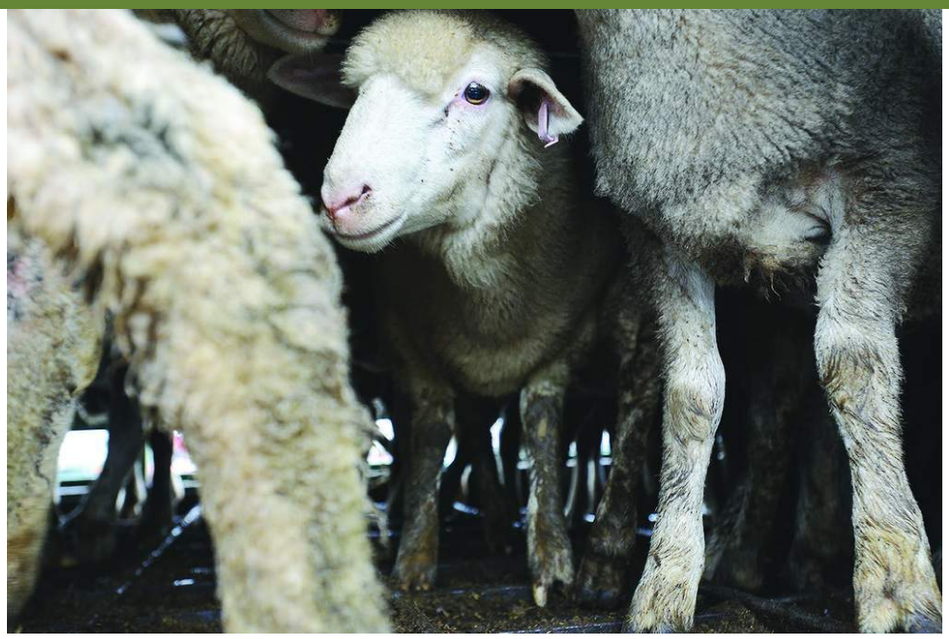
There are many ways to live happily and healthily while reducing harm to animals *and* to the environment—if we don't choose to hide and ignore them. Thank you for looking at the animals we rarely actually *see*. My hope is that you won't turn away. ■

Jo-Anne McArthur / WeAnimals.org

JO-ANNE McARTHUR is a photojournalist who has documented the plight of animals for over a decade. She works closely with international animal organizations and is the central human character in the documentary *The Ghosts in Our Machine*. Her book, *We Animals*, was published by Lantern Books.



A farm owner collects chickens for transport to slaughter. They are carried by their legs, six at a time, and put into crates. Spain.



Sheep tightly loaded onto transport trucks, which are bound for slaughter, live transport or farms. Australia.

A rabbit next in line for slaughter. Spain.

Jo-Anne McArthur / WeAnimals.org

Misogyny and Misery on the Menu

BY CAROL J. ADAMS

Matthew Jeane

IMAGINE YOU ARE in the Netherlands and find yourself driving behind a transport truck for pigs. For most pigs in transport, this is their first time outside. They are being moved from one place of captivity to another—their final destination. On the truck, they receive neither water nor food. You see one plaintive snout sticking out from the truck. In your car, you might begin to think: What is it like for them, penned up inside? But then you see the image on the back, a pig, languorously stretched out, sexually posed; breasts and a plump rear grab your attention. And your visual senses say, "That's funny," distracting you from what is inside. The image is a mask, re-presenting what is happening to the animals inside the transport truck. The visual cues announce that what is happening to the pigs is okay. In fact, they suggest the animals like it; they want you to consume them.

Chickens don't fare any better. For more than twenty years, "Rosie the *Original* Organic Chicken," in her red high heels, necklace, and hat, has proclaimed her "organic" nature to consumers in California. She, too, wants to be consumed. As does "Cackalack's Hot Chicken". There she is: wearing high heels, stockings, and a bustier. She poses seductively, her eyes meeting yours. "Come and get me," she invites. "Come and *eat* me," she means. A similar image advertised "Fred's Chicken" in Turkey, a chicken with her rump plumb in the center of your view, eyelashes curled, breasts jutting out, inviting the viewer to come and eat. In Israel, a cartoon showed a man in a car, pulling over to the sidewalk, calling out to a chicken with a purse and curled eyelashes, saying in Hebrew, "What's up Kapara? Do you want to go out with me to a round?"

Seeing is Believing

We don't realize that the act of *viewing* another as an object and the act of *believing* that another is an object are actually different acts, because our culture has collapsed them into one. Through images, misery is made sexy. Advertisements and other representations are never only about the product they are promoting. They are also about how our culture is structured, what we believe about ourselves and others. Advertisements appeal to *someone* to buy *something*. In this, they offer a window into the myths by which our world is structured. Ads *advance* someone over something. All of these images, and a panoply of others, accept the sexualized object status of women while presenting the consumable nature of domesticated animals.

In these advertisements and images, farmed animals who are actually in bondage are shown "free," free in the way that "sexy" women have been depicted as free—posed as sexually available, as though their only desire is for the viewer to want their bodies. Sometimes the images show a hybrid woman/animal wanting to be consumed. In Italy, a restaurant's ad depicted two beings in bed: a human man with his arm around a woman's body with a cow's head. Osteria La Capannina removed their *Amanti della Carne* (Meatlovers) ad after protests that it was sexist.

CAROL J. ADAMS is the author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and many other books, most recently *Never Too Late to Go Vegan* and the co-edited volume (with Lori Gruen), *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*. She has been involved in social justice activism for more than forty years. www.caroljadams.com

Mitch Goldsmith

Barbecues often present a hybrid woman/pig desiring consumption. These images and advertisements, such as one selling the "Best Butts in Georgia" collapse the ideas of consumption and consummation. With the images, what you see is what you get—visual and literal consumption of the "full-bodied" female body.

A "bum burger" advertisement in 2013 in Australia showed a woman's rear end as buns for a hamburger and was challenged for being sexist. The Advertising Standards Bureau Case Report summarized the problem: "The advertisement features a woman lying on the beach in a bikini. The photo is focused on her bottom which has the contents of a burger including lettuce, tomato, cheese, and a meat patty between the cheeks of her backside. The text reads: 'Goodtime Burgers' and 'The freshest fun between the buns.'"

One of the complaints explained, "A burger patty and accompanying lettuce etc is lodged in a woman's private part, the woman's body and private parts are objectified as something for people (probably men) to consume." Carl's Jr., the US burger chain, did a similar ad, but in the United States there is no mechanism for challenging it. Indeed, challenging a misogynist ad usually results in promoting it.

The Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence created a campaign that said, "It's not acceptable to treat a woman like one." One public service ad showed a punching bag. But another showed a side of "beef" hanging from a hook, clothed with a tank top and short denim skirt. In other words, it is not acceptable to treat a woman like a piece of meat, but *it is acceptable to treat a nonhuman animal as one*. European human rights campaigners, including Amnesty International, have created several public service ads against human trafficking, showing women covered with cellophane as though they were packaged like meat. Again, the message is "don't treat women like meat animals, but you don't need to disturb your treatment of meat animals."

For the past twenty-five years, readers of my book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* have sent me images like the ones reproduced here. These images illustrate my argument that the oppression of women and the oppression of animals, especially those used for food, are linked. Women are animalized or represented as meat, and animals are sexualized and feminized. Interestingly, the first edition of my book presented only two visual examples of what I described: an image of a woman cut up as though she were a side of beef, and a pig posed as though she were in a Victorian brothel. But by showing how women were represented by reference to animals' fate and how animals were represented by reference to women's sexual consumability, I offered others a place to stand to reject these images.

The Reproductive Politics of Meat

Current examples might be the Safari Showclub announcing "Free Range Grass Fed Strippers"—the woman animalized. In Manchester, England, "Filthy Cow," a hamburger restaurant, depicts a cow in a necklace, stockings and heels (again

with the stockings and heels), saying, “Come upstairs and eat me.” The animal sexualized.

Consider “Lisa,” a part of a pharmaceutical exhibit at the annual convention of “pork producers.” (The sow is—against her will—the real “pork producer.”) “Lisa,” a buxom cartoon pig with stockings, heels, garters, and lipstick, fondles the medicine that is being advertised. The large exhibit announces, “Lisa gives you one more pig per year.” For “Lisa,” production and reproduction are the same act, and her body is the raw material of production. Kept in gestation crates and then farrowing crates, captive reproduction deprives sows of expressing their maternal instinct, which is to nurse and care for their piglets away from humans. But in these images, the sow is burdened by sexist cultural representations that show her wanting to be dominated, pregnant, and consumed.

While the image of “Lisa” commits discursive violence, it exists to support a material form of violence. Sows who have been kept captive find it difficult to move from one place to another and have been prodded and poked and violated and beaten to get them to move. One undercover activist took a photo of a sow in a gestation crate, and next to her number (#21288; no name), was scrawled, “Fat Selfish Bitch”. Here, too, we find a fluidity of movement between references to women and references to sows.

From a sexualized female who “wants” to give you another baby through reproductive captivity to “Fat Selfish Bitch,” the arc of the narrative being told about the childbearing sow enforces on their lives and perpetuates some of the painful regressive stereotypes applied to women. *Fat selfish bitch?* Maybe she wanted to stretch.

Cows, too, according to the narrative of the pharmaceutical companies advertising in agricultural magazines, want to be pregnant, want to be milked. Bovi-Shield Gold presented a photograph of a cow with a pheasant in her mouth; in front of her poses a hunter with a gun showing off four other pheasants he shot. In large print: “If she can’t stay pregnant, what else will she do?” In smaller print: “Keep your cows pregnant and on the job.”

I’m intrigued by this way of framing female reproductivity. During a time when reproductive rights for women are being rolled back, an advertisement like this carries cues about cows *and* women. Cows spend nine months of each year both pregnant and lactating. The yield of milk of cows in the twenty-first century is close to four times what they would “naturally” produce. This effort is equivalent to jogging six or more hours a day. (See Élise Desaulniers’s *Cash Cow: Ten Myths about the Dairy Industry*.)

Bovi-Shield Gold issued another ad in the series that asks the question, “If she can’t stay pregnant, what else will she do?” This one showed a cow sitting in the front seat of a fire truck. The answer: *She might be taking your job.*

Nathan Runkle / Mercy for Animals (mercyforanimals.org)

Out of the day-to-day suffering inflicted on female farmed animals arises a contempt that those who suffer for us are beneath our notice; names associated with the female reproductive system become insults: *Cow, pig, sow, hen, old biddy,* and *bitch* all have negative connotations. These are all terms for women derived from females who have absolutely no control over their reproductive choices. The fluidity between discourse, representation, and treatment becomes embedded in our cultural discourse.

The Absent Referent

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I introduced the concept of *the absent referent* to explain how oppressions may be interconnected and yet go largely unacknowledged. Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the nonhuman animal whose place the meat takes. The function of the absent referent is to keep *something* (like a hamburger) from being seen as having been *someone* (a cow). We do not see our meat eating as contact with another animal, because it has been renamed as contact with *food*.

While meat eating requires violence, the absent referent functions to put the violence under wraps, like the saran wrap that surrounds the dead being for sale in the grocery store. Being both *there* and *not there*, present in one form and absent in another, overlapping but absent referents form a structure linking violence against women and against animals. In Brazil, an issue of *Playboy* showed a woman

Theo Audenaerd

with lines on her body as though she were to be cut up like a piece of meat. The advertising campaign displayed the magazine among cuts of meat in a meat display. The name of a restaurant in New Jersey, "Adam's Rib," raises the question: Just who is being consumed? Women's commoditization is both there and not there. In 2013, a new Israeli steakhouse in Haifa and Ness Ziona called "Angus," promoted itself with the image of a blond woman's naked body (the photograph is from the side). Her body parts are labeled in Hebrew as though she were meat. The ad asks, "Do you ever have the desire to bite a choice piece of meat?"

Perhaps you join someone for lunch in Chicago. You consider the sandwiches and see "Double D Cup Breast of Turkey Sandwich. This sandwich is SO big." (The turkeys are now bred for such large breasts that they can't walk to be slaughtered; they topple over.) But if you protest, you might be told, "It's just a joke."

Yet, there are "breastaurants" like Hooters or Twin Peaks, Burger Girl, and the Honey Shack that invite men to experience a fantasy of consumption. The message: it's okay to create a restaurant around the objectification of women and talk about them in double entendres. Twin Peaks announces, "Better Grab a Pair."

In 2015, at a Los Angeles branch of Trader Joe's a poster placed above the meat department announced, "Finest quality cuts that 'meat' everyone's approval." It shows men leering at a woman who has meat tied to her hat with a ribbon. It offers a voyeurism of voyeurism, teaching others how to consume.

The sexualized pigs and chickens, or the "Skinny Cow" who advertises low fat milk (no "fat cow" there, even though we are the ones who have made the cows "bovine" by immobilizing them and keeping them in milk production year round), makes the degradation and consumption of women's images and of meat appear playful and harmless.

Because of the absent referent, no one is seen as being harmed, so no one has to be accountable. Everyone can enjoy the degradation without being honest about it. "We're just looking at a pig." "It's just a chicken image, for goodness' sake!" "It's just a menu item."

We might ask, "Why?"

These images insulate meat and dairy eating while intensifying misogyny. Sexual references massage the dead meat into a doubly consumable object, because women are fragmented as well: "piece of ass," "breast man," "leg man." Better to think of oneself as enjoying a breast, or a thigh, or a rack than the fragmented body parts of slaughtered animals.

These images heighten the inevitability of meat eating and dairy consumption. Rather than acknowledging that ways to structure our world exist other than by dominating and eating animals and objectifying women, these images offer the imprimatur of normalcy. What appears to be a feature of life is actually a one-sided construct. The point of view of the entire culture, reiterated through advertisements and

newspaper illustrations, a melding of pornography and popular culture, is actually only a particular point of view.

These images provide a safe outlet for feelings of unease when one thinks about the miserable lives and deaths of animals who are consumed for food or whose reproductive products are taken from them. We are discomforted by uncomfortable feelings but titillated by sexual references.

The absent referent serves our desire not to know about the violence behind what we are eating. But the function of the absent referent not only kills the animal who ends up on our plate, but a part of our spirit, too, because it keeps us disconnected. It helps us live with lies and allows the continuation of forms of violence that could be stopped.

These images prevent a specific kind of seeing, a specific kind of representation, the representation of the real lives and deaths of farmed animals. They bolster entitlement to consumption. It is understandable that we might want to keep things hidden away when they are in violation of our spiritual awareness of connection with others. But those things that are hidden often erupt into view. This is the insidious part of the sexual politics of meat: When those who have been hidden do make their appearance, they are dressed to be killed, with all the accoutrements of sexual consumability. So they enter the oversexualized climate of our culture and meld in. Rather than disturbing our conscience, they reassure.

With the sexual politics of meat, privilege creates perspective. Then the privilege disappears and what it allows access to—fun with the bodies of others—is seen as a personal choice. Thus misogyny is simultaneously both inscribed and denied, and eating animals remains business as usual. Inequality, already made sexy, has also been made tasty. ■

Food as Medicine

Vermont Youth Grow Food for the Hungry

BY ALEXIS LATHEM

When I join the farm crew on a late morning in midsummer, they are just finishing up the day's squash and cucumber harvest. Crew leader Jeremy Schleining, dressed in Carhartts and a ball cap, is standing between the rows of sprawling waist-high zucchini plants that have become so prolific they seem to grow right before my eyes. I can hear the voices of the harvesters, who are crouched down between the rows, drifting softly in the air with the sweet fragrances of summer.

"Everyone!" Schleining calls out gently. "We're going to wash-pack now."

The harvesters appear as they stand, dressed in their Vermont Youth Conservation Corps uniforms—short-sleeved green button-down shirts with a VYCC patch over the shoulder—lifting totes full of vegetables to be hauled to the far end of the row and onto an old pickup. I follow behind a Nepali girl named Anjou, who wears sandals, her arms adorned with bangles.

The first indication that this is no ordinary organic farm are those green shirts. Modelled after FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) of the Depression era, the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps is an educational and conservation program, and like its predecessor, VYCC is dedicated as much to healing bodies and spirits as it is to repairing abused soils and degraded forests. At the farm at VYCC, the principle of *food as medicine* is in operation, in more ways than one.

The nine members of the VYCC farm crew, who are between fifteen and eighteen years old, are hired to work on the farm through the Labor Department's Workforce Investment Act. The farm crew and their mentors—apprentices in their early twenties who live and work on the farm—can claim a sizable share of the thousands of hours of labor that

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ALEXIS LATHEM is the author of the poetry collection, *Alphabet of Bones*. Poet, environmental journalist, and writing instructor at the Community College of Vermont, she lives on a small farm in Vermont.

The Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (VYCC) provides employment, leadership training, and mentoring to at-risk youth. Farm Crew Leader Jeremy Schleining (left, foreground), with summer farm crew members (left to right) Olivia Camp-Allen, Sumitra Acharya, Joe Preston, Ethan Spier, Tracy Streeter, Stephanie Bartlett, Khada Acharya.

Caelan Keenan

go into growing and packing vegetables for some three hundred farm shares every week for twelve weeks. Almost all of this food is distributed free of charge to families who would otherwise have no access to fresh local produce. Cooking and nutrition classes are included.

A Holistic Approach to Food, Work, and Health

In a unique partnership with area hospitals called Health Care Shares, the farm at VYCC offers weekly farm shares throughout the growing season to income-eligible patients who have been selected by their physicians. In both 2013 and 2014, the farm delivered over 50,000 pounds of organically raised produce, and the occasional pasture-raised chicken, to poorly nourished Vermonters, while providing meaningful full-time employment to at-risk youth. Most of the crew are working their first jobs, and will leave here, says Schleining, "with a solid job experience on their resumes—and a reference."

I walk back to the wash station with Bruce, an eighteen-year-old with light blond hair and wire-rimmed glasses, who is working his second season on the farm. To be eligible for a job on the crew through the WIA program, applicants must

be economically disadvantaged and must have at least one other "barrier to employment": either they have a disability, are homeless, or are in foster care. Bruce (who asked me to withhold his last name) would qualify for at least three risk factors, although since he turned eighteen he is no longer a legal ward of the state. He was about ten years old, he tells me, when he first went into Department of Children and Families custody. It wasn't until two years ago that he was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury, inflicted by his birth father, who smashed his head against a cement floor when he was a small child.

"I finally spoke up about the abuse that was going on," he explained, regarding his injury. "I had no choice."

As we walk, Bruce tells me about the farm of his own he wants to have one day.

"I don't think I'll have meat birds. I don't like them. I prefer heritage birds. You have a more constant cycle."

We meet up again with Schleining and the others who are washing freshly picked vegetables in three large metal troughs in the shade, sorting them into "firsts" and "seconds." A tall girl with long blond hair is hanging over the edge of a trough, draping her arms up to her elbows in the cool water. Three crew members who have recently emigrated from Nepal are at the far end of the wash station, chatting among themselves in Nepali.

Schleining picks up a large zucchini covered with warts and holds it up.

"Would you call this a second?" he asks.

"Second!"

He agrees, and tosses it into a tote. Twenty-six-year-old Schleining, who wears nickel-sized studs in his ears and has a colorful peace sign tattooed on his forearm, came here from Seattle, where he studied custom auto painting at a technical college. A patch on his green shirt reads "Americorps/Vista."

"I thought I wanted to build muscle cars," he tells me. "It's amazing how much a person can change in ten years."

Schleining is also responsible for facilitating the crew's daily reading, writing, and discussion sessions. The purpose of these sessions, he says, is "to teach them to start discussing things." (On the day I observed discussion, one of the crew members had selected the topic, "Due Process and Equal Protection for Gays and Lesbians," which was, among the farm

Farm crews prepare weekly Health Care Shares of fresh produce for distribution to food-insecure Vermonters. Farm Crew Leader Jeremy Schleining (left), with crew members Sumitra Acharya (middle) and Olivia Camp-Allen (right).

Caelan Keenan

crew, entirely uncontroversial. Gay marriage? Why not?) Schleining tells me that he loves working with kids. "It's been fun seeing them learn where food comes from. What does a broccoli plant look like? People are shocked. Onions really do come out of the ground! Learning these things changes the way we think about food. It creates better eating habits."

He draws a large smooth-skinned zucchini through the cool water, lifts it, and lets the water fall down into the tub.

"I grew up in a family where money was tight. We couldn't afford to eat well. That's why this program really hits home."

Today's New Deal: Food Justice

It is hard to imagine, but the US federal government once enlisted three million young men between 1933 and 1941 to address a national environmental crisis. Drawn from the legions of unemployed youth who roamed the streets in search of work, crews were deployed across America to repair the "waste, neglect, and destruction of generations" by planting trees and anchoring soils that were billowing across the landscape in great clouds of dust. The CCC introduced progressive ideas and conservationist thinking into every corner of the country and was embraced across political divisions. "Work without thought is drudgery" was a core principle of a program that sought to "close the gap between the practical and the theoretical," to engage minds as well as bodies. However we evaluate its success as a conservation program, its effect on those who took part was undeniably transformative.

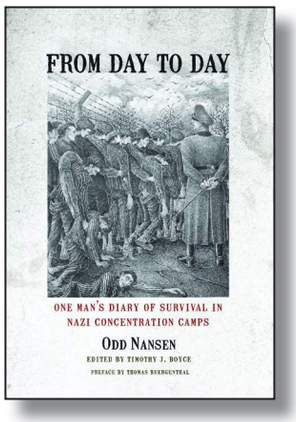
I would not expect that the current administration create anything like the CCC of the Depression era. Federal food and farm policies are too entrenched, the institution of the presidency too disgraced, and the culture too enamored of technological fixes to accept that the best solutions to our problems might be low-tech, hand-built, and close to home.

But there is no reason why the Vermont program—built on the core principle that access to healthful food is a human right—could not be reproduced in every county, on the outskirts of every city, wherever there are idle youth, farmlands in need of repair, depressed local economies, and communities without access to healthful food. Land trusts, youth groups, hospitals, labor departments, schools, climate justice groups, and food shelves can work together to reclaim farmlands from suburban sprawl, provide meaningful work to youth, build local food systems, reduce hunger and obesity, and create low-carbon peace economies. Town by town and crew by crew, community farms on the VYCC model across the country could change the way Americans think about food and our relationship to the places where we live and work. Farm work should not be drudgery. A community that knows "how to discuss things" will neither be backward nor intolerant, but inclusive and diverse.

This is what a local food system that is also a model of food justice could look like. A vigorous local food movement has much to be proud of, but inclusive it is not. In Vermont, which has the highest number of farmers' markets per capita of any state, and where a vibrant local food movement is growing, so, too, is food insecurity, a term generally defined as the lack of sufficient access to food to consistently meet an individual's or a family's basic needs. For a state that is ranked number one for its commitment to local food, it is a source of shame that, according to a 2011-2012 study conducted by the US Census Bureau, 84,000 Vermonters could not afford to meet their basic food needs, and 21 percent of Vermont children are food insecure. To "vote with the fork" as a way of letting food corporations know that we do not want to eat pesticide-laden, genetically modified, reconstituted foods is the privilege of those who can afford to buy organic brussels sprouts at eight dollars a pound.

The VYCC model of food justice should also be our model for the future of farming. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food has acknowledged, scientific evidence has abundantly shown that sustainable agriculture offers the most promise for increasing food production, poverty alleviation, and resilience to climate shocks as we look forward to a global population of nine billion people. The future of food lies not in industrial, chemically intensive agriculture but in ecologically based practices, like those that are practiced and taught at the VYCC. (*continued on page 66*)

The real-time diary of a survivor's experience in concentration camps



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Physicians and Torture

Medical Teshuvah for a Profession in Need of Healing

BY MARTHA SONNENBERG

Teshuvah, or repentance, in the Jewish tradition, is most often practiced during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but is, in fact, appropriate at all times. While doing my own personal work in this regard, I was led to turn my attention to my profession, that of medicine and health care.

Since the revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib, and most recently, since the US Senate Intelligence Committee on Torture made public its report in December 2014, physicians have spoken out against the role of doctors in the implementation of torture. It is a sensitive issue for the profession, and most physicians are aghast at such obvious trespass of the most basic standard of medical ethics, to "do no harm." They see themselves in a moral and ethical universe wholly apart from that of those doctors who have actively participated in torture.

An example of this sentiment appeared in an article by George Annas and Sondra Crosby published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, in which the authors seek to understand how physicians could overcome their professional inhibitions and "evolve" into active participants in torture at CIA "black sites." They suggest that physicians complied because they were assured by lawyers that they "had immunity from prosecution and would not be held legally responsible for violating US and international law against torture." A solution, the authors suggest, is that lawyers support doctors in the maintenance, and not in the violation, of ethics.

While such an alliance may be constructive, I do not believe it strikes at the underlying dynamic that allows doctors to participate in torture. Rather, I believe that my medical colleagues and I do, in fact, inhabit the *same* world as those physicians complicit with torture. Further, I suggest that we are so caught up in the daily requirements of our work that we do not see the slippery slope of declining ethics upon which we stand. It is the responsibility of our own profession to address these problems and to heal ourselves.

Emry Layton / emrylayton.com

The Medical Heart of Darkness

At a time when the health care system itself is rapidly evolving, and when many groups and organizations are attempting to change the way health care is delivered, reports of physician complicity in torture and violation of ethics suggest that the system and the culture we want to change have deeper and darker roots than we may want to admit. We have in American medical history, for example, the Tuskegee study, which subjected black sharecroppers in Alabama to infection with syphilis so that researchers might study the natural progression of that disease. The study, sponsored by the US Public Health Service, continued from 1932 to 1972. The "subjects" were denied treatment long after penicillin was available as a cure for syphilis. And then there was the Willowbrook hepatitis study (Saul Krugman and the New York University School of Medicine), lasting from 1955 to 1970, in which institutionalized, mentally disabled children were deliberately infected with hepatitis virus. Only some of the children had been given a protective antibody. There have also been multiple medically sanctioned studies

MARTHA SONNENBERG, MD is an independent consultant in quality and safety and former chief medical officer.

of torture techniques prior to waterboarding, including the MKUltra study, which involved the CIA's use, in the 1950s, of forced morphine addiction and subsequent forced drug withdrawal on US military personnel. These examples are but a few, and for all these "studies," the justification was that the research was conducted for the sake of society, the military, the pharmaceutical industries, etc.

The point is that doctors and other professionals are subject to the same societal and institutional pressures as everyone else. The extreme form of this response to institutional pressure is the "socialization to atrocity" seen most often in military institutions, a concept first articulated by Robert Jay Lifton in discussing Nazi doctors. But subtler institutional pressures on physicians, exerted by health care organizations, by the insurance and pharmaceutical industries, and by some research protocols, can still be found every day in hospitals, nursing homes, and ambulatory care centers. Doctors are pressured, sometimes directly but more often indirectly or monetarily, to treat patients too quickly and carelessly, with unnecessary or unsafe medications or procedures, or with futile and invasive end-of-life interventions that prolong suffering.

The economic underpinnings of the current health care system turn health care into a profit-generating business. This leads to complicity, conscious or not, with the delivery of medical care that is dehumanizing at its essence, and to substandard or no care for those who cannot pay. These pressures make further, less ethical actions seem acceptable or reasonable. Such institutional pressures have undoubtedly led to problems of poor quality and unsafe care in American hospitals and long-term care facilities. It is time for physicians to take responsibility for their complicity in this process.

The Erosion of Medical Ethics

Socialization to complicity with torture and violation of ethics should be understood not as an aberrant deviation from normal physician activity, but rather as the extreme end of a *continuum* of socialization to institutional pressures on physicians to act in a manner that violates their conscience and their humanity. Finger-pointing at "bad doctors" has proven ineffective in improving physician performance and similarly cannot lead our profession to confront its most unethical and dysfunctional innards. Only when physicians and all health care workers understand, with compassion, how institutional socialization works, from its most horrific forms to its most seemingly benign, and only when we are willing to acknowledge that we *all* have within us the potential for trespassing our ethical standards, can we begin to hope for the changes we desire.

Every time we physicians rush a patient, avoid eye contact (including looking at a computer screen rather than at a patient), dismiss concerns, prescribe unnecessary medications,

Emry Layton / emrylayton.com

denigrate other health care workers, or are party to the denial of quality care to any patient but particularly to the poor and indigent, the elderly, the chemically dependent, and those with mental health problems, we are dehumanizing our patients and their families, as well as ourselves. This brings a particular challenge for physician leaders at all levels, not only within military institutions: while trying to align physician performance with institutional missions, we must also ensure that we do not undermine our profession's ethical standards as an unintended consequence of this alignment. As the American playwright August Wilson wrote, "Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing." Our profession must begin to wrestle with its own demons if we are to be successful in transforming health care into a truly healing profession.

Wrestling with Our Demons: From Repentance to Action

What would wrestling with the profession's demons look like? *Teshuvah*, as repentance, has several components and goes beyond the mere recognition of a sin. According to Maimonides, himself a physician, there are several actions one must take to fully repent. Among these are:

- Remorse for the sin.
- Acting in a way opposite to that of the sin.
- Refraining from lesser sins to safeguard oneself from committing greater sins.
- Teaching others not to sin.

First, our profession must acknowledge its dark history and the contemporary actions that dehumanize patients and numb us to further actions that erode our sense of ethics. Dehumanization is a precursor to the demonization of people, and demonization is a prerequisite to the justification of torture. It is my belief that most physicians and health care workers *want* to deliver humane and un-objectified care, and that disillusionment, unconscious though it may be, with the current health care delivery system is the cause of much demoralization, depression, chemical dependency, and suicide among health professionals.

Second, we must, as individuals and as a profession, provide care in a manner that affirms our patients' individuality and humanity, refraining from and opposing any activities which denigrate our patients' and their families' being. This will certainly involve our direct interactions with patients, but also calls upon the profession to act collectively to engage its members in promoting new kinds of behavior and a professional culture that values the humanity of patients and caregivers. We can work alongside patients' rights groups, and humbly learn from our patients to achieve more humane care.

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Third, we must be vigilant, again both as individuals and as a profession, against activities that may appear innocuous but numb our own sense of ethics and diminish our acknowledgement of our patients' humanity. These activities include hurried and incomplete exams; treating patients as disease entities rather than as individuals; denigrating and discounting concerns and fears; promoting unnecessary treatments and procedures; prescribing unnecessary or harmful medications; providing rushed and inadequate informed consent; participating in research protocols that violate ethical standards or prey on the imprisoned, the homeless, or the mentally disabled; and treating nurses and other caregivers with disrespect.

Fourth, we must require changes in the medical education process, such that a loving and humanistic approach to patients be as important as a correct diagnosis, that the humanity of medical students be emphasized, that medical students learn humility rather than arrogance in their professional journey, and that they learn to be part of a team of caregivers rather than authoritarian, autonomous practitioners.

Beyond this, it must be said that the underlying institutional pressure to objectify and dehumanize people comes from the society in which we all live, where profit and competition constitute the pervasive value system. Therefore, the full realization of a new kind of medicine, one that truly returns us to the caring soul of medicine, will inevitably require a radical transformation of society as a whole, such that human well-being becomes paramount to profit and all people have access to the highest quality (not the most expensive) care. The actions required by *teshuvah* for the medical profession and for society as a whole—actions that will take us beyond doing "no harm," to practicing a profession that can truly heal and be healed—should begin today. The transformation of consciousness and behavior does not happen quickly or without resistance. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE

The online version of this article at tikkun.org contains links and references to the studies mentioned by Martha Sonnenberg.

If you are interested in pursuing these issues further and/or joining the Health Care Task Force of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, please contact Martha Sonnenberg at SbergMD@aol.com or Cat Zavis, executive director of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, at cat@spiritualprogressives.org.

Lessons from Palestine

On Walls, Cultural Resistance, and the Artistry of Lily Yeh

BY ARIEL BLETH

Lily Yeh and her mural "Once upon a time, there was the land of Palestine."

Ben Marlett / www.InfiniteVisionArt.com

The small Palestinian village of Al-Aqaba, home to 300 inhabitants, lies atop a rocky ridge in northern West Bank. Its large, striking minaret punctures an otherwise earth-bound, rugged geography, and the Jordan Valley fans out to the east like a desert mirage. Waves of brown, orange, and red blur into one another—a striking view from the three-tiered scaffolding that precariously hugged the wall of the village's most prominent building in the spring of 2015. Up and down the rickety structure for the better part of a week, Philadelphia-based artist Lily Yeh gave most of her attention to the aqua-colored expanse in front of her and the task of painting a mural on the twenty-five-foot wall.

Yeh is no stranger to this process, frequently choosing walls as her canvas. Her brightly painted murals enliven otherwise bleak environs all over the globe today. Under the auspices of her organization, Barefoot Artists, Yeh travels to impoverished or traumatized communities and brings art as a means of healing and transformation. Part visual art, part community building, bonding, and mobilizing, it is a process she describes as a living social sculpture. Yeh passionately believes in the power of communities to embrace their suffering and transcend it through creativity and beauty, a sort of alchemical transformation that can diffuse the heavy weight of living under oppression, persecution, or war.

Art Under Occupation

By now, after four visits to the Palestinian territories, Yeh is familiar with the humanitarian impacts of the ongoing Occupation and conflict in the region. In 2011, she led a community-based art project at the Balata Refugee Camp on the outskirts of Nablus—the largest refugee camp in the West Bank and considered to be one of the most densely populated places on earth with 23,000 residents living within one-quarter square kilometer. In 2014, the mayor of Al-Aqaba invited Yeh to paint a small mural near the school's classrooms. The village itself lies within the Area C designation of the West Bank, where Israel retains nearly exclusive control. It sits squarely within a military firing zone.

Yeh, inspired by the village's commitment to thrive under challenging circumstances, returned the following year to take on a project with a much larger scale. Now, a large tree of life (one of Yeh's favorite images) is the first thing one sees upon arriving at Al-Aqaba. Olive branches reach skyward through shades of blue and green and are surrounded by

ARIEL BLETH is a freelance writer and visual artist who lives in Missoula, Montana.

bright flowers, doves, and stars. Between its branches are traditional symbols of Palestinian heritage, the national flag and the *kaffiyeh*, a traditional Middle Eastern headdress or scarf. "The pain of oppression is a huge mental wall," Yeh says, acknowledging the multiple manifestations of walls, "but where we dare to imagine and thrive, there we have a freedom and a joy nobody can control. How do we create joy? Through creating beauty."

To the north and west of Al-Aqaba, another type of wall stretches over the arid terrain of the West Bank landscape. Consisting of concrete, razor wire, ditches, watch towers, and electronic surveillance systems, this 400-mile, disputed barrier has been given many names: *security barrier*, *separation fence*, *antiterrorism fence*, and *apartheid wall* are among them. The construction of the barrier began in 2002, and if the project continues as planned, the barrier will be four times the length and, in some places, twice the height of the Berlin Wall (ranging from sixteen to twenty-six feet tall).

Walls Ancient and Modern

I traveled with Yeh to Palestine in 2015 along with four other volunteers from Barefoot Artists. Our first encounter with the barrier was in Bethlehem, near the crossing terminal to Jerusalem—one of thirty-two checkpoints that currently exist along the barrier's course. (Restrictions on Palestinians crossing through checkpoints vary but generally require ID cards and/or crossing permits.) Graffiti art and a series of plaques with quotes from local Palestinians decorate the lower reaches of the wall—splashes of color that pepper an otherwise gray, foreboding structure.

On the Palestinian side, art and language are often used to convey political messages and give voice to experiences of oppression and occupation that otherwise might not be heard. "Do you want . . . " one plaque begins, "do you want freedom of speech? Do you want freedom of movement? Do you want justice?" The questions seem to have tumbled out of the writer, Hisham. "Do you want peace? Do you want to experience other cultures? Do you want humanity? I do. Since I could think, live, and breathe I think of my freedom. I want to live, like most people in the world."

Humans have built walls to enclose, separate, and protect individuals, tribes, and nations for millennia—the walls of Jericho, Hadrian's Wall, or the Great Wall of China may come to mind. Yet there are ramifications to walls. After the fall of the Berlin Wall over a quarter-century ago, many of us might have imagined that we were entering a time in human history when the use of large-scale barriers—to defend borders, occupy lands, or divide people—was no longer conceivable, let alone acceptable. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the number of barriers separating countries, territories, and communities has dramatically increased worldwide; estimates indicate that over 6,000 miles of varying types of separation barriers have been established in little more than a decade to prevent, limit, or monitor people's movement.

We seem to be in a collective state of uncertainty as to whether walls (of the megaproject variety) actually curtail or fuel the violence, religious extremism, and despair that, more and more, appear to define our reality. In their *Dictionary of Symbols*, Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant write that walls (literal and figurative) can be understood as interruptions of intercommunication. Psychologically, walls make some feel secure, but their protection also stifles and imprisons. From this perspective, continually opting for segregation may be an instinctual, knee-jerk response that feeds a stance of intolerance and, in fact, threatens the survival of our species. If we are to disrupt the age-old story of separation, we as individuals must acknowledge our own mental and emotional constructs that act as dividers and recognize when they serve and when they hinder our capacity to be present in this world with an open heart.

Ben Marlett / www.InfiniteVisionArt.com

In Nablus

These thoughts remained with me as I traveled to the West Bank, where, in addition to the project in Al-Aqaba, the team was invited to paint a mural and facilitate a community art project in the old city of Nablus. The heart of Nablus has a cultural legacy of 5,000 years; buildings show evidence of architecture from the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman eras, though today the ancient, large, dry-stone walls are combined with modern cement and cinder blocks—a superficial reminder of the neighborhood's long history of political resistance and the devastation, as well as the ensuing repair, that incurred during and after the Second Intifada. Posters line the walls of its labyrinthine alleyways with pictures of men, mostly young, who died as suicide bombers or were jailed or killed during the conflict.

Majdi Shella, a native of Nablus and the local coordinator for the Barefoot Artist team, is a veteran of the resistance movement. His history with the movement includes several long periods of imprisonment during the 1980s, in the notorious Al-Fara'a Prison. Shella continues to be a political organizer, but over the years he has honed his efforts toward cultivating a strong civil society as part of a cultural resistance movement. To him, sociocultural programs and activities are critical tools in their struggle, which, as Shella explains, is really the struggle "to live, not to die; to choose life over apathy; to build open hearts and minds; to become more accepting of the other."

With approval from the Old City neighborhood council, Shella organized Yeh, her team, and local youth to paint old, rusted metal doors of the shops and homes surrounding the square. Over the course of several days, energizing primary colors began to jump out of the muted earth tones. Echoes of "Mama Lily, Mama Lily" bounced off the stones and bricks of the old city—an enthusiasm that reverberated from wall to wall as children besieged Yeh with their desire to participate, get her approval, or share in the delight of their accomplishment. For Yeh, this is where community-building occurs: creating new patterns of action that allow for an immediacy of experience in transformation. Drawing on ideas and images that arise out of the children's art or participation (often simple geometric shapes, folk art, (*continued on page 67*)

Grieving Ourselves Whole

BY WILL HECTOR

I WAS RECENTLY IN a corporate office when a thud interrupted the whir of strategic planning.

"What was that?" someone asked.

"A bird hit the window," said another.

There were a few sounds of sympathy, and one woman said, "I want to go hold it." Another woman spotted it on the ground one floor below, and, her voice lilting hopefully, said, "Its wing is still moving."

At this point things seemed to shift. Compassion, nurturance, and mourning were hurled against the staid wall of workplace norms. Who can practically weigh the life of an injured bird against the collective inertia and consensus of repressiveness among coworkers needing to pay rent?

"It's just a pigeon," announced the first voice, interjecting a mechanistic perspective. It was well timed. It seemed to quell the uncertainty of emotion and the complexity of empathy, returning an air of rationality to the initial outpouring that could be described—albeit momentarily—as healthy grieving.

Just like that, nature collided with a culture that provides an illusion of our dominion over it—and lost handily. An event went from potentially being a reunion of compassion to a group exercise in suppressing grief by stuffing loss and challenging questions into a file cabinet drawer.

This story illustrates the confounding human capacity to override our sorrows and losses. Consumer culture, and the corporations that fuel it, benefit mightily from this capacity. This is because grief is as powerful an aspect of being human as the ability to love, and quelling it separates us from our most resourceful and capable selves, making us easy prey to the manipulation that underlies overconsumption.

The Value of Loss

Grief, notoriously hard to define, is the engagement of loss. It's a process that looks different for everyone. It's not completed by checklist or through Kubler-Ross's five stages. To engage with loss—the death of a loved one, but also the passing of a moment—is to feel one's connection to life and to define one's experience of love. Grief drives us to intimate connection, brilliant creativity, and our clearest thinking when we allow it to. It is the foundation of love because it frames relationships for us.

But grief is ostracized in a culture of material accumulation where loss is to be avoided. The systematic disengagement from the biosphere that began with agrarianism and grew exponentially through the production and consumption practices of capitalism has reached epic proportion. And now the natural world, like an ignored partner, is protesting with increased volatility and unpredictability to the extent that we are approaching the brink of extinction.

To heal this crisis we must grieve our lost connection: engagement with this loss means examining our consumption habits and rethinking what is acceptable behavior in the workplace and outside of it. To do this meaningfully is to reexamine capitalism—or any other economic system that doesn't incorporate grief.

Would the workplace be more innovative, healthy, and productive if employees were encouraged to express themselves fully—including their grief—instead of being coerced into

Library of Congress

WILL HECTOR is a therapist and writer living in Oakland, Calif., with his wife and two four-legged companions. In his therapy practice, he works with couples, individuals, and children, and offers a group for ecological grieving.

narrow roles that center around optimism, competition, and growth? Would schools and neighborhoods be safer, and the politics of hatred vanquished, if grief were a celebrated part of our educational and cultural systems? We tend to view our differences as granting us power, proclaiming ourselves special by virtue of ethnicity, possessions, test performance, or other distinctions that separate us. I wonder how our relationships might shift if we were willing to lose our identities even a little. When we hold on too tightly, we fall prey to the delusions of identity; if we could grieve our lack of dominion, we wouldn't have to draw such hard lines around everything that defines "us" versus "them." Grief denied is augmented, perverted, and passed on.

At its core, war is about survival. Armies concurrently ply violence in an attempt to project loss onto each other. To escape death—or the illusion of it, through our threatened faith systems, exploitation of resources, or a territory grab, to name a few methods—we kill instead. If we could fully accept loss—meaning to face and to grieve it—it is hard to imagine we would be so easily driven to the rage and hatred necessary for war. But if left to fester, unattended grief around the perceived loss of what we hold dear can be manipulated by warmongers. Misappropriated grief after 9/11 propelled the "shock and awe" campaign that followed. The subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have, in turn, become recruiting tools for ISIS. Grief denied does not lose its power; it powerfully reemerges in another form. And if war's victims—and its heroes—don't grieve, the cycle continues into the next generation.

Unexpressed grief also has subtler repercussions: inhibition and perversion. When we suppress grief, we narrow our experience of living. To cope with this deadening of the self, we employ distractions and defenses, including addiction, overconsumption, anger, dissociation, and a desperate pursuit of entertainment. Amidst this bevy of transgressions, right action gets twisted into wrong action.

Wrong action can appear in surprising places. Two years ago I joined other writers, psychologists, activists, and nonprofit leaders at a retreat led by environmentalist Joanna Macy aimed at creating a "great turning" toward a healthy biosphere. On the final day of the workshop, I shared a lunch table with two participants whose frustration and fury over climate change ran so high they had become hopeless.

The workshop had offered plenty of opportunity to grieve. There were stories and sorrows in every lecture. But at lunch, absent the formal workshop container guided by a wise leader for just an hour, it seemed my companions allowed their anger to unconsciously rule without grief to mitigate it. They regressed to planning a desperate, lonely act. They proposed a perpetual carbon-burning art installation that would increase release of carbon into the atmosphere as a way of "showing the world" just how messed up and wrongheaded its "apathy" was.

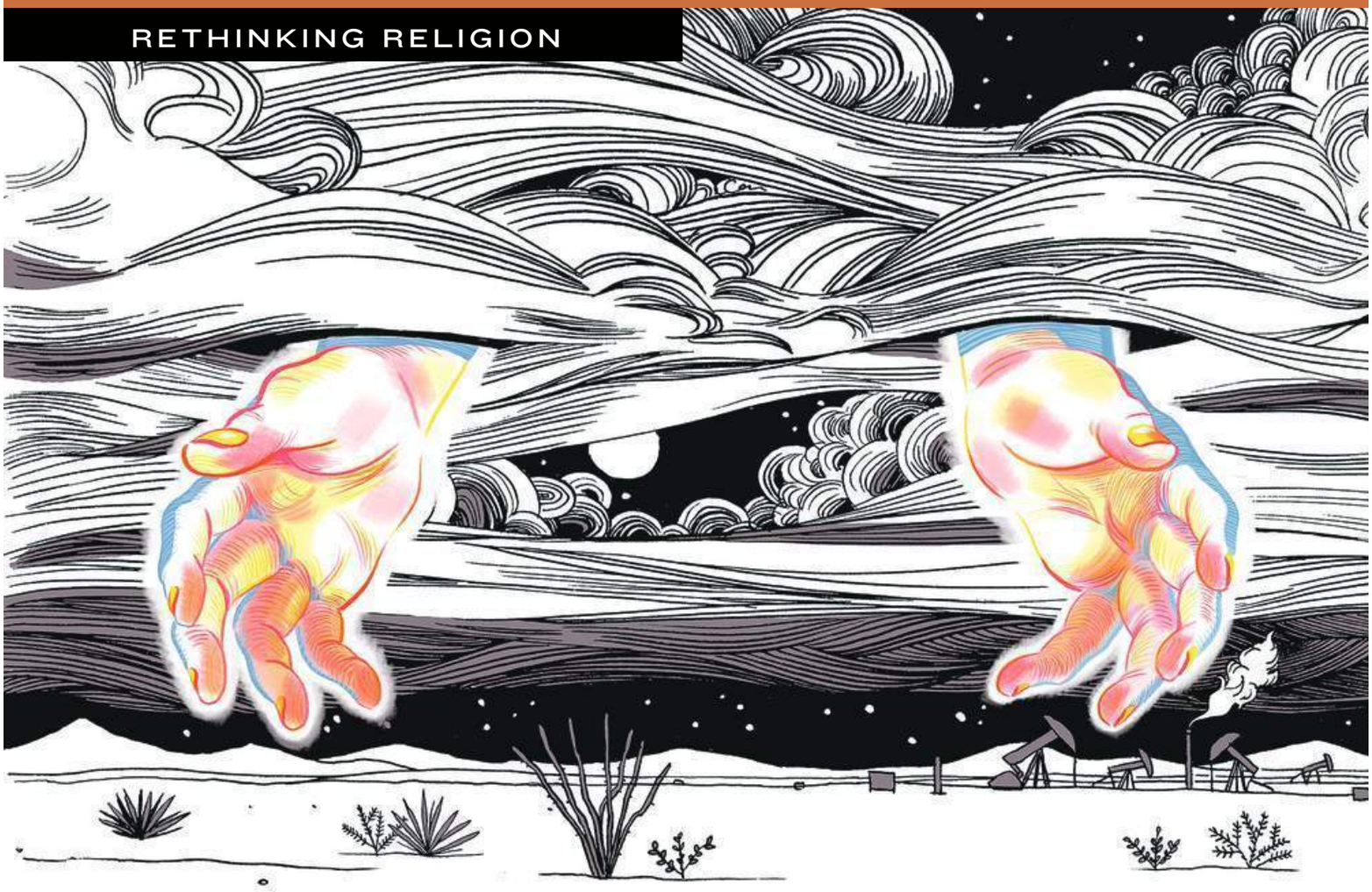
To my ears this was a perversion of grief into anger that drove the desire to destroy the very thing we were unbearably saddened over losing. The inability to grieve had mutated into apathy, which, not coincidentally, was the very target of their anger. Such projection further polarizes and disintegrates us.

The unwillingness or inability to grieve distorts our perception of reality. To grieve is to live with a heart fully exposed; viewing the world through the eye of such a heart is the experience poets have been espousing for centuries. But grief is elusive and fluid—one day engulfing us and the next day waning to an ember. If we're able to endure the less bearable days—be it through substances or behaviors—we can fool ourselves into thinking the quieter days of grief are all we have to contend with. And if we can't fully experience what's in front of us, including grief with every heartbeat, we'll make choices based on illusion. The consumption culture is the perfect accomplice for such illusory choices, stoking and slaking our constant need for gratification at the increasing peril of the biosphere. A pain-aversion cycle gets formed: mindless consumption destabilizes the biosphere, which creates painful feelings of loss that we mask with further consumption.

In addition to supporting defenses and behaviors like addiction, numbing out, and retail therapy, such consumption runs unaware of—and disconnected from—our deep reliance on earth's rhythms and bounty. Nature provides ample opportunity to grieve, but from artificial snow to off-season fruit on grocery shelves, we don't like missing the things we feel entitled to. We can't even accept that we have feelings about a dead bird in the workplace. This also makes sense: the corporate workplace has industrialized our consciousness. We perform increasingly mechanized tasks at work that comply with constructed ideas of productivity in order to meet organizational parameters of growth. In such environments, there isn't room for any feeling other than forced optimism. We sublimate any other feelings into loathing the boss or planning a hostile takeover.

There's another layer of grief to contend with—one more personal and perhaps more painful: the realization that any one of us can only do so much. This offends both our personal and social experiences of omnipotence. From the infant who cries and gets fed to the notion that money can make us immortal, we have a primal relationship with omnipotence that's hard to overcome. There are so many broken behaviors and failing systems to fix, so many injustices to acknowledge—let alone repair—that motivation wilts before the list can even be completed. In the face of truly examining temperature anomalies, rising sea levels, extremes in precipitation (including both drought and flood), and threats to our food and water supplies, is it even possible to avoid being overwhelmed, let alone to allow grief to guide us?

(*continued on page 68*)



God's Hands from "How to be Happy"

Eleanor Davis / www.doing-fine.com

The Dharma Within Climate Crisis

Living a New Story

BY THANISSARA

Some nights I am pulled awake before morning light by a rising wave of queasy sensations, which implode my reasonably coherent sense of self into a vortex of struggling pieces. While I worry about many elements of my personal life, I have come to associate my night monster with a leap of awareness regarding our terrifying global situation. A warming biosphere and the ubiquitous signs of a world tipping toward catastrophe, confirmed by scientific facts, have chained my waking life to a new and increasingly radical curriculum. It is a syllabus in which words like "resilience" and "revolution" are markers.

The irony that I teach meditation but am reduced to night sweats is not lost on me. While meditation generates calm, well-being, and the perspective of insight, the actual process of awakening from the dross of apathy, resistance, and delusion is a struggle. It would be naïve to think otherwise. The depiction of the Buddha-to-be, Siddhartha Gautama, on the cusp of his enlightenment sums it up. Arrayed against him

THANISSARA, originally from London, is a meditation teacher. She cofounded Dharmagiri Meditation Center in South Africa and teaches in the EU, the United States, and Israel. Her new book is *Time to Stand Up: An Engaged Buddhist Manifesto for Our Earth*.

are the forces of Mara, the personification of the great power that serves illusion, ignorance, and division. Mara is similar to the Satan of Abrahamic religions: an adversarial tempter who accuses and seduces. Today these forces are the voices that dull our awareness of climate crisis, undermine our courage to combat it, and put us back to sleep.

The Struggle to Enlightenment

The Buddha's enlightenment arose from a momentous struggle. Siddhartha began his journey by departing from a life of excessive pleasure, which he rejected; then, influenced by the religious metaphor of his time, he perfected refined states of meditation. However, he inevitably felt trapped by the coarse realities of the body. Thinking the body was the problem, he tried to crush it while removing himself from all contact with the world. This period is known as his six years of extreme asceticism. Such was the severity of his determination that he pushed himself to the edge of death.

As Siddhartha underwent his life-denying practices, a woman called Sujata observed him from a distance. One day she decided to intervene. She made some milk rice and brought it to him. Gaining some strength, Siddhartha realized the utter uselessness of the path of pain to which he had committed. He recognized the need to embrace what he had been denying. The problem was not the world; the problem was his rejection of it. It was a moment of softening and opening.

This symbolic moment of Siddhartha receiving Sujata's milk rice portrays the archetypal warrior, and his attempts to control life, yielding to the life-giving energy of the archetypal lover. Instead of conquering his body and preferencing subtle realms of consciousness, Siddhartha felt reverence for the mysterious world of forms of which he was a part. He saw the beauty of the natural world around him and allowed himself to be nourished by the food offered to him. Sujata's gift, as a symbol of the deep feminine, was critical for the new awakening Siddhartha would bring to the world: he thought, "Is there another way?"

A Different Way Forward

In the midst of a global struggle, this too is our question. We are now in times of anthropogenic climate change, meaning that now, as never before, humans have altered the geological reality of the earth and its biosphere. The facts are so familiar as to have become banal: the oceans are acidifying and warming, aquifers are drying up, ice caps are melting, and the sixth great extinction is underway. Still, it is stunning to consider that we are surely creating the conditions for the collapse of our civilization and, perhaps, mass human extinction. The thought of it may jolt each of us awake occasionally—but as a society and a species, when will we wake up to face this reality?

Like Siddhartha, we have come to the end of manipulating natural resources for our gratification and pleasure. We must surely also see the futility of the path of pain, degradation, violence, and war that would result from continuing to exploit the earth so recklessly. And like Siddhartha, we have a clear choice before us. Do we take the path of death or of life? If that sounds too dramatic, then we haven't understood the lethal forces arrayed against us.

This is a deeply testing moment in our evolutionary arc. Clearly we require a revolution, or a shock that startles us from our dreamy complacency into a collective struggle for survival. The required level of mobilization has to touch almost every level of our personal and collective lives, which means that going about business as usual is not an option. We have to reject the delusional narrative of "free trade," which treats the earth as a machine with endless resources, ensnares the poor in servitude, and sanctions the savage abuse of animals. Livestock alone accounts for 51 percent of greenhouse gases and the use of one-third of the world's water.

For the most part, Western democratic processes have been hijacked by a fossil fuel–based corporate agenda that has billions of dollars at its disposal. This agenda is to extract and burn as much oil, gas, and coal as possible, which will certainly tip us over the edge of sustainability. The shine and glamor of the advertising industry and the rhetoric of politicians cover a great lie. For example, ExxonMobil, the largest corporation the world has ever seen, conducted a Machiavellian strategy of climate change denial while pretending to enter informed debates, all the while hiding the work of its own scientists from the 1970s, who warned that the continued burning of fossil fuels would be "catastrophic." It is clear that we can't trust corporate bodies and the politicians that serve them to act in our best interests.

Instead, we have to take a radically different path, one that moves from a hyper-individualized, profiteering, and conquering metaphor to living the reality of a deeply interrelated world. The discriminating mind, which separates everything, has to recognize this deeper nature of interconnection. In an ancient Buddhist text, the Shurangama Sutra, this nature is described as pure essence of consciousness, or undivided *knowing-awareness*, which is inherent within all sentient life as an inclusive, intuitive intelligence. Nothing is split away; the destructive and merciless shadow energies, as well as wisdom, beauty, and courage, are all within this mind.

The Sutra states that, while we imagine the mind to be separate from phenomena, in reality all phenomena, including the great Earth, appear within the mind. From the tiniest ants to the farthest stars, all that we know and the "one knowing" are interwoven within the tapestry of consciousness. Recognizing this, the heart knows its intimacy with all things. The icy devastation of our alienation can thaw. Instead, while redeeming our true human soul, which feels its connection with all life, we can work to protect our precious earth.

Acting Out—By Starting From Within

I have found that action is a positive way of dealing with the panic of our global crisis. The practice of transforming fear, anxiety, and overwhelm into wise and compassionate action is an essential dimension of spiritual life. When it comes to climate crisis and its colossal implications, we need to join others for support and to combine our strengths. To focus solely on personal enlightenment and self-advancement at this time—something for which Buddhists are often criticized—makes little sense. Instead, for the task at hand, we need to make alliances, which may mean moving beyond our prejudices. If we can do this, then climate change has the potential to galvanize a collaborative effort on a massive scale.

As we negotiate this deeply uncertain time, this battle for the future, we must, in spite of everything, stretch ourselves in order to bring about the changes that need to happen. To read the science of our situation and to see the ubiquitous signs of disaster is to live with the unsettling knowledge that the storm is coming. In fact, many storms are coming. Nevertheless, the possibility of another world is dawning. There is a new story emerging, which is actually a very old story, one that reclaims a respectful relationship with the natural world, as seen in the wisdom of indigenous peoples and our wiser elders, who lived sustainably and within an ethical commitment to duty and compassion.

This new narrative posits that there is no independent "self" apart from objects. The Buddha stated, as recorded in the Mula Sutta, that "upon desire (aspiration, volition), and upon attention, all things are born." (The name *mula* means *root*.) This means that our fundamental experience depends on a dynamic, which is the co-arising of "self" in relationship to "other." While there are conditioned social, cultural, and psychological boundaries within which we negotiate everyday life, and while every living thing has conscious subjectivity, in reality there is actually no independent "thing" and therefore no independent self. The old narratives of extreme independence, acquired through profit and power or by removing ourselves from "the world," as in religious metaphors that seek "heavenly salvation," are false. Instead, each thing coexists in relationship with everything else—for example, the breath, food, and liquids upon which our bodies depend.

Further, our experience of "the world" is dependent on consciousness and the outpost of consciousness, which is the activity, informed by volition and desire, of placing attention. We tend to think of the world of objects as having primacy, while actually conscious awareness, the causal influence of mind over what we give our attention, and the power of intentionality, are what shape the world around us. When we glimpse this actuality, we understand Siddhartha's insight: he realized the problem wasn't the world but his relationship to it. The world isn't "out there" somewhere but is seeded and born within our individual and collective minds. If this is the case, instead of being caught in a habitual dream, born of dysfunctional and erroneous narratives, we will wake up and work to change the story. Exploring the matrix of consciousness, intentionality, matter, and energy as ultimately seamless, we will begin to shift our ways of thinking. This will allow us to move beyond the false boundaries of centralized systems that are deeply abusive, into collaborative processes that take into account the interconnection of all things.

An Initial, Specific Goal

The discourse surrounding our oil-dependent energy policies offers an example of these false boundaries. We already know about scientific models for ever-innovative uses of the sun, wind, and oceans for energy. We know, for example, that it is entirely possible to shift to 100 percent renewable energy. Researchers at Stanford University have already come up with a renewable energy road map for all fifty states. On July 25, 2015, Germany set a new record by using renewable energy to meet 78 percent of the nation's energy needs. The technology is possible, the resources are available, but what is lacking is political and corporate will, which for too long has been beholden to a power base that cannot think beyond a dualistic mindset committed to "man over nature" and the domination of all living things in the service of individual profit.

Making the necessary shift means overcoming our own dualistic ways of thinking. It will require us all to demand specific changes to our politically, economically, and socially dysfunctional and inequitable systems. Germany's renewable revolution came about not through top-down leadership, but through grassroots pressure. Joining together as people of faith and using the information and connectivity available to us, we can free ourselves from old authorities, and begin to create, love, and share in ways that seek to express the truth of our deeper spirit, which is the aspiration to live from the truth of our innate intimacy with the earth and with each other.

We can draw from that spirit to stop the extraction of fossil fuels by divesting from them, and to lobby for a global carbon tax. At the same time, we can put pressure on governments to fully activate and employ the amazing new technologies that can meet our energy needs through renewable systems. We can support environmental organizations that restore forests and livable ecosystems, while encouraging a return to local food growing and a shift toward plant-based diets. And we can shun wasteful consumerism and embody new social values of thrift and creative reuse. If we work together as good people of the earth, we represent a powerful, united, and intentional consciousness that can activate ethical pressure at local and national levels. If we can do this, then we not only offer hope but stand a chance of winning the future. ■

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The Innocence of God: The Third Commandment

Building the Religious Counterculture

BY ANA LEVY-LYONS

Of all the old-and-dusty-sounding commandments in the Hebrew Bible, the commandment to not "take God's name in vain" seems oldest and dustiest. We can't help but picture nuns rapping school kids on their knuckles for the sin of swearing. And yet if we look deeply into this commandment, it's not about four-letter words at all. This commandment is truly among the most radical. It calls us to earn our own rewards and admit our own failings without dragging God into it.

In his beautiful series on Jewish ethics, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin points out that the Third Commandment was violated routinely by the nineteenth-century Southerners who justified slavery by saying that it was approved of in the Bible and by God. Yet to say that the Bible approves of slavery is a manipulation of the truth, which is that the Bible does not explicitly allow or disallow slavery—it *assumes* slavery. And there were biblical laws protecting the rights of slaves that did not exist in the American South. For example, while biblical law forbids forcibly returning a slave who has run away, this practice was ruled legal in the United States with the Dred Scott decision in 1857. And yet this idea of the Bible condoning slavery was used to great effect. And so God and the biblical tradition were unfairly associated with something evil.

In the actual biblical tradition, *this*, the appropriation of God and the Bible to justify something horrific, is considered unforgivable. The second half of the biblical commandment not to take God's name in vain says, "for God will not acquit a person who takes God's name in vain." It doesn't say anything like that about murdering. It doesn't say that about stealing

ana levy-lyons is senior minister at First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, New York. She is writing a book on the Ten Commandments as a radical spiritual and political vision. Visit facebook.com/Ana.LevyLyons.author. Twitter: @Ana_LevyLyons. Email: analevylyons@hotmail.com.

> **Faith gets injured when the concept of God is used opportunistically to justify evil acts. Faith gets injured when religious institutions or representatives of God act badly themselves.**

or committing adultery. It doesn't say that about any of the other nine commandments. It seems that, to the biblical author, there's something particularly unforgiveable about violating this particular commandment. As though this is the one that God takes personally. Violations of any of the other commandments merely reflect badly on the human who did them. This one, when violated, reflects badly on God. This one is about God's reputation. This one imputes sins to God—sins of which God is innocent.

The Theft of a Name

The word "take" in "take God's name in vain" is a translation of the Hebrew verb *nasa*. A better translation may be "pick up and carry off." It was used in transactions in the ancient Near East to indicate the sealing of a deal. When you buy something and pay for it, it's the moment that you *nasa*—pick it up to carry it away—that the deal is final. It connotes ownership. So in the case of this commandment, there's a sense of picking up and carrying away God's name. Of claiming ownership, appropriating it. "In vain" is another key term here. The Hebrew word is *lashav,* which means "without meaning"—outside a proper meaning, common or unimportant, or without the sanctity that should be there. So we could rewrite the commandment: do not appropriate God's name in a way that nullifies the sanctity that should be there, because God's reputation is at stake. It's a kind of libel.

So then the question becomes—why not? So what if God's reputation as a good and loving and just God gets tarnished? What happens then? What happens is that *people lose faith*. Not only the perpetrator, but also everyone around the perpetrator. Faith gets injured when the concept of God is used opportunistically to justify evil acts. Faith gets injured when religious institutions or representatives of God act badly themselves.

Extreme examples of this abound. LGBT people have become alienated from religious life in this country because of the supposedly biblically based claims about the sinfulness of their relationships. Muslims describe fleeing Islam because of the association of their tradition with terrorism in God's name. Jewish women have become alienated from the persistent image of an angry, patriarchal God, plastered with masculine pronouns.

And the Catholic Church, in the clearest example of all, has been hemorrhaging members since the child sex abuse scandals emerged. That the abuse was so pervasive and systematically concealed, and that the perpetrators still called themselves God's representatives (called "Father" in a tradition that calls God "Father") has been soul crushing to Catholics around the world. The loss sustained is painful, even traumatic, because in most of these cases, the defamation of God's character alienates the believer not just from the person or institution that did it, but from God itself. Our notions of God are intimately interwoven with the people and institutions that teach about God. It's hard for anyone to disentangle them.

Ironically, atheism and Unitarian Universalism have benefitted tremendously from violations of this commandment. At the Brooklyn, NY, congregation where I serve as minister, many members were alienated from their faith and their birth religions when they were told that, for example, their favorite uncle was going to hell because he had not accepted Jesus Christ as his lord and savior. I hear versions of this story almost every day. Many of them were exposed to institutions and religious leaders that pinned on God their own bigotry and small-mindedness. And this exposure was toxic. It was toxic to their faith and toxic to their lives in general. And so they left religion, often painfully disillusioned. To this day, such people can be deeply suspicious of the idea of God or anything that sounds too "religious." They still suffer from what is sometimes called "post-traumatic God disorder."

The Name of All Being

What if you're an atheist and there's nothing at stake for you in whether people do or don't have faith in God? Or you're Richard Dawkins and you'd actually prefer they didn't? Then what meaning could this commandment possibly have? In this case, we need to go back and look at the concept of the name of God. "Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." What is the name in question? To understand this, we have to look at the preamble to the Ten Commandments. In this preamble God identifies Godself, saying, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage."

The English translation "Lord" in that sentence is a placeholder for the name of God that's actually written there, spelled YHVH. Likewise, in the commandment about taking "the Lord's" name in vain, the text actually says the Hebrew equivalent of the letters YHVH. The word itself

> **So we could rewrite the commandment: "Do not appropriate the concept of 'reality' in a way that nullifies the sanctity that should be there, because the reputation of life itself is at stake."**

is unpronounceable. YHVH. It's all air and breath. We are never supposed to even attempt its pronunciation because pronouncing it would limit it, make it finite. It's the biggest word in the world. It contains the entire universe of possibility—the little that we know and the vast expanse that we don't know. YHVH is considered the most sacred name of God. And it's not even a name; it's a form of the verb "to be," like "I am becoming" or simply, "I am." *That* is what we're supposed to respect and not take in vain. It's a word that signifies the ground of being itself.

When we are resigned and say, "That's just the way it is," the *it* that we're talking about is that very same ground of being: existence, life, nature, human nature, reality. So we could re-write the commandment: "Do not appropriate the concept of 'reality' in a way that nullifies the sanctity that should be there, because the reputation of life itself is at stake." When someone wants to know how this world works, the third commandment teaches that we shouldn't project our own prejudices; we shouldn't claim to know more than we do about the vast mystery of the world; we shouldn't claim that something painful or oppressive is just "the way *it* is."

Yet we do this all the time: "Boys will be boys" or "There will always be war" or "People will always act in their own economic self-interest." We throw up our hands and say, "Well, you have to lie and cheat and steal because that's the way the world is." The "is-ness" of the world is in question here. Is the world *really* like that—and can we really know that for sure—or are we opportunistically appropriating this concept of how the world is in order to justify our actions, nullifying the sanctity that should be there?

Guns and the Third Commandment

A perfect example of this right now is the pro-gun lobby in this country. This lobby can still exist post–Sandy Hook and post–Umpqua College only because of an argument that violates the Third Commandment: "It's nature, human nature, to be violent. There will always be people who want to shoot up a school and will find some way to do it. So it's best to be realistic ("realistic" meaning "of or related to reality") and arm everyone. So folks can fight back. Because that's just how reality is."

This is a defamation of the character of reality: taking the concept of reality in vain, appropriating it for one's own purposes, ruining reality's reputation! And what happens when we do this? What happens when the massacre of children is not enough to get any significant movement on gun control? What happens when we are told that guns are necessary to defend ourselves in an inherently violent world? What happens when we're told that poverty and inequality are just part of the nature of life? What happens when we are told that corporations will never become responsible stewards of the environment because executives are always going to look out for number one and make money first and foremost? What happens?

People lose faith. People lose faith that anything can ever change. People lose faith in the world as a good and beautiful place. They come to feel unsafe, unable to be embraced by the universe. Or maybe, because this kind of libel against life is so commonplace, they never had the chance to gain faith to begin with. They are forced to foreclose on the possibility of change.

What if we instead replied that this is not the way the world is but the way we're making it through our actions? What if we said that when someone shoots up a school, it's a *distortion*, not an *expression* of human nature? What if we said that our destruction of the environment is not due to our inherent selfishness, but is owed to a shortsightedness that can be corrected with a better prescription? What if we stopped pinning injustice and oppression on "reality" and instead took responsibility for it ourselves? What if we actually defended the innocence of God and life itself from defamation?

Then we would live in a world where God could be God and life could be life and the sanctity of those ideas—the inherent goodness and beauty of the universe—could shine among us. We would hold open the doors of possibility, taking every opportunity to proclaim that things can be different from the way they happen to look right now. By keeping the commandment to protect the holiness of reality, we would spread joy, not mistrust; safety, not peril. We would care for one another in this way—giving hope where hope is often hard to find. ■

Cities of Refuge

BY MARYANN JACOBI GRAY

Although I've always known I'm Jewish, my family was not in the least bit religious. We rejoiced on the High Holy Days because it was so easy to reserve a tennis court near our house in Scarsdale. We were too busy decorating our Christmas tree to celebrate Chanukah. When Easter rolled around, my sister and I dyed hard-boiled eggs lurid colors and received little baskets filled with chocolate bunnies and jelly beans.

Even though we never joined a temple or went to services, it was impossible to grow up in Westchester County without learning something about Judaism. There were bar mitzvahs and weddings to attend; occasionally I went to temple with a friend's family. I learned how to say "*Baruch atah Adonai Elohenu*," and I knew the words meant "blessed our Lord," but I had no idea what came afterward and no burning desire to find out.

I learned more in college, because I took a course on Judeo-Christian religions after I was closed out of a class on Eastern religions. I also sat through a day-long workshop about the Kabbalah, in the same spirit that I attended Sufi dancing and Buddhist meditation sessions—striving to be open, but knowing in my heart that something was off about the fit. I don't believe in organized religion, I concluded, and that's where things might have stayed if not for the accident.

The Accident

At first what happened convinced me that God did not exist, or at least not a benign and loving God. If He did, He would never have let an eight-year-old boy named Brian dart into the street in front of my car. He would never have let that child die in the road, his blood pooling on the blacktop while his mother wailed a few yards away. He would not have left me all alone at age twenty-two, without comfort or support. None of it made sense.

I could only partially accept the idea that God was punishing me. I was envious of those prettier and more popular than I was, contemptuous of those less so, and overly concerned with myself. But why would God punish an eight-year-old boy? Why punish his entire family? If there was a God, He wasn't paying much attention on that day.

I spent the first few weeks after the accident hiding inside my apartment. I was ashamed to show my face and afraid of being attacked if anyone recognized that I was the girl who killed a local child. Although I had moments of despair, I mostly felt dull and frozen. I thought about the accident all the time, while a continuous loop of flashbacks ran in random sequence: The boy flying up into the air after I hit him. His mother in a house dress, knees buckling on her front stoop. A crowd of onlookers. Blood. Sitting in the back of a police car, arms wrapped around myself, while an officer told me the boy had died.

Sometime during those weeks I pulled out my college textbooks and read more about Judaism. I was longing for solace, but I would have settled for some decent advice. What I discovered was not reassuring. In *To Be a Jew*, a book offering an introduction to contemporary Judaism, Rabbi Hayim Donin writes, "If he who saves a life is credited in our tradition with saving a world, it follows that he who destroys a life is guilty of destroying a world."

"He can't mean *me*," I told myself. "What I did was accidental." But I couldn't shake the suspicion that he did.

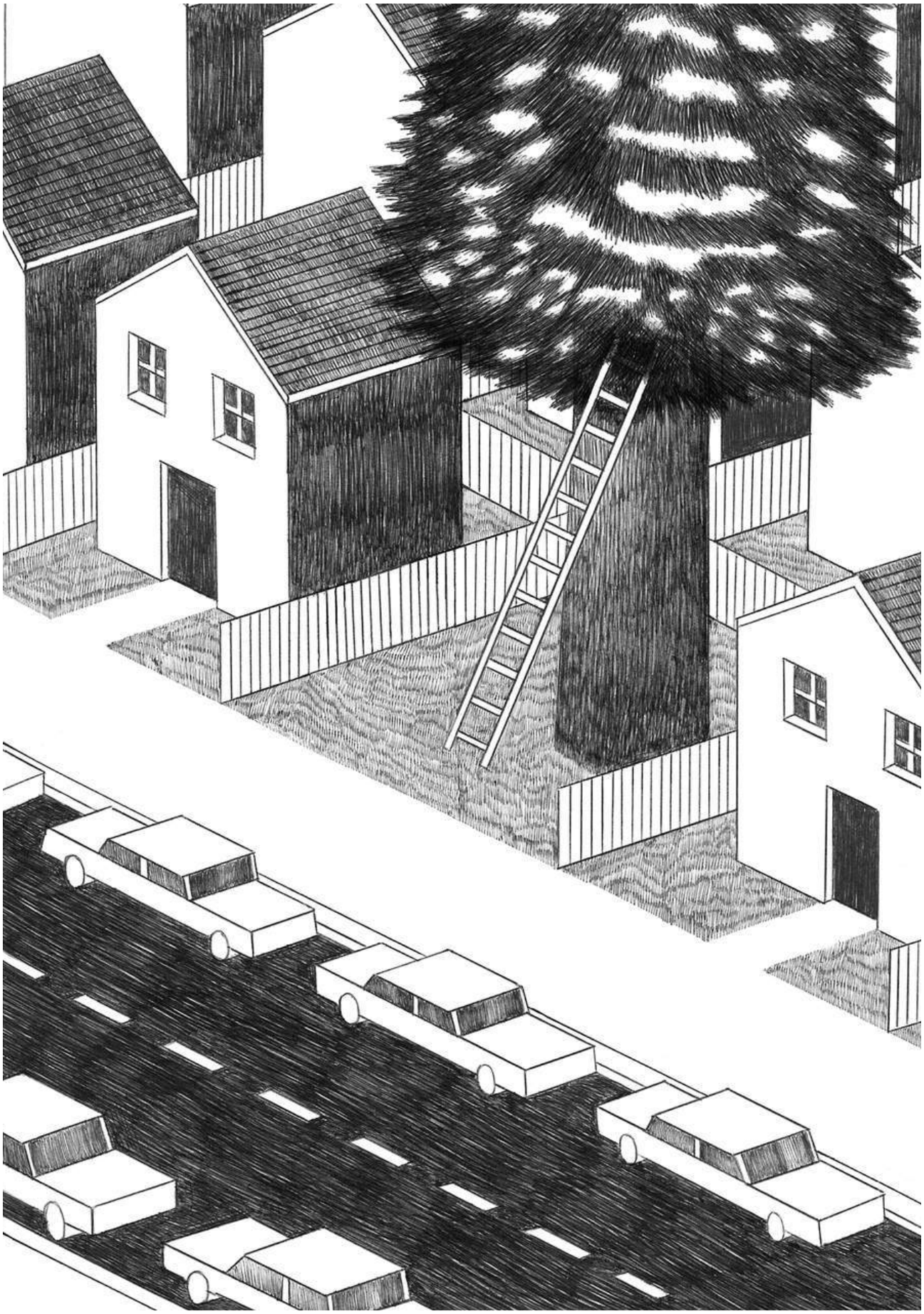
Thumbing through the book for another perspective, I ran across a quote by Abraham Joshua Heschel. "The purest intentions, the finest of devotion, the noblest spiritual aspirations are fatuous when not realized in action." So, my intentions were irrelevant. It didn't matter that the child's death was an accident. What mattered were my actions, and they were horribly destructive. I felt queasy.

But didn't Judaism also tout the wonders of atonement? Could I atone for killing Brian and, therefore, for destroying an entire world? Again, I was disappointed by what I read. Donin writes,

> Yom Kippur does not atone for sins committed against one's fellow man unless the grieved party has been pacified and has agreed to forgive the wrongdoer . . . God does not forgive unless the grieved party has first forgiven.

I had sinned against Brian and his family, but how could I possibly approach them to ask for forgiveness? I had no right to ask anything of them. They (*continued on page 68*)

MARYANN JACOBI GRAY is a social psychologist currently serving as assistant provost at UCLA. She also maintains a website for people involved in accidents at www.accidentalimpacts.org.



Kevin Lucbert / www.kevinlucbert.com

Lonesome Town by Kevin Lucbert, ink on paper, 2013.

THE *TIKKUN* PASSOVER SEDER SUPPLEMENT FOR 2016/5776

This is meant as a supplement to the traditional Haggadah. You can use it in addition to a traditional Haggadah, introducing whichever parts you like to your Seder to provoke a lively discussion. Or you can use this as the basis for an alternative Haggadah, which can then be supplemented by the traditional Haggadah.

Pronunciation guide: we write kh *to get the sound you get when pronouncing the first two letters of* Chanukah *or the third and fourth letters of* le'cha'im.

A NOTE TO NON-JEWS

You are very welcome at our Seder! Jesus was a Jew, and the Last Supper was a Seder. Our supplement affirms the liberatory message that is part of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and which is found in many other religious and spiritual traditions, as well: that rebirth, renewal, and transformation are possible, and that we are not stuck in the dark, cold, and deadly energies of winter.

Judaism builds on this universal experience of nature and adds another dimension: it suggests that class structure (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, or neoliberal imperialism) can be overcome. We human beings, created in the image of the Transformative Power of the Universe (YHVH, Yud Hey Vav Hey, a.k.a. God), can create a world based on love, generosity, justice, and peace.

We understand God, in part, as the Transformative Power of the Universe—the force that makes possible the transformation from *that which is* to *that which ought to be*: the force that makes it possible to transcend the tendency of human beings to pass on to others the hurt and pain that has been done to us; the force that permeates every ounce of Being and unites all in one transcendent and immanent reality.

OUR CHALLENGE AND OUR REDEMPTIVE HOPE

When faced with the enormity of the environmental crisis created in large part by advanced industrial societies, the temptation is to take a small piece of the crisis and see what we can do to fix it. Recycle here, stop fracking there, or oppose a new oil pipeline. Yet for every struggle won, the dynamics of capitalist economies—which must continually find new raw materials, create new markets, seek growth, and promote ever-new forms of consumption and ways to exploit the physical world—guarantee that larger forms of destruction will continue. Until we have a globally unified environmental movement with an articulated vision of how to replace the capitalist marketplace with an environmentally friendly economic system, even the most concerned environmentalists are in danger of despairing and giving up.

That's why *Tikkun* and the Network of Spiritual Progressives have advanced the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the US Constitution (ESRA), which would require the largest corporations selling goods or services in the United States to prove a satisfactory history of environmental responsibility in order to keep doing business here.

As we campaign for this, we need, in addition to the thousands of local projects working to save the planet, a campaign for a New Bottom Line that evaluates our social, economic, and political systems and institutions as "efficient, rational, or productive" not to the extent that they maximize money and power (the Old Bottom Line), but to the extent that they maximize love, generosity, environmental sanity, and sustainability; enhance our capacity to transcend a narrow utilitarian or instrumental attitude toward each other by treating one another as embodiments of the sacred; and respect nature by responding to it with awe, wonder, and radical amazement—cherishing it rather than just exploiting it or treating it as a commodity to be sold.

Unrealistic? Yes. Just like every other liberation struggle and attempt to move beyond the narrow consciousness of what is possible that has been drummed into our heads by the pharaohs of every age. Passover must become the time to replenish our energies, to become the agents of an expanded consciousness that can envision and create a world that lives in harmony with planet Earth—God's gift to us.

Around your Seder table, take turns reading aloud the paragraphs below.
Sing the order of the Seder: Kadesh, Urchatz, Karpas, Yachatz, Magid, Rachtsah, Motzi, Matzah, Maror, Koreych, Shulchan, Orech, Tsafoon, Barech, Halel, Nirtzah.

KADESH

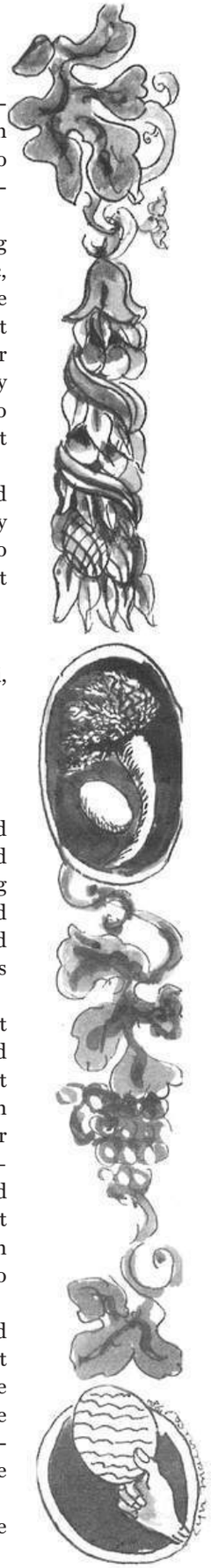
Before blessing the wine, read this together:

We are the descendents of a people that have told a story of liberation from slavery and placed that story at the very center of our religion, most of our holidays, and the Torah read each Shabbat. We took upon ourselves the task of telling the world's people that nothing is fixed, that the world can be fundamentally transformed, and that together we can build an economic, political, social, and cultural reality based on love and generosity, peace and nonviolence, social and economic justice, and caring for each other and the world. This is our inherited calling as the Jewish people.

We Jews remember ourselves as having been slaves who then managed to revolt against the existing order and free ourselves from that slavery. That process of liberation required us to overthrow the internalized messages of an oppressive order: "Be realistic—you don't have the power to overthrow the existing system," "You are not worthy or deserving enough to be free," "If you dedicate your time to transformation, you'll be setting yourself up for even worse oppression by the powerful," "You can't really trust other oppressed people—they are unlikely to really be there for you when things get tough, so protect yourself and your family by not getting too involved," and "Nothing ever really changes, so accept what 'is' and make the best of it." These are some of the crippling messages that make people in every generation become passive, despairing, depressed, or resigned—hence enslaved to an oppressive reality.

Yet in every generation there is a different voice, the voice of the Force of Healing and Transformation, Yud Hey Vav Hey, Adonai, Yah, Shechinah, the God of the universe that makes possible the transformation from that which is to that which ought to be—a voice that continually asserts itself in the consciousness of human beings. This is what we are talking about when we talk of God—whatever it is about the universe that makes it possible to overcome the internalized oppression we all carry, so that we are able to participate in the struggles to heal and transform the world.

Yet as much as we must celebrate the victories of the past, we are also sadly aware of the oppressive realities of the present.



Now ask people at your Seder to list some of those oppressive realities.

Today it's important to understand that the "downtrodden"—those who are hurt by the materialism and selfishness built into the very ethos of global capitalism—are *not only* the homeless, the jobless, the underemployed, the African Americans who are often targets of random violence from police or others, but also those who can't vote as new racist laws are enacted to prevent people of color from participating in the democratic process, those who are filling up our jails and prisons (often for drug offenses that are rarely punished when committed by upper-middle-class whites), those who are working more than one job in order to help support their families, and of course the millions of refugees who are being turned away from countries that can afford to take them in.

While some of us don't suffer from the forms of deprivation described above, all of us do suffer from a spiritual and psychological deprivation generated by the ethos of the global capitalist system. Many of us find ourselves surrounded by others who seem endlessly selfish and materialistic, or by people who see us only in terms of how we can advance their interests or perceived needs. People today increasingly report that even their friends, spouses, or children seem to see them through the frame of the questions, "What have you done for me lately?" and "What can you give me to satisfy *my* needs?"

No wonder people feel unrecognized, disrespected, and very lonely, even when they are part of a family or a loving relationship. These are also the downtrodden, a part of the 99 percent: victims of the very same system that makes people jobless, homeless, hungry, or desperate, and scared that they will soon be among the economic casualties of this system—a system that teaches us to close our eyes to others' suffering.

The spiritual distortions of contemporary capitalist society are transmitted daily through each of us to the extent that we, and others around us, look at each other and the world through the framework of our own narrow self-interest and fail to see the holy, the beauty, the uniqueness, and the commonality of all human beings.

Pause here for a moment to look around and see the beauty of everyone at this Seder!

The message of Passover and Easter is that we are not stuck, that liberation and transformation are possible, and that we should celebrate the partial victories of the past in order to gain both perspective and hopefulness about the future. As we drink the first cup of wine or grape juice, we bring to mind all that we as the human race have accomplished against existing systems of oppression, and we joyously affirm our intention to continue the struggle until all peoples are truly free.

Recite the following and drink the first glass:

Barukh ata YHVH, Eloheynu Melekh Ha'olam Borey pree ha gafen.

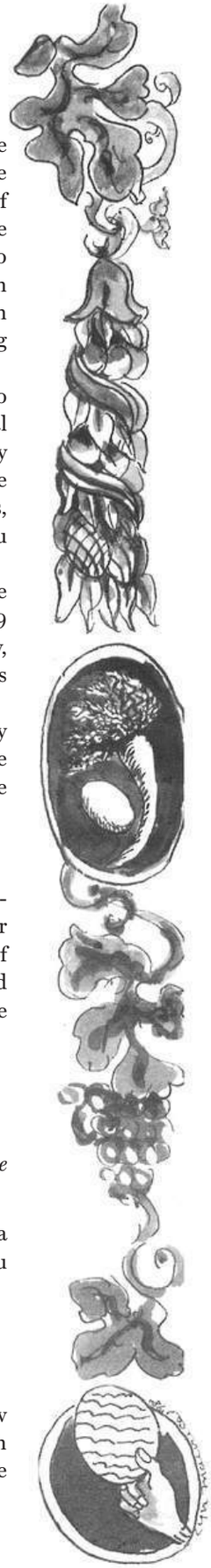
Now, create blessings and toasts to the struggles for liberation that continue around the world.

We thank God and the universe for enabling us to celebrate together this evening. Brukh ata YHVH Eloheynu melekh ha'olam, sheh'hekhee'yanu, veh'keey'eh'manu veh'hee'g'ee'yanu la'zman ha'zeh.

Drink the first cup of grape juice or wine.

URCHATZ

As we wash our hands, we imagine washing away all cynicism and despair. We allow ourselves to be filled with the hope that the world can be transformed in accord with our highest vision of the good. We wash away our own sense of powerlessness—because powerlessness corrupts.



The irony of systems of oppression in the contemporary world is that they usually depend upon the participation of the oppressed in their own oppression. Rather than challenging the system, people accept their place within it, understanding that they may lose their jobs, or worse, that they may become known to the powerful as "disloyal" or "dissidents." In capitalist societies, it is not just external coercion but also the internalization of the worldviews of the powerful that make the oppressed willing participants in the system. As we do the Urchatz on Passover, we symbolically wash our hands of this participation in our own oppression.

Hand washing without a blessing.

KARPAS

We eat a vegetable and celebrate spring and hope, rejoicing in the bountiful blessings of the earth as it renews itself. We are all too aware that environmental damage is increasing rapidly. The free market, in a relentless fury to amass profits, has generated tens of thousands of corporate ventures and products that, as a whole, and with some notable exceptions, have combined to do incalculable damage to the life-support system of the planet. While some have falsely come to believe that individual acts of earth-caring can change the big picture, the reality is that the life-support system of the planet can only be saved if we create a global economic system that no longer relies on endless growth or promotes the notion that well-being comes from accumulating and owning things and experiences. Ecological sanity cannot be achieved without global economic justice.

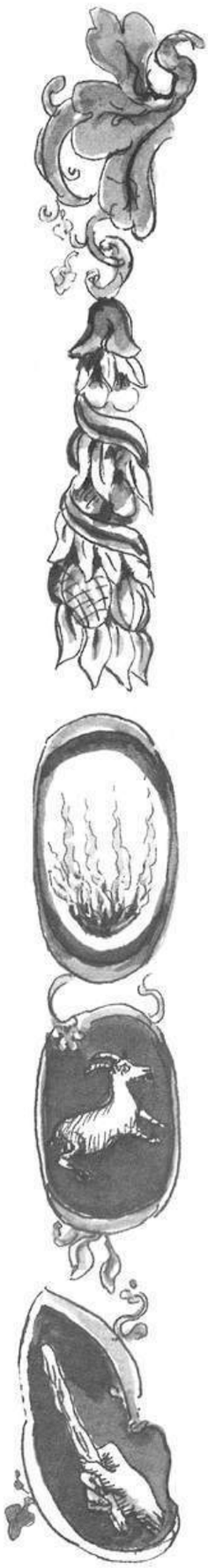
Dip some parsley, celery, or another green vegetable into the salt water. This is symbolic not only of our past suffering from oppression, but also of our tears for the suffering of the earth, and the suffering of all on this planet who are caught up in systems of oppression. Then, close your eyes and take a few minutes to visualize the earth as a living organism whose suffering you allow yourself to consciously experience.

Recite:
Brukha at Yah Shekhinah, ru'akh khey ha'olamim, boreyt pree ha'adamah.

Sing:
Adamah, veh' Shamayim
Adamah, veh' Shamayim Chom Ha'esh, u'Tslil Ha'Mayim, Ani margish zeh beh'gufi, ruchi veh nishmati
Love the earth, love the sky, heat of fire, drop of water. I can feel it in my body, in my spirit, and in my soul! Heya heya heya heya heya heya heya ho!
Celebrate and love each other! Build a world of peace and justice! We can do it in our lifetime, we can save our planet earth. Heya heya . . .
Bottom line: awe and wonder, love and kindness, social justice. End the suffering of our planet, be God's love, be God's peace. Heya Heya . . .

YACHATZ

We break the middle matzah in half, acknowledging our own brokenness and recognizing that imperfect people can usher in liberation. There's no sense in waiting until we are totally pure and psychologically and spiritually healthy to get involved in *tikkun* (the healing and repair of the world). It will be imperfect people—the wounded—who heal and transform the world, even as we simultaneously commit to doing ongoing psychological and spiritual work on ourselves. Whenever we fail to do this inner work, our distortions paralyze our socially transformative movements. And whenever we tell ourselves that we have to postpone being involved in social transformation work until we are the fullest embodiment of our most ideal and healthy selves, we are electing to allow the status quo



to continue, because that state of perfection will never come except as a result of working on both the psycho-spiritual level and the institutional-change level at the same time.

We cannot celebrate this Passover without acknowledging the biggest distortion in Jewish life today: the often blind worship of the State of Israel in an era when Israel has become, for the Palestinian people, the current embodiment of pharaoh-like oppression.

The broken matzah may also be seen as symbolizing the need for the Jewish people to give up the fantasy of controlling all of Palestine, when in fact what is needed is either a two-state solution or one democratic state with equal rights for all.

The State of Israel calls itself "the state of the Jewish people." Many of us who have had the opportunity to live there for any length of time have come to love and cherish Israel for many reasons. Sadly, it is also a state which is known globally for its human-rights violations, the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza, the seizure of Arab and Bedouin lands, the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians without trial by their peers, the revelations by Israeli soldiers of acts of brutality they personally witnessed their peers committing in Gaza and the West Bank, and assaults on random West Bank Palestinians and the destruction of their olive trees. All this has been documented by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel, and the soldiers' organization Breaking the Silence. These are not isolated incidents. They are the inevitable consequences of imposing and enforcing the Occupation. On this Passover, we call upon all people—all Jews, and our fellow Americans of all religions and none—to do everything in their power to support the peace movement in Israel and Palestine and to push, in every nonviolent way possible, to end the Occupation by 2017, the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Occupation. Enough is enough.

Lift the matzah:

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate as they were liberated from Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. This year we are here, next year we will be in a world liberated from pain and oppression!

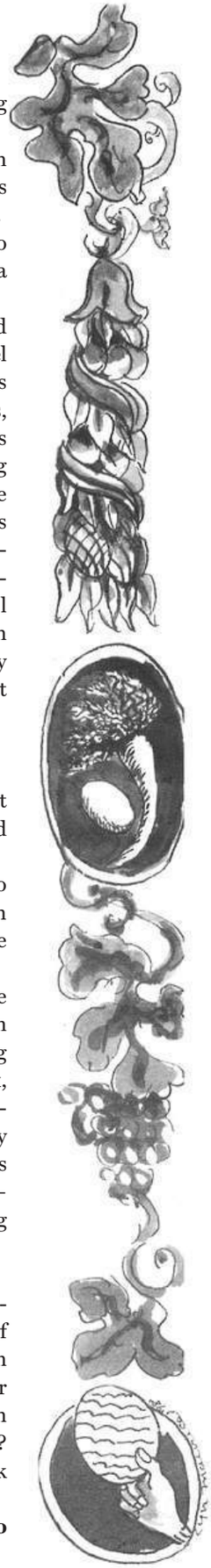
But as we say that traditional line, "Let all who are hungry come and eat," we must also recognize the stark contrast between the generosity of the Jewish people expressed in this invitation and the actual reality in which we live. We in the wealthier countries of the world live in contradiction to this inclination toward generosity.

When we say, "Let all who are hungry come and eat," we also include those who are hungry for spiritual nourishment. Our society, based on selfishness and materialism, often makes spiritual consciousness seem irrelevant or trivial. Too many people seek meaning or compensation from loneliness and meaninglessness in drugs, alcohol, profligate sex, addiction to television, or shopping, or sports, or power, or in fundamentalist or even violent religious and nationalist communities. These perverse responses to a perverse reality can only be fully overcome when the ethos of global capitalism is replaced by a global ethos of love, generosity, love of the earth, and awe and wonder at the grandeur of the universe—in short, what we at *Tikkun* call The Caring Society—Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth.

* * *

This is a taste of what a Seder conducted according to a Judaism of Love—an Emancipatory and Transformative Judaism—will look like. Yet this is only the very beginning of the Seder—we haven't even reached the Four Questions or the story of our liberation from Egypt. The complete version of this supplement can't fit into these pages, so please visit our website at www.tikkun.org/JudaismofLoveSeder to download the full version. Then join us to build a Judaism of Love—an Emancipatory and Transformative Judaism. Will you? The first step is easy: join, at no cost, our Judaism of Love movement, part of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, at www.spiritualprogressives.org/Judaismof Love.

If you happen to be in the SF Bay Area in April, register at www.beyttikkun.org to attend our second-night Seder on April 23.



Culture

BOOKS

Fragments Against Our Ruins

Ozone Journal
by Peter Balakian
University of Chicago Press, 2015

Vise and Shadow: Essays on the Lyric Imagination, Poetry, Art, and Culture
by Peter Balakian
University of Chicago Press, 2015

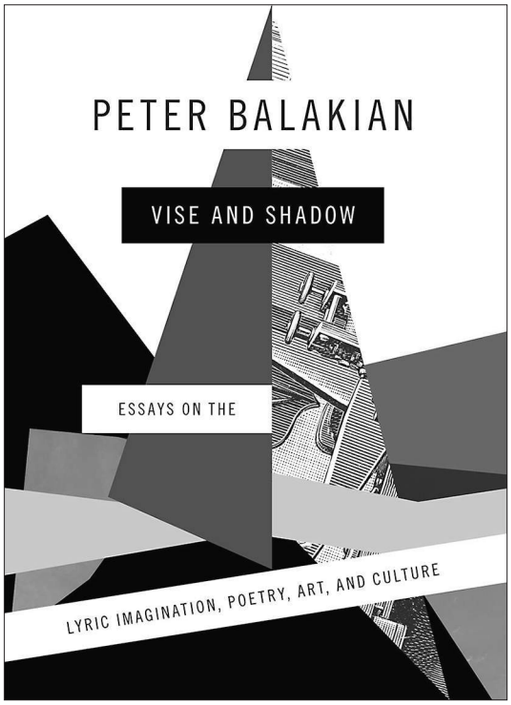
REVIEW BY DAVID WOJAHN

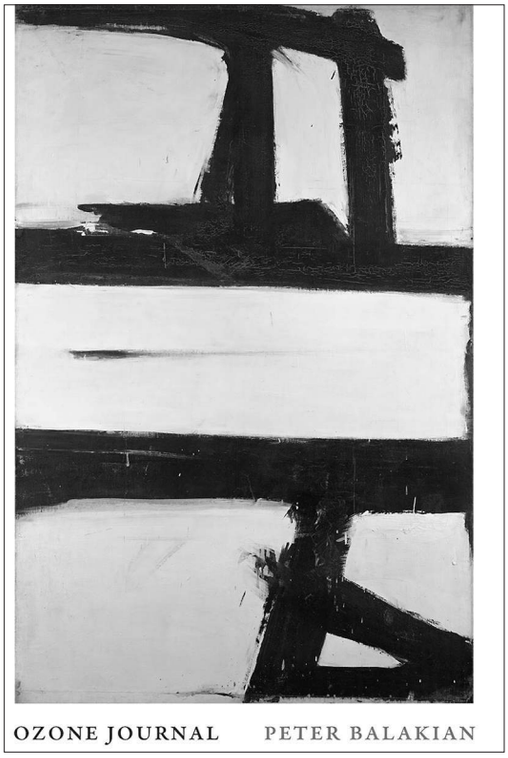
Although he has been publishing verse and various genres of prose since the 1970s, creating a distinguished body of writing, the Armenian-American writer Peter Balakian remains something of a well-kept secret. The politics of literary reputation are always fickle, but in Balakian's case the relative neglect of his work is especially puzzling. Few American poets of the boomer generation have explored the interstices of public and personal history as deeply and urgently as has Balakian, and his significance as a poet of social consciousness is complemented by his work in other genres. *The Burning Tigris,* his study of the Armenian genocide and America's response to it, is perhaps the most definitive account of this tragedy in English. Balakian is also the author of a memoir, *The Black Dog of Fate,* a work that interweaves recollections of a Cold War childhood spent in suburban New Jersey with an examination of the genocide's impact on Balakian's own extended family.

Earlier this year, Balakian published two books: a new collection of verse and a volume of essays. Although the essay collection is a bit of a miscellany—its topics range from the work of modern Armenian poets to visual artists Robert Rauschenberg and Arshile Gorky, from poet Hart Crane to our great contemporary troubadour Bob Dylan—Balakian's insights are penetrating and his prose is lucid and jargon-free. Furthermore, the essays offer readers some useful insights into Balakian's current poetic method, which is practiced to notable effect in his new volume of verse, *Ozone Journal.*

Like so many other American poets who came of age in the 1960s and '70s, Balakian's early work is grounded in the autobiographical lyric and informed by a strong engagement with the possibilities of metaphor. It echoes confessional writers such as Robert Lowell (whom he elegizes in his debut collection) as well as the neosurrealism of figures such as W.S. Merwin and James Wright. Yet there are places in the early collections where Balakian departs from his era's period style, particularly in "The Claim," a several-page examination of the Armenian genocide that makes inventive use of documentary material and narrative disruption. This poem prefigures the approach that Balakian arrived at in his 2010 collection, *Ziggurat,* but that volume and *Ozone Journal* employ the techniques of juxtaposition and collage with much greater ambition.

The centerpiece of *Ziggurat* is "A-Train/Ziggurat/Elegy," a work of nearly thirty pages, divided into forty-five short sections. The poem blends autobiographical recollection with a sometimes-dizzying array of recurring narrative fragments, homages, and jeremiads. September 11 and its aftermath figure prominently in the poem, but so do Miles Davis, Woody Allen, Andy Warhol, Richard Nixon, Philip Glass, and the painter Franz Kline. Most significantly, however, Balakian brashly interweaves some harrowing material drawn from the second Iraq War with references to the culture of Ancient Sumeria and the career of Sir Leonard Woolley, the excavator of Ur. The poem does not seek to resolve its underlying tensions; in fact, Balakian repeatedly suggests that such a resolution may not be possible. This suspicion also animates the title poem of *Ozone Journal,* which the book's





jacket describes as a kind of sequel to "A-Train/Ziggurat/Elegy."

Jolts to the Senses

Literary collage is by no means a new order of poetic device. It's a form employed in several key modernist long poems—consider T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All*, and George Oppen's *Of Being Numerous*. Yet Balakian is after a more nervous and jittery form of collage-making than his modernist predecessors. In an essay included in *Vise and Shadow*, Balakian gives a name to his new approach—"writing horizontal"—and his rationale for employing his method is worth quoting in detail:

> The world of the late twentieth century struck me—and still strikes me in the early twenty-first—as a fast moving landscape with its multifarious, colliding planes of shifting realities, and jolts to the senses and our cognitive wires. These kinds of jolting images—Pan Am 103 exploding in the night sky over Scotland, or a section of Armenia disappearing into rubble and corpses—reproduced on the screen in complexly repeated and protracted ways made the real and the virtual intersecting vectors in the brain; and this changed how the handheld camera in my head was working.

Balakian is not the first to make the point that the Internet and the various platforms of digital culture it serves are one vast collage, eschewing historicity, linearity, and the synthesizing impulses that are so much a part of the Romantic tradition. Nor is he the first to mourn the loss of such continuities. Still, the issues Balakian sets out to explore are vexing ones. How can a writer confront the immense complexity of our era of sound-bites, factoids, endless reproducibility, and intractable knowledge, most of it superficial? How does the "hand-held camera" that Balakian has chosen as his primary point of view bring any sort of insight into our present condition?

In some ways, Balakian's approach to these challenges is not as far from the aims of his modernist ancestors as he would like to think. He seeks, to paraphrase Eliot at the close of *The Wasteland,* to shore up some fragments against our ruins. Yet the differences between Eliot's war-ravaged Europe of 1922 and the contemporary America and Middle East where Balakian sets *Ziggurat* and *Ozone Journal* is that our present reality is made up of an infinitely vaster number of fragments and ruins; and, as Balakian suggests in the quote above, they present themselves in a manner that is bewildering and relentless. A prototypical section of the title poem of the new volume offers some striking juxtapositional ironies:

> News pouring off telex blur of screen
> color on iPhone,

old *Chaldean bricks washed into the Tigris,*
The cylinder seals—pieces of Ur gone—
still trying to text Ani in Boston

Yes, this is a passage that could easily have been drawn verbatim from the notes function on your iPhone, but its implications are stark. The detail concerning Sumerian ruins being washed into the Tigris—an event likely caused by American troop movements, which did irreparable damage to Iraq's archaeological sites—is of course remarkable and tragic, but the fact that this information has been summoned up for the speaker on the estranging pixels of his iPhone screen is in many respects just as uncanny—and just as temporally "horizontal." Tellingly, at the very same time that the speaker is lamenting a contemporary despoliation of the oldest city-states, he is unsuccessfully trying to text Ani, his daughter. Technology is seen as a fraught tool, both magical and baffling, too often allowing us to harbor the illusion that our consciousness has become ahistorical. Balakian's project of "writing horizontally" attempts both to acknowledge this condition and set itself against it—to find within the pitiless hubbub of contemporary consciousness those essential recollections (what Wordsworth termed "spots of time") that are the sources of our truest sense of selfhood and to devise a new method for meaningfully confronting and memorializing the past.

In the title poem of *Ozone Journal*, Balakian's impetus for this project is nothing less than a kind of quest. In 2009, Balakian accompanied a *60 Minutes* crew to the Syrian-Turkish border. The objective was to film a segment on the Armenian genocide; its showpiece was a visit to Syria's Der Zor Desert, the site of one of the largest mass killings of the past century—400,000 Armenians are said to have perished there. (In *The Burning Tigris,* Balakian calls Der Zor "the epicenter of death.") The sections that detail Balakian's journey with the film crew are related in flashings and jottings, and they can sometimes seem off-handed and even glib, but the undertaking is fundamentally a sacerdotal one, and it becomes the catalyst for the wide-ranging meditations on recollection and history that make up the bulk of the poem.

The poem's second section, in its movement from the sarcastic to the rhapsodic, is a good example of Balakian's method:

All day I was digging Armenian bones
out of the Syrian desert
with a TV crew that kept ducking the
Mukhabarat
who trailed us in jeeps and at night
joined us
for arak and grilled goat under colored
pennants and cracked lights
in cafes where piles of herbs glistened
back at me
I passed out from sun and arak and
camel jokes
in a massive hotel, my room opened up
to the Euphrates
that was churning in the moonlight.

It is of course impossible in a brief review to do justice to the intricacies of a poem such as "Ozone Journal," but contemporary verse is richer thanks to Balakian's range, ambitiousness, and moral seriousness. His new collection is also noteworthy for the sections of shorter efforts that bookend the title poem. Several of these pieces are also drawn from Balakian's travels, particularly the lively and cinematic "Pueblo Christmas Dance" and "Slum Drummers, Nariobi." Also noteworthy is a tender elegy for the Kashmiri American poet Agha Shahid Ali. The poem's closing harkens back to Balakian's earlier, more lapidary style:

Shahid: *beloved* in Persian, *witness* in
Arabic, you drove back
in the early upstate spring on the road
to Hamilton
where the cows stared blankly at your
car:
the mud fields were plain and cold,
potholes smashed the tires,
the road was next to nothing
and you asked me—staring through the
window
at the trees and back roads: how can
gray
drizzily light, just be gray drizzily light.

In the manifesto on "horizontal writing" in Balakian's *Vise and Shadow* essays, the poet expresses a desire to arrive at "a way of feeling and pushing the poem for more space and layers and flexibility." This has been a primary goal of our essential poets at least since the time of Whitman and the Romantics, but achieving it in the face of our era's dissonance and relentless technological change offers challenges undreamed of by poets of the previous two centuries. Too many of our artists and writers take our present condition of flux and cacophony for granted, leaving its consequences unexamined. The recent poetry of Peter Balakian reminds us of the perils of this sort of obliviousness. And that is an important message indeed. ■

DAVID WOJAHN's most recent books are *World Tree* (2011), a collection of poems, and *From the Valley of Making: Essays on the Craft of Poetry* (2015). He teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University and in the MFA in Writing Program of Vermont College.

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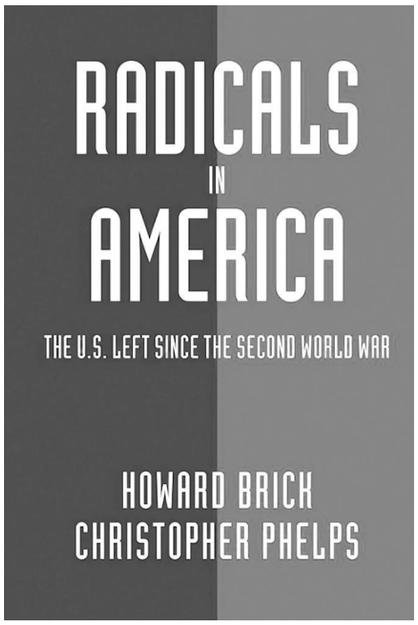
The Fate of the Left

Radicals in America: The U.S. Left Since the Second World War
By Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps
Cambridge University Press, 2015

REVIEW BY PAUL BUHLE



THIS MIGHT BE described as a book for its time, our time, although perhaps it might be even more timely if it were delayed a year, because the effects of the global austerity crisis (not to mention the refugee crisis) and the bold socialistic campaign of Bernie Sanders in the United States—no doubt influenced by the victory of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Labour Party—just might take the last chapter in a different direction. Or maybe not . . . and we will be disappointed again, as we have been so often across the decades.

Still, *Radicals in America* is a generous overview, well-written and rich with detail, offering readers a lively way to grasp a subject that has often seemed more discontinuous and elusive than understandable. It astutely follows leading movements and personalities across almost three generations of American history. It takes us from the optimism of the immediate post–World War II era, when fascism/Nazism had been defeated, to the bitter reality of the Cold War, up to the left's own daily reality—domestic repression, blacklisting, breakup of left-leaning unions, and so forth.

A Strong Left

One of the early strengths of the text comes from its discussion of the late 1940s and early 1950s; even a repressed, depoliticized left had many hidden powers outside the logic of the great, intensely organized movements of the 1930s. Pacifism, foreshadowing today's Nuns on the Bus, showed itself, and not only in religious garb. The notion that a sort of anarcho-pacifism could actually confront the Arms Race and the nuclear juggernaut at home seems, at first glance, nearly preposterous. But the activists themselves took no apparent notice of their disadvantage and set the tone for the anti-war movement to follow in the 1960s. Never mind that one of the great souls of the early movement, Bayard Rustin, jumped off the train and joined the other side; he had, before his decades-long defection to the neoconservative Freedom House, done his work well.

The sheer localism of the 1960s movements—not only in anti-war and student activism but in community peace work, black liberation, women's liberation, and gay liberation—makes it seem almost impossible to recount in under several thousand pages. Here, I think, the writers take the expeditious course of telling the story that can be told, given the task before them. Personal memories will not be encompassed. And we, the underground newspaper sellers, leaflet passers, and meeting goers (but not big speakers), will not be mentioned by name. But that's okay.

The decline and collapse of the New Left, the violent repression of the Black Power movement (not to mention the infighting of assorted Marxist-Leninist factions), and what might hesitantly be called the domestication of radical feminism (that is, redirection to breaking the glass ceilings into offices of power rather than taking over the building) all yield difficulties of understanding so painful that the survivors have hardly figured them out yet. Why do the movements that seemed so amazingly powerful in 1969 seem so weak a decade later?

The empire, as they suggest, has taken hold again, notwithstanding the fall of Nixon and in part because of the end of the Vietnam War. Revanchist claims, made broadly by a rising, vastly funded right but vigorously supported by hawkish Democratic Party hacks and top labor bureaucrats, led the way to Ronald Reagan's election and political survival amidst scandals and breaches of law far more serious than those that brought down Nixon. The Vietnam War had not been lost militarily, but rather through sabotage—this argument was defeated with great difficulty, and then the right's narrative changed again, claiming that our dead soldiers had sacrificed themselves only to be shunned by ungrateful, unpatriotic liberals.

The Past Three Decades

If the left of the 1960s was so much less organized than the left of previous eras, the left of the 1980s and on into the new century made the mobilizations of the 1960s seem, by contrast, not only well organized but also relatively successful. Movement after movement has arisen, made a mark, and then apparently disappeared. It should be noted that many of the participants remain the same people, growing older but hanging on. (*Tikkun* and Rabbi Michael Lerner get a mention, as part of a spiritual renewal that offered something genuinely new, and not only for 1960s veterans.) *Radicals in America* soldiers on into the twenty-first century, eagerly approaching phenomena like Occupy and its counterpart, the 2011 Wisconsin uprising. We are not exactly left in limbo after the retreat of these movements, but with a hope that is far from a precise root in reality.

My first reservation about this narrative regards the paucity (not really an absence) of material on the local left/progressive election victories of the 1970s, from college towns like Madison, Berkeley, and Ann Arbor, to dense urban ghettos, notably Detroit and Gary, as well as those that occurred in the 1980s, most importantly in Chicago, but also Santa Cruz, among others. Here, the left played crucial roles, mostly with the support of the labor movement, especially (but not only) white-collar unionists. These local leftist governments wielded as much power as cities can have without a left-leaning state legislature, governor, congress, or president. What did they accomplish? How did they learn to build upon their victories? These questions remain unasked, for the most part, in *American Radicals*. But responses to such questions might have helped answer one posed toward the end of the book: How can the left build institutionally?

My second reservation has to do with the difficulty of sources. The great change in immigration law in 1965 brought new populations and languages, or at least vastly expanded populations of non-English-speaking workers and organizers, to the left. Many of the sources would more likely be oral or auditory, especially radio, rather than print publications. But even the print publications tend to be poorly collected and demand specialized language skills or extended oral histories. It is no discredit to the authors, but this diversity poses a challenge for our understanding at large.

For these groups, as well as groups that I sought to study for my own understanding of the pre-1950 American left, there was another reason, besides familiarity, to operate in non-English-language settings and publications. European ethnic Communists of the early 1920s were often protected, relatively speaking, from the worst of the FBI's penetration and government censorship of their press. FBI agents lacked the language skills, unless reliable spies could be hired, and papers were passed mostly by hand and truck rather than through the mail. Far from marginal, these groups established the fraternal halls used by the early industrial unions and supplied the bulk of their cultural associations, playing a large role from the mid-1930s until the second Red Scare, when most, but not all, were forced to shut down. As late as the 1980s, I could stand and watch thousands of Cape Verdeans attend events in support of the PAIGC revolution against the Portuguese, in blue-collar Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Or I could march with Haitians against the predatory practices of US invaders and then listen, grasping the oratory power of the speeches despite not understanding the words.

And then there is the problematic legacy of the Popular Front. For all their strengths, Brick and Phelps look at the CPUSA as a collapsing institution rather than as the original moving force for a cultural politics that long outlived its 1930s-to-40s origins and has to this day subtly influenced the practices and behaviors of the left. The liberal or progressive Hollywood film today follows the same narrative method, with good reason: blacklisted writers like Walter Bernstein (author of *The Front*, among other films) never stopped working, and younger actors, writers, directors, and producers learned from the example of old-timers. Likewise, I think of Woody Guthrie as a totemic, continuing influence, not only on Pete Seeger but also on what must be, by now, the five generations that followed. And there are so many others across a wide swath of popular culture, where messages forbidden in politics can find their way to large audiences.

A last caveat: the presence of a certain radical, mostly (if not entirely) secular Jewishness, generation to generation, is underplayed here, and one wishes the authors of *American Radicals* would have made more of it. Many of the leading names are present in the book, but the inner sensibility of the Jewish left is somehow lacking. The thousands who passed out of the Communist Party (or its margins) or other left-wing movements, but who never quit the struggle, joining civil rights, labor, antiwar, ecological, and other campaigns until their last days—they contributed their children, even their grandchildren, to the left. These radicals are such an important part of the story that it could not be fully told without them. ■

PAUL BUHLE, founder of the new left journal *Radical America*, has written or edited fifty books, mostly on the history of the left, but also on the Jewish left and the extensive role of American Jews in popular culture. His latest book is *Red Rosa*, a graphic biography of Rosa Luxemburg, drawn by Kate Evans.

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BERNS *(continued from page 24)*

That scent is powerful, powerful enough to convince a bovine primipara to give up her udders and their colostrum-filled contents to another imposter: Barbed Wire.

The Test

Sending Barbed Wire into an alien pen to procure her meals under Jacob-esque guise was not easy. Sue had to be left alone to sniff the skinned carcass of her stillborn calf for a few hours. When I asked Gary why that wouldn't backfire and convince her that her offspring was dead, he answered, "Well, she's just hoping she's gonna come back to life again." A few hours later we removed the skinned stillborn the way we had brought him in: on a grimy black sled that Kelsey and I hauled through thick mud and around a bevy of grazing cows, totally indifferent to the carnage of one of their own in their midst, fixated with single-minded devotion on the freshly cut alfalfa brought in to distract them while we tended to and tricked Sue.

Carcass removed and freshly flayed hide retrieved, we had to negotiate a squirming and noncompliant Barbed Wire as we secured the disguise that would be her life-saver—and Gary's money-saver—under her belly with nylon chords. A newborn calf is worth several hundred dollars, and one who is weaned and ready to be sold to a feedlot fetches up to a thousand; Gary's stake in this operation was significant. True to plan, Barbed Wire ventured into the pen without embarrassment. She subjected herself to our proddings, which consisted of turning her butt towards Sue so that she'd smell only the fetid but familiar blood- and feces-smattered posterior rather than the foreign and alien head or neck. Understandably, Barbed Wire wanted to spin around and face the hulking mammal near her. She wanted to see her surrogate mother—after all, she had as much, or more, riding on this as did Sue.

Sue, for her part, was having none of it. She sniffed and huffed her disinterest; Gary, after producing a series of expertly pitched and timbered cattle calls, somehow communicated to Sue that this was her calf, and to Barbed Wire that she had to find the milk-giving organs and quit pussy-footing around. Still, Sue wasn't fooled. We had to tie one of her legs to keep her from retreating to the farthest corner of the barn. Who would want to be forced to nurse? The dance went on: Sue rebelled and fell to the muddy ground, pathetically and with a great earth-shaking crash. Chastened, she rose, and after a prolonged and forced flirtation, Barbed Wire found the teat and Sue resigned herself to her biological duty and her lactating destiny. "Well, that'll do it," Gary remarked as we beat a silent retreat so as not to disturb surrogate mother and child. "But what if the hide falls off?" I asked. "Won't Sue know it's all a ruse?" "Nope," Gary said, shaking his head in denial, amused at the ignorance that underlay my question. "That's her calf now. Once she sucks she's gonna keep on sucking. Don't matter if the hide falls off. It will. Time to go."

And then it was on to more tagging, injecting, feeding, hay bale moving, fence repair, and pen construction for the growing group of young calves rejected by their mothers for one reason or another. In spite of our success with Operation Save Barbed Wire, I was only just starting to ask questions. My thoughts flew to Genesis and Jacob's trickery. Of course it was the smell that fooled old man Isaac. Of course the Bible's authors knew which sense awakens instincts and activates memory and affection. Of course the taste of the stew and the feel of the fur are only preludes to the real drama: smell.

Scent

Back in South Carolina, I reached for my copy of the *Miqra'ot Gedolot*, a Hebrew Bible surrounded by a host of medieval commentators that was first assembled and printed in sixteenth-century Venice. I took the Genesis volumes from my shelf and sought to learn more about this tale, and the centrality of smell, from the commentaries. Ovadiah Sforno, a Renaissance doctor and moneylender who lived in Bologna, noted that Isaac inhaled Jacob's garments in order "to smell his soul via the flavor of scent, for as our sages said 'what is the thing that the soul delights in but the body does not? It is scent.'" Jacob would have smelled of husbandry, feed, and excrement; in other words, like a shepherd.

But, I quickly saw as I scanned the densely printed pages, many rabbis dance around and euphemize the real smell of the fields, at least where animal husbandry and grafting are involved: blood, dirt and pervasive shit. One twelfth-century French rabbi wrote that Jacob's clothes were "perfumed," and one of his Spanish contemporaries claimed that his garments smelled of "tree blossoms," since it was the "first month" (*Nisan*) when this story took place, corresponding to March or April in the Gregorian calendar. The great Rashi—a man who, it is said, made his living as a vintner in northern France—knew a thing or two about what a farmyard smelled like, and noted that "although there is no smell worse than washed goat skins" (recall that Rebecca had ordered Jacob to kill and skin a goat), "even so Jacob carried with him the scent of paradise." The "smell of the fields" that God gave Jacob was, according to Rashi, "a good smell, the smell of apples." I saw only one commentator who did not try to perfume Jacob's clothes with apple blossoms. He notes with refreshing simplicity that "the garments he [Jacob] was clothed in had a smell of the fields, for in them Jacob emerged from the fields." This commentator, like the biblical author himself, knew that smell is too primal and too affecting to be qualified with adjectives. It delves down directly to a place where words are irrelevant.

Words are processed in our neocortical brain, but smells bypass this advanced, exterior layer of our neural

networking and proceed straight to our limbic and reptilian brains, cerebral anatomy we share with other mammals. And that is why, perhaps, mute brutes like cows can be the best illuminators of a world many in our society are curious about—out of faith or humanistic exploration—that was one of powerful, unmediated experiences that tap down deep into our prelingual, unevolved animal selves. The gap between Jacob and twenty-first–century urbanized people is a chasm; that chasm can be narrowed to a crack through the sense of smell.

How many more mythological or historical episodes might be unlocked, enriched, and demystified not in the library but in the field? I study Talmud with a brilliant Semitic philologist and ordained rabbi. When I returned from the ranch, I spoke to him via Skype and told him about my trip. Born and bred in Brooklyn in the middle years of the last century, before "locally sourced" and "DIY" were on everyone's lips, he had limited opportunities to visit rural places—the setting, after all, of so much of the literature he loves. Reflecting on a talmudic episode we had studied together regarding an injurious cow, I told him that cows sometimes eat their own placentas not so much for their nutritional value but to avoid leaving around an olfacting, steaming, succulent item that could attract wolves or other predators. At this he smiled, nodded approvingly, and said, "you have to be in the fields to know this stuff." True. It turns out that the fields are helpful not only in clarifying abstruse talmudic debates, but also in explicating scripture. Not only were the rabbis of the Talmud "in the fields," but the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs, Jacob, Isaac, Esau, and Rebecca, were, too. Their drama, and countless others like it, unfurled in a place where agricultural rhythms drove life.

Most city dwellers in contemporary America are alienated from preindustrial ways. In order to live ecologically responsible lives we must make a concerted effort. Few of us experience, in any meaningful way, how proteins are converted from placid ruminants to our evening meals. Biblical patriarchs and modern ranchers alike are luckier: their lives of husbandry acquaint them with these processes in a visceral, immediate fashion. Our ancestors in the book of *Genesis* did not take the question of where their food came from—including how it was killed, transported, and prepared—for granted. We readers of Genesis need not take it for granted, either, for it provides a key that can unlock the inner sense of scripture. ■

LATHEM *(continued from page 37)*

Food Justice as Health Justice

The success of the Health Care Shares program has been unequivocal. Physicians participating in the program cannot emphasize enough the contribution of poor nutrition to the many chronic health problems they see in their patients, from hypertension to obesity to Type 2 diabetes. They also describe an enormous need, in Vermont as well as throughout the nation, for access to nutritious food, and a revival of a lost culture of home cooking. "There are many people who know they don't eat well, but they don't know what to do about it," says Barbara Bendrix, who coordinates the Health Care Shares for a clinic in Plainfield, Vermont. "When you give them an opportunity to change the way they eat, they jump on it."

"Primary care is changing," says Dr. Alicia Jacobs, a physician with Colchester Family Practice, one of the first clinics to participate in the program:

> In our practice we provide a *medical home* that is choosing to care for patients in a different way. Instead of medicalizing every problem, by sending patients out to specialists, we provide nutritional guidance, exercise coaches, and social workers. This is the exciting context of the Health Care Shares program. The VYCC is changing the culture of food by teaching people how to cook and engaging youth in farming, while the culture of medicine is also turning a corner.

Meaningful Work

The impacts of the program on the youth who participate on the other end of the process—those who plant, harvest, and distribute the food—is also undeniably positive, even for those who have learned that they don't particularly like farming. They are learning what it means to be connected to their food, to the land, to one another, and to the broader community. Farm crews include new Americans who have come from refugee camps in Nepal, Thailand, and Kenya, who harvest and plant side by side with fifteen-year-olds who have never traveled outside Vermont. Together, they discuss social issues over lunch, cook giant meals, and break bread together.

"In mid-summer," says Cae Keenan, a farm apprentice, "the farm is a beautiful sight to see. It's also a vision of something greater: the combined work of hundreds of people in a celebration of food."

I rejoined Bruce at work on the crew's next-to-last day. "I love working outdoors!" he tells me, "I love to *farm*." He picks a squash and notices that something has taken a bite out of it. "A rabbit," he muses, tossing it on the ground between the rows.

I ask Bruce what it is about farming that he likes so much.

"It's rewarding. You see a plant grow from a little seedling all the way to bearing fruit." He drops an overripe squash between the rows. "The best part about this program is that all the food is going to people who need it. And we're feeding the earth, as well as feeding people."

Further down the row, I find another member of the crew working by herself, harvesting yellow squashes, a fifteen-year-old with shoulder-length blond hair and porcelain limbs. I ask her how she feels about the season coming to an end. "It makes me sad," she says. As she talks, I notice she has a series of razor-thin scars along the length of her forearm. "I love everything about this farm," she says, taking in air as she begins to talk, as if she were preparing for a dive. "It's my passion, it's what I want to do with my life. Everyone here is just really, really friendly. I can be feeling bad and I can just go and pick some vegetables, and it makes me feel good because I know we're giving it to people who can't afford it, and I just love it here." She looks up from her work and gazes across the rows. "I hope I can come back."

Before they go, the summer crew will celebrate the harvest and nine weeks of their hard work with their community. The Friday Night Food Affair is a free community meal held every week at the Congregational church in town. But it is not every week that participants are served a seven-course meal, with most of the ingredients freshly harvested from the garden. The summer crew and their mentors have gone all out for this one. Each of them has contributed a family recipe: shepherd's pie, stuffed shells, Nepali cabbage dumplings, a variety of salads and appetizers, and for dessert, a mixed berry mousse with maple whipped cream. The tables are dressed in white tablecloths and decorated with small bouquets of zinnias.

At the entrance, two farm crew members, Tracy and Stephanie, stand near the front door to greet dinner guests as they arrive. They are dressed in their green shirts, their hair is neatly tied back, and their faces, tinted from working in the sun, are aglow. They smile for a photograph, looking into the camera and into an uncertain future. That uncertainty would be more unsettling if they were not surrounded by their community. Their community has new members now, some with origins far away, and for nine teenagers among them, they understand, as too few of us do, what it means to be connected to others through the land that feeds us. ■

BLETH *(continued from page 43)*

or images from their everyday life), she helps transform them into public art as a way to foster a positive sense of dignity and recognition.

This seems especially important in Nablus, where the old city square is often bedecked with teenage boys or twenty-something men who appear as if they are left with no option but to look cool in their idleness. One such man is Misho, never too far from his motorbike and, more often than not, riding around the square, popping wheelies. For two days he maintained a stance of indifference while watching the creative chaos that was exploding around him. By the third day, however, Yeh somehow managed to lure him in and, with a paintbrush in hand, Misho was soon leading the Mama Lily chorus. "Everybody was smiling at the end of the day," reflects Yeh. "That is the transformation of that wall."

Reversing the Effects of Trauma

Yeh and Shella share a belief in the potential of the individual to alter self-defeating identifications or destructive behavioral patterning that can arise from the psychological impacts of trauma. The opportunity that Yeh and the Barefoot Artists bring, from Shella's perspective, is exactly what youth, in particular, need and respond to—an exciting, liberating way to defy their own, parental, or societal expectations, and to just be kids again. "What if these kids asked for violins or paintbrushes as gifts instead of plastic toy guns?" he muses. Shella also understands that under international law, an oppressed people have the right to resist, including armed struggle. "But the hardest way to resist" he asserts, "is to build the consciousness and humanity of the people. The conflict will never end until we live together."

Today, a mural acknowledging the history of Palestinian resistance towers high above the bold sections of orange, green, red, blue, and yellow that dot the square. At the base of the mural reads the caption, in English and in Arabic, "To resist is to exist." For many Palestinians, the act of breathing, eating, going to school, and trying to maintain a normalcy of life is a fundamental form of resistance. Perhaps now, so too is the act of creating beauty.

We all embody, in some form or another, perceptions of the Other. We've all experienced times when the wall grew too high and compromised our vision for a future based on justice, harmony, and mutual respect. We might even agree, in our most honest moments, with sentiments Yeh expressed at a Bioneers conference years ago, in reference to her work with genocide survivors in Rwanda: "Genocide is happening now in everybody's heart. If we have greed, are caught up in our ego-hood,

and if we poison our air, we poison our human relationships." In Palestine, I began to see that it is possible to cultivate a creative intelligence that no longer denies the imperative of our interdependence; that chooses to tear down the outdated walls of our interior and exterior landscapes, the apartheid walls of our own making—how we each do this will surely be unique to the contours of our individual lives.

Yeh's response is to run straight into humanity's suffering—the broken, dark, and devastating places that demand intense vulnerability yet hold the greatest potential for transformation and wholeness. "Here there is no separation. It is for another but, even more, it is for my soul." Thirteen years since the founding of Barefoot Artists and now in her seventies, Yeh is still a force to be reckoned with. She climbs up and down scaffoldings as if her energy were boundless; her laughter is infectious, and her praise of any creative contribution feels genuine. What is most notable, perhaps, is the way her exuberance and passion excludes no one. It wraps itself around all in her presence until there is a collective experience of the possibilities that appear when we dare to imagine. ■

HECTOR *(continued from page 45)*

We would be much more buoyant if death and loss were honored—or at least acknowledged—instead of scrubbed clean from our cultural symbols and practices. Grieving that we don't possess the power to solve climate change by ourselves would change the conversation. Such honesty might empower us to plant a garden, ride a bicycle, limit air travel, or become vegetarian instead of numbing the pain and burying the grief.

Occasionally we unite in grief for the big losses we readily agree to recognize: organizing to create the AIDS quilt and the Vietnam War Memorial, spontaneously placing flowers and handwritten notes at the World Trade Center site after 9/11 and at Kensington Palace after Princess Diana's death. But the less sensational losses we've been conditioned to overlook—the friendships faded and leaves fallen—are the ones that offer us a chance to fulfill our highest promise. Humans are the ones for whom loss matters so much—it's our duty to acknowledge, digest, and integrate all the loss we encounter. It is grief that truly roots us in the world. Grieving in this way takes us on the same existential journey that is offered through being born: defining purpose in life, finding the strength to remain in pain when the impulse is to flee it, making a spiritual intention, and creating meaning. The gifts that are available as the result of grieving include wisdom, life-affirmation, richer love, and courage.

When I pass one of the numerous lumps of fur and bone on the road that society neatly labels "road kill"—a cost of modern life often treated with humor, and even commoditized in "road kill café" tee shirts—I allow my heart to speak. Sometimes I turn off the radio and offer silent contemplation. I almost always say aloud, "I'm sorry, friend." Occasionally, I cry. When I'm riding my bicycle past an animal that's been crushed under the wheels of a car, I make the sign of the cross. Not because I'm steeped in Christianity, but because it's the most easily recognizable visual act of drawing upon faith and grace that I'm aware of. I want others to see me, not out of piousness, but because I want to communicate that there's been a loss here and that it deserves to be marked.

Could capitalism survive grief? If it's centered on resource depletion or exploitation, surely not. If, however, while driving to work one morning in a solar-powered vehicle and hitting a possum, I can stop and acknowledge the loss and contemplate my action and initiate a ritual that allows me communion with this precious, sentient creature, then even capitalism has a chance. And if the climate crisis begets a sustainable and humane capitalism that allows us time to grieve—and therefore to fully know the privilege of living—then maybe we all have a chance. ■

GRAY *(continued from page 52)*

had a right to hate me. Atonement was out of reach.

Decades Later

I was approaching fifty years old. The accident was ancient history, except it didn't feel that way. I had stopped talking about it long before, but I still thought about it every day. More than that, actually: every time I got in my car; when I was around kids; if I did something careless. *Watch yourself, you know what can happen*. My husband Glen and I had decided against having children. We both came from troubled families, and we were both deeply involved in our careers. "I don't think I'd be a good mother," I would say, but what I secretly meant was, "I'm afraid my child would get run over. I don't trust myself." Glen was a non-practicing Lutheran and I was a non-practicing Jew, and that was fine with both of us.

In July 2003, an out of control car plowed through the Santa Monica Farmers' Market, killing ten people and injuring over sixty. I lived and worked nearby, and the buzz of helicopters

overhead became the soundtrack to that day. Glen and I watched television for hours, working email and the phone to make sure friends and coworkers were okay. As I watched enraged bystanders scream "murderer" at the elderly driver, I remembered how I feared that others would hate me, even try to hurt me after my accident. For the next few days, memories of my accident flooded me, and I had frequent flashbacks, which hadn't happened for years.

Unable to concentrate at work, I started surfing the web, exploring sites for people who had accidents. I searched the phrases "car accident" and "auto accident," but all I got were gory photos or advertisements for lawyers. After that I tried "accidental killer." The words seemed awkward and overwrought and I wasn't expecting much. The first few hits were things like "poison number one accidental killer in the home."

But then I clicked on a site that caught my attention. At the top of the page was a head shot of a rabbi—a kindly, plump face topped by a black yarmulke—Rabbi Buchwald. In the middle of the screen, I read:

> In chapter 35 of Numbers, we read that G-d speaks to Moshe and directs him to tell the people of Israel that when they cross the Jordan and enter into the land of Canaan they are to establish six cities of refuge where a person who accidentally kills another person must run.

The Torah was talking about *me*. I kept my office door closed and began to read. I ended up obsessed with learning all I could about the cities of refuge, endlessly surfing the web for commentaries, talking with faculty members and clergy at the University of Southern California and UCLA, and visiting the library at Hebrew Union College. I couldn't say exactly what drove me, but I never felt bored.

Safe Spaces

The Torah first addresses cities of refuge in the Book of Numbers, which indicated that, of the forty-eight cities assigned to the Levites, six would be designated as cities of refuge. More information is provided in the Books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. Then there are the hundreds, maybe thousands, of pages of commentary that have accumulated over the centuries.

> The Lord spoke further to Moses: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: when you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall provide yourself with places to serve you as cities of refuge to which a manslayer who has killed a person unintentionally may flee. The cities shall serve you as a refuge from the avenger, so that the manslayer may not die unless he has stood trial before the assembly. (Num. 35:9-12)

The way it worked was that, immediately after a deadly accident, the killer would race to the city of refuge. The victim's relatives, called blood-avengers, were likely to be in hot pursuit. If they caught up with the killer en route to the city, they could attack or even murder him with impunity. Once inside the gates of the city, however, the killer was safe from revenge attacks. He would stay in the city until his trial before an assembly of elders. If the assembly decided that the victim's death was intended, the person faced execution for the crime of murder. If the assembly agreed that the death was unintentional, the accidental killer then returned to the city of refuge to live.

> But if he pushed him without malice aforethought or hurled any object at him unintentionally, or inadvertently dropped upon him any deadly object of stone, and death resulted — even though he was not an enemy of his and did not seek his harm — in such cases the assembly shall decide between the slayer and the blood-avenger. The assembly shall protect the manslayer from the blood-avenger, and the assembly shall restore him to the city of refuge to which he fled, and there he shall remain until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the sacred oil. (Num. 35:22-25)

The Book of Numbers also specifies that the cities of refuge were not only for Israelites, but also protected resident aliens. Furthermore, no one could buy their way out of the city with bail, bribes, or ransom.

When the High Priest in Jerusalem died, the accidental killer could return in safety to his home and his lands. Anyone who attacked him in revenge would be punished. If he left before the High Priest died, however, the blood-avengers could murder him without consequence.

It's not clear why accidental killers were released from the city of refuge when the High Priest died. Some rabbis believe the Priest's death symbolized penance for all the sins of the Jewish people. Others wrote that the death of the High Priest reminded everyone that no one lives forever, so the victim's family would realize they were not alone in their grief.

Deuteronomy provides additional information, describing the person who can find refuge there as "one who has killed another unwittingly, without having been his enemy in the past" (Deut. 19:4). This chapter also notes the importance of providing ready access to the cities of refuge. "Otherwise, when the distance is great, the blood-avenger, pursuing the manslayer in hot anger, may overtake him and kill him; yet he did not incur the death penalty, since he had never been the other's enemy" (Deut. 19:6).

Talmudic commentary indicates that, to help accidental killers reach safety, the roads leading to the cities of refuge were supposed to be twice as wide as regular roads, free of obstacles, with good signs and sturdy bridges. If the blood-avenger attacked the accidental killer before he could reach a city of refuge, all Israelites shared in the blame.

Protection and Reflection

The Book of Joshua underscores the protections offered by the cities of refuge, stating that the manslayer should run to the gates of the city, plead his case to the elders, "and they shall admit him into the city and give him a place in which to live among them" (Josh. 20:4). Moreover, if the blood-avenger came to the city seeking revenge, the residents were obligated to protect the manslayer.

Although separation from all the people, places, and activities that constitute one's life must have been wrenching, the cities of refuge were humane. The accidental killer's immediate family usually accompanied him there. Rather than being ostracized or confined to a ghetto, accidental killers were fully integrated into the community. In fact, they could even receive honors, so long as they disclosed their past.

I had felt so disconnected from Judaism, and so harshly judged. And then, decades after I chucked the whole thing, there were entire chapters laying out exactly how society is supposed to respond to people like me. The Torah wasn't telling me that I was a horrible person. Even God found me deserving of asylum.

Once the immediate danger of retribution passed, however, the God of the Torah did not want me to simply move on with my life. He knew that killing, even by accident, changes a person. The safety of the city allowed the accidental killer to move beyond fear for his own survival to a deeper consideration of life, death, and personal responsibility. In this safe space, the killers could reflect on the harm they caused, build character, and deepen their appreciation for life.

As soon as I learned about cities of refuge, I yearned to find one. What I didn't realize was that I was already living in one—not a designated place for accidental killers, but a community that cared about me. As long as I kept my accident a secret, I felt alone. When I began telling my story, I was deeply touched by the acceptance of my friends and family. I was also able to reach out to Brian's older brother (his parents had passed away) to let him know that Brian lives in my heart. This painful conversation, more than thirty years after the accident, brought us both some solace.

Yet far more important to my own spiritual growth than *accepting* refuge has been *offering* refuge. A few years ago, I established a website for people who have killed accidentally. I receive correspondence every day from people who are despairing and frightened, and I try to write back to all of them. Many post comments and write back and forth to each other as well. The website has become a virtual city of refuge—a safe space where visitors in need can be both open and accepted.

Welcoming the Stranger

The residents of the cities of refuge, most of whom were not accidental killers, welcomed strangers and outcasts into their communities. They did not set quotas. They did not turn them away. Rather than complaining that the killers were a burden, they helped them become productive members of the community. Some accidental killers—traumatized and perhaps otherwise troubled—undoubtedly needed lots of support, while others were more resourceful. I expect that some were

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grateful for the safety of the city while others resented their confinement. It didn't matter—they needed sanctuary, so the community took them in.

This willingness to accept strangers is foundational to Judaism. Abraham and Sarah practiced *hachnasat orchim* (welcoming the stranger) when they offered three strangers food and rest and washed their feet. The command to extend hospitality to strangers is repeated throughout the Torah. After all, the Jews, too, were once strangers, wandering the world and seeking refuge.

> You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exod. 22:20)
>
> When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Lev. 19:33-34)
>
> You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10:19)

And according to talmudic commentary, welcoming the stranger takes precedence over both Torah study and welcoming the divine presence.

Modern Cities of Refuge

It is this concept of hospitality to those in need that offers a bridge between the biblical cities of refuge and today's cities of refuge. Over the centuries, the concept has become more expansive, no longer limited only to accidental killers but rather to anyone seeking sanctuary or protection due to circumstances that are at least partly beyond their control. Contemporary cities of refuge offer sanctuary to those seeking protection from persecution and injustice. While this is evident in the modern sanctuary movement, it goes back at least two hundred years in the United States.

A bizarre effort to establish a city of refuge began back in 1820, when Mordecai Manuel Noah bought 2,555 acres of land on Grand Island near Buffalo, New York, and five years later declared it a city of refuge for Jews worldwide. Noah was an accomplished man—a playwright, journalist, newspaper editor, ambassador, sheriff, and businessman—but his success did not buffer him from anti-Semitism. In 1816, Secretary of State James Monroe revoked his appointment as Consul to Tunis because he was a Jew, writing, "At the time of your appointment . . . it was not known that the religion which you profess would form an obstacle to the exercise of your Consular functions." This and other experiences convinced Noah of the need for the Jewish people to have a state of their own.

He opened his city of refuge, which he called Ararat, with great fanfare on September 15, 1825. A cannon fired to start the day, followed by a large parade and a twenty-four gun salute. Noah, dressed in a crimson silk robe trimmed in fur, declared himself governor and judge of Israel. Among various proclamations, he imposed a tax on all Jews worldwide of three silver shekels per year to support Ararat.

Ararat was a failure. No one moved there, not even Noah, and today only the cornerstone remains to commemorate his vision.

The story of Ararat is a story of one man's hubris, but it also shows that building a city of refuge must be a *community* responsibility. No single individual can create one.

Other cities of refuge have been less grandiose and far more effective. The tiny Protestant village of Le Chambon in the French countryside became a city of refuge for Jews fleeing persecution during World War II. The 5,000 villagers saved the lives of 5,000 Jews, sheltering them in their homes, establishing schools and homes for orphaned children, and helping some escape to safety.

The sanctuary movement of the 1980s emphasized safety for undocumented immigrants, particularly those from Central American nations that were engaged in civil war and/or harsh repression. The movement began in churches and synagogues, but by the end of the 1980s, more than twenty cities had declared themselves cities of refuge. Even though the last twenty-five years have seen repeated efforts to undermine such places of refuge, today over 200 cities are considered "sanctuary cities."

During the 2016 electoral season and throughout last year's Republican debates, anti-immigration rhetoric makes for a bizarre and distressing soundtrack juxtaposed against images of thousands of refugees streaming across borders in search of safety. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the forcibly displaced population around the globe had grown to 59.5 million people by the end of 2014, compared to about 37.5 million a decade ago. Each day in 2014, roughly 42,500 people fled their homes, yet the United States accepts only about 70,000 refugees per year. Never have we needed cities of refuge more.

Although the six cities of refuge played a special role, talmudic commentary tells us that all forty-eight cities assigned to the Levites had some responsibility to welcome the refugees of the day. In addition, as the population grew, the citizens were expected to add more cities of refuge. Today, too, each of us has the opportunity and obligation to offer refuge and to welcome the displaced and the needy. To deny refuge is to deny our own history. We can transform all our cities into places of refuge. ■

Passover

Why is this night different from all other nights?

And we tell the story. But underneath the story every night is different, color, flavor, eager faces turning we forget so soon. Every night has its own story.

God sets us free and leads us thru the wilderness of each week. We follow a pillar of fire when we fall in love leading us to each other, our promised land in trembling arms and the skin of home.

We put an extra meal outside for the prophet Elijah passing by singing, roaring drunk, combing ruined cities out of his beard, his eyes gummed with honey tears like a lion's.

Inside we tell the story, drink the cups of wine and watch the ocean rise above our heads and part to let us thru, startled deep sea creatures flickering away from our noses.

The child asking the four questions lifts a finger towards a transparent fin till his mother frowns but he won't forget. We marked our gateposts with blood and the Angel of Death passed over and had no power on us. We are telling our story but is it only our story? Is it past or future?

Every lonely person has a promised land and stumbles thru a pillar of smoke by day. We sing the songs. "Dayenu." If God had helped us only a little "dayenu," it would've sufficed. He did it all. But is there more? Someday will we mark the gateposts with song instead of blood and Death will listen and leave our world alone? Nothing in hospital beds but spiderwebs and soldiers coming home embarrassed like little boys caught playing hookey in a war.

Will it be everyone's story? When will we sing those songs?

—Julia Vinograd

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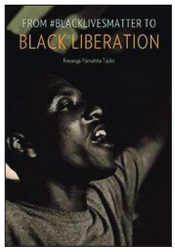
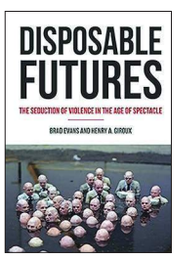
Tikkun RECOMMENDS

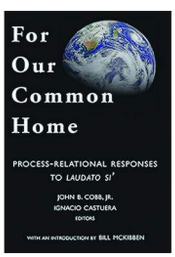


From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor
Haymarket Books, 2015

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor challenges the notion that the United States is fundamentally "color-blind" or a "postracial society." Taylor, who teaches at the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University, shows that this fantasy has become a major justification for dismantling the state's capacity to challenge the real and pervasive discrimination that persists not only in the criminal justice system and in the economy, but also in the ways that the courts are now engaged in allowing racist states to restore old barriers to voting. Her central point is that these attacks on African Americans are a "Trojan horse" shielding a much broader attack against all working-class people, including whites and Latino/as. The political and economic elite have a vested interest in color-blindness and in perpetuating the myth that America is a meritocracy, precisely to hide the fundamental injustice of the entire system from the victims of austerity cutbacks in social welfare. While Black elites cannot transcend race altogether, in general they experience racial inequality differently compared to poor and working-class African Americans (think of Justice Thomas or Dr. Ben Carson). For the Black elite, their success validates the dominant meritocratic fantasies of class society and leads them to believe that it is the personal failings of the less fortunate that cause their problems. To fight this system, Taylor argues, requires building solidarity among the oppressed and exploited. Taylor tells us that despite the ubiquitous "common sense" of "white privilege," most ordinary whites live in fear about the future. The liberation needed by African Americans requires relentless struggle to win white workers to anti-racism—and then to a struggle against global capitalism.





Disposable Futures: The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle

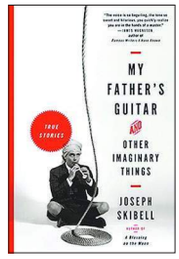
Brad Evans and Henry A. Giroux
City Lights Books, 2015

For Our Common Home: Process-Relational Responses to Laudato Si'

Edited by John B. Cobb, Jr. and Ignacio Castuera
Process Century Press, 2015

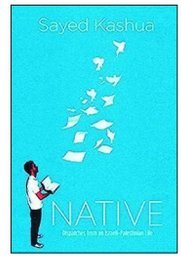
Those who have read Henry A. Giroux's brilliant and provocative columns on our website, tikkun.org, will be excited to see how Evans and Giroux present a systematic exposé of American politics and culture in their book. Subtitled *The Seduction of Violence in the Age of Spectacle*, it unveils pervasive violence and sadism in contemporary America. Incorporating insights from Adorno, Arendt, Bauman, Deleuze, Foucault, Zizek, Marcuse, and Reich, the book confronts the violence and ethos of disposability represented by the prevalent neoliberalism of the Obama/Clinton age, the subservience of education to the requisites of the corporate economy, and the way that violence is now sold to us as entertainment. This is a must-read book for anyone ready to transcend fear and imagine a new reality.

Nowhere is this vision demonstrated more powerfully than in Pope Francis's encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*. The responses to the Pope's encyclical collected by John G. Cobb, Jr. and Ignacio Castuera—including an introduction from Bill McKibben and essays by Vandana Shiva, Rosemary Ruether, Herman Daly, David Ray Griffin, Roger S. Gottlieb, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Bonnie Tarwater, Philip Clayton, and many more—present a serious grappling with the Pope's urgent message: the suffering of the earth and the fast-approaching environmental catastrophe, along with the suffering of the poor, who are most likely the first (but not the only) victims of this tragedy, is rooted in values that are intrinsic to the worldview of global capitalism.



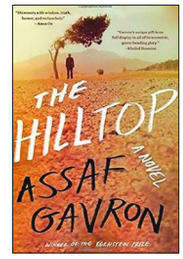
My Father's Guitar and Other Imaginary Things

Joseph Skibell
Algonquin Books, 2015



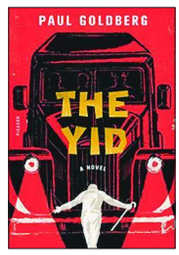
Native: Dispatches from an Israeli-Palestinian Life

Sayed Kashua
Grove Press, 2015



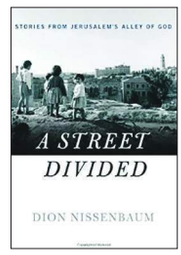
The Hilltop

Assaf Gavron
Scribner, 2013



The Yid

Paul Goldberg
Picador, 2016



A Street Divided: Stones From Jerusalem's Alley of God

Dion Nissenbaum
Palgrave Macmillan, 2016

Sometimes you get a better grip on reality by reading fiction than you get from nonfiction—or at least, at times, a relief from the craziness of the contemporary world. Here we've selected some authors whose works you might enjoy or learn from. Joseph Skibell's *A Curable Romantic* is an enduring gem, and his true stories in *My Father's Guitar* have been described as those of "a literary Louis C.K."; they are full of humor and wisdom. Sayed Kashua is the Israeli Palestinian whose articles for *Ha'aretz* (collected in this latest book), novel *Dancing Arabs*, and Israeli television sitcom *Arab Labor* have all been directed at helping Israeli Jews understand the dilemmas of Israeli Palestinians. After the anti-Arab pogroms in Jerusalem in 2014, he moved his family to safety in the United States. Assaf Gavron's novel *The Hilltop* is a deeply insightful presentation of the consciousness of some West Bank settlers and how they manage to get away with stealing Arab lands. Paul Goldberg's *The Yid* reminds us of the struggles faced by Jews living in Stalin's last years, when he turned against the very Jews he had saved from Hitler's death camps. And Dion Nissenbaum gives a surprisingly nuanced set of stories of the dynamics in a Jerusalem street in Abu Tor that connected East and West Jerusalem.