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POLITICS • SPIRITUALITY • CULTURE

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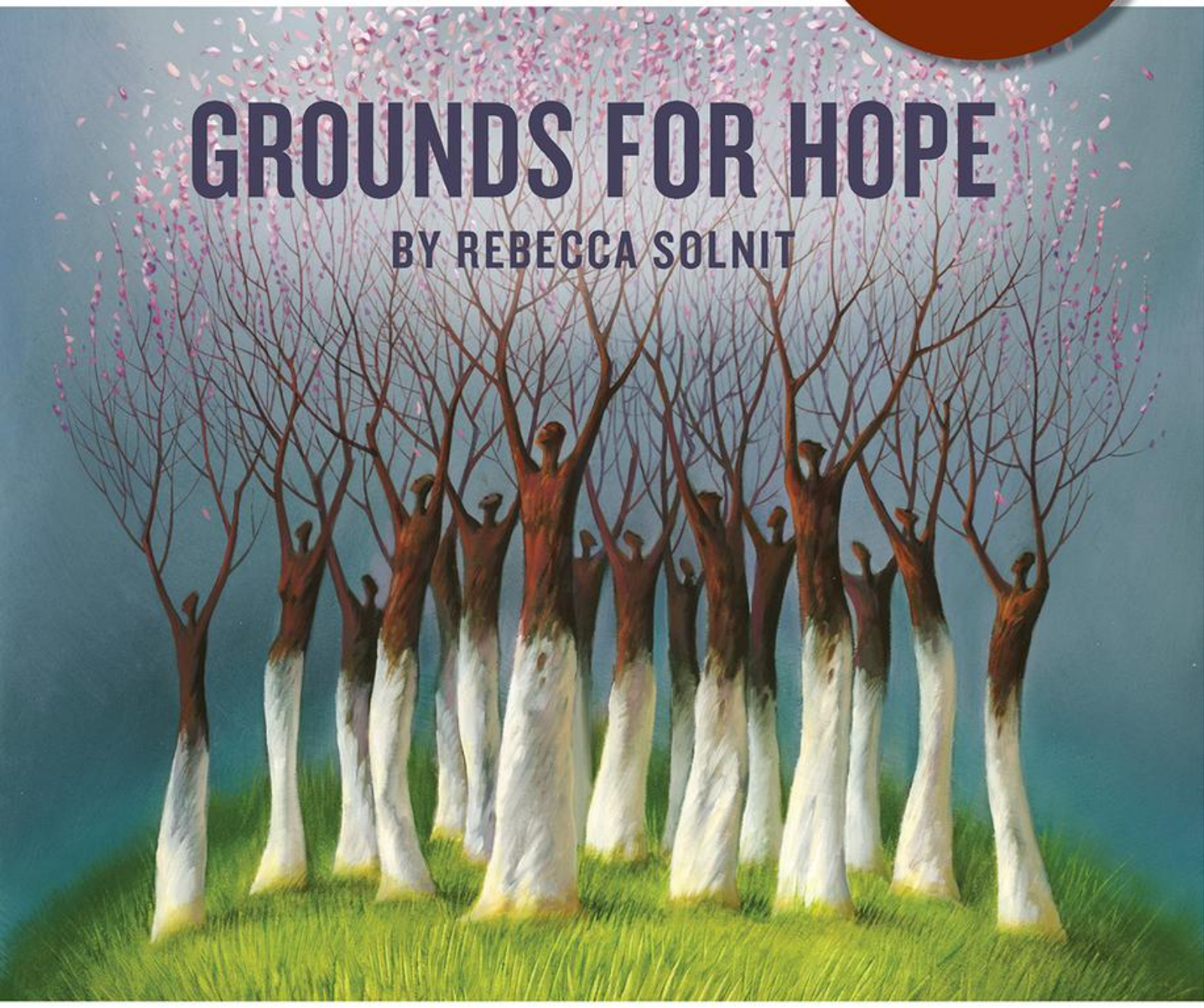
WINTER 2017

OVERCOMING TRUMP-ISM

page 4

GROUNDS FOR HOPE

BY REBECCA SOLNIT



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WINTER 2017

INSIDE COVER: Of Biblical Proportions | SEBASTIAN AGUDELO

3 Letters

EDITORIAL

4 Overcoming Trump-ism: A New Strategy for Progressives
RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

9 Coercive Deference and Double Bind Politics on the Left | PETER GABEL

11 A Call for Love in the Face of Hatred: Rabbi Michael Lerner's Talk at Muhammad Ali's Memorial

POLITICS & SOCIETY

13 On Wild Ethics | DAVID ABRAM

16 Are Humans Special? | DAVID LOY

20 Kaddish for Che | MARTHA SONNENBERG

24 Back to Hobbes? | ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

31 Grounds for Hope | REBECCA SOLNIT

40 We Are Poured Out Like Water | DANIEL A. BUFORD

RETHINKING RELIGION

43 New Psalms for a Paradigm Shift in Judaism
HERBERT J. LEVINE

47 Psalm 23: A Psalm to Inspire and Support Social Justice Activists | CAT J. ZAVIS

CULTURE

52 A Journey to Armenia: Visual Reminders of Genocide and Oppression | PAUL VON BLUM

BOOKS

58 Is Everything in God's Image?
Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World
Review by Arthur Green

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Overcoming Trump-ism
page 4

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WINTER 2017

62 Being Here Now: This Creation is the Divine Image
Response to Arthur Green's review of *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World* | David Seidenberg

65 The Blessings of Metonymy
The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai, Ed. Robert Alter | Review by Rodger Kamenetz

POETRY

71 Before Rain | by Tom Sleigh

71 OUTPOST | by Barbara Goldberg

72 [Once there was a man . . .] and [give me peace o my world . . .]
by Tadeusz Dąbrowski | Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

ARTISTS

Originals and Reprints | Tania Maya Advani, Hanna Barczyk, Robert Barsamian, Maya Freelon Asante, Autumn Evelyn, Yervant Herian, Arno Hovhannisyan, Vladimir Kush, Ken Lezin, Samson Martirosyan, Adam Jones, Ruben Malayan, Liam O'Donnell, Lawrence Santanello, Adolfo Valle, Olivia Wise

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ART DESIGN Duke University Press
POETRY EDITOR Joshua Weiner
ASSISTANT POETRY EDITOR Lindsay Bernal
JEWISH THOUGHT & CULTURE EDITOR Shaul Magid
FICTION EDITOR Joshua Bernstein
WEB DESIGN Craig Wiesner and Derrick Kikuchi
AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT Staci Akselrod

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Bradley Shavit Artson, David Biale, Aryeh Cohen, Arnold Eisen, Jill Goldberg, Roger Gottlieb, Deborah Kory, Oren Kroll-Zeldin, Mark LeVine, Ana Levy-Lyons, Fred Mendes, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, Ben Naparstek, Karla Suomala, David Sylvester, Phil Wolfson, Stephen Zunes

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

PUBLISHER Duke University Press

905 W. Main St., Suite 18B, Durham, NC 27701
Visit Duke University Press Journals at dukeupress.edu/journals.

Articles in *Tikkun* do not necessarily reflect *Tikkun*'s position on any issue. *Tikkun*'s positions are presented in our editorials.
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Tikkun (Vol. 32, No. 1, ISSN 0887-9982) is published quarterly by Duke University Press for the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Tikkun*, 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704. Periodical postage paid at Berkeley, CA, and additional mailing offices. For individual subscriptions, visit tikkun.org/subscribe. For institutional subscriptions, visit dukeupress.edu/tikkun.
Individual subscription prices for 4 issues:
US residents, $29.00; all others, $39.00. Institutional subscription prices: print plus electronic, $134.00; electronic only, $102.00; print only, $134.00. Payment in US dollars required. For information on subscriptions to the e-Duke Journals Scholarly Collections, see dukeupress.edu/library/eDuke. For a list of the sources in which *Tikkun* is indexed, see dukeupress.edu/tikkun.
Printed in USA. Printed on recycled paper.

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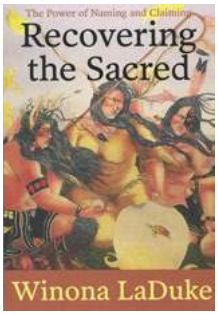
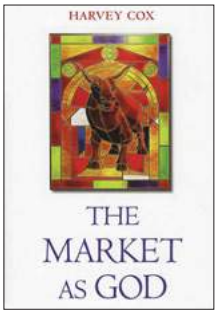
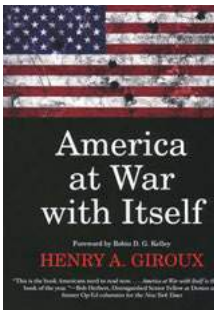


Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming
Winona LaDuke
Haymarket Books, 2016

With Americans experiencing a growing awareness of the persistence of racism in every aspect of our lives, we welcome Haymarket Book's republication of Winona LaDuke's important focus on the way the Native American community is healing itself from the ravages of the genocide inflicted upon them even as that community must now recover power to slow the latest assaults on their land and their rights by the energy industry. LaDuke highlights the way Native Americans are healing through recovering their own sacred traditions, and in that process are increasingly able to lead the way to slow climate change.



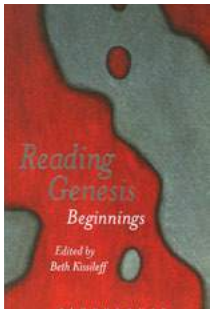
The Market As God
Harvey Cox
Harvard University Press, 2016



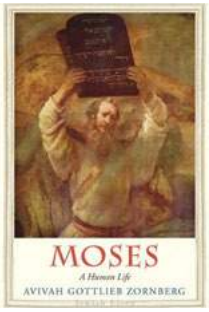
America at War with Itself
Henry A. Giroux
City Lights Books, 2017

The connection between a deeper spirituality and resistance to the destructive path of global capitalism comes into deep focus in the brilliant new book by Harvey Cox, a professor of divinity at Harvard. Cox shows how the glorification of the market, allegedly by secular and impartial economists, media, and politicians is actually a manifestation of worship for the new religion in which the competitive market is their god. Instead of serving a useful but limited purpose, the worshippers of "The Market" (capital letters appropriate to a god) have sought to give it supreme sovereignty, abolishing all consideration of our humanity that conflict with its power. Cox suggests a path of repentance, restoration, and recreation—restoring the market place to its much more limited and healthy place and the democratization of the economy as a whole. "Ordinary people and local communities would be directly involved in not just political decisions but all the decisions that affect their lives, including economic ones." Cox hopes in this process that we can reclaim for humanity "a God whose essential nature is itself pluralistic and who strives to compose a universe of free and responsible 'others'."

Henry Giroux has become the Left's most articulate and insightful critic of America's distorted political life, highlighting its authoritarian turn and the political illiteracy that our culture fosters and that the media helps channel into racism, the worship of money and power, and an ethos of survival-of-the-fittest that produces the foundation for renewed fascistic movements. The alternative is a critical pedagogy linked to an ongoing project of democratization and "the defense of public spheres capable of producing thoughtful citizens, critically engaged communities, and an ethically and socially responsible society (see also Giroux's "Defending Educators in An Age of Neoliberal Tyranny" in *Tikkun*, Fall 2016, vol. 31, no. 4). Giroux manages to link together almost every dysfunctional aspect of American society in a cohesive account that is really important to read!



Reading Genesis: Beginnings
Ed. Beth Kissileff
Bloomsbury, 2016



Moses: A Human Life
Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg
Yale University Press, 2016

No matter how many times you read the Torah, you will never exhaust the ocean of commentary and reflective thought it continues to generate in every generation. Here are two books that add new and exciting directions for scholars and theologians, but are also important for anyone interested in understanding the ongoing appeal of the Jewish religious tradition.

In *Reading Genesis*, editor Beth Kissileff has brought together a treasure chest of smart thinkers including Russell Jacoby, Ilan Stavans, Joan Nathan, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Sander Gilman, Dara Horn, Jacqueline Osherow, Seth Greenberg, and many more, and articles that range from "The Apple and Eve: A Neuropsychological Interpretation," "It Is Not Good for Man to be Alone," "Bloodlust," "The Face of the Other: Sarah-Hagar Then and Now," "The Binding of Isaac and the Arts of Resistance," "Imperfect Forgiveness: Joseph and His Brothers," and "The Death of Jacob: Responding to the End of Life." Many of these articles have appeared before in a variety of magazines, but bringing them together makes them handily accessible.

Avivah Zornberg's *Moses*, like much of her writing on Torah, draws heavily on the classical interpretations of the past, including the Midrashic and classical and modern religious thinkers, but also some of the most creative thinkers in other fields, and melds all that with a willingness to bring her own creative psychological wisdom to yield interpretations and new ways of seeing the old texts that are at once both provocative and exciting. Moses is seen as a friend of God who "intuits what kind of conversation God desires" and she finds Moses' lifelong anger is sometimes manifested "in the interest of compassion" and to avert God's anger, as Yochanan Muffs once taught. She sees him sometimes as "aggressively masculine: pushing, snatching, tearing, girding his loins" but also at times playing "a distinctly 'feminine' role." Zornberg's *Moses* is a richly dimensional character, and one that adds a deep new reading to the Torah text.

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Readers Respond

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.

There were thousands of responses to Rabbi Lerner's talk at the memorial for Muhammad Ali, but we only have room for a few in this print edition of *Tikkun*. To see a video of the talk online and to view more comments, visit www.tikkun.org/ali

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Wow! Wow! Wow!

Chazak v'ematz (the blessing, "Be strong and courageous") to Rabbi Michael Lerner for this AMAZINGLY courageous eulogy for Muhammad Ali!

He not only said it in the true Jewish spirit that I live by; he said it to, and in the face of those who weren't expecting to hear it, who have everything to gain or lose from it, and to those who HAD NO IDEA that we, many Jews around the world, think and live like that.

Absorb his words, watch the reaction of the attendees, and understand how deeply such words at such an occasion have the ability to change the game; the world game of power, control, empires, occupation, and visions of "the other."

He hits on almost all the open nerves and isn't ashamed to say the right thing, as he did with Ali against the War in Indo-China. He is attracting flack already from those who fear; fear of "the other" for lack of a universal understanding that we are the "other" of our other. We must speak to our others and reassure them that we, their other, are just as they; looking for a good life for us, our family, and our friends. We must all understand that the ONLY way to assure that for US is to also assure that for our "other." It hasn't worked for 10,000 years to ignore or fight our other. Only when we respect our other as we respect ourselves will we achieve true peace. And only after we achieve true (not total) peace, will we achieve true (not total) security.

Jews of the world, it is time to raise our heads and be proud of our people. Rabbi Michael Lerner has afforded us this moment in the world. Let's absorb it, learn from it, and implement its ramifications from this moment on. Let's call out those of ours who will condemn him or his words. Let's have the courage to stand up against those who would superglue us in this world of conflict, our world of fear, hate, and occupation! They're coming! They're on the attack. BE READY. I've already read their comments in other places.

We have it within our power, should we decide to take it, to change the world for the better. It's the spirit of Judaism, of Islamic ideals, of Christianity, and of humanity. Let's be strong and courageous to unite and end the fear of the other that leads to hatred, suppression, violence, and wars.

—Moshe Chertoff, *Shamerat, Hazafon, Israel*

Bless you, Rabbi, for that impassioned presentation!

As a Muslim poet, of Palestinian background, I'm very moved to hear this.

Peace, all ways.

—Yahia Lababidi, *Fort Lauderdale, Florida*

I was electrified with glee (after watching Rabbi Lerner's talk), smiling ear to ear. It gave me added hope that good Americans will overcome the racism and hate speech that Donald Trump uses to attract people who just don't know any better.

—John DeSombre

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.

Overcoming Trump-ism

A New Strategy for Progressives

We are deeply concerned about the path our country is going to take under Donald Trump's leadership. The racist, sexist, and xenophobic signals given during the 2016 campaign led to an escalation of acts of public hate against Latinos, Muslims, and Jews. Much of what liberal and progressive social change movements have worked for these past decades is about to be substantially reversed and dismantled. We cannot expect that militant demonstrations or protests by themselves are going to help much until we understand more deeply why a larger majority of Americans have not been willing to give liberals and progressives the kind of electoral victories necessary to actually implement the Left's policies and programs.

We have a strategy, one part of which is to split the Trump forces, challenging the policies of the truly dyed-in-the-wool racists, sexists, homophobes and Islamophobes, while responding with empathy, caring, and respect to those who are not. Many of these latter have been in deep pain not only because of economic insecurity, but also because they've felt disrespected, first by the Democratic Party which raised their hopes for a very different world but then capitulated to the elites of wealth and power (remember the Obama of "yes we can"?), and then dissed by a Left that sees them as haters or stupid when many of them are not. Trump offered them the opportunity to express their anger and rage at the societal selfishness and materialism that surrounds them—and for many, not having the love, caring, respect, economic security, and meaningful work they need. Their pain at witnessing family breakdown, and disrespect toward the national and religious institutions that they've turned to for a sense of security and community, found expression in the Trump rhetoric, even though many who voted for him deplored his own personal distortions. The Left must become a love army, first for each other, then also for those with whom we disagree.

For thirty years *Tikkun* magazine has been trying to alert the liberal and progressive world to the deep psychological and spiritual crisis that leads many people to the Right, whose economic and political interests are better served by the Left. Instead, we've been told that it's more realistic to fight for narrow "achievable" goals than to address the psychodynamics of American society and develop a vision of the world we seek. But as much of what was achieved in that supposedly more pragmatic way gets dismantled, it's time for the large array of social change movements to rethink this, and address the psychological and spiritual crisis in people's lives that has finally led them to move far away from what the Left has pieced together.

Many leftists, stuck in a narrow materialist view of human beings, have believed that if we could just offer more economic programs and political rights to Americans, they would satisfy and win the allegiance of the American people. They were wrong.

Despite having the best political and economic program by far, Bernie Sanders' message did not prevail. Bernie recognized the pain in people's lives, yet attributed it mostly to economic insecurity, not recognizing the spiritual and psychological needs that are systematically thwarted by the internalization of capitalist values and the ethos of the competitive marketplace. So he was unable to help people understand the connection between the pain in their lives and how our social system and its ideology, drummed into our heads in schools, through mass media, and through our daily experience in the capitalist workplaces and marketplaces, make us unwilling accomplices to the pain many people have been feeling for several decades.

We at *Tikkun* have mostly backed the economic and political rights programs of the Left, while simultaneously insisting that when the Left speaks to people with a condescending tone, creates a culture of suspicion toward men and whites, and projects an intense religiophobia and contempt for a large swath of the American public, it ensures that it will never have the political power to implement a progressive agenda. It needs to radically reconstitute itself.

Yes, it is true that some of that pain is connected to the uncertainty that many people feel about their future ability to provide food, clothing, and housing for their own families. Yet the pain of economic insecurity once led to the creation of powerful labor unions and social democratic movements. What is different in the past forty years has been the degree to which people have come to believe in the self-justificatory ideology of the capitalist marketplace—that they live in a meritocracy. From childhood on, most people in the U.S. are taught that we live in a society that rewards merit, so if you are smart enough and work hard enough you will "succeed" in your life. For the "winners" economically, the belief in the meritocracy provides a justification for having more money

and more things than the rest of the people in society. They tell themselves "we earned it through superior smarts and hard work." But for everyone else, this same belief in meritocracy gives rise to intense self-blaming. The research we did at the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, which you can find in my book *Surplus Powerlessness*, unveiled the powerful role that self-blaming has in making people feel relatively powerless and leading them to be less willing to reveal to others their inner pain and fears since they often believe that doing so is only revealing what a failure they feel themselves to be.

Even those who are doing fairly well economically often find themselves facing inner distress as human relations become increasingly shaped by the powerful dynamics of the capitalist marketplace. They spend all day in the world of work where they are taught that their own worth is based on how successful they are in helping the owners of capital accumulate wealth and power, or how successful they are in accumulating those for themselves. And they experience people in that economic marketplace as caring only about themselves and willing to manipulate, control, or bully others in order to be more successful, or to accumulate more money to purchase more things. They come away from work with a strong belief that this is just how the "real world" is — filled with people who will do almost anything to gain power and economic success. They go home and see "the real world" presented to them on television or in movies as dominated by this same ethos — most extremely in the type of reality television shows that made Donald Trump famous — and they increasingly come to feel that the only rational way to live is to maximize self-interest or else be dominated, manipulated, and controlled by others.

Many come to believe that caring only for oneself is the deep truth of "human nature" that cannot be changed, and that the only rational way to live is to give priority to looking out for number one and seeing others as valuable primarily for what they can do to advance our own self-interest. Sadly, the more people accept this way of being, the more they act in ways that actually undermine the possibility of sustaining long-term friendships, loving relationships, and families. And experiencing the world this way weakens everyone's ability to fully see other people as embodiments of the sacred — deserving love and caring just because they are miraculous manifestations of the beauty and goodness that has evolved on Earth!

The more that people see each other through a narrow utilitarian frame, the less they are able to build and maintain strong relationships. Families become less stable because increasingly as the marketplace mentality shapes consciousness, people enter into marriages with the thought that this person they are marrying will fulfill more of their needs than anyone else likely to be interested in a relationship — a calculation which then produces great insecurity in many marriages because each party cannot be sure that at some point their partner might not find someone else whom they believe could satisfy yet more of their needs. The resulting insecurity about whether one's family will actually remain intact or become one more divorce statistic is a central dimension of the spiritual crisis generated by the capitalist marketplace and causing immense pain in the personal lives of those who have been shaped by marketplace consciousness.

In no way should we blame people for this instrumental or utilitarian way they view others. It is almost impossible to not think this way. It is a rare person who can see our fellow human beings as deserving of love, caring, and respect just for who they are and not because they are potential satisfiers of our own needs. This alternative way of being with others, seeing people as embodiments of the sacred, through what Martin Buber called an "I-Thou" relationship, or what secular humanists call seeing the other as Subject and not merely as Object, is the defining aspect of a spiritual consciousness, and it is part of what attracts many people to religious communities and spiritual practices (though it is not always available there either, depending on how much one's church, mosque, synagogue, ashram, etc. have themselves become infiltrated with capitalist market values). Many people do find the sense of being recognized and cared for in the religious or spiritual world that they rarely find in any other aspect of their lives, and if the cost of that is to buy into right-wing ideologies that are taught in some of these religious communities, they will do so.

What we discovered in our research about the world of work was that most people hate being in world dominated by materialism and selfishness. They yearn for a life in which love, caring, being seen deeply and authentically by others, and contributing to the common good and to a higher purpose are more prominent, and yet at the same time they suppress these yearnings because they've been so fully indoctrinated by the dominant ethos of the society that "you can make it if you deserve to" and if you haven't made it in your personal life with a fulfilling relationship and work that have a higher meaning, the same self-blaming you learned in regard to the economy is also appropriate for the rest of your life. Lack of love? Lack of meaning? It is solely your own fault, we are taught.

These painful feelings that we have failed ourselves are intensified by the pop-psychology and pop-spirituality of capitalist society that teach that you create your own reality so you have no one to blame for your own lack of fulfillment but yourself. All this obscures the economic, political, and cultural institutions of the society over which most people have little control and which increasingly reward materialism and selfishness in almost every way.

Because of the spiritual emptiness and the fact people are not getting what they desire in their personal lives and relationships, it is no wonder that many turn to various forms of religion, or often right-wing quasi-religious movements.

It is often in churches, synagogues, and mosques or in secular nationalist movements that they find a commitment to cherishing people not for what they have accomplished in the marketplace, but simply for who they are. There are many progressive churches and synagogues in which this community is mixed with a deep commitment to end racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia. Unfortunately, there are also many others that offer community at the cost of embracing a message of right-wing extremism: the reason people are surrounded by selfishness and materialism is that there is some "Other," often those of a racial or ethnic minority, that is promoting selfishness and materialism. This selfishness, they are taught, is manifested in those who are willing to abort babies because their pregnancy is "inconvenient," those who are in same-sex marriages and hence don't share the burden of raising the next generation, or those who are seeking equality through affirmative action programs rather than wait their place in line for societal goodies like "the rest of us," supposedly getting ahead and enjoying special advantage without having earned it by their own merit. They are also told that liberal culture is destroying ethical values and family stability by engaging in profligate sexuality, and that undocumented workers are flooding into our country illegally to take away jobs others might have.

Liberals and progressives have refuted these claims many times in the past. But what they don't recognize is that the reason people will cling to these beliefs is that they offer a (distorted but effective) way out of the often unconscious but pervasive self-blaming that has been poisoning the lives of millions of Americans. The Right gains immense credibility, helping people regain some self-esteem, by blaming these "others" who are actually doing nothing more than seeking to rectify the unfair treatment they've historically received themselves.

Unfortunately, in the totally justified pursuit of rectification of past and current racist, sexist, and religious discrimination, cultural, political and economic oppression, police violence, rape, murder, and escaping from the ravages of global imperialism and its wars (often instigated and perpetuated by the U.S.), those who are victimized sometimes focus away from the global system that distorts and oppresses almost everyone, and instead articulate their pain and suffering in ways that demean everyone whom they believe has benefitted from that system.

Many who rightly struggle against racism, sexism, etc., end up labeling everyone who is white as having "white privilege" and being racist and everyone who is male as having "male privilege" and misogynistic. In fact, it was not uncommon to hear liberals and progressives label as racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, or just plain stupid everyone who voted for Trump, though many who voted for Trump did so for the same reasons articulated above that lead people into right-wing churches and movements even though they themselves may not share the racist and sexist ideas in those movements.

It remains a major goal of *Tikkun* and our Network of Spiritual Progressives to advance the struggle against these and all other forms of oppression. So we at *Tikkun* continue to call for programs that would rectify the inequalities and oppression, including stopping police violence against people of color and the violence against many women that persists in our society. (See our Path to a World of Love and Justice, www.tikkun.org/covenant, where we call for reparations for slavery, a living wage rather than a minimum wage, a guaranteed income for every person in this society sufficient to provide them with adequate food, clothing, housing, energy, education and health care—and many other programs that would go far toward establishing genuine economic and political equality. Also, see also our proposed Global and Domestic Marshall Plan www.tikkun.org/gmp.)

These kinds of programs are key to rectifying the history of various forms of oppression.

What is not okay, and which we've seen increase over the years and reach a crescendo during the 2016 election campaign, is to be blaming all whites or all men for the history and persistence of racism and sexism and all the other forms of oppression. Yet in some sections of the Left in the U.S. there is a subtext in which all men and all whites are frequently seen through a veil of suspicion.

When my research team at the Institute for Labor and Mental Health began to interview middle-income men and women, they told us numerous stories of peace rallies or other events shaped by the Left where they heard people say things such as, "we have to learn to renounce our male privilege and our white skin privilege," and that left them feeling alienated. For these people, some of them white and some of them people of color, this kind of language was experienced as extremely offensive because they did not see themselves as privileged. They were struggling to hold two jobs and still have a few minutes of waking time with their families. What they felt was that this group of liberals and progressives had no clue about the realities of their lives, their struggles, their pain, and did not care about that one whit. They felt misunderstood, judged, shamed, and ultimately their needs ignored. Those who were union members continued to vote Democratic, but those who were not reported being drawn to right-wing churches or to the Republican Party where they felt more deeply understood and respected.

Shaming all white people and all men, it turns out, is not really a smart strategy—and if progressives learn nothing else from the 2016 election, they should learn this! As a side note, the media should learn that when people are deeply shamed by the elites and by the Left, they will give false answers to pollsters and journalists about who they support for office, leading the media to make misguided predictions about election results.

I understand that many on the Left are totally unaware of how the culture of the Left often conveys this kind of shaming message. They are shocked to hear this. And the reason they don't understand why this would be the case is because they don't understand how deeply the self-blaming induced by the meritocratic ideology of capitalist society makes people particularly sensitive to any form of shaming. Nor are they aware of how the ideology of meritocracy has become an almost unconscious but pervasive belief in the consciousness of even the most progressive or even radical activists, an assumption that their success in the world is a product of their own superior smarts and ethical merit that others lack. This is a key element of classism and it is conveyed to the rest of the population by television figures like Bill Maher, news commentators at MSNBC, and even at times by Jon Stewart when he ran *The Daily Show*. It is the notion that people who are not on the side of liberal and progressive politics are dumb, dumber, and dumbest (and everyone is encouraged to laugh in agreement).

We learned something else from our research: that many working class and middle-income people were at various points in their lives attracted to progressive anti-war, social justice, environmental, or human rights movements, but found that the Left culture put down anyone attracted to religion. What they told us was that in their encounters with people in the Left they often heard comments about religious or spiritual people that went something like: "We really want to get liberal Christians to our demonstrations and to vote for our candidates. We trust if they hang out with us long enough they will eventually evolve in consciousness to our higher level where we have no need for the racist and sexist father figures and reliance on irrational beliefs of religious people." More recently, after the publication of my book *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back our Country from the Religious Right*, I met many people who are active in social change organizations who confessed to me that they feel most comfortable in the Left when they keep their spiritual practice or religious affiliations secret, because whenever they made them known they encountered derision. In short, religiophobia in the Left is another form of shaming.

I have no desire to shame the shamers of the Left. Just as most whites had no understanding of how deep the racism in our society extends until the Civil Rights and other anti-racist movements started to educate us, and most women and men had no understanding of how deep the sexist conditioning of our society was until feminist movements started to educate us, so most people who have bought into the meritocratic assumptions, religiophobia, and other forms of shaming have little awareness of how deep within us are these other forms of shaming. In these cases, there is not some clear class delineation of oppressed and oppressor — the religiophobia and the meritocratic assumptions permeate the society and are oppressive across traditional class lines.

Our goal is not to make progressives feel bad, but rather to help us overcome demeaning ways of perceiving those who are not yet part of a progressive movement — perceptions that undermine our effectiveness and generate anger and outrage from many who might otherwise be open to becoming our allies. I deeply want our world to transform and for the Left to be successful in its efforts to eradicate racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, etc. and to build a loving and just world. Sadly, some of the strategies promoted by the Left for the last half century have alienated many people who otherwise would join their cause. Even many who gave Hillary Clinton a popular vote majority did it with very mixed feelings and little excitement. I hope my message can be received as a manifestation of great caring about creating a world of love and justice, and seeing how our liberal and progressive movements unintentionally deliver a message that is filled with shaming and blaming that makes us less successful.

When many Americans outside liberal and progressive circles are hit with this combination of being seen as sexist, racist, and dumb by the Left, many respond with an intense anger. Most people in the liberal and progressive world have no concept of how bad these charges feel to people who are already deeply engaged in self-blaming, and without the love and care they badly need and deserve. It is our task to help them understand that the alienation in their lives, and the background assumptions that contribute to the materialism and selfishness that surrounds them, is a function of the capitalist marketplace. That cannot happen, however, until the Left itself is educated about these issues, about what I call the spiritual crisis generated by the capitalist marketplace, the shaming generated by the ideology of meritocracy, and the deep disrespect conveyed by the Left's religiophobia combined with its seeming to blame all whites for the continuing legacy of racism and all men for the continuing legacy of sexism.

Factor all this into understanding the psychodynamics of American politics and you get a much clearer understanding why, when Hillary Clinton described half of Trump's followers as "a basket of deplorables," her remark was heard by tens of millions of Americans as just further confirmation of the intense disrespect that liberals and progressives have for them.

The failure of people on the Left to vigorously disassociate themselves from what she probably thought was just a denunciation of racism, sexism, and bullying in the Trump world nevertheless highlighted what has been the psychological subtext of the Left's communications to many Americans.

The Left, in an effort to support the voices and needs of traditionally marginalized groups, dismisses the real pain and suffering of white middle, working, and poor people (and some people of color, a small segment of whom did vote for Trump and do not identify as racist, sexist, or homophobic)

and even worse, blames them for systemic racism and sexism. We reject that path.

But it is possible to both lift up the voices of traditionally marginalized groups so their perspectives and experiences are heard and valued, so the history of ignoring their voices is addressed in meaningful ways, while simultaneously acknowledging the voices of working class and poor people of all races and genders. Trying to change systemic structures of oppression does not require that we shut our ears to the pain and suffering of others. On the contrary, it is precisely by acknowledging all the different forms of suffering, even of those who act in hurtful or oppressive ways or who materially benefit from the suffering of others, that we have the best chance of building a lasting transformation of our society to one based on justice and love.

To get to that place, we need to both validate and move beyond identity politics, to unite across class, race, and gender, and bring to the forefront the intersectionality or shared experience of all the different forms of pain and suffering. But to do so we have to be willing to see that others who we have historically seen as our enemy are really our brothers and sisters too. We need to recognize that we are bound up with them as they are with us and that the real enemies are the systems and structures that allow for a society based on alienation and separation, and those who rely upon those systems and structures to maintain their power and oppress us all. This kind of solidarity must be extended to all people on earth. Together we can build a world of love and justice!

A Strategy for Progressives 2017-2021

So what do we do in light of all this? Here are some elements of a strategy for progressives in the Trump era.

1. Create an Empathy Tribe of hundreds of thousands of people on the Left who have learned how to recognize and transform blaming into compassion for those whose own pain has been manipulated into destructive or hurtful actions, ideas, and reactionary movements.

The Empathy Tribe will work on two fronts. First, to change the culture of the Left by challenging the shaming and blaming described above. Second, to reach out to people outside the liberal and progressive world with an empathic approach to the pain that has been caused by the worldview, institutions, and daily practices of the capitalist marketplace and which has been channeled into racist, sexist, or other destructive directions. We shall make a clear distinction between the institutions and practices that must be challenged and the individuals who, through no fault of their own, may be benefitting from those practices. We will assume the goodness of Americans rather than assuming that they created racism or sexism.

2. Apologize loudly, and repeatedly, for the way liberals and progressives have engaged in shaming Americans.

3. Challenge Religiophobia in the Left.

4. Bring a spiritually-based critique of capitalist values into the communities that now find their spiritual life tied to institutions that validate the competitive marketplace.

5. Build an explicitly spiritual progressive caucus in the Democratic Party, the Green Party, or create a new Love and Justice Party to champion a New Bottom Line in both public and private life. Every institution, social practice, corporation, government policy, our judicial and penal system, our educational system, our health care system, and more must be judged efficient, rational, and productive (i.e., successful) to the extent that they maximize our capacities to be loving and kind, generous and compassionate, ethically and environmentally just, to create just social and economic systems, to see other human beings as inherently deserving of love and respect and not in instrumental or utilitarian ways, and to see our planet Earth not as a repository of materials that can be turned into commodities and sold for the sake of our own profits but rather as our sacred inheritance which we are responsible to care for and respond to with awe, wonder, radical amazement, and deep appreciation. This New Bottom Line would quickly yield a love-based socialism quite different from the socialisms of the past that were mechanistically economistic and did not speak adequately to the heart of humanity.

6. Create visioning circles for people to imagine what their world would look like with our New Bottom Line. Organize in-depth discussions with friends, neighbors, colleagues, and co-workers to envision what would look different in the places in which they spend their lives if the New Bottom Line were to be implemented there. Only one rule: keep the "reality police" out of the discussion (the reality police are all the voices in your head or in the heads of others in this discussion that are intensely yelling to them: "don't waste your time because 'they' won't ever let anything like this happen in the real world.") Instead, allow each member of this visioning circle articulate their most beautiful visions, because as they do so with adequate detail they will be energized to join you in building a local embodiment of our Network of Spiritual Progressives and a better world.

7. Teach a new approach to foreign policy.

The strategy of domination and power over others as a path to homeland security has guided the foreign policy realists and the imperialist interventionists for the past 8,000 years since the invention of class-based societies. And it hasn't worked to make the world safe. In fact, when coupled with the power of the gun lobby in Washington D.C., America becomes one of the most significant sources of rising violence both domestically and internationally, providing arms that eventually end up in the hands of terrorists and militarists.

That's why the Network of Spiritual Progressives advocates for a Global and Domestic Marshall Plan www.tikkun.org /gmp to once and for all eliminate (not just ameliorate) global and domestic poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education and health care, and also repair the damage done to the planet after 300 years of environmentally irresponsible forms of industrialization and modernization in both the capitalist and self-described socialist world.

8. Lobby your local and national elected officials to pass the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Join us in this endeavor and you will help create the possibility that by the 2020 elections a progressive force could capture most State Houses and Legislatures, redistricting them in ways that would allow for the possibility of electing a progressive President and Congress. Far more likely that this path will work than continuing to fight every small battle against the Trump.

To learn how to get involved, please contact cat@spiritualprogressives.org. She offers a training that will teach you the skills you need to truly be a spiritual change agent with the depth of psycho-spiritual understanding and skills needed to manifest the world we want.

In short, I implore you to go for your highest dreams and deepest values and to make that the motto for your life and the lives of all whose worldviews you might influence these next four years. Demonstrate, protest, write op-eds, go to public discussions, and everywhere you go, present the spiritual progressives analysis and our proposed New Bottom Line—and advocate for The Caring Society—Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth.

And please help *Tikkun* and our interfaith and secular-humanist welcoming Network of Spiritual Progressives get the financial support to bring this strategy into reality—and the world could look very different than it will in the Trump years. www.tikkun.org/donate or Tikkun, 2341 Shattuck Ave, box 1200, Berkeley, CA 94704.
RabbiLerner.tikkun@gmail.com ■

Coercive Deference and Double Bind Politics on the Left (a response to the 2016 election)

BY PETER GABEL

I SHARE WITH I'm sure virtually all of *Tikkun's* readers a feeling of pain and horror at the acts of racial and ethnic violence that have occurred since the election of Donald Trump. And I of course agree that the rhetoric of Trump's campaign has had the effect of stirring up and legitimizing the expression of these racist and xenophobic impulses in terrible and alarming ways. But it does not help our efforts to respond to and counter these realities to simply denounce the Trump campaign or Trump supporters as "being" racist or xenophobic as if their violent and cruel behavior were just an expression of their evil essence or brainwashed minds. Instead, we must look deeply into the impacted conditions of their psychological, spiritual, and economic lives to see what in their experience has led them to burst out by the millions in response to Trump's message.

Many white working-class communities feel robbed of much of their sense of worth and recognition by the impact of the global economy on the conditions of their life and on their culture. They see elites (millionaires, billionaires, tech wizards, bi-coastal cultural sophisticates) benefiting from an economy that their prior economic communities have been eviscerated by (in the rust-belt states of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, for example, all of whom voted in large numbers for Trump). And they feel this

PETER GABEL is Editor-at-Large of *Tikkun* magazine, co-founder of the Project for Integrating Spirituality, Law, and Politics, and the author of *Another Way of Seeing: Essays on Transforming Law, Politics, and Culture*.

marginalization and cast-asideness not just because of its material or economic aspect, but also, and in some ways more importantly, because of its denigration of their own sense of worthiness, recognition, and sense of communal belonging and value. In this latter sense, they feel spiritual suffering and the loss of human solidarity and love.

Instead of responding to this with compassion and concern, many in the liberal world have unconsciously communicated to this community that the world is, or would be, fine if these whites had exercised their "equality of opportunity" to pursue their god-given right to fulfill their dreams through successfully competing in the marketplace — except for minorities, women, the LGBTQ community, disabled people, and other designated groups who must be given "special benefits" due to past discrimination so that they can gain the same "equality of opportunity" that the so-called white community already has. This liberal attitude reflected in the mainstream of the Democratic Party not only denies the spiritual pain of the white working class, but it also implicitly blames the white working-class for failing to succeed themselves and for somehow contributing to the oppression of African-Americans, women, and all the other groups whom the liberal world (correctly) wants to extend more rights and more benefits to.

Thus, many in the liberal world in effect flaunt their own success as elites, implicitly blame the working class for their own failures, and then hold them responsible as "whites" for the oppression of other oppressed groups, requiring them to deny their own sense of marginalization and spiritual pain, their own invisibility, and to defer to the orthodoxy that it is the other oppressed groups who are deserving of concern and recognition. And even more, these white working-class communities are not allowed to comment upon this whole process because that would be racist, or sexist, or otherwise not politically correct for them to do. Understandably, this makes these white working-class communities feel they are simultaneously in pain and silenced from commenting on their pain, an untenable and explosive hurt that Trump perfectly spoke to in his campaign.

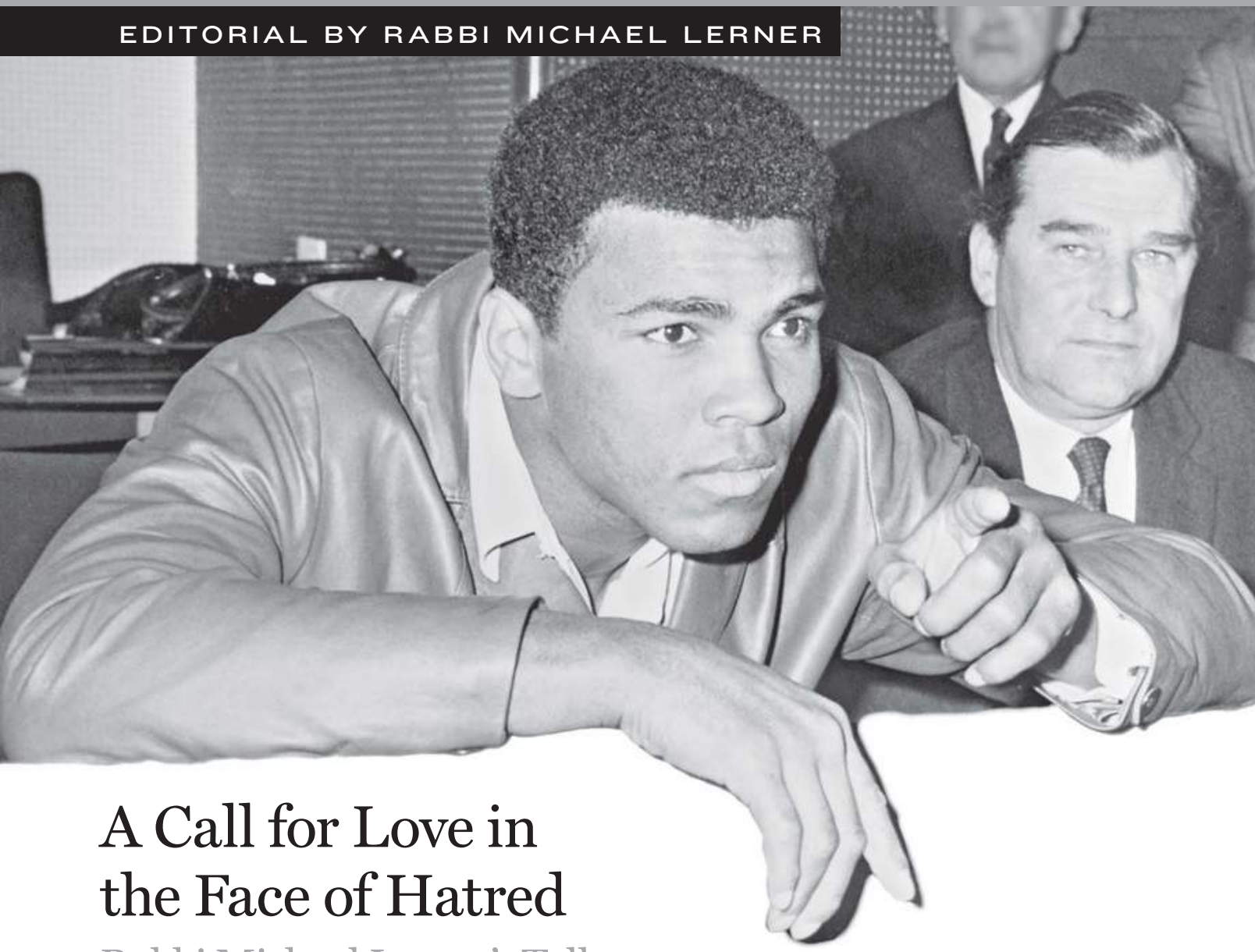
What we saw in the election results, furthermore, was that this dynamic was not limited to the white working-class, but also to white college-educated men *and women* who voted for Trump in large numbers, in spite of his derogatory comments about women. While these "whites" don't face the identical socio-economic conditions of the white working-class, they also suffer the spiritual pain of not being affirmed in a loving and valuing way within our alienated culture, and they also are expected to direct all their concern to designated oppressed others and deny the pain of their own spiritual isolation. And they too are not allowed to comment upon this because they are supposed to be guilty about the pain of others rather than crying out themselves.

This is the coercive deference and the double-bind that has undermined the Left's appeal for the last forty or so years since the Left abandoned a universalist view of human liberation in favor of an exclusive focus on the extension of liberal rights to previously discriminated-against groups, and on an identity politics based on the past and continuing injuries to each victimized identity group for which a designated oppressor group (i.e. "whites") are responsible.

"The solution to this is a new spiritual politics that sees all of us as suffering in an alienated, socially-separated, individualistic social world."

The solution to this is a new spiritual politics that sees all of us as suffering in an alienated, socially-separated, individualistic social world that fails to affirm all of us as worthy of love, respect, and recognition, and that seeks to build an economy and a culture that carries forward that loving affirmation to all human beings. Of course, this must include compassion for and solidarity with the historical and continuing particular suffering inflicted on African-Americans, women, the LGBTQ community, and others who have been harmed, demeaned, and unrecognized, but it must also extend a loving solidarity to the "whites," that is, to *all of us* as universal beings with particular histories and circumstances who long for a world based on love, care, and the embrace of truly being supported and valued.

Bernie Sanders did a great job of showing such a politics is possible right now, even though he focused only on economic issues as carriers of spiritual care and concern rather than on a fuller, truly spiritual-progressive program that would have addressed a broader array of spiritual and communal needs. Until we move our politics in this universalist healing direction, others like Donald Trump will continue to succeed with messages that speak to "white" people's pain in distorted ways with likely harmful consequences. ■



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A Call for Love in the Face of Hatred

Rabbi Michael Lerner's Talk at Muhammad Ali's Memorial

Note: Muhammad Ali knew Rabbi Lerner as a friend and ally in the 1960s and early '70s when both were indicted by the U.S. government for their roles in opposing the war in Vietnam. Ali, knowing he would die from Parkinson's disease, planned his memorial ahead of time and decided to invite Lerner to represent the American Jewish community at his memorial service, which took place June 10, 2016 in Louisville, Kentucky. Lerner's speech was met with wide acclaim, went viral on YouTube and other social media, and helped popularize the saying "Be Ali." You can watch it online by searching "YouTube Rabbi Lerner." His talk was interrupted so many times by applause and standing ovations that we decided not to include them in this transcript. Lerner started his talk by chanting, in Hebrew, the opening words of a Jewish memorial prayer for the dead.

El maley rachamim, shocheyn ba'meh'romeem. Master of compassion, God of compassion, send your blessings to Muhammad Ali, send your blessings to all who mourn for him, and send your blessings for all the millions and millions of people who mourn for him all over this planet. I come here speaking as a representative of American Jews — and to say that American Jews played an important role in solidarity with African-American struggles in this country and that we today stand in solidarity with the Islamic community in this country and all around the world.

We will not tolerate politicians or anyone else putting down Muslims and blaming Muslims for a few people. We know what it's like to be demeaned. We know what it's like to have a few people who act against the highest visions of our tradition to then be identified as the value of the entire

tradition. And one of the reasons that we at *Tikkun* magazine, a magazine of liberal and progressive Jews, but also an interfaith magazine, have called upon the United States to stand up to the part of the Israeli government that is oppressing Palestinians is that we, as Jews, understand that our commitment is to recognize that God has created everyone in God's image and that everyone is equally precious and that means the Palestinian people as well as all other people on the planet.

I know the people of Louisville have a special relationship to Muhammad Ali, and I had a personal relationship with him in the '60s when both of us were indicted by the federal government for our various stands against the war in Vietnam. I want to say that although he was cheered on as the heavyweight champion of the world, you know the truth is — and all the honor to him — but heavyweight champions of the world come and go and sports heroes come and go. There was something about Muhammad Ali that was different. At the key moment when he had that recognition, he used it to stand up to an immoral war and say, "No, I won't go."

And it's for that reason that tens of millions of Americans who don't particularly care about boxing, do care about Muhammad Ali, because he was the person who was willing to risk a great honor that he got and great fame that he got to stand up for the beliefs that he had. To speak truth to power when the rest of the people around him said, "No, no, you're going to lose your championship." And it was taken away from him for five years, but he stood up and was willing to take that kind of a risk because of that kind of moral integrity.

So I want to say, how do we honor Muhammad Ali? And the answer is: the way to honor Muhammad Ali is to be Muhammad Ali today.

That means us, everyone here and everyone listening. It's up to us to continue that ability to speak truth to power. We must speak out, refuse to follow the path of conformity to the rules of the game in life. We must refuse to follow the path of conformity. Tell the one percent who own 80 percent of the wealth of this country that it's time to share that wealth.

Tell the politicians who use violence worldwide and then preach nonviolence to the oppressed that it's time for them to end their drone warfare and every other form of warfare, to close our military bases around the world, to bring the troops home. Tell those who created mass incarceration that it's time to create a guaranteed income for everyone in our society.

Tell judges to let out of prison the many African-Americans swept up by racist police and imprisoned by racist judges. Many of them in prison today for offenses like possessing marijuana that white people get away with all the time.

Tell our elected officials to imprison those who authorized torture and those who ran the big banks and investment companies that caused the economic collapse of 2008.

Tell the leaders of Turkey to stop killing the Kurds. Tell Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that the way to get security for Israel is to stop the Occupation of the West Bank and help create a Palestinian state.

Tell the next president of the United States that she — tell the next president of the United States that she should seek a constitutional amendment to make all national and state elections funded by congress and the state legislatures and all other sources of money should be banned, including money from corporations, from individuals, all other money. Make it all public funding. Tell her that the way to achieve homeland security is not for us to try new ways of domination. The strategy of domination of the world of the other to get security has been tried for the last 10,000 years and it doesn't work. The way to get security is for the United States to become known as the most generous and caring country in the world, not the most powerful.

"We today stand in solidarity with the Islamic community in this country and all around the world."

We can start with a global and domestic Marshall Plan to once and for all end global and domestic poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education, inadequate health care.

So I want to invite you, as chair of the interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives, http://www.spiritualprogressives.org, to come and join us. I want to affirm our commitment to the well-being of all Muslims on this planet as well as the people of all faiths and secular humanists as well. We wish to pay honor to Muslims of the world as they continue today the fast of Ramadan and join with them in mourning the loss and celebrating the life of Muhammad Ali, a great fighter for justice and peace. Peace be upon him, peace be upon the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon all of humanity, and peace on all of us. Amen. ■

Join Our Movement

Through the work of the Network of Spiritual Progressives — the interfaith and secular-humanist-welcoming activist organization associated with this magazine — *Tikkun* is creating a movement with a positive vision of the world we want to create: a world of love, generosity, social justice, compassion, and caring for each other.

tikkun.org/join

On Wild Ethics

BY DAVID ABRAM

All of man's mistakes arise because he imagines that he walks upon a lifeless thing, whereas his footsteps imprint themselves in a flesh full of vital power. — Jean Giono

Although "ethics" is commonly equated with a set of rules or principles for right conduct, the heart of ethics has more to do with a simple humility toward others — an attentive openness not just toward other persons but toward the inexhaustible otherness of the manifold beings that compose this earthly world.

When we consider the palpable earth around us as though it were an object — when we conceive of nature merely as an objective set of mechanical processes — we tacitly remove ourselves from the world we inhabit. We pretend that we are not corporeal creatures co-evolved with the rest of earthly life, but are rather disembodied minds pondering reality from a godlike position outside that reality. In this manner, we free ourselves from any responsibility to the rest of the biosphere. We give ourselves license to engage other animals, plants, and natural elements as a set of resources waiting to be used by us, as a clutch of fixed and finished entities waiting to be manipulated and engineered to suit our purposes. To look upon any entity only as a determinate object is to sever the possibility of real relationship with that being, and so to forestall any need for ethical reflection.

If, however, we acknowledge the myriad presences around us not as objects but as bodily subjects in their own right — as open-ended beings with their own inherent spontaneity and active agency — then we swiftly become aware of the relationships that we sustain with those beings. For only then, when we recognize the things we experience as sensitive beings like ourselves, do we notice that we inhabit a common world. And in truth, it is not only the other animals and the plants with whom we actively share this world, but also glacier-carved mountains and meandering rivers, the asphalt street underfoot, and the wind surging through the skyscrapers. Every aspect of the sensuous surroundings can be experienced as an active, animate power, able to respond to the beings around it and to influence them in turn.

When we speak of earthly nature in this manner, not as a collection of passive and determinate objects but as a community of living subjects, then we straightaway begin to feel ourselves as members of this community, and to wonder about the quality of our relations with the other beings in our neighborhood.

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The intuition that we inhabit a breathing cosmos — the awareness that the sensible things around us are, like our own creaturely bodies, sensitive and perhaps even sentient powers — is common to the discourse of virtually every indigenous, traditionally oral culture. For in the absence of intervening technologies, the unaided human senses cannot help but encounter the world as a tangle of animate, expressive beings. Since we ourselves are corporeal creatures thoroughly embedded in the sensuous cosmos, we are able to encounter things only from our limited angle or perspective. We never experience another entity in its totality — we can never completely penetrate or plumb the secrets of another being.

Each thing that we perceive has its accessible aspects and its hidden aspects, its bright facets that capture our attention and its unseen dimensions that lure us deeper into participation. Hence our perception of any presence is not an instantaneous event but rather an unfolding dynamic — a living interchange wherein a thing first catches our eye, or subtly calls our attention, to which we reply by focusing our gaze upon it, or reaching out to touch it, whereupon the other replies by revealing some further facet of itself, and so we are drawn ever deeper into dialogue with the unique allurement of this boulder or that fungus-ridden tree stump. Direct sensory perception reveals the things around us not as inert or inanimate chunks of matter but as enigmatic, elemental presences with whom we find ourselves in a living interchange.

To speak of the world as a clutch of inanimate and mechanical objects is therefore to deny our real experience; it is to avoid, and to stifle, our spontaneous, sensory encounter with the world in favor of a set of mental abstractions. It is a way of speaking, and thinking, that closes our animal senses.

DAVID ABRAM, cultural ecologist and geophilosopher, is the author of *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* and *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. A recipient of the international Lannan Literary Award, Abram recently held the honorary Arne Næss Chair in Global Justice and Ecology at the University of Oslo. Abram is founder of the Alliance for Wild Ethics (AWE), an organization dedicated to the rejuvenation of oral culture (the culture of face-to-face and face-to-place storytelling) as an ecological imperative (www.wildethics.org).

Illustration by Lawrence Santanello

To speak of the earth, on the other hand, as a living field of relationships between beings — each being with its own openness or creativity — is to speak in accordance with our senses, and with our spontaneous bodily experience of the world around us. It is a way of speaking, and of thinking, that enhances our sensory rapport with the sensuous terrain; a way that holds us in conscious relation to the elemental realities that enfolds us. By acknowledging the inherent ambiguity and mystery of the myriad beings that surround us (by acknowledging that we can never fathom all the secrets of even a single blade of grass) such a way of thinking engenders humility, and a steady wonder — the exuberant heart of a wild ethics.

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At this curious moment in the world's unfolding, when human violence toward other humans is matched only by our violence toward the living earth — with terrestrial and oceanic ecosystems rapidly collapsing under the weight of our steady assaults, and with countless species tumbling into oblivion as a result of our arrogant disregard — it is now evident that our own species must undergo a sea change if anything of beauty is to survive.

If we wish to bring humankind into a new reciprocity with the rest of the biosphere, then we will need to release ourselves from the tyranny of outmoded concepts, and remember ourselves as carnal constituents of this breathing planet. We'll need to renew our felt experience of the land as a complex of sensitive and sentient powers, as a boisterous community of beings in which our own lives are participant, and to which we are beholden. This primordial form of experience, which returns us from the pretense of disembodied detachment to our corporeal situation in the midst of the here and now, engenders a new respect and restraint in all our actions. Divesting ourselves of our abstractions, acknowledging the enigmatic otherness that things display when we meet them in the depth of the present moment, enables an attentive and ethical comportment in all our endeavors, an empathic attunement to our surroundings, and a compassionate intention to do least harm.

For too long we humans have withheld our allegiance from the sustaining earth, reserving our faith only for a mystery assumed to reside entirely beyond the sensuous. To return to our senses is to remember an older, indigenous faith that we have never completely lost — our breathing body's implicit faith in the solid ground underfoot and the renewal of light every dawn, its faith in mountains and rivers and the cyclical return of the salmon, in the silent germination of seeds and the steady nourishment in the unseen air. It is this animal fidelity to the breathing earth, so easily overlooked or forgotten, that unites us with countless other species — and it remains the ground of every lasting ethic between persons, and between peoples. A faith in the wild and shadowed goodness of the Earth. ■

Illustration by Lawrence Santanello

Are Humans Special?

BY DAVID LOY

Obviously we are a unique species. Just look around: humans have transformed much of the surface of the earth, remolding it for our own convenience. We have fulfilled God's injunction in the first chapter of the Bible: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (*Genesis* 1:26) A few chapters later our dominion is reiterated: "And fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air . . . into your hands they are delivered." (9:2) We may wonder what it means to be made in God's image (more on that later), but our superiority to all other creatures is thereby divinely sanctioned, with the apparent implication that they exist for us to use.

These verses are often cited as one root of the ecological crisis, because the consequences of that superiority—technological, at least—have become devastating. It is not surprising, then, that an increasing number of people now doubt that we should anoint ourselves as the pinnacle of creation. Deep ecologists claim that the natural world should not be understood as a resource for humans to exploit, for all living beings have inherent worth. The evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould argued that evolution does not imply that we are a unique species: any perception of progress is a delusion based on human arrogance.

From a Buddhist perspective, however, our situation is more complex. The earliest texts emphasize how precious human life is. According to an analogy repeated three times in the Pāli Canon, to be born as a human is more rare than the chance that a blind turtle, rising to the surface of the sea only once every hundred years, would put its head through the hole in a wooden cattle-yoke floating on the waves. In this case, however, the emphasis is not on some innate superiority but on our unique potential. Viewing ourselves as better than other species, which exist for our benefit, is not the only way to understand the unique position and role of humans on the earth. This alternative perspective needs to be clarified. In what ways are we special, and in what ways are we not?

Progress?

From an evolutionary perspective, a tendency toward more complexity and greater awareness is apparent. Many important biological traits have originated and improved over time, most noticeably the better information-processing abilities provided by larger brains. In accord with this, not all scientists are as uncomfortable as Gould in viewing

DAVID ROBERT LOY is a professor, author, and Zen teacher in the Sanbo Zen tradition of Japanese Zen Buddhism (www.davidloy.org).

evolution as progressive. The renowned biologist E. O. Wilson, for example, claims that progress "is a property of the evolution of life as a whole by almost any conceivable intuitive standard, including the acquisition of goals and intentions in the behavior of animals. It makes little sense to judge it irrelevant."

But can progression be understood in a way that does not fall into the hubris that worried Gould?

Here I think we can benefit from Buddhist teachings about the "two truths," which distinguish the highest (absolute) truth from conventional (relative) truth. From the ultimate perspective there is no such thing as progress, because no matter how simple or complex phenomena (forms, things, etc.) may be, they remain "empty" (*shunya*) of any self-existence. Everything is interdependent, a process arising and passing away according to conditions. In cosmological terms, our self-organizing universe ceaselessly generates new forms, and all of them are equivalent insofar as they are impermanent products of the same cosmic creativity. There is no progress or decline because, in terms of that generative process, there is no gain or loss. There is no more value to a rock or tree than to a chimpanzee or human, because better or worse does not apply here. Each of them simply is, not as a distinct thing, but as an "empty" manifestation. And from this perspective nothing is lost if civilization collapses or even if humanity becomes extinct. Other species will continue to evolve, because the universe will continue to generate forms.

Yet that perspective is not the only perspective. "Form is emptiness," declares the *Heart Sutra,* but also "emptiness is form." In terms of that relative dimension — focusing on the forms themselves — there is evolutionary progress: from unicellular to multicellular life, from reptilian to mammalian brains, from conscious primates to self-conscious human beings. And, according to traditional Buddhist teachings, only humans can awaken and become Buddhas. That is why it is so important not to waste our precious human birth.

Creatures that Create

In this way the "two truths" doctrine of Buddhism can help to answer the question of whether human beings are special in some way (which does not necessarily mean that we have dominion over the rest of creation) or are no more special than any other species (as Gould and many others believe). Both perspectives are valid. In one way, we are creatures just like every other creature and of no more value. Nevertheless, there is something that distinguishes human beings, as Buddhism also emphasizes. One characteristic of that distinctiveness is that we are creatures that know we are creatures; moreover, we are creatures that create, and know that we create. If the universe is not a thing but an ongoing creative process, we have become its epicenters, in a way that none of its other forms are (so far as we know). With us, new types of creativity and flourishing become possible.

Illustration by Liam O'Donnell

Many species create. African termites construct complex mounds more than thirty feet high that include nursery chambers and fungal gardens. Unlike such instinctive behaviors, however, humans create something immeasurably more complex and interesting: culture, which in turn re-creates us and conditions the further possibilities we can envision and realize. If we don't assume the usual distinction between biological and cultural evolution, we can see civilization as a continuation of the same generative process. Our supersized neocortex and opposable thumbs enable us to be co-creators. If "God" is another, more familiar term for the intrinsic creativity of our ever-transforming cosmos, is this what it means to be "made in the image of God"?

We transform eating into growing food, cooking, and dining; procreation into romance, weddings, honeymoons, marriage, and family life (and divorce); communicative grunts into literature, philosophy, and other types of storytelling. We create new "species" that could never evolve without us: hand axes and knives, houses and schools, temples and cathedrals, string quartets and jazz quartets, economic systems and political institutions. In this fashion the universe becomes endlessly richer in ever-ramifying possibilities. Humans are not just one more manifestation of this process: we have become a unique and important contributor to its incessant creativity.

Modernity has brought about an explosion of ingenuity incomparably more sophisticated than anything that existed previously. Today, innovation of all sorts has become an ever-accelerating feedback loop, as scientific discovery and technological achievements enable fresh ones. Thanks to new communications media, only one person needs to discover something important; within a few days most people who follow the news can know about it, and within a few years it can be utilized around the world.

We have become so accustomed to this process that we now take it for granted, yet it is one of the most extraordinary features of contemporary life. And, although I am as concerned as anyone to decry the institutionalized greed that motivates and exploits so much economic activity today, capitalism, with its encouragement of the entrepreneurial spirit, has played an essential role in promoting that creativity, and continues to do so.

Meaning

There is another implication to be highlighted: the most important thing that humans create is meaning. Steven Weinberg, a Nobel laureate in physics, famously claimed that "The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless." But to examine the universe objectively and conclude that it is pointless misses the point. Who is comprehending that the universe is pointless? Someone separate from it, or someone who is an inextricable part of it? If cosmologists themselves are a manifestation of the same universe that cosmologists study, with them the universe is comprehending itself. Does that change the universe? When we come to see the universe in a new way, it's the universe that is coming to see itself in a new way.

Weinberg's bleak scientific conclusion is very different from the traditional mythologies of perhaps all ancient civilizations. For them the world was objectively meaningful in the sense that humans are a part of a larger pattern and that we have an important role to play in maintaining that order. In ancient Egypt, rituals were necessary to keep the sky goddess Nut separated from the earth god Geb, or chaos would overwhelm the earth. Mesoamerican civilizations believed that human sacrifices were necessary to sustain the cosmos, the most famous example being the Aztec practice of cutting out the hearts of war victims as offerings to the sun god.

Few people still believe in such mythologies, fortunately, yet belief that the universe is ultimately pointless is problematic in a different fashion. From one perspective meaning is inescapable: it is built into our priorities. If my focus is "looking out for number one," the meaning of my life becomes the promotion of my own best interests. If my own well-being cannot really be separated from the well-being of others, then that basic orientation may be based on a delusion; and if that delusion is widespread, the meaning built into the functioning of a whole society can be self-stultifying and even self-destructive. Such a motivation may nonetheless seem appropriate if the universe is pointless and our species is nothing more than an evolutionary accident. But if we are a way that the generative cosmos becomes self-aware, there are more interesting possibilities.

One uniquely human characteristic, emphasized by Buddhism, is that we can develop the ability to "dis-identify" from anything and everything, letting go not only of the individual sense of separate self but also of collective selves: dissociating from dualisms such as patriarchy, nationalism, racism, even species-ism ("we're human, not lower animals"). Meditation develops such nonattachment, yet the point of such letting-go is not to dissociate from everything but to realize our nonduality with everything.

That human beings are the only species (so far as we know) that can *know* it is a manifestation of the entire cosmos opens up a possibility that may need to be embraced if we are to survive the crises that now confront us. Instead of continuing to exploit the earth's ecosystems for our own supposed benefit, we can choose to work for the well-being of the whole. That we are not separate from the rest of the biosphere makes the whole earth our body, in effect, which implies not only a special understanding but also a special role in response to that realization. As the *Metta Sutta* declares: "Let one's thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world — above, below, and across — without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity."

To ask whether the universe itself is objectively meaningful or meaningless is to miss the point — as if the universe were outside us, or simply there without us. When we do not erase ourselves from the picture, we can see that we are meaning-makers, the beings by which the universe introduces a new scale of significance and value.

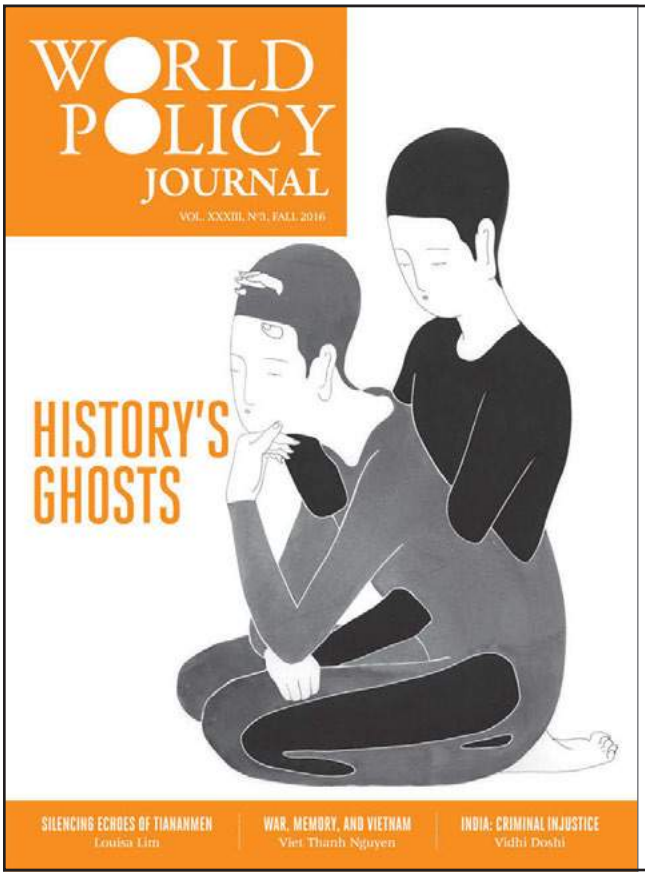
The Responsibility of Being Special

If we are special because of our potential, we must choose. We are free to derive the meaning of our lives from delusions about who we are — from dysfunctional stories about what the world is and how we fit into it — or we can derive that meaning from insight into our nonduality with the rest of the world. In either case, there are consequences.

The problem with basing one's life on delusions is that the consequences are unlikely to be good. As well as producing poetry and cathedrals, our creativity has recently found expression in world wars, genocides, and weapons of mass destruction, to mention a few disagreeable examples. We are in the early stages of an ecological crisis that threatens the natural and cultural legacy of future generations, including a mass extinction event that may lead to the disappearance of half the earth's plant and animal species within a century, according to E. O. Wilson — an extinction event that may include ourselves.

What needs to be done so that our extraordinary co-creative powers will promote collective well-being (collective in this case referring to all the ecosystems of the biosphere)? Must we evolve further — not biologically but culturally — in order to survive at all? From a Buddhist perspective our unethical tendencies ultimately derive from a misapprehension: the delusion of a self that is separate from others, a big mistake for a species whose well-being is not separate from the well-being of other species. Insofar as we are ignorant of our true nature, individual and collective self-preoccupation naturally motivates us to be selfish. Without the compassion that arises when we feel empathy — not only with other humans, but with the whole of the biosphere — it is likely that civilization as we know it will not survive many more generations.

In either case, we seem fated to be special. If we continue to devastate the rest of the biosphere, we are arguably the worst species on earth: a cancer of the biosphere. If, however, humanity can wake up to become its collective bodhisattva — undertaking the long-term task of repairing the rupture between us and Mother Earth — perhaps we as a species will fulfill the unique potential of precious human life. ■



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Kaddish for Che

The Meaning of History and Memory in Transforming the World

BY MARTHA SONNENBERG

This article was written before the death of Fidel Castro in November 2016. Like Che, Castro remains, regardless of how one felt about him, one of the twentieth century's greatest revolutionary figures. His death and the complex legacy he leaves put the issues raised in this article into sharper focus. For more, search online for "1926-2016 Fidel Castro, Tikkun Daily" for another piece by the same author.

I HAVE BEEN THINKING a lot about Che Guevara, the Cuban revolutionary who, in his death perhaps even more than in his life, has achieved an iconic status. Three reasons underlie these thoughts. First, the recent opening of U.S. policy on Cuba and a photograph of a street mural of Che my husband took on a visit there late last year. The mural is faded, its paint chipped, and the wall on which it is painted is exposed and crumbling. Second is the openness of large segments of American youth to the ideas of socialism and revolutionary change, most evident in the supporters of Bernie Sanders. There is no doubt that, with this burgeoning progressive movement, the iconography of Che will experience a new resurgence in American popular culture. And third is a new book, *The Politics of Che Guevara: Theory and Practice* by Samuel Farber, a Marxist sociologist-historian born in Cuba. For these reasons, and after reading Farber's book, I realized that my memories of Che are like the faded mural in my husband's photograph, and that I need to refresh these memories. I realized that I never fully mourned Che's death, nor really considered the meaning of his life.

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One evening in 1968 I sat in my small apartment in Berkeley, recovering from a severe asthmatic attack precipitated by the tear gas used to disperse demonstrators at a "Stop the Draft" march in Oakland. Wheezing, struggling for breath, and over-stimulated by medicine containing adrenaline, I read Ernesto "Che" Guevara's *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*, which had just been published. Che, plagued by lifelong asthma as I was, became a doctor and then a revolutionary. His youthful experiences led to his militant opposition to the oppression and imperialism he saw threatening Latin America. He joined Fidel Castro in 1955 and was part of the crew of the Granma boat which invaded Cuba in 1956, the beginning salvo which led to the overthrow of the Batista government in 1959. Eight years later in 1967, Che was killed in the mountains of Bolivia, fighting a guerilla war with tactics exported from the Cuban revolution, with often unwilling Bolivian peasants, and against a much stronger Bolivian military heavily supported by the CIA. He was alone, isolated, and gripped by severe asthma without any medication. Bolivia was a doomed effort from the start.

I was profoundly influenced by Che's words and experiences. Reading about Che's work as a physician and his leadership of guerillas in the Sierra Maestra mountains of Cuba, all the while suffering from asthma, I felt less alone with my own disease, and encouraged to continue my part in the anti-war struggle. My decision to become a doctor was inspired by Che, as was my later decision to specialize in infectious diseases, and particularly to work with HIV patients, guided by Che's work with leprosy patients. Che died when he was 39. I continued to live my life, and with the passage of time, my perspective on Che became less romantic and memories faded.

Sam Farber's book is the first serious and critical look at the politics of Che Guevara since the 1997 comprehensive biography written by Jorge Castañeda, *Compañero*. Farber's book summarizes the important facts of Che's life and, more importantly, discusses in depth, and from a Marxist perspective, his political thought and action. Farber acknowledges the success of the Cuban revolution, as well as the heroism, passion, bravery, egalitarianism, and moral integrity of Che. But he adds a perspective that has often been ignored, as he delineates the more problematic aspects of what he labels "Guevarism." The youth movement of today will benefit greatly from Farber's perspective, because it ultimately asks important questions about what a revolution really entails, what the process of revolution may be, and what role democracy will have in that process.

Farber's perspective comes from a view that there are

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

Photograph by Ken Lezin

two kinds of socialism (a perspective articulated by Hal Draper in a 1966 pamphlet, "The Two Souls of Socialism") — socialism from above, which is inherently undemocratic and is administered by an often bureaucratic leadership, and a socialism from below, which is rooted in democracy and representation of autonomous workers and popular power. He makes the case that Che was the former kind of socialist. He shows how Che was influenced by "Stalinized Marxism" and that for Che, the essence of socialism consisted "in having the state, led by the vanguard Communist Party, control the economic life of the country."

Farber further supports his perspective in his discussion of Che's theory of the role of the vanguard, guerilla warfare, and Che's participation in the suppression of dissident thought and activity in early post-revolutionary Cuba. In his writings, Che articulates his belief that the role of the vanguard is to be the prime mover in a revolution, and that the vanguard must educate the masses to follow their lead. Flowing from this was Che's belief that vanguard-led guerilla warfare was possible throughout all of Latin America — and internationally — regardless of the economic, social, and political conditions in each country.

Che's belief in the vanguard-led Cuban government led to the imprisonment and even execution of political opponents who were innocent of any crimes during his administration of La Cabaña prison in 1959. His participation in the labor camps in Guanahacabibes in 1960, which initiated extrajudicial incarceration for minor offenses, set the precedent for the later UMAP (Military Units to Aid Production) camps for the confinement of dissidents, homosexuals, and later people with AIDS, established after Che was no longer in government. Farber acknowledges Che's later criticisms of the bureaucratic tendencies of the pro-Moscow communist parties, as well as Soviet style "socialist realism" in the arts, but he does not see this as a significant move away from Che's "Stalinized" political theory.

Ultimately, Farber states that socialism is truly liberating only when society is controlled by those who, through their labor, make social existence possible. A socialist society must be democratic, with majority rule and respect for minority rights and civil liberties. Economic reforms alone cannot bring about full emancipation.

Further Questions Remain

Farber's book raises issues about the meaning of history and about how we view historical figures. I prefer to think of people, to paraphrase the psychologist Carl Rogers, not as products, but as processes. And in looking back on Che's life I do not see a static figure with a completely developed political theory, but rather a person who was still in the process of political evolution at the time of his early and tragic death.

Che was certainly influenced by "Stalinized Marxism." But I see contradictions within his thought most evident from the mid-1960s to the time of his death. Had he lived, I would like to think that these contradictions might have evolved into a more humanistic, democratic, and compassionate Marxism. As early as 1961, at a national meeting for production, Che noted that "the Ministry (of Industry) has often issued orders without consulting the masses; it has often ignored the labor unions and ignored the great working masses."

In 1965 Che delivered a speech while in Algiers. In this speech he laid out his critique of pro-Moscow Communist parties. A month later he wrote his famous, "Socialism and Man in Cuba," in which he criticized Soviet style "socialist realism" in the arts, and in which he initiated his discussion of the relationship of the individual and socialism. These two events strained his relationship with Fidel and Raúl Castro, as he was accused of "indiscipline and irresponsibility." The speech and the article were anathema to Moscow.

In his article, Che reveals many of the contradictions in his thought about the revolutionary process, about consciousness, and the role of the vanguard. On the one hand he still speaks of the vanguard as "the catalyzing agent that created the subjective conditions necessary for victory." At the same time, he speaks of the "close dialectical unity between the individual and the mass, in which both are interrelated and in which the mass interacts with its leaders." True, despite his use of the term "dialectical," he has not yet reached an appreciation of the complexity of the relationship between the revolutionary leader, social circumstances, and the led. He still sees "the mass" as a passive receptacle of education by leaders, rather than as subjective makers of their own history, from whom leaders may learn. Che's passive view of "the mass" is critiqued by Marx in his third "Theses on Feuerbach":

> . . . the materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore changed men are products of other circumstances . . . forgets that men themselves change circumstances and that the *educator himself must be educated*.

But there is an indication here that Che's thought is opening to the need for leaders at least to interact with the men and women making up a socialist society rather than simply to issue directives. For someone who had not immersed himself in the early writings of Marx, and who was not exposed to the developing Marxist humanism movement among Western socialists, Che devoted a great deal of thought to the relationship of the individual and a changing society, to the development of a new consciousness. "What is important," he says in his article, "is that each day individuals are acquiring ever more consciousness of the need for their incorporation into society and, at the same time, of their importance as the motor of that society." Further, ". . . one must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth in order to avoid dogmatic extremes, cold scholasticism, or isolation from the masses. We must strive every day so

that this love of living humanity is transformed into actual deeds." He expresses a beginning understanding of the need for reciprocity between leadership and the led, when he says with real humility, "At times we lose our way and must turn back. At other times we go too fast and separate ourselves from the masses. Sometimes we go too slow and feel the hot breath of those treading at our heels." And finally:

> Socialism is young and has its mistakes . . . We revolutionaries often lack the knowledge and intellectual audacity needed to meet the tasks of developing the new man and woman with methods different from the conventional ones.

After Algiers, Che was essentially excluded from leadership in Cuba. He graciously resigned all his leadership positions and embarked on the fateful ventures in the Congo and in Bolivia. And in these situations he began to acknowledge some limitations of his views on the primacy of the vanguard guerilla. Regarding his experience in the Congo, he wrote in an unpublished manuscript of 1966, "Our situation was getting more and more difficult and the notion of building an army was slipping through our fingers . . . Still imbued with a sort of blind optimism, I was incapable of seeing it."

And from Bolivia, "I know Bolivia and it is very difficult to have a guerilla struggle in Bolivia. There has already been a land reform and I don't think the Indians would join a guerilla struggle." These are statements from a person devoting profound and critical thought to his life's work as a revolutionary.

Malcolm X was another revolutionary in the process of transformation at the time of his death. A year before his assassination, after a trip to Mecca, he stated, "I'm a revolutionary and I'm a Muslim. That's all I know about myself. Where I'm going to go, what ideology I'm going to develop, I don't know. But I must crawl before I walk. I must walk before I run, and I don't think I'll have time." Thus the American Marxist Grace Lee Boggs said of her friend, Malcolm X, "I think that's one of the most important qualities of a revolutionary, to be transforming yourself, to be expanding your humanity as events challenge you." I believe that Che Guevara was in a similar process of transformation.

Had Che lived, he might have been in Cuba to meet the great Trinidadian Marxist, C.L.R. James, who visited Havana in 1967. He might have been able to engage with James at a cultural Congress in Havana and been challenged by James' remark, "We are having a body of intellectuals talking about culture. You have not invited here the Socialist workers of Cuba to take part." He might have learned from James' seminal book, *The Black Jacobins*, a critique of repression of direct democratic expression within the Haitian revolution. He might have met the British Marxist humanist E.P. Thompson, whose planned trip to Cuba was approved by Castro, but prevented by the pro-Moscow Cuban Communist Party. Thompson, later famous for his work, *The Making of the English Working Class,* was a vocal challenger of the Stalinist deformations of Marxism and insisted on the importance of human agency in making change, with attention to the cultural contributions of class experience in forming that change.

Indeed, Che's abiding interest in the role of consciousness in the revolutionary process might even have even led him to read the 1933 pamphlet by the German Marxist psychologist Wilhelm Reich, "What is Class Consciousness?" which so eloquently challenged the very "scholasticism" on the part of the Communist leadership that Che decried in his Algiers article. For Reich, this "clinging to old, worn out, ossified dogmas" kept a potentially revolutionary movement out of touch with the lives, the needs, and concerns of the very people whom they wanted to reach.

People change. I witnessed change in my own parents, who left the Stalinist CP and became socialist humanists — a transformation that was important to the evolution of my own perspective. Change has occurred in many socialist and revolutionary leaders — Eugene Debs, Gandhi, even Lenin. We cannot know what Che would have thought, written, or done had he lived; we can, however, appreciate that his thought was evolving, that it was not a closed book.

Kaddish

The Mourner's Kaddish certainly does not require that the person mourned be Jewish. The prayer does compel the mourner to consider how the meaning of life is changed by the loss of the deceased; it is an invitation for the mourner to incorporate the meaning of the deceased's life into the life of the living, "during your lifetime and your days, and the days of all the world." Ultimately, the Kaddish asks us to heal a world diminished by the loss of one person by continuing the work begun by that person. And so as I mourn the death of Che Guevara, I also take this moment to affirm life, my life and the lives of the people around me, as well as the life of a new movement for radical transformation we are witnessing in this country. The Kaddish compels us to continue the evolution of thought and action that Che was unable to achieve at the time of his death; it compels us to rescue the worth of Che from the finality of his death. His politics must be understood, as Farber so conscientiously elaborates, but those politics cannot fully characterize him if we consider that the seeds of change were present in his thought. Memory of Che can allow us to continue the journey that he began. In Cuba there is a slogan "Seremos como el Che" ("We will be like Che"). For me it will be "Seremos como el Che podría haber sido" (We will be as Che might have been"), for a revolutionary transformation of ourselves and our world, in which human creativity and imagination is valued, in which all have a voice in a democratic process, and in which dissent, and differences are respected. Let the memory of Che Guevara help us to maintain and expand our own humanity as we struggle for the changes we want in this world. ■

Pixabay

Back to Hobbes?

BY ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, published in 1651, famously postulated that a strong central government was necessary to suppress human inborn cruelty, thereby making life among humans liveable, instead of "nasty, brutish, and short" as it would otherwise be. Every man or woman was up in arms against every other man and woman. Every other was an already unmasked enemy or an enemy yet to be unmasked. Antennae had to be stretched and tuned at all directions. Permanently. Safety was a bluff. A moment of tranquillity was the enemy's ploy meant to put vigilance to a nap. Were the Hobbesian pre-state creatures in possession of powder, they would've surely keep it dry.

Yet today many believe that human endemic aggressiveness and propensity to violence has been anything but mitigated by strong central governments, let alone extinguished; they are alive and always ready to be kicking at a moment's notice, or indeed without any notice at all.

The right to draw the line between legitimate and illegitimate, allowed and prohibited, legal and criminal, tolerated and intolerable coercion is the principal stake in many contemporary power struggles. Possession of such a right is, after all, the defining feature of power — while the capability of using that right and rendering its use binding for others is the defining trait of domination. Establishing and executing that right has been viewed since *Leviathan* as the domain of politics; a prerogative of, and a task accomplished by, the government standing for the political body. That view has been closer to our time emphatically reiterated and extensively argued by Max Weber (in his definition of the political state by its monopoly of the means — and presumably the use — of coercion), acquiring since an all-but-canonical status in social-political scholarship. Though, as Leo Strauss warned at the threshold of our liquid-modern era, on the occasion of unravelling the precepts of historicist approach to human condition:

> There always have been and there always will be surprising, wholly unexpected, changes of outlook which radically modify the meaning of all previously acquired knowledge. No view of the whole, and in particular no view of the whole of human life, can claim to be final and universally valid. Every doctrine, however seemingly final, will be superseded sooner or later by another doctrine. . . . All human thought depends on fate, on something that thought cannot master and whose workings it cannot anticipate. . . .
>
> It is due to fate that the essential dependence of thought on fate is realized now, and was not realized in earlier times.[1]

Two previously voiced, authoritative and seminal warnings jump to mind as laying the groundwork for Strauss' reasoning: Hegel's of the owl of Minerva that spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk, and Marx's of humans being the makers of history albeit on conditions not of their choice. Between themselves, those three warnings/recommendations justify a thorough revision of Hobbes' vision of the State as the guarantor of its wards' security and their sole chance of defense against their intrinsic aggressiveness and so of protection from violence. They even suggest the possibility of listing the State, once described as the prime (or even as much as the only) warrant of human security and insurance against violence, among the prime factors, causes, and operators of the currently prevailing ambiance of unsafety and vulnerability to violence. One of today's foremost, sharpest and most outspoken socio-cultural critics, Henry A. Giroux — author of *America's Addiction to Terrorism* — goes as far as concluding:

> Built into the system is a kind of systemic violence that's destroying the planet, all sense of public good and democracy — and it controls itself no longer by ideology, but by the rise of a punishing state — where everything is increasingly criminalized because it offers a threat to the financial elite and the control they have over the country . . . Neoliberalism injects violence into our lives, and fear into our politics.[2]

I would add "and vice versa: violence in politics, and fear into our lives." And when saying "ours," I have in mind not just those who reside in the ruins of the fallen states — those whose presence in ever nearer proximity to our homes as all-too-visible-and-tangible points of reference causes us for the time being to stifle/suspend/repress the horrifying suspicion of the commonality, and growing similarity, of our respective fates. I have in mind: cherishing and enjoying day in, day out, the comforts of "law and order" settings, though in the moments of clarity unable to prevent such suspicion to emerge from its exile to the depths of the unconscious.

In a nutshell: by a long line of unanticipated turns of fate the Leviathan has become insolvent — unable to pay interest on the credit of trust that the seekers of security, on Hobbes'

Zygmunt Bauman, one the world's most creative sociologists, social theorists, and critics of post-modernity, is the author of 57 books including *Modernity and the Holocaust*, *Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age*, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, and forthcoming in 2017: *Retrotopia*.

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advice, used to invest in its assumed — genuine or putative — powers. On more and more occasions it shows itself incapable to render binding and un-encroachable the line it draws between legitimate and illegitimate violence. It has lost, moreover, its assumed and granted monopoly on drawing such a line — in any but a purely formal sense. The lines it still continues, by inertia, to mark and attempt to fortify, are invariably contested in both theory and practice. Worse still: having put the task of repossessing its lost monopoly on violence in the center of its concerns and at the top of its raisons d'être, it found itself pushed/forced/obliged, but also chose to be inspired, to subordinate all the rest of its extant duties to that purpose; if not to abandoning them altogether through the ploy of washing its own hands of the responsibility for the performance and its results: a subterfuge of outsourcing them by contracting out or subsidiarizing. In consequence of all such departures, the State has turned for all practical intents and purposes from the role of a defender and guardian of security to that of one (though perhaps the most effective) among the many agents cooperating in raising insecurity to the rank of permanent human condition.

Those agents are indeed manifold — though most of them and arguably all of them sprout from the same root: the thoroughly globalized human condition slipping out of control in confrontation with the territorial and nominally sovereign State, shaped up historically to promote autonomy, autarky, and independence with extraterritorial powers and an all-but-unfeasible task of assuring security inside its territorial borders while proceeding under conditions of uncontrollable, and in all probability irreversible, planet-wide interdependence.

I'll try to name and briefly describe some of such agents — starting from the saturation of the planet with widely available, easy to obtain, and easy to hide mortal weapons.

In 2003, a campaign called Control Arms jointly run by Amnesty International, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), and Oxfam, summarized the then situation in the global arms trade:

> The lack of arms controls allows some to profit from the misery of others. While international attention is focused on the need to control weapons of mass destruction, the trade in conventional weapons continues to operate in a legal and moral vacuum. More and more countries are starting to produce small arms, many with little ability or will to regulate their use. Permanent UN Security Council members — the USA,

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> UK, France, Russia, and China — dominate the world trade in arms. Most national arms controls are riddled with loopholes or barely enforced. Key weaknesses are lax controls on the brokering, licensed production, and 'end use' of arms. Arms get into the wrong hands through weak controls on firearm ownership, weapons management, and misuse by authorized users of weapons.[3]

While ten years later, on March 2, 2013, *The Guardian* reported: "Despite the economic downturn it has been business as usual for the world's biggest arms companies who have seen *sales of weapons and military services rise during 2010 and exceed $400bn* (£250bn)." And after two more years, by August 2015, Amnesty International reported 875 million small arms and light weapons estimated to be in circulation worldwide — and between 700,000 and 900,000 small arms produced annually.

Let me recall the advice the great playwright Anton Chekhov gave aspiring playwrights: if there is a rifle hanging on the wall in the first act of a play, it must be discharged in the third. It would be utterly naïve to expect that many, perhaps most of the close to one million annually produced small arms won't be annually discharged. We live in a world in which pragmatism is the topmost rationality: a world of "I can, and so I shall and will." A world in which Weber's idea of "instrumental rationality" has been turned upside down: rather the purposes seeking means, it is the means that seek applications. Such pragmatism is inalienable in our world of consumers; a world in which products, instead of answering to an already existing demand, are obliged and expected to create it — indeed conjure it up, all too often *ab nihilo*.

When trying to describe this aspect of our present-day condition, I find most adequate and useful the metaphor of a minefield, designed and deployed (though in a somewhat different context) by Yuri Lotman, the formidable Estonian culturologist. What we know of minefields for sure is that they are stuffed with explosives; what we reasonably guess is that sooner or later explosions must occur; but we have no inkling when and where they will happen next. The sole cure for such dreadful condition of the awareness of the blow's imminence combined with incapacity of predicting the place and time of its strike is to abstain from mining the fields; a sound idea in itself, but a pipe-dream in our present plight.

Indeed a pipe dream, considering that the industrial-military complexes of this world will not resign their fabulous profits, while the governments of this world will not desist the temptation of salvaging the employment statistics from further falling which the thriving of the weapons industry offers; and the criminals of the world won't miss a chance of profiting from the failure by such governments to constrain imports of guns or explosives. Remember as well another temptation — one that the users of small arms find excruciatingly difficult to reject: a temptation offered by the global media to make a petty small-town discharge visible and audible, inflate it into a global event, casting life all around the globe, in every nook and cranny of the planet, in the state of a permanent risk and emergency. And to top the list of factors making the disarming of minefields a pipe dream: the summary effect of all already named facts-of-the-matter is the growing conviction of the electorates all over the world (with the U.S. incontestably at the top of the league) that more weapons, and making them easier to obtain, are the best medicines against the damage done by easy to obtain weapons.

Soil fertile for the sprouting of seeds of violence is ample nowadays. It would be futile to charge the newly available informatics technology with responsibility for the appearance and spectacular proliferation of the copycat phenomenon; at the utmost, it may play an auxiliary, facilitating role rendering the previously cumbersome and costly undertakings temptingly easy and seductively cheap. The seeds of violence would've been found sterile and fruitless were the soil on which they've been sprinkled barren. Well, barren it is not, quite the opposite — thanks to all too many fertilizers the human condition is all too ready and keen to supply. They are many and varied, but one ingredient which each one of them must need carrying is the anger — rankling, festering, and blistering because frustratingly and incapacitatingly short of an outlet. That anger torments wide and widening sectors of the population though affecting them unevenly. This is for two starkly different reasons. Jock Young, an indefatigable and uniquely perceptive explorer of its roots sunk deep in the "vertigo" of liquid-modern life, spells them out: "The obsessive violence of the macho street gang and the punitive obsession of the respectable citizen are similar not only in their nature but in their origin. Both stem from dislocations in the labor market: the one from a market which excludes participation as a worker but encourages voraciousness as a consumer, the other from a market which includes, but only in a precarious fashion that is, from tantalizing exclusion and precarious inclusion." As to the psychological mechanism of recycling the accumulated frustration and wrath into outbursts of violence, Young suggests: "Transgressors are driven by the energies of humiliation — the utilitarian core is often there, but around it is constructed a frequent delight in excess, a glee in breaking the rules, a reassertion of manhood and identity."

What the above implies is that the acts of aggression are to a great extent disinterested — as in the popular formula "nothing personal, Sir/Madam"; their main, and arguably the only efficient cause is all too often an overwhelming, uncontrollable pressure of anger — while the object of aggression is contingent and only loosely, if at all, related to its cause. The aggressiveness gestated by the unbearable sense of humiliation and abasement — or by similarly unendurable horror of social degradation and exclusion — is unfocused. Whether

premeditated, deliberately chosen, or accidental, the victim of a violent act tends to be an adventitious and random (as well as unplanned) result of the unknowability or unreachability of the genuine culprit of the aggressor's misfortune and anguish. In the case of the terrorist acts, their unfocused character and randomness of their victims tends to be deliberately demonstrated and in a way impossible to overlook — with the intention to maximize the reach of the terror produced by a locally conceived and performed violence: the message inserted in that randomness is frequently a delight in excess, a glee in breaking the rules, a reassertion of manhood and identity.

No one is safe — whether guilty or innocent, everybody may fall victim to future vengeful explosions of anger. Trying to prove to oneself and to others one's own non-involvement in causing the avenged injustice won't help. The message intended to be conveyed by the calculated randomness of the cull is that all of us with no exception have similarly valid reasons to be afraid of the prospect of experiencing the horrors of the victims' fate first hand.

There is also a widespread and well-grounded belief that the blame for today's growth of violence, particularly dense and intense in the underprivileged, poor, and deprived urban areas, falls to a considerable extent on the dominant consumerist culture to which most normal, *comme il faut* members of the present-day society, as much as their violent attackers, are born, brought up and trained/seduced to keenly participate. Five years ago, on the aftermath of London Lewisham riots, I wrote:

> From cradle to coffin we are trained and drilled to treat shops as pharmacies filled with drugs to cure or at least mitigate all illnesses and afflictions of our lives and lives in common. Shops and shopping acquire thereby a fully and truly eschatological dimension. Supermarkets, as George Ritzer famously put it, are our temples; and so, I may add, the shopping lists are our breviaries, while strolls along the shopping malls become our pilgrimages. Buying on impulse and getting rid of possessions no longer sufficiently attractive in order to put more attractive ones in their place are our most enthusing emotions. The fullness of consumer enjoyment means fullness of life. I shop, therefore I am. To shop or not to shop, this is the question. For defective consumers, those contemporary have-nots, non-shopping is the jarring and festering stigma of a life un-fulfilled — and of own nonentity and good-for-nothingness. Not just the absence of pleasure: absence of human dignity. Of life meaning. Ultimately, of humanity and any other ground for self-respect and respect of the others around.

"Unwertes Leben" — life unworthy of living — was originally a label attached by tyrannical rulers to the categories of population they declared unfit and undesirable — a burden or a menace to a nation, class, race, or religion. Increasingly, the matter of adopting or rejecting that label is in our times being subsidiarized to the individual abandoned to stew in their own juice; a question of choice rather than a decree of authoritarian powers. A rising number of individuals are preferring that choice to a life lived under conditions which they find unendurable and suspect, with valid reason, to remain such for its duration; the choice of a "meaningful death" appears to them a better alternative — all too often incomparably better — to the hopelessly meaningless life, its only realistic substitute. It is from among such individuals, or whole categories of such individuals, that the commanders of terrorist gangs recruit their obedient soldiers: the sole effort left to the recruiters to perform is to brainwash the recruits into the faith in the meaningfulness; the task made all too easier to perform by the soldiers having been well before joining them convinced of the meaninglessness of life.

Hobbes' world, let us recall, the world knowing of no politics and no politically produced powers, was a theatre of war: a war of all against all, and so a war conducted by, and against, no one in particular. As we feel it to be (even if we can't put a name on that feeling), our world — the liquid world of weakening human bonds, of deregulation and atomisation of politically constructed structures, of divorce between politics and power — is again a theatre of war: a war of all against all, and so a war conducted by, and against, no one in particular. Conducted day in day out, individually or occasionally in alliances — day in, day out a-changing. By the united forces of markets, teachers of our schools, managers of our workplaces, and the media portraying for us the world we are predestined to inhabit, we are all from early childhood groomed and honed to spend our life serving as soldiers of that war — renamed as competitors. As Frank Bruni of *The New York Times* found, the admission process to the leading educational establishments, the most prestigious, authoritative stage-setting colleges in this world, "warps the values of students drawn into a competitive frenzy." We are all each other's competitors: either already unmasked as such, or yet to be unmasked. People in "competitive frenzy" tend to keep their powder dry, their guns well lubricated — always ready to hand and to use.

We are being taught self-reliance — which translates as determination, and readiness, to count on no one but ourselves when it comes to running out of trouble and from muddy and turbulent into clear and tranquil waters. The order of things may be not of our own making, but it is us, each one of us, that must play 24/7 its guardian. Play, but be?! Hardly any one of us manages to avoid sooner or later the gruesome discovery that — as Anand Giridharadas, quoted by David Brooks in the same issue of *The New York Times* suggests — "if anything unites America in this fractious moment it is a widespread sentiment that power is somewhere

other than where you are." Giridharadas dubs that sentiment "anxiety of impotence."

As the Pew Research Center found out: in reply to the question "Would you say your side has been winning or losing more?" Sixty-four percent of Americans chose the second option. I suspect that the percentage of that option's users would be higher yet, and perhaps considerably higher, were it not for the Americans' and all the rest of us, trained/drilled as we are in measuring our value by the strength of our own feet on which we are expected to stand, felt shameful to admit those legs' wobbliness to the strangers asking such a personal question. The sentiment of impotence and the dread/jitters it sediments is not is a highly embarrassing condition that one would be aghast to divulge. Absolute power — as the folk wisdom has insisted since Lord Acton — may be corrupting absolutely; but in order to update that wisdom to the conditions of our deregulated/atomised society, Brooks makes us aware that also "the feeling of absolute powerlessness can corrupt absolutely":

> Today we live in a world of isolation and atomisation, where people distrust their own institutions. In such circumstances many people respond to powerlessness with pointless acts of self-destruction. In the Palestinian territories, for example, young people don't organize or work with their governments to improve their prospects. They wander into Israel, try to stab a soldier or a pregnant woman and get shot or arrested — every single time. They throw away their lives for a pointless and usually botched moment of terrorism.

However illusory meaningful moment of power, it tends to be hoped (hoped against hope) to be capable of compensating for, repaying or avenging the life-long brutally meaning-denying powerlessness. One may deride the naivety of that hope, or feel baffled by the enormity of price some people are so ready to pay for putting that hope to a (a priori abortive and doomed) test; and yet many others may well perceive it as the only realistic — attainable — chance of rehabilitation and repossession of the treacherously stolen dignity. And the knife-carrying Palestinians are but one case on the long list of people exposed to multiple human-dignity-and-respect denying oppressions. As to those on the other pole of the well-being scale, the Americans, citizens of the richest and most powerful country on the planet — they, in David Brook's words:

> Are beset by complex, intractable problems that don't have a clear villain: technological change displaces workers; globalization and the rapid movement of people destabilize communities; family structure dissolves; the political order in the Middle East teeters, the Chinese economy craters, inequality rises, the global order frays, etc.

One is tempted to say: lucky the Palestinians for being at least able to focus on the common denominator of all their hardships: the Israeli Occupation. The others elsewhere, in a similar no-prospects no-dignity plight, have little idea whom they should stab with the knives they carry. They strike at random. Life in our updated version of Hobbes is akin to walking through a minefield whose maps were never sketched or have been lost; a field so saturated with explosives that explosions are bound to occur time and again, but no one can say with any degree of certainty where and when.

And so it seems that we are entitled to remove the question mark following this article's title. We are indeed back, or at any rate on the road leading back to the world of Hobbes — though this time we are finding ourselves into the condition of *bellum omnium contra omnes* not because of the absence of Leviathan, but because of the co-presence of numerous, all-too-numerous Leviathans gravely malfunctioning and failing to perform the tasks for the sake of which our ancestors, in Hobbes' opinion, invited (had to invite, and so conjured up) the Leviathan to rule them. And because the Leviathan — a Leviathan capable of curing the flaws and deficiencies of the crowd of lesser Leviathans' is nowhere is sight. Among such flaws, the mismatch between the mode of our shared cohabitation of our planet and the already firmly entrenched conditions of global interdependency occupies arguably the prime pf place. As Ulrich Beck, the exquisitely insightful observer of wrongs in our current ways of living together — we are already cast, whether we like it or not, in a cosmopolitan situation; and yet we haven't started in earnest to develop cosmopolitan awareness, without which the ways and means of tackling that situation effectively are utterly unlikely to be discovered or invented. ■

Notes

1. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (1950; repr., The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 21–28.
2. Henry A. Giroux, interview with Chuck Mertz, "Neoliberalism injects violence into our lives, and fear into our politics," Episode 882, *This is Hell!,* WNUR 89.3FM Chicago, https://thisishell.com/interviews/882-henry-giroux.
3. Debbie Hillier and Brian Wood, "The Arms Bazaar," in *Shattered Lives: The Case for Tough International Arms Control* (Oxford: Amnesty International and Oxfam International, 2003), 54, quoted in Anup Shah, "The Arms Trade is Big Business," *Global Issues,* http://www.globalissues.org/article/74/the-arms-trade-is-big-business#Asworldtradeglobalizessodoesthetradeinarms.

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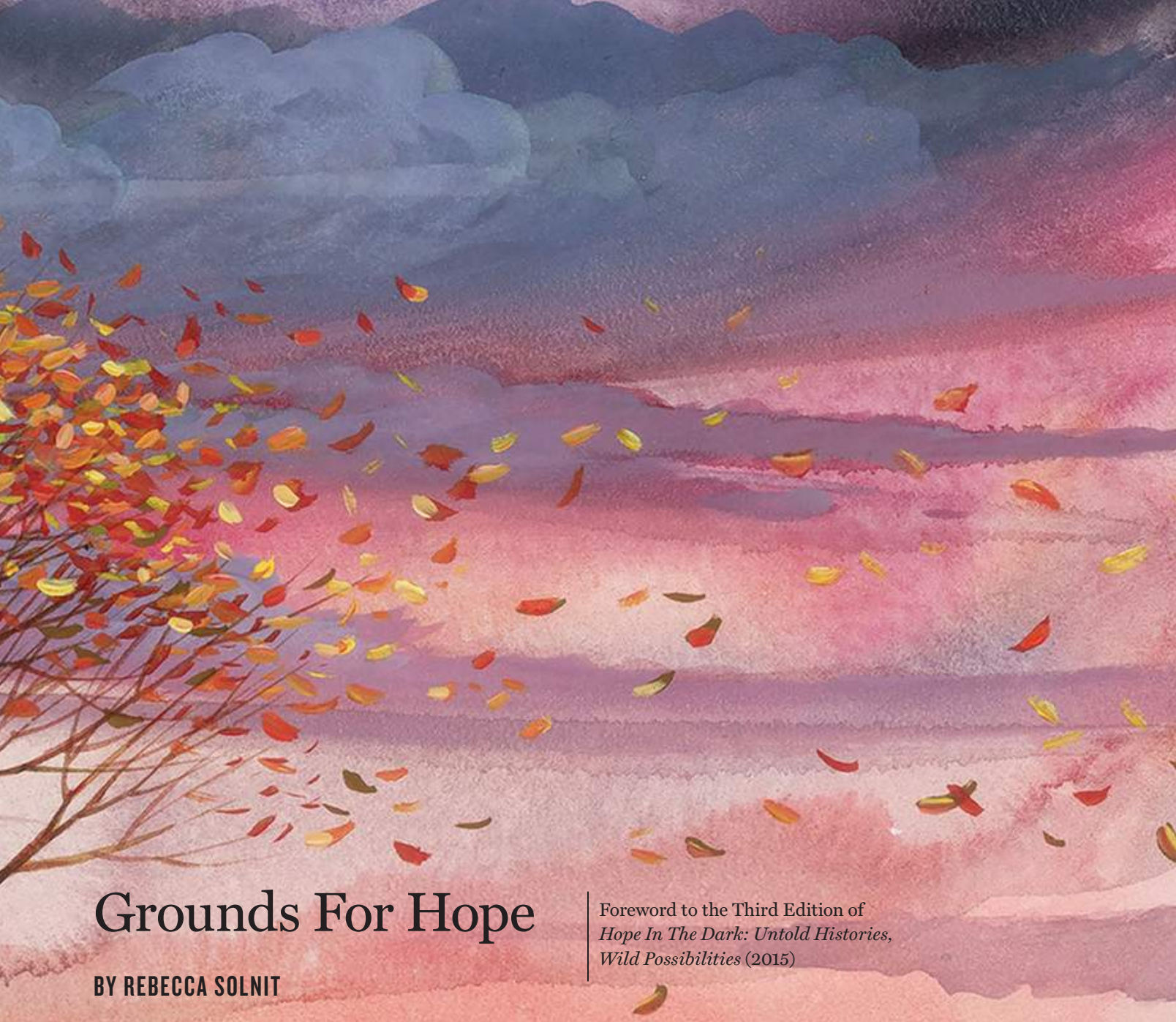


Grounds For Hope

Foreword to the Third Edition of *Hope In The Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (2015)

BY REBECCA SOLNIT

YOUR OPPONENTS would love you to believe that it's hopeless, that you have no power, that there's no reason to act, that you can't win. Hope is a gift you don't have to surrender, a power you don't have to throw away. And though hope can be an act of defiance, defiance isn't enough reason to hope. But there are good reasons.

I wrote this book in 2003 and early 2004 to make the case for hope. The text that follows is in some ways of its moment — it was written against the tremendous despair at the height of the Bush administration's powers and the outset of the war in Iraq. That moment passed long ago, but despair, defeatism, cynicism, and the amnesia and assumptions from which they often arise have not dispersed, even as the most wildly, unimaginably magnificent things came to pass. There is a lot of evidence for the defense.

Coming back to the text more than a dozen tumultuous

Writer, historian, and activist REBECCA SOLNIT is the author of eighteen books about environment, landscape, community, art, politics, hope, and memory, including *Men Explain Things to Me*, *Hope in the Dark*, *The Faraway Nearby*, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, *Wanderlust*, and *River of Shadows* (for which she received a Guggenheim, the National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism and the Lannan Literary Award); and atlases of San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York City. A product of the California public education system from kindergarten to graduate school, she is a contributing editor to Harper's.

years later, I believe its premises hold up. Progressive, populist, and grassroots constituencies have had many victories. Popular power has continued to be a profound force for change. And the changes we've undergone, both wonderful and terrible, are astonishing. The world of 2003 has been swept away. Its damage lingers, but its arrangements and many of its ideologies have given way to new ones—and, more than that, to a sea change in who we are and how we imagine ourselves, the world, and so many things in it. This is an extraordinary time full of vital, transformative movements that could not be foreseen. It's also a nightmarish time. Full engagement requires the ability to perceive both. The twenty-first century has seen the rise of hideous economic inequality, perhaps due to amnesia both of the working people who countenance declines in wages, working conditions, and social services, and the elites who forgot that they conceded to some of these things in the hope of avoiding revolution. The rise of Silicon Valley as a global power center has eliminated and automated countless jobs, enhancing economic inequality; it has produced new elites and monstrous corporations from Amazon, with its attack on publishing, authors, and working conditions, to Google, which is attempting to build a global information monopoly in myriad arenas and in the process amassing terrifying powers, including the power that comes with sophisticated profiles of most computer users. The major tech companies have created and deployed surveillance capacities that the Kremlin and FBI at the height of the Cold War could not have dreamed of—in collaboration with the government that should be regulating them. The attack on civil liberties, including the right to privacy, continues long after its Global War on Terror justifications have faded away.

Worse than these is the arrival of climate change, faster, harder, and more devastating than scientists anticipated.

Hope doesn't mean denying these realities. It means facing them and addressing them by remembering what else the twenty-first century has brought, including the movements, heroes, and shifts in consciousness that address these things now. Among them: Occupy Wall Street; Black Lives Matter; Idle No More; the Dreamers addressing the Dream Act and immigration rights; Edward Snowden, Laura Poitras, Glenn Greenwald, and the movement for corporate and government transparency; the push for marriage equality; a resurgent feminist movement; economic justice movements addressing (and in many cases raising) minimum wage and fighting debt peonage and the student-loan racket; and a dynamic climate and climate justice movement—and the intersections between them all. This has been a truly remarkable decade for movement-building, social change, and deep, profound shifts in ideas, perspective, and frameworks for broad parts of the population (and, of course, backlashes against all those things).

The Uses of Uncertainty

Hope in the Dark began as an essay that I published online about six weeks after the United States launched its war on Iraq. It immediately went, as they say, viral—it was widely circulated by email, picked up by a mainstream newspaper and many news websites, pirated by some alternative newspapers, even printed out and distributed by hand by someone who liked it. It was my first adventure in online publishing, as well as in speaking directly to the inner life of the politics of the moment, to the emotions and perceptions that underlie our political positions and engagements. Amazed by the ravenous appetite for another way of telling who and where we were, I decided to write this slender book. It has had an interesting life in several languages, and it's a pleasure to revise it with this introduction and a few new chapters at the end, notes, and handsome redesign. Updating the book would have meant writing an entirely new book, so we chose to reissue the 2005 second edition with this additional material instead.

After the book was published, I spent years on the road talking about hope and activism, the historical record and the possibilities, and my arguments grew, perhaps, more polished or more precise or at least more case-hardened. Here's another traverse across that landscape.

> **Your opponents would love you to believe that it's hopeless, that you have no power.**

It's important to say what hope is not: it is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine. The evidence is all around us of tremendous suffering and tremendous destruction. The hope I'm interested in is about broad perspectives with specific possibilities, ones that invite or demand that we act. It's also not a sunny everything-is-getting-better narrative, though it may be a counter to the everything-is-getting-worse narrative. You could call it an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings. "Critical thinking without hope is cynicism, but hope without critical thinking is naïvete," the Bulgarian writer Maria Popova recently remarked. And Patrisse Cullors, one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, early on described the movement's mission as to "Provide hope and inspiration for collective action to build collective power to achieve collective transformation, rooted in grief and rage but pointed towards vision and dreams." It's a statement that acknowledges that grief and hope can coexist.

The tremendous human rights achievements — not only in gaining rights but in redefining race, gender, sexuality, embodiment, spirituality, and the idea of the good life — of the past half century have flowered during a time of unprecedented ecological destruction and the rise of innovative new means of exploitation. And the rise of new forms of resistance, including resistance enabled by an elegant understanding of that ecology and new ways for people to communicate and organize, and new and exhilarating alliances across distance and difference.

Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act. When you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes — you alone or you in concert with a few dozen or several million others. Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists. Optimists think it will all be fine without our involvement; pessimists take the opposite position; both excuse themselves from acting. It's the belief that what we do matters even though how and when it may matter, who and what it may impact, are not things we can know beforehand. We may not, in fact, know them afterward either, but they matter all the same, and history is full of people whose influence was most powerful after they were gone.

There are major movements that failed to achieve their goals; there are also comparatively small gestures that mushroomed into successful revolutions. The self-immolation of impoverished, police-harassed produce-seller Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010, in Tunisia was the spark that lit a revolution in his country and then across northern Africa and other parts of the Arab world in 2011. And though the civil war in Syria and the counterrevolutions after Egypt's extraordinary uprising might be what most remember, Tunisia's "Jasmine Revolution" toppled a dictator and led to peaceful elections in that country in 2014. Whatever else the Arab Spring was, it's an extraordinary example of how unpredictable change is and how potent popular power can be. And five years on, it's too soon to draw conclusions about what it all meant.

You can tell the Genesis story of the Arab Spring other ways. The quiet organizing going on in the shadows beforehand matters. So does the comic book about Martin Luther King and civil disobedience that was translated into Arabic and widely distributed in Egypt shortly before the Arab Spring. You can tell of King's civil disobedience tactics being inspired by Gandhi's tactics, and Gandhi's inspired by Tolstoy and the radical acts of noncooperation and sabotage of British women suffragists. So the threads of ideas weave around the world and through the decades and centuries. There's another lineage for the Arab Spring in hip-hop, the African American music that's become a global medium for dissent and outrage; Tunisian hip-hop artist El Général was, along with Bouazizi, an instigator of the uprising, and other musicians played roles in articulating the outrage and inspiring the crowds.

Mushroomed: after a rain mushrooms appear on the surface of the earth as if from nowhere. Many do so from a sometimes vast underground fungus that remains invisible and largely unknown. What we call mushrooms mycologists call the fruiting body of the larger, less visible fungus. Uprisings and revolutions are often considered to be spontaneous, but less visible long-term organizing and groundwork — or underground work — often laid the foundation. Changes in ideas and values also result from work done by writers, scholars, public intellectuals, social activists, and participants in social media. It seems insignificant or peripheral until very different outcomes emerge from transformed assumptions about who and what matters, who should be heard and believed, who has rights.

Ideas at first considered outrageous or ridiculous or extreme gradually become what people think they've always believed. How the transformation happened is rarely remembered, in part because it's compromising: it recalls the mainstream when the mainstream was, say, rabidly homophobic or racist in a way it no longer is; and it recalls that power comes from the shadows and the margins, that our hope is in the dark around the edges, not the limelight of center stage. Our hope and often our power.

The Stories We Tell

Changing the story isn't enough in itself, but it has often been foundational to real changes. Making an injury visible and public is often the first step in remedying it, and political change often follows culture, as what was long tolerated is seen to be intolerable, or what was overlooked becomes obvious. Which means that every conflict is in part a battle over the story we tell, or who tells and who is heard.

A victory doesn't mean that everything is now going to be nice forever and we can therefore all go lounge around until the end of time. Some activists are afraid that if we acknowledge victory, people will give up the struggle. I've long been more afraid that people will give up and go home or never get started in the first place if they think no victory is possible or fail to recognize the victories already achieved. Marriage equality is not the end of homophobia, but it's something to celebrate. A victory is a milestone on the road, evidence that sometimes we win, and encouragement to keep going, not to stop. Or it should be.

My own inquiry into the grounds for hope has received two great reinforcements since I wrote *Hope in the Dark*. One came from the recognition of how powerful are the altruistic, idealistic forces already at work in the world. Most of us would say, if asked, that we live in a capitalist society, but vast

amounts of how we live our everyday lives — our interactions with and commitments to family lives, friendships, avocations, membership in social, spiritual, and political organizations — are in essence noncapitalist or even anticapitalist, full of things we do for free, out of love, and on principle.

In a way, capitalism is an ongoing disaster anticapitalism alleviates, like a mother cleaning up after her child's messes (or, to extend the analogy, sometimes disciplining that child to clean up after itself, through legislation or protest, or preventing some of the messes in the first place, and it might be worth adding that noncapitalist ways of doing things are much older than free-market economic arrangements). Activists often speak as though the solutions we need have not yet been launched or invented, as though we are starting from scratch, when often the real goal is to amplify the power and reach of existing alternatives. What we dream of is already present in the world.

> **This is an extraordinary time full of vital, transformative movements that could not be foreseen. It's also a nightmarish time.**

The second reinforcement came out of my investigation of how human beings respond to major urban disasters, from the devastating earthquakes in San Francisco (in 1906) and Mexico City (in 1985) to the Blitz in London to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. The assumption behind much disaster response by the authorities — and the logic of bombing civilians — is that civilization is a brittle façade, and behind it lies our true nature as monstrous, selfish, chaotic, and violent or as timid, fragile, and helpless. In fact, in most disasters most people are calm, resourceful, altruistic, and creative. And civilian bombing campaigns generally fail to break the will of the people, making them a waste as well as a crime against humanity.

What startled me about the response to disaster was not the virtue, since virtue is often the result of diligence and dutifulness, but the passionate joy that shined out from accounts by people who had barely survived. These people who had lost everything, who were living in rubble or ruins, had found agency, meaning, community, immediacy in their work together with other survivors. The century of testimony I drew from for my 2009 book *A Paradise Built in Hell* suggested how much we want lives of meaningful engagement, of membership in civil society, and how much societal effort goes into withering us away from these fullest, most powerful selves. But people return to those selves, those ways of self-organizing, as if by instinct when the situation demands it. Thus a disaster is a lot like a revolution when it comes to disruption and improvisation, to new roles and an unnerving or exhilarating sense that now anything is possible.

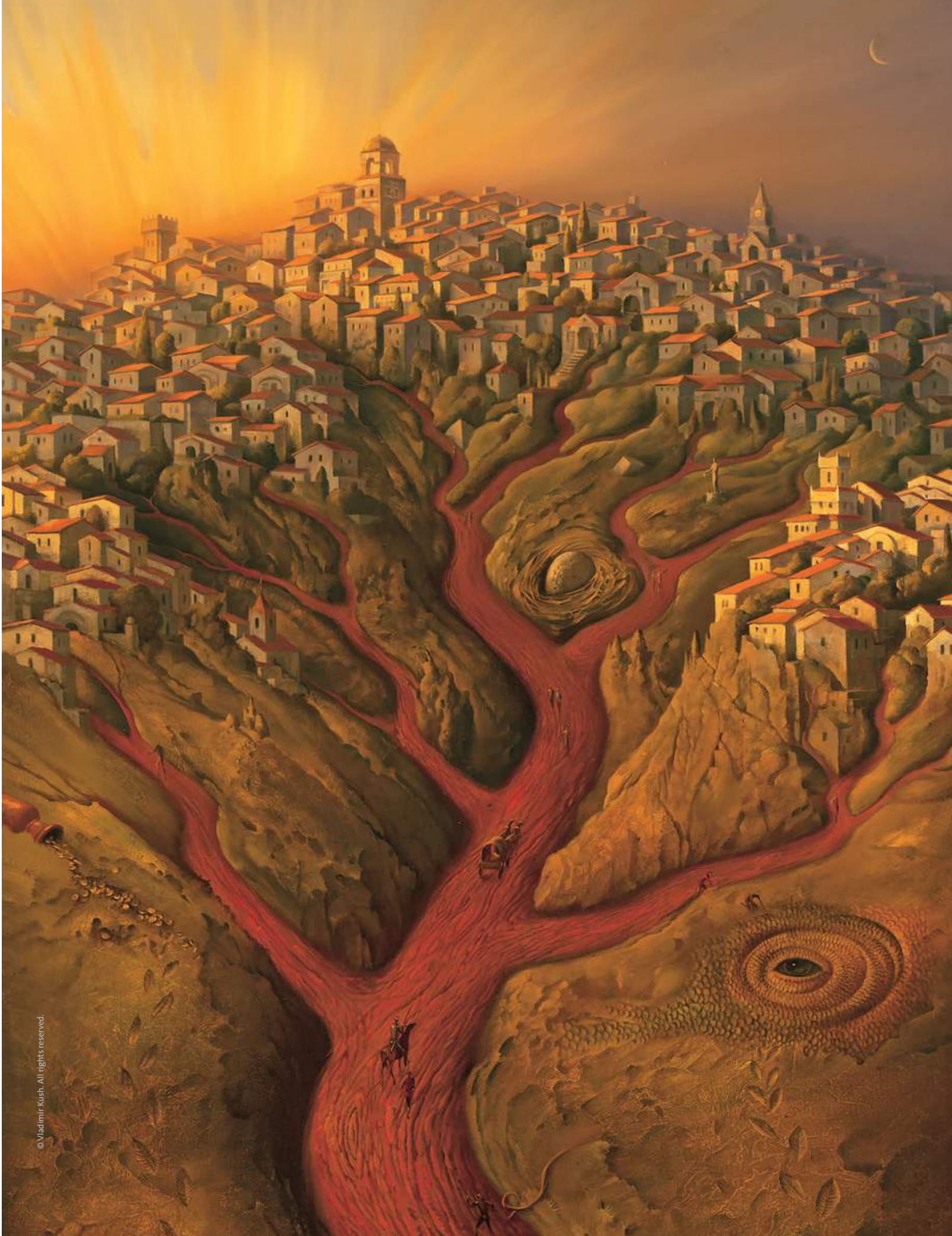
This was a revolutionary vision of human nature and a revelation that we can pursue our ideals not out of diligence but because when they are realized there's joy, and joy is itself an insurrectionary force against the dreariness and dullness and isolation of everyday life. My own research was, I realized by its end, a small part of an enormous project going on among many disciplines — psychology, economics, neurobiology, sociology, anthropology, political science — to redefine human nature as something more communal, cooperative, and compassionate. This rescue of our reputations from the social darwinists and the Hobbesians is important, not to feel positive about ourselves but to recognize the radical possibilities that can be built on an alternative view of human nature.

The fruits of these inquiries made me more hopeful. But it's important to emphasize that hope is only a beginning; it's not a substitute for action, only a basis for it. "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced," said James Baldwin. Hope gets you there; work gets you through. "The future belongs to those who prepare for it today," said Malcolm X. And there is a long history of that work, the work to change the world, a long history of methods, heroes, visionaries, heroines, victories — and, of course, failures. But the victories matter, and remembering them matters too. "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope," said Martin Luther King Jr.

The Branches Are Hope; the Roots Are Memory

"Memory produces hope in the same way that amnesia produces despair," the theologian Walter Brueggeman noted. It's an extraordinary statement, one that reminds us that though hope is about the future, grounds for hope lie in the records and recollections of the past. We can tell of a past that was nothing but defeats and cruelties and injustices, or of a past that was some lovely golden age now irretrievably lost, or we can tell a more complicated and accurate story, one that has room for the best and worst, for atrocities and liberations, for grief and jubilation. A memory commensurate to the complexity of the past and the whole cast of participants, a memory that includes our power, produces that forward-directed energy called hope.

Amnesia leads to despair in many ways. The status quo would like you to believe it is immutable, inevitable, and invulnerable, and lack of memory of a dynamically changing world reinforces this view. In other words, when you don't know how much things have changed, you don't see that they are changing or that they can change. Those who think that



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way don't remember raids on gay bars when being queer was illegal or rivers that caught fire when unregulated pollution peaked in the 1960s or that there were, worldwide, 70 percent more seabirds a few decades ago and, before the economic shifts of the Reagan Revolution, very, very few homeless people in the United States. Thus, they don't recognize the forces of change at work.

One of the essential aspects of depression is the sense that you will always be mired in this misery, that nothing can or will change. It's what makes suicide so seductive as the only visible exit from the prison of the present. There's a public equivalent to private depression, a sense that the nation or the society rather than the individual is stuck. Things don't always change for the better, but they change, and we can play a role in that change if we act. Which is where hope comes in, and memory, the collective memory we call history.

The other affliction amnesia brings is a lack of examples of positive change, of popular power, evidence that we can do it and have done it. George Orwell wrote, "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." Controlling the past begins by knowing it; the stories we tell about who we were and what we did shape what we can and will do. Despair is also often premature: it's a form of impatience as well as of certainty.

My favorite comment about political change comes from Zhou Enlai, a high-ranking member of Chairman Mao's government. Asked, in the early 1970s, about his opinion of the French Revolution, he answered, "Too soon to tell." Some argue that he was talking about the insurrections of 1968, not the monarchy-toppling of 1789, but even then it demonstrates a generous and expansive perspective. To retain a sense that even four years later the verdict isn't in is to live with more open-minded uncertainty than most people now can tolerate.

News cycles tend to suggest that change happens in small, sudden bursts or not at all. As I write, the military men who probably murdered Chilean singer and political activist Victor Jara in 1973 are being charged. More than forty years have gone by; some stories take far longer than that to finish. The struggle to get women the vote took nearly three-quarters of a century. For a time people liked to announce that feminism had failed, as though the project of overturning millennia of social arrangements should achieve its final victories in a few decades, or as though it had stopped. Feminism is just starting, and its manifestations matter in rural Himalayan villages, not just first-world cities. Susan Griffin, a great writer in the present who was also an important part of 1970s feminism, recently remarked, "I've seen enough change in my lifetime to know that despair is not only self-defeating, it is unrealistic."

Other changes result in victories and are then forgotten. For decades, radicals were preoccupied with East Timor, brutally occupied by Indonesia from 1975 to 2002; the liberated country is no longer news. It won its liberty because of valiant struggle from within, but also because of dedicated groups on the outside who pressured and shamed the governments supporting the Indonesian regime. We could learn quite a lot from the remarkable display of power and solidarity and East Timor's eventual victory, but the whole struggle seems forgotten.

For decades, Peabody Western Coal Corporation mined coal on the Hopi/Navajo land at Black Mesa in ways that contaminated the air and drained vast amounts of water from the region. The fight against Black Mesa was a totemic struggle for indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice; in 2005, the mines were shut down, and the issue disappeared from the conversation. It was also a case of tenacious activism from within and good allies from without, prolonged lawsuits, and perseverance.

We need litanies or recitations or monuments to these victories, so that they are landmarks in everyone's mind. More broadly, shifts in, say, the status of women are easily overlooked by people who don't remember that, a few decades ago, reproductive rights were not yet a concept, and there was no recourse for exclusion, discrimination, workplace sexual harassment, most forms of rape, and other crimes against women the legal system did not recognize or even countenanced. None of the changes were inevitable, either — people fought for them and won them.

People adjust without assessing the changes. As of 2014, Iowa gets 28 percent of its electricity from wind alone, not because someone in that conservative state declared death to all fossil fuel corporations or overthrew anyone or anything, but because it was a sensible and affordable option. Denmark, in the summer of 2015, achieved 140 percent of its electricity needs through wind generation (and sold the surplus to neighboring countries). Scotland has achieved renewable energy generation of 50 percent and set a goal of 100 percent by 2020. Thirty percent more solar was installed in 2014 than the year before in the United States, and renewables are becoming more affordable worldwide — in some places they are already cheaper than fossil-fueled energy. These incremental changes have happened quietly, and many people don't know they have begun, let alone exploded.

If there is one thing we can draw from where we are now and where we were then, it is that the unimaginable is ordinary, that the way forward is almost never a straight line you can glance down but a convoluted path of surprises, gifts, and afflictions you prepare for by accepting your blind spots as well as your intuitions. Howard Zinn wrote in 1988, in what now seems like a lost world before so many political upheavals and technological changes arrived, "As this century draws to a close, a century packed with history, what leaps out from that history is its utter unpredictability." He was, back then, wondering at the distance we'd traveled from when the Democratic National Party Convention refused

to seat Blacks from Mississippi to when Jesse Jackson ran (a largely symbolic campaign) for president at a time most people thought they would never live to see a Black family occupy the White House. In that essay, "The Optimism of Uncertainty," Zinn continues,

> **The global movement to address climate change is also, at last, far larger and more powerful than we could have dreamed.**

> The struggle for justice should never be abandoned because of the apparent overwhelming power of those who have the guns and the money and who seem invisible in their determination to hold onto it. That apparent power has, again and again, proved vulnerable to moral fervor, determination, unity, organization, sacrifice, wit, ingenuity, courage, patience — whether by blacks in Alabama and South Africa, peasants in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Vietnam, or workers and intellectuals in Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union itself.

People Have the Power

Social, cultural, or political change does not work in predictable ways or on predictable schedules. The month before the Berlin Wall fell, almost no one anticipated that the Soviet Bloc was going to disintegrate all of a sudden (thanks to many factors, including the tremendous power of civil society, nonviolent direct action, and hopeful organizing going back to the 1970s), any more than anyone, even the participants, foresaw the impact that the Arab Spring or Occupy Wall Street or a host of other great uprisings would have. We don't know what is going to happen, or how, or when, and that very uncertainty is the space of hope.

Those who doubt that these moments matter should note how terrified the authorities and elites are when they erupt. That fear signifies their recognition that popular power is real enough to overturn regimes and rewrite the social contract. And it often has. Sometimes your enemies know what your friends can't believe. Those who dismiss these moments because of their imperfections, limitations, or incompleteness need to look harder at what joy and hope shine out of them and what real changes have emerged because of them, even if not always in the most obvious or recognizable ways.

And everything is flawed, if you want to look at it that way. The analogy that has helped me most is this: in Hurricane Katrina, hundreds of boatowners rescued people — single moms, toddlers, grandfathers — stranded in attics, on roofs, in flooded housing projects, hospitals, and school buildings. None of them said, *I can't rescue everyone, therefore it's futile; therefore my efforts are flawed and worthless*, though that's often what people say about more abstract issues in which, nevertheless, lives, places, cultures, species, rights are at stake. They went out there in fishing boats and rowboats and pirogues and all kinds of small craft, some driving from as far as Texas and eluding the authorities to get in, others refugees themselves working within the city. There was bumper-to-bumper boat-trailer traffic — the celebrated Cajun Navy — going *toward* the city the day after the levees broke. None of those people said, *I can't rescue them all*. All of them said, *I can rescue someone, and that's work so meaning ful and important I will risk my life and defy the authorities to do it*. And they did. Of course, working for systemic change also matters — the kind of change that might prevent calamities by addressing the climate or the infrastructure or the environmental and economic injustice that put some people in harm's way in New Orleans in the first place.

Change is rarely straightforward, and that is one of the central premises of this book. Sometimes it's as complex as chaos theory and as slow as evolution. Even things that seem to happen suddenly arise from deep roots in the past or from long-dormant seeds. A young man's suicide triggers an uprising that inspires other uprisings, but the incident was a spark; the bonfire it lit was laid by activist networks and ideas about civil disobedience and by the deep desire for justice and freedom that exists everywhere.

It's important to ask not only what those moments produced in the long run but what they were in their heyday. If people find themselves living in a world in which some hopes are realized and some joys are incandescent and some boundaries between individuals and groups are lowered, even for an hour or a day or several months, that matters. Memory of joy and liberation can become a navigational tool, an identity, a gift.

Paul Goodman famously wrote, "Suppose you had the revolution you are talking and dreaming about. Suppose your side had won, and you had the kind of society that you wanted. How would you live, you personally, in that society? Start living that way now!" It's an argument for tiny and temporary victories, and for the possibility of partial victories in the absence or even the impossibility of total victories. Total victory has always seemed like a secular equivalent of paradise: a place where all the problems are solved and there's nothing to do, a fairly boring place. The absolutists of the old left imagined that victory would, when it came, be total and permanent, which is practically the same as saying that victory was and is impossible and will never come. It is, in fact, more than possible. It is something that has arrived in innumerable ways, small and large and often incremental, but not in that way that was widely described and expected. So victories slip by unheralded. Failures are more readily detected.

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And then every now and then, the possibilities explode. In these moments of rupture, people find themselves members of a "we" that did not until then exist, at least not as an entity with agency and identity and potency; new possibilities suddenly emerge, or that old dream of a just society reemerges and — at least for a little while — shines. Utopia is sometimes the goal. It's often embedded in the moment itself, and it's a hard moment to explain, since it usually involves hardscrabble ways of living, squabbles, and eventually disillusion and factionalism — but also more ethereal things: the discovery of personal and collective power, the realization of dreams, the birth of bigger dreams, a sense of connection that is as emotional as it is political, and lives that change and do not revert to older ways even when the glory subsides.

Sometimes the earth closes over this moment and it has no obvious consequences; sometimes empires crumble and ideologies fall away like shackles. But you don't know beforehand. People in official institutions devoutly believe they hold the power that matters, though the power we grant them can often be taken back; the violence commanded by governments and militaries often fails, and nonviolent direct-action campaigns often succeed.

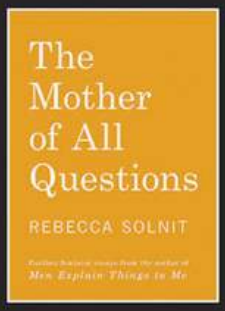
The sleeping giant is one name for the public; when it wakes up, when *we* wake up, we are no longer only the public: we are civil society, the superpower whose nonviolent means are sometimes, for a shining moment, more powerful than violence, more powerful than regimes and armies. We write history with our feet and with our presence and our collective voice and vision. And yet, and of course, everything in the mainstream media suggests that popular resistance is ridiculous, pointless, or criminal, unless it is far away, was long ago, or, ideally, both. These are the forces that prefer the giant remain asleep.

Together we are very powerful, and we have a seldom-told, seldom-remembered history of victories and transformations that can give us confidence that yes, we can change the world because we have many times before. You row forward looking back, and telling this history is part of helping people navigate toward the future. We need a litany, a rosary, a sutra, a mantra, a war chant of our victories. The past is set in daylight, and it can become a torch we can carry into the night that is the future. ■

"*Hope In the Dark* changed my life. During a period of pervasive cynicism and political despair, the first edition of this book provided me with a model for activist engagement that I have held dear ever since. Today, as movements for climate, racial, and economic justice sweep the globe, its message is more relevant than ever."
—Astra Taylor

"The Antidote to Mansplaining."
—*The Stranger*

"It's a fraught time to be female in America (or should I say fraught-er), and a newly expanded edition of Rebecca Solnit 's *Men Explain Things* to Me is the most clarifying, soothing and socially aware document I've read on the topic this year."
—Lena Dunham, *Wall Street Journal*



In a timely and incisive follow-up to her national bestseller *Men Explain Things to Me*, Rebecca Solnit offers indispensable commentary on women who refuse to be silenced, misogynistic violence, the fragile masculinity of the literary canon, the gender binary, the recent history of rape jokes, and much more. In characteristic style, Solnit mixes humor, keen analysis, and powerful insight in these essays.

REBECCA SOLNIT | Books for changing the world from **HaymarketBooks.org**

We Are Poured Out Like Water

BY DANIEL A. BUFORD

Reverend Buford offered these remarks on October 2, 2016, about a month before the presidential election, at the Beyt Tikkun High Holy Days services at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Ca.

Thank you Rabbi Michael Lerner for the invitation to make some brief remarks about what it is like to be an African American in the twenty-first century. This makes me think of W.E.B. Dubois who was answering a similar question over hundred years ago. For him, the question boiled down to being asked "What is it like the be THE Problem?" Everybody has problems and we usually have more than one problem. Shakespeare said that "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions."

To be Black in the twenty-first century means that you have the same problems that everyone else has, plus the added burden of being seen as the problem by the dominant culture. We will be blamed if Hillary Clinton wins. We will be blamed if Donald Trump wins. With Obama in the White House we can't win for losing.

In the neighborhood we say "What do it mean?" "What it is?" and "What do it be like?" It's like waking up every morning with a bad hangover of survivor's guilt. Walking the streets and catching the bus with the walking wounded and the walking dead who are just waiting for a fresh grave to open up; where every road is either a dead end or an intersection of the Avenue of the Damned and the Boulevard of Lost Souls.

To be Black in twenty-first century U.S.A. is to be poured out like water; a watershed of bloodshed, poured out like water wasted and untasted. Polluted, diluted, Reconstituted, and refuted.

Poured out like water that freezes and turns to dry ice on contact with hearts frozen by the frosty coating of white skin privilege; hearts turned cold by compassion fatigue of hearing about too many cops murdering too many unarmed Black lives because too many of our lives really don't matter.

We are poured out like water on a hot urban pavement; on a scorching urban landscape that still swelters under the heat of injustice in the twenty-first century while the steam and temperature of our discontent rises in urban rebellions.

We are poured out like water on a hot street where the chalk outline of another brother's blood can't contain the pool of blood that won't stay within the lines.

We are cut down like trees of an old growth redwood forest; cut down in their prime, cut down before their time, cut down by the police and cowardly lyin'; cut down by a cowardly lyin' legal system, a cowardly lyin' judicial system; cowardly lyin' politicians; cowardly lyin' religious leaders. When you cut down too many trees and too many forests it causes loss of habitat, deforestation, drought, climate change, temperatures rise, displacement, gentrification, loss of green space, loss of oxygen, I can't breathe! I can't breathe!

What is it like to be a Black Man in the United States in the twenty-first century? We are hunted down, shot down, put down, and slaughtered like the millions of almost extinct wooly-haired buffalo that once roamed the plains. Herds of dark skinned, herds of the wooly-haired descendants of the Buffalo soldiers being exterminated like their buffalo namesakes and the Indians whose culture thrived with the buffalo.

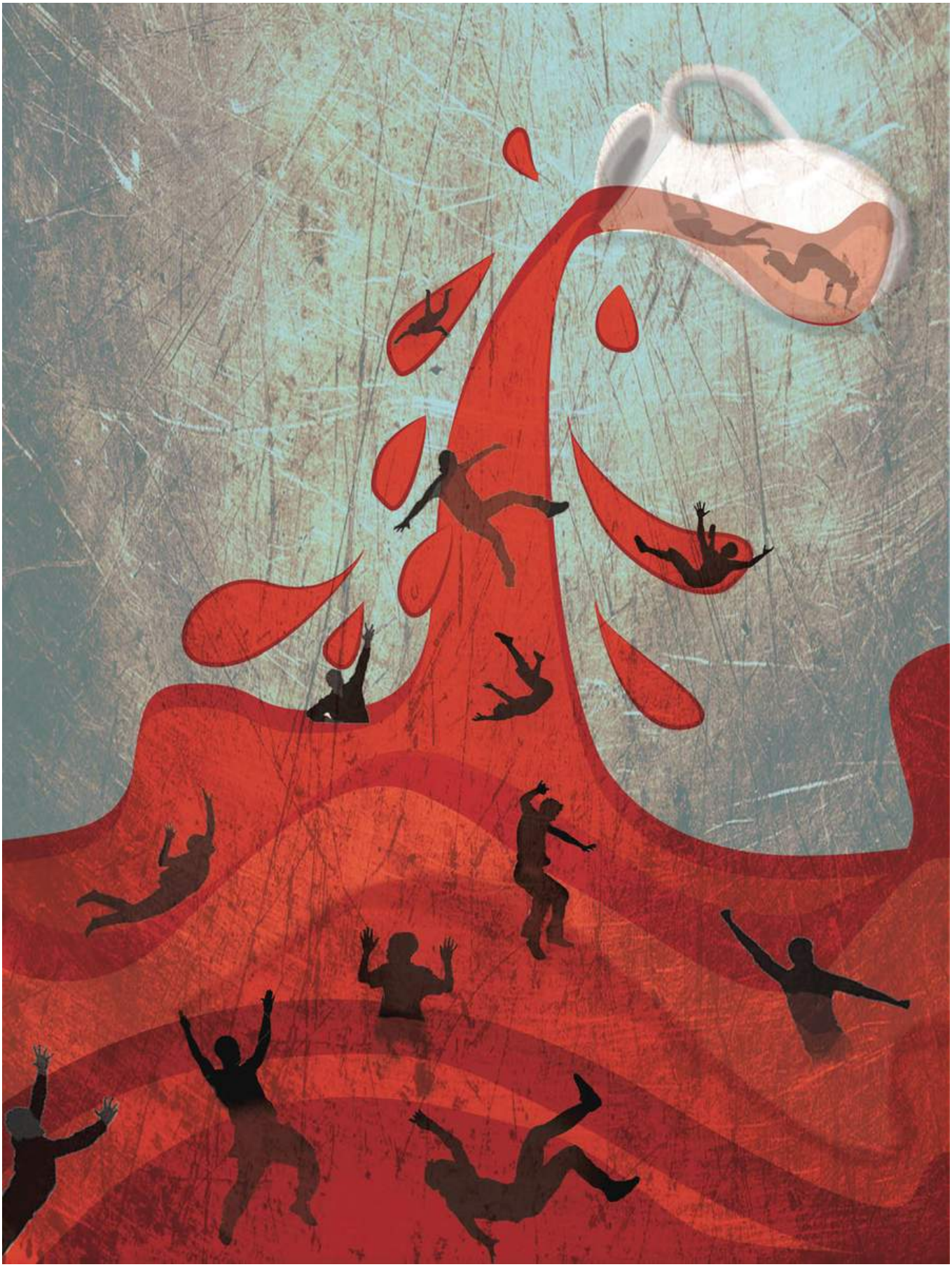
Hunted like the buffalo by SWAT teams, DEA, ATF, police, sheriff's deputies keeping promises of death and depopulation; hunted down in drive-by shootings by the KKK, Nazis, random idiots, Bloods, and Crips who murder for uniforms and color codes of dishonor.

What is it like to be an African American in the twenty-first century? It's like watching a real life movie about your own extinction in slow motion with subtitles that are in a foreign language while you become a cultural artifact and a mural subject for future residents to muse on.

Enough water poured out and justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream, enough water poured out can turn a desert into an oasis; enough water poured out can be a flood like Hurricane Katrina.

For every tall redwood tree that is cut down four more may grow from one stump. But what will happen to the United States when the waters run out, the shade from the trees can give no rest, Black people are extinct and all the buffalo are gone? ■

Reverend Daniel A. Buford heads the Prophetic Justice Ministry at Allen Temple. He is a founding organizer and trainer of the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond based in New Orleans, Louisiana and has conducted Undoing Racism workshops throughout the United States, South Africa, Japan, and Puerto Rico since 1980. He is the President of the Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, a peace and justice law think tank organization located in Berkeley, California.



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New Psalms for a Paradigm Shift in Judaism

BY HERBERT J. LEVINE

Blessed are you, world — you appear before me
each day as problems to solve and living visions to praise.

These verses of a contemporary psalm came to me in Hebrew, the language of Jewish continuity and the one I find best suited for enduring Jewish creativity. I wrote most of the poems in this essay first in Hebrew and then translated them into English. They offer alternatives to traditional forms of Jewish prayer and psalmody that do not require a leap of faith. Think of them as post-theistic — that is, their author has been deeply imbued with theism, maintained a lifelong quarrel with it, and emerged as an unconflicted non-theist.

My project of writing secular psalms was prompted by Shaul Magid's call in the 2015 Winter issue of *Tikkun* for forms of Jewish worship to embody Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's paradigm-changing approach to Jewish theology. In an accompanying sidebar approving Magid's message, Reb Zalman (z"l) admitted he had not been ready to initiate such a change during his life, but knew that its time was coming.

In his book *Paradigm Shift*, Reb Zalman brought into Jewish discourse the Gaia hypothesis, formulated by biologists in the 1970s, which posits that biological organisms and the inorganic world form a unified, self-regulating system that preserves the conditions for continued life on Earth. Expressing this in evolutionary terms, humans are the embodiment of the cosmos becoming self-conscious, and, in moral terms, are therefore responsible for the future of that evolution. Gaia, Reb Zalman told us, was the living God, and we were Gaia's vanguard.

With the human crisis on the planet (climate change, population size, food resources) becoming ever more pressing, our rabbi-theologians have been following Reb Zalman's lead in giving us various versions of God as Gaia — most recently, Arthur Green's *Radical Judaism* (2010) and Brad Artson's *Renewing the Process of Creation* (2015). In the past two decades we have seen God presented as a verb, as the verbal phrase is-was-will-be, as a transformative, liberating movement toward justice, as the interdependence of humans and plants — all formulations welcome, it seems, except those that attribute to God the power of being in charge, which we post-Holocaust Jews cannot accept.

Over thirty years ago, I spoke to my teacher, Reb Zalman, about my difficulty with the traditional language of Jewish prayer. He asked me if I thought I could say "you" to the universe. As he did to so many others, he gave me permission to experiment — to use *barukh ata olam*, "blessed are you, world," as an inner mantra, even as he urged me to continue to say the traditional words. After thirty years, I realized that I needed to go further, to claim *Barukh ata olam* as more than an inner mantra, by giving myself permission to say those words in prayer. That discovery led to the creation of these prayerful poems, which I think of as psalms for our time.

Marcia Falk's *Book of Blessings* and *The Days Between* opened the way for bilingual, non-theistic Jewish poems. Many Jewish poets have similarly offered prayerful poems with no God-term as contemporary psalms, including Karl Shapiro, Irving Feldman, Allen Ginsberg, Paul Celan, and Yehuda Amichai, among others. I think especially of the exemplary God-discourse of Yehuda Amichai in his final book, *Open Closed Open*. There he claims "Change is god and death is its prophet," suggesting that our only bedrock is change itself, the mutability of the visible world to which lyric poetry has always been devoted. Amichai, in turn, was building on the committed secularism and Jewish allusiveness of Chaim Nachman Bialik. These iconoclasts loom large as paradigm-changing Jewish forebears, just as I hope, in my small way, to continue their work.

HERBERT LEVINE'S forthcoming book is *Words for Blessing the World: Poems in Hebrew and English* (Ben Yehuda Press). He has previously published poems in *Tikkun* and is also the author of *Sing Unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms*.

Illustration by Autumn Evelyn

Illustration by Autumn Evelyn

Just as the lad Abram put a hammer
in the hand of the biggest idol
in his father's workshop
and pointed to it as the one who shattered
all the rest, so our father Abraham
put that self-same hammer in our hands
so that we might destroy images of God,
which, since then, have screened us from seeing
that there is nothing holier than the world.

By adopting the familiar biblical model of the quarrel with God and by playing, especially in Hebrew, with resonances from the Bible and the prayer book, I understand my post-theistic poems to speak a Jewish language for Jewish seekers. The audience for them may be more apparent in contemporary Israel than in the United States. In Israel, there are seekers who have never experienced Jewish prayer, yet meet on Shabbat evenings in community centers and open spaces (a large group meets on the beach in Tel Aviv) to share spiritual poems in community. Here is one of my Israel-centered prayer-poems that both breaks with and embraces the past.

In the archives at Kibbutz Beit Ha-Shita
I discovered forgotten hand-written notes
of a Passover Seder from 1927.
In the place of the holiday Kiddush was written
Barukh ata kibbutz, 'Blessed are you, Kibbutz.'
Now let's widen the blessing circle
and say together, 'Blessed are you, world,'
to praise your fragile, complex beauty.

Like that enthusiastic kibbutznik
who insisted on making his time new
let's make new what's old and make holy what's new
and join what's called secular to what's called holy
and what's material to what's called spiritual
until the gulf between them disappears.

The 2013 Pew Research study, "A Portrait of American Jews," found declining religious affiliations and a growing number that self-define as Jewish, not religious. Yet most of our synagogues and *havurot* continue to perpetuate Judaism as intergenerational religious nostalgia. We teach our children the forms we knew as children because they offer us comfort and continuity even though we mostly don't believe in the God that we're teaching our children to worship. Our children pick up our doubts, so that by the time they reach bar and bat mitzvah age — if they are savvy — they are proud atheists who stand at a remove from Judaism. But when their own children reach school age, they will likely once again offer them the same comfortable, but ultimately alienating forms, which replicate themselves like genes, but with diminishing returns, in each Jewish generation.

I have written my contemporary psalms for this growing group of non-religious Jews who may become seekers. Spirituality begins in gratitude and awe. Gratitude — not an emotion, but an attitude — reminds us that we are not self-created, but limited beings dependent on many contingencies, especially other people, for our well-being. Awe is our response to powerful experiences — seeing snow-capped mountains, holding a newborn — that remind us of our finite

nature in the face of what is grand and enduring. I often use autobiographical reminiscence like the following to explore paths to gratitude and awe.

Every Rosh Hashanah during my childhood, my father
Would ask my Bubbe, "Why are the corners
of your prayer book's pages folded over?"
Every year she answered him, "This is where we cry."
From her life of wanderings,
my Bubbe understood tears
and what follows from them: in no way
challenge fate by failing to mention
the One who watches over all,
but hope with 'the help of God' and be
grateful with 'Praise God,' and 'Thank God.'
I also want to express hopes and
give thanks for the good in my life
and be amazed by the wonders of the universe.
My tongue is getting used to new expressions
with the help of the world,
with thanks to the universe.

In these poems, I believe I am contributing to the next stage in the evolution of Judaism into a reality-based, cosmos-centered approach to the world that is not limited by our traditional narratives and rituals, but is nevertheless in an authentic relationship to them. So my paradigm-shifting poems integrate science and spirit for a world where Darwin and Einstein are what Moses once was, prophets of ultimate truth. Here are two stanzas that bring insights from biochemistry, evolutionary biology, geology, chemistry, and astrophysics into what I hope is prayerful speech.

My life and yours began through a crack
in the ocean floor, through which heat rose
(and still rises) from the core of the earth and catalyzed
the salty waters. The amino acids
were created, containing the history of life
in the sea, on land and in the air.
The psalmist wrote, "with you is the source of life."
Every day, I too acknowledge the source of life
that warms every breath I take.

From Einstein and his students I learned
that the elements in me were forged
in the same furnace as the stars.
From other great ones, I have learned
to sit, breathe, pay attention
with watchful eyes
to a world filled with glory and wonders
like me, like you and like the stars.

The pillars of traditional Judaism are God, Torah, and Israel, or expressed in temporal terms, creation, revelation, and redemption. New Jewish prayer-poems inevitably create alternative ways for envisioning these categories. To reframe Torah for our time, I offer the following:

This is the Torah
that was written by human beings
over many generations,

that Ezra put
before the people of Israel
in the name of Moses,
that Hillel the elder summarized
hundreds of years after Ezra:
What is hateful to you, don't do to your fellow.
The rest is commentary that's worth studying
and, afterwards, do what needs doing.

Reenvisioning Torah requires a language for commandments that does not include a commander. I turn *mitzvotav*, God's commandments, into *mitzvoteynu*, our practices for becoming more conscious of self and world, for taking responsibility for both self- and world-transformation. This is in line with the Torah's view that God chose Abram because he would teach his children to do what was right and good.

Our ancestors were right when they said that one mitzvah
leads to another, and, likewise, a misdeed.
This I know from the mistakes of my life.
I don't believe in a commander, but the language
of 'Thou shalt' reminds me that we inherited
the mitzvot in order to be refined,
like silver in the hands of the smith,
like gold separated from its dross.

The Torah concludes with the Promised Land always on the horizon, while the Tanakh completes the circle with Cyrus of Persia's declaration that the Jews should now return to the land. Whether authenticated by God or by an earthly emperor, the overarching narrative of Jewish scripture ensures that we will fail to see the other people in the land, even as our legal codes urgently reiterate the need to treat the strangers among us with compassion and justice, "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." With tragic consequences for ourselves and our 'others,' we continue to live with this unsolved tension. Several of the psalms retell the great stories of the Bible. In my revisionist versions of the Bible, I reintegrate the stranger into the narrative of the family circle.

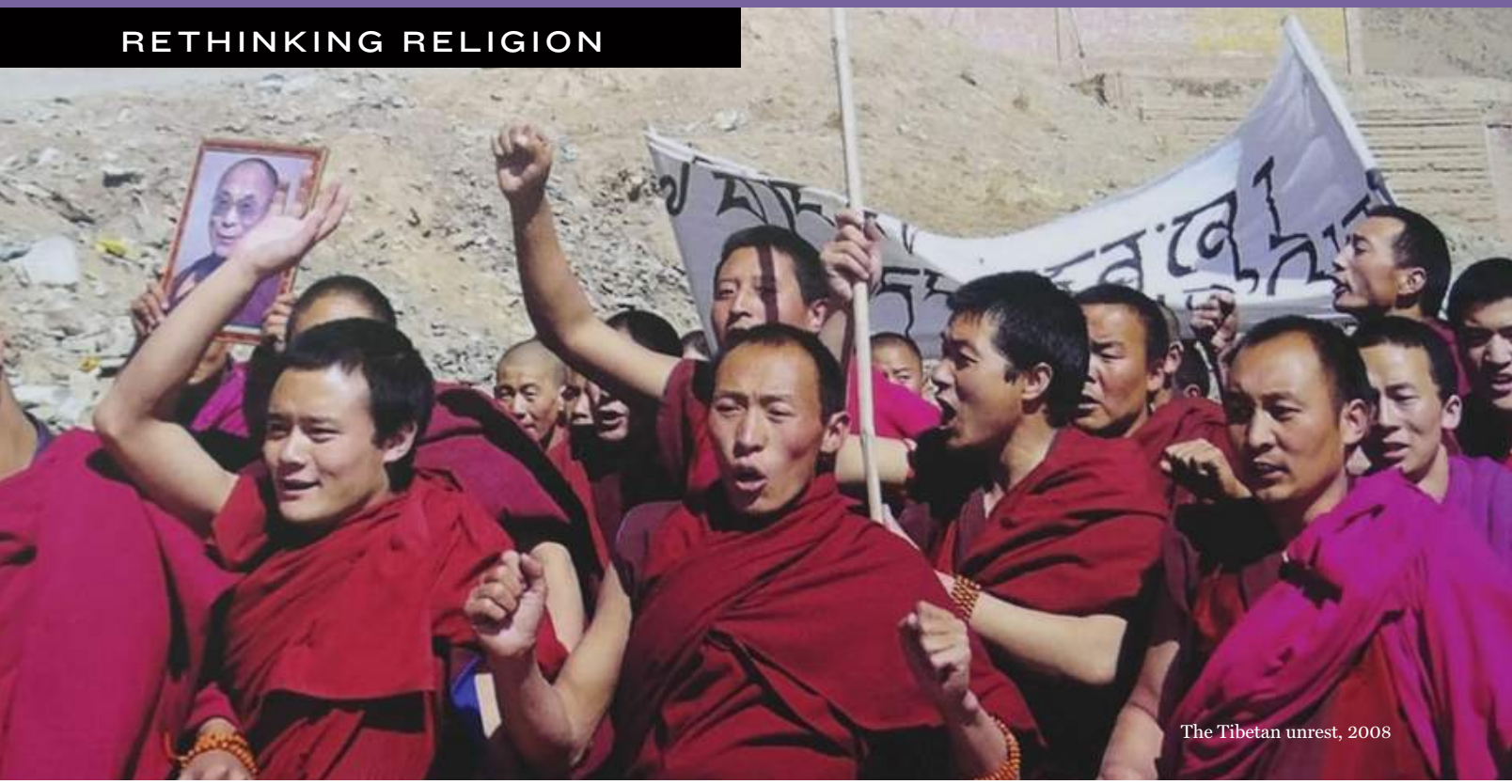
We sat, my brother and I, in the back
of the family car and quarreled unceasingly,
until our mother, may she rest in peace, would ask,
"How will there be peace in the world if two brothers
cannot live together in peace?" We knew
from the Bible stories she had taught us
that Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy,
that Ishmael beat up Isaac, even if it meant
his exile, that Jacob was ready to steal and Esau
to murder to receive what he could never get,
the one indivisible blessing.
Nowadays my brother and I meet for meals
on our birthdays, talk of our cholesterol levels
and sleep apnea, of the jobs that our children
have taken, and of the Israelis and Palestinians,
he, embarrassed like a Diaspora Jew, and I, shaken
by this quarrel of brothers who rise from their graves
to deceive and to fight, to die and to kill, united
by their shared family plot, where they
pause for a moment to bury their dead.

The Palestinians celebrate their tragic Nakba,
a holy day of remembering and mourning the loss
of their nation. In days to come, when they celebrate
the beginning of their state, may they also celebrate
a Palestinian Purim, with costumes, masks and hashish
(the Muslims won't be drinking alcohol),
when they'll wipe out the name of Israel
once a year, and then they'll say what the Jews say
on Hanukkah, Passover and Purim: They tried to kill us
but they didn't succeed, so let's eat rich food
and tell funny stories so we keep living well and not fall
to the bottom of memory's black hole
of tears and shame and fury.

As a committed diaspora Jew, I know that redemption will not be finished when the Palestinians have their own state or are part of a binational state in the whole of the historic land of Israel, as envisioned by Martin Buber and Judah Magnes. We learn from Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution* that "that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt... that there is a better place... a promised land... and that there is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching" through the wilderness. In a poem that juxtaposes the particular and the universal aspects of Judaism, I say that

I believe with perfect faith
that the Jews came out of Egypt to testify
that there are narrow straits in every place
that all of us must pass through
to march toward a promised land
that we will not reach,
but which will never disappear .

At a visit I made to the National Museum of the American Indian, I made note of a remark made by the father of one the artists, Calvin Hunt of the Kwag'ul band, about the tradition of the Potlatch, the ceremony of mutual gift-giving and feasting between tribes: "If we did not carry on, our hearts would break." For many years, this was my rationale for maintaining a traditional Jewish practice. We inherited this tradition from our forebears at great cost to them. Who was I to throw it aside? But increasingly, I've been saying to myself, "If I carry on in this way, my mind will break." I have written these bilingual, bicultural poems to bring heart and mind together. ■



The Tibetan unrest, 2008

Adam Jones, Ph.D. | Global Photo Archive | Flickr

Psalm 23

To Inspire and Support Social Justice Activists

BY CAT J. ZAVIS

Psalms have a unique place in Jewish tradition. They are used to comfort us in a variety of situations, including when sick and at funerals. A different psalm is recited each day of the week to add to our prayer and experience of the flow of the week, and they are used to inspire us. Yet one area where psalms have not been traditionally used is in the area of social justice, which is surprising given the fact that Jewish theology and the Torah are filled with ethical teachings and lessons on the need to stand up to the powerful and to empire, that the world can be fundamentally transformed (i.e., that slaves can be freed), and that God calls for your participation in changing and transforming the world and freeing yourself and others. I embarked on a project to work with one psalm and explore how to translate that psalm in a way that can be used by social justice activists to inspire them in their work. It is my hope that this psalm can be used at marches, protests, and meetings to provide a meaningful and spiritually connected context to our work. Let's explore a new translation of Psalm 23.

Psalm 23

A Messianic psalm

(1) YHVH, the Loving Transformative Power of the Universe, is my shepherd — my guardian
I shall not want

(2) Its energy causes me to lie down in green pastures, out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing
Guiding me to restful waters

(3) Its compassion renews my soul's life
Its call for righteousness encircles me and guides me on pathways of justice to what ought to be
For the sake of Transformation

(4) Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death
I fear no evil for You are with me
Your rod and Your staff — like a grounding stick — they comfort me and give me strength

Cat J. Zavis, JD, is the Executive Director of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. Zavis is also a mediator, teacher of compassionate communication, and co-leader of services at Beyt Tikkun with Rabbi Michael Lerner. In the spring of 2016, Zavis took a course in Psalms with Herb Levine (also featured in this issue). That class, and Levine's guidance and support, provided the inspiration for this piece.

(5) You spread before me a table in front of my enemies — those I'm bound up with — so we can break bread together
You anoint my head with oil, comforting me
My cup overflows
(6) Let only that which is life giving and loving kindness pursue me
All the days of my life
And I shall dwell in the house of YHVH
for many long years

How might activists use this Psalm to nurture and comfort them in times of fear and challenges? How might it empower and inspire them to continue on the long path of working for a just world? Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Everybody can be great . . . because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love," and in his book, *God in Search of Man*, Abraham Joshua Heschel argues that God is seeking man's participation in the world to bring about *tikkun olam* (the healing, repair and transformation of the world). How might Psalm 23 help those who are partnering with God on this moral path towards justice, to *tikkun olam*? And are there aspects of this psalm that remind us of teachings from other traditions that can strengthen our interfaith work for social justice?

Fannie Lou Hamer, American civil rights leader, at the Democratic National Convention, August 1964

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How one reads, understands, utilizes, and integrates Jewish liturgy is in large part formed by how one conceptualizes Yud Hey Vav Hey (YHVH — יהוה), typically translated as Adonai or God. When people think of the word God or Adonai, it sometimes conjures static, male, patriarchal, hierarchical, and even militaristic images. This God, particularly when thought of in the context of the use of Psalm 23 to comfort people in times of death and sickness, leans towards a vision of God as a big man in heaven who metes out reward and punishment and offers absolution from past wrongs. Drawing on the work of Rabbi Michael Lerner in *Jewish Renewal*, I conceptualize YHVH as "The Loving Transformative Power of the Universe"— the loving energy that makes possible the transformation from that which is to that which ought to be. This understanding of YHVH comes from an understanding of the word itself. The letters in Hebrew, Hey Vav Hey (HVH — הוה), can be read as the third person (male) present tense of the verb "to be." When the letter Yud (Y — י) is added to the beginning of a third person male present tense it forms the future tense. Interestingly, in this case, the letters YHVH (יהוה) are actually a combination of the present and future tense of the verb *to be*. YHVH can be understood to be the movement or energy that makes the transformation from the present (that which is) to the future (that which can or ought to be).

Before the psalm begins, there is an introductory line that was added at some later time that describes the time in which the psalm was written, who wrote it, and/or for whom it was written. Psalm 23 begins with a reference to King David, and is often translated as "A Psalm to David." It is believed in Jewish tradition that the messiah will come from the lineage of David. So instead of translating the sentence as "A Psalm to David," I have chosen to translate it as a "Messianic Psalm" to draw on the energy of a time in the future when peace and justice will prevail.

The psalm then begins in verse 1 through 3, by referring to YHVH in the third person and then briefly switches in verses 4 and 5, placing YHVH in a more intimate second person connection, giving us a taste of familiarity and trust. It then shifts, somewhat abruptly in the final verse back to the third person. Why? What, if any, might be the meaning of these shifts or what might they indicate to the reader?

I suggest that at the beginning of the psalm, the psalmist has a more distant and perhaps doubtful relationship with YHVH or faith, which is often reflective of our own relationship with a belief in the possibility of transformation. In other words, as much as we might want there to be a loving, transformative power in the universe that makes possible the transformation from what is to what ought to be, we often lose faith in this possibility. Thus, we can see in Psalm 23,

that even as the psalmist acknowledges that YHVH is like a shepherd (verse 1) who cares for and protects one's flock (people) and that with that knowledge, "I shall not want," there is still doubt in the psalmist's voice. Rather than this line being a statement of the psalmist's faith, it reads more like a plea or call to oneself: "Remember ... YHVH is my shepherd and thus I shall not want." It is hard to have faith at all times, so at first we need to remind ourselves to have faith, to just sink into trusting that there is a force in the universe that makes transformation possible, even in the darkest, dreariest times. This first verse is a call for that remembering.

Understandably, activists, even those grounded in faith traditions, often doubt that change is possible. They fail to see the radical transformations that have occurred over the course of their lives and history. They often grab on to partial victories and lose sight of the larger goals that originally inspired them, unconsciously embracing criteria of what is or is not realistic which have been preached to them by the very society and media that they originally hoped to change. So we activists need not only the reminder to ourselves to have faith in YHVH, but to be brought by YHVH into the field of a different world. This is done in the second verse of Psalm 23 when YHVH (i.e., "Its energy") brings the psalmist to green pastures to lie down. This is not a vision of activists integrated in a more closely connected relationship with YHVH, in the second person, but of one still being guided by YHVH from a more distant lens. We are nudged to this place by the loving energy of transformation. I am reminded of the Rumi poem:

> Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other" doesn't make any sense.

The loving transformative power of the universe is such a compelling force, instilling hope in the possibility of possibilities, its energy so vast that you can meet others in a field beyond wrongdoing and rightdoing, beyond duality, and trust in the oneness of all. How inspiring! Isn't this the place we want to be as social activists? When we lay down in that field, it is as if we are guided to resting waters, in stillness and peace. In that place, we can relax and experience ourselves in a safe haven, as if back in the womb.

In this field, in this place of rest, we are renewed and rejuvenated by the possibilities of possibility. We can then let go and allow ourselves to be encircled and guided by the loving transformative power on pathways of justice to what ought to be for the sake of transformation (verse 3). This verse is so rich in its language and possibilities for meaning and interpretation. The Hebrew word *maglai* means circle in English. Robert Alter and others translate *maglai* as "pathways" thus giving the meaning of "encircles me and guides me on pathways of justice." The word *tzedek* (i.e., justice) brings to mind the phrase "*tzedek tzedek tirdof*" from Deuteronomy 16:20, which is often interpreted to mean pursuing justice by just means. I added the phrase "to what ought to be" to this line because in the Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon I found, to my great surprise and delight, that *tzedek* also can be interpreted as "what is right and just, what is so or ought to be so." Including this term adds a richer and deeper vision of transformation than would be understood without it. Finally, I chose to translate *shemo*, which means "His Name" into the word "transformation" since I see YHVH as transformative energy and I want to help the reader and inspire the activist to remain in the vision of YHVH as transformation, rather than as a static entity or merely a name. So with all this in mind, verse 3 provides an image of a loving transformative energy encircling us in justice, giving us the power and confidence to pursue a just path to a just and ethical future.

This transformation has a personal and a social quality and element. Once we allow ourselves to be guided on this path, we begin to integrate YHVH into our being more closely such that by verse 4, YHVH is referred to in the second person. The loving transformative power of the universe is not just an entity or energy out there anymore — but rather an energy both within the psalmist/reader/activist and a companion on the journey to building a more just society. Our faith and belief in the loving transformative power of the universe is restored and integrated into our being more fully.

This energy of the possibility of transformation lives within each of us and in all the peoples around the world. All beings are capable of transformation, and in fact, do transform. When we recognize this, we see the interconnectedness of all beings, and see those around the world who, like us, are struggling to transform the world. That renews and revitalizes us and we feel invigorated to stay in it for the long haul. From that place, we are reminded to return to our essence, our higher self. When YHVH renews our soul and being, we are filled with God-energy and can work in partnership with God and others to transform our world.

We do this for the sake of YHVH (i.e., for the sake of transformation) so we can be in partnership with YHVH because a vision of God as a loving force of transformation with whom we can partner provides a way for people who are reactive against God conceptions that have come out of the history of patriarchal and class societies, and read and experience in this psalm that narrow conception of how God operates in the world to instead think of God as existing in the world in a different way. It just may give them a way to connect with God as imminent — present and acting in the world — and not just transcendent. There is no big man in heaven meting out rewards and punishment, the world will not transform without human engagement and intervention. This is evidenced when YHVH sought Moses' participation in freeing the Hebrews from slavery. Theoretically an all-powerful, all-knowing God could have done that alone, but in fact God

Gandhi during the Salt March, 1930

required and still requires the active engagement, involvement, and faith of human beings.

Once we trust in the possibility of a transformed world and join in partnership with YHVH, YHVH becomes closer to us, we relate to YHVH then as You instead of It, as a friend, a companion on the path to justice. Only when YHVH is integrated into our being in this more intimate fashion are we ready to walk into the valley of the shadow of death (verse 4). Allowing ourselves to believe in the possibility of change often requires us to transform internally as well and that internal transformation requires us to walk in the valley of the shadow of death because we may have to allow a part of ourselves to die in order to transform from a nonbeliever to a believer. When we are more separate from YHVH, we live in greater fear, we are less willing to take risks, but when we have a more intimate relationship with God, we can overcome our fear. We feel empowered, even invincible. Even though we know that engaging in social change work and nonviolent direct action will lead us into darkness and danger, we are ready now because we now know, deep in our bones, deep in our being, that we are not alone — the loving energy of transformation surrounds us in circles of justice, thus we fear no evil.

This image brings to mind pictures of the *tzadikim* (the righteous ones) who sat at the lunch counters, who ventured on the freedom rides, who walked in the salt marches in India, who helped slaves escape, who fought for women's rights, stood their ground at Standing Rock, and the list goes on and on. These brave heroes and heroines walked straight into harm's way knowing they would be beaten, assaulted, arrested, and possibly even killed. Yet they kept at it again and again — challenging the Pharaoh of their time. What is it that impelled them to do this? What is it that allowed those who stood in the lines in the salt marches in India to stay in that line knowing that when they got to the front of the line, they'd be bashed in the head? What was it in those at the lunch counter sit-ins during the '60s that impelled them to sit at the counters and stay there while they were spit at, while food was being thrown at them, while being beaten and slammed to the ground, and then for others to replace them knowing the same would happen. And what was it that gave them the fortitude to not respond with violence or hatred? What is that voice within us that allows us to break bread with our enemies as Nelson Mandela did metaphorically during his time in prison when he held such compassion and open heartedness for his jail guards that they had to keep changing who guarded him because the guards became too sympathetic to Mandela and later literally when he broke bread with his former captors? What voice within each of us compels us to stand in the face of fire? For me it is that burning bush inside, that voice of the loving energy of the universe that is in each and every one of us that makes me know that it's possible for the world to change from what it is to what it ought to be. And the message and teachings in Judaism that each of us are to play a role in bringing that forth into the world because we too are a part of the unity of all Being, a part of the loving transformative power. When you trust that you are doing God's work, when you engage in efforts to

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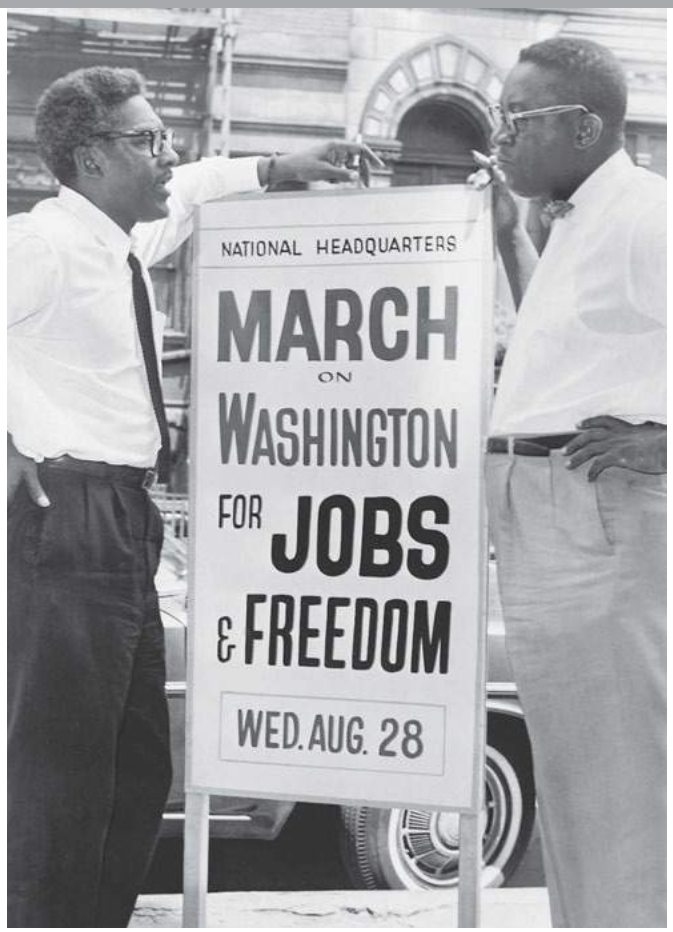
bring about the world that ought to be you not only have faith that the transformative power of the universe is with you, you feel its energy inside you. And when joined with others, that energy magnifies, instilling even greater strength and fortitude.

In parsha Bo, YHVH says to Moses—"Bo Pharaoh"—"Come to Pharaoh." This is usually interpreted to mean that God is with Pharaoh as in, "Come here, to me and Pharaoh." But I offer a different understanding where "Come" is meant as "Come (with me) and come to me (and Pharaoh)" because YHVH (the loving power of transformation) is with and in everyone. God is with Moses and with Pharaoh. When we take on the powerful, challenge the existing structure and order of society, in a just way, for a just end, the loving transformative power of the universe is there with us, we are not alone. And YHVH is with the Other, offering the possibility of transformation to them as well. To transform our world requires courageous souls who are willing to walk into the belly of the beast, who can overcome their fears and messages that things can and never will change, and join with others and YHVH to bring about a different world. Knowing and trusting this, grounds me (line 3, verse 4).

We are nurtured and comforted by that energy, so much so that we can sit at a table in front of our enemies—those we are bound up with (verse 5). The more traditional interpretations translate the Hebrew word צרר as enemy, but the Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon and the Brown-Driver-Briggs Dictionary provide a definition of the root, צרר, as to bind up or bind together. Both seem appropriate to me because when we are struggling for social justice we find ourselves bound up with those we view as our enemy. So I have chosen to combine them to give both the image and understanding of the fact that when we see those we are struggling against as our enemies, and hold an enemy image of the Other, we are, in fact, bound up with them. This offers us a vision of being nurtured and fulfilled even in the face of those we believe to be our enemies and provides the greater possibility and vision of becoming transformed, disentangled, unbound, free.

When activists stand together in the face of injustice, they no doubt feel a sense of fullness and nurturance from their acts of civil disobedience. As we join together in these acts, we nourish one another as well and perhaps from that place of fulfillment we can remember the field beyond wrongdoing and rightdoing, break free from seeing the Other as an enemy, become unbound, untethered to enemy images, and break bread together; thereby being nourished. Through this transformation, we are lovingly nurtured and that nurturance is deepened by the image of YHVH anointing our heads with oil—comforting us and soothing us through the challenges of transformation. Such fulfillment, such gentleness, such loving, tender transformation fills one up—so much so, that our cup overflows and we are strengthened to return to the work of helping to bend the arc towards justice.



March on Washington, August 1963

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And now we end with a beautiful reminder or call to ourselves, just as we began, with a reference to YHVH in the third person. "Let only that which is life giving and loving kindness pursue me." Help me remember to stay in a place of empathy and compassion all of the days of my life. I know I will doubt again in the possibility of transformation. I know there will be losses and setbacks and my faith and belief will be challenged; when this happens, let only that which serves life and loving kindness pursue me. If I can just remember this, I shall certainly dwell in the house of YHVH (in the belief of the loving transformative power of the universe) for many long years. This shift to the third person is a reminder of our fragile connection with faith and hope and a call to ourselves to trust even when we lose that faith and hope, as well as an expression of yearning for something larger than ourselves, some energy in which we can dwell and to which we can return again and again for protection and nurturance when we need it most.

I hope that this psalm provides a way for people to connect with God, YHVH, the loving energy of the universe, in times of challenge and despair, when going into the fire. And to instill hope, deepen faith, and provide inspiration and comfort to move them forward and keep them on the journey knowing they are encircled by love along the path to justice. This energy is a part of each one of us and when we join together with one another, we can move mountains. ■

Culture

A Journey to Armenia: Visual Reminders of Genocide and Oppression

BY PAUL VON BLUM

After many decades of teaching and speaking about the Armenian Genocide, I was invited in March 2016 to give a series of presentations in Armenia. I spoke about the Genocide, the Holocaust, and about American racism, sexism, and homophobia at seven universities and in various public venues in Yerevan and Gyumri. One of my objectives was to link the Armenian tragedy to a broader historical and global context, not to diminish the tragedy of the millions of Armenians who lost relatives, but rather to highlight the deeper pattern of oppression that will, among other things, advance the long overdue international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. I found my audiences extremely receptive to this perspective and appreciative of my passionate opposition to all forms of racism and historical falsehoods, including the continuing Turkish denial about the first genocide of the twentieth century.

In many of my presentations, I used visual artworks to illustrate my major points, including examples from Armenian American artists, artists from Nazi concentration and extermination camps, and American social and political artists, including prominent African Americans. These visual examples also resonated with university students and public audiences, most of whom had never seen any of these works even in reproductions in art magazines or books. These images dramatically revealed the human dimensions of historical and contemporary oppression against Armenian, Jewish, Roma, and African American populations.

In Armenia, I also had ample opportunity to see many visual examples of protest and resistance artworks. The year 2015 was the 100th centennial of the genocide and was commemorated throughout the world. Probably the most visible and regularly visited monument in the country is situated at the Armenian Genocide Museum in the capital city of Yerevan. Visiting that institution is a compelling and heartbreaking experience, emotionally comparable to my earlier visits to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the House of Slaves on Gorée Island off the coast of Dakar, Senegal, and the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, Czech Republic. The Genocide Museum, like its counterparts throughout the world, contains historical timelines, documents, photographs, and other reminders of the horrific events that began in 1915, resulting in the murders of approximately one and a half million Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman authorities.

At the Museum site is the national memorial complex, Armenia's official monument dedicated to the Genocide's victims. Every year on April 24, Remembrance Day, thousands of Armenians gather to pay homage to the victims while Armenians in the Diaspora and supporters also attend commemoration events and services. The monument (Figure 1) is 44 meters high and symbolizes the rebirth and survival of the Armenian people after their deadly dispersal. An eternal flame lies under the adjoining slabs that form a circle. These slabs are stars that represent the regions where Ottoman forces murdered Armenian women, children, and men from 1915 to 1917. The monuments, like its Holocaust counterparts throughout the world, draw both laypersons and dignitaries to pay homage to the memory of the fallen.

PAUL VON BLUM is Senior Lecturer in African American Studies and Communication Studies at UCLA, where he has taught since 1980. He taught at UC Berkeley for 11 years prior to coming to UCLA. He has received distinguished teaching awards at both campuses. He is a longtime civil rights and social activist and has published over 130 articles and nine books. His tenth, *Creative Souls: African American Artists in Greater Los Angeles*, will be out in late 2016.

They also encourage visitors to reinforce their commitments to remember the past and to work to ensure that genocides end in the twenty-first century.

Other public artworks reinforce that message. Throughout Yerevan, I saw billboards marking the centennial of the Genocide. The dominant image was the number 1915, the year that the Genocide began. But strategically placed between the "1" and the "5" is a conspicuous period, signifying the million and a half Armenians slaughtered, reinforced by the word "millions" itself. The billboard is a simple and effective visual reminder of the events of a century ago.

Another billboard in Yerevan, in English to appeal to international visitors, compares the Armenian Genocide with the Nazi Holocaust. By juxtaposing the years 1915 and 1939 and the visual symbols of Turkish and Nazi German "leadership," viewers are reminded of Adolf Hitler's statement justifying his invasion of Poland in 1939: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" There is no question that the infamous death marches of Armenians and the grotesque rapes and murders of women and even young children are fully comparable to Nazi atrocities. This billboard focuses viewers' attention on the two of the most horrific twentieth century genocides and encourages thought about all the horrific genocides that followed the end of World War II: Indonesia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Darfur as well as other mass murders throughout the world that have despoiled post-World War II history.

In some of my Armenian presentations, I used examples of Armenian American artworks, which were new to my audiences. Not surprisingly, many artists of Armenian heritage find it compelling to use their talents to comment on the horrific events of a century ago. This is similar to Jewish American artists who produce artwork on the Holocaust and African American artists who focus on slavery and racism.

One of the artists I highlighted in Yerevan is Zareh Meguerditchian from Glendale, California. As a young man, he recalls hearing about his grandfather who was shot in the head and thrown in a pit with other Armenians during the Genocide. He remained there for three days until he escaped. This story is all too familiar in Armenian Genocide survivor memoirs.

One of Meguerditchian's most dramatic works is "Turkish Soup," a gripping three-dimensional piece that combines imagery and text to provide a biting condemnation of Turkish mass murder. The top of the installation features a skeleton that symbolizes the million and a half Armenians slaughtered in the Genocide, clearly stated directly below the skeletal figure. The largest text makes the artist's position clear. By announcing that "Turkish Soup is made with Armenian Bones," he highlights the deep moral flaw of modern Turkey as long as it continues to deny the genocide domestically and internationally. At the lower right of the artwork is the name "Pasha," identifying Mehmet Talaat Pasha, one of the "Young Turks" who was one of the principal architects of the Armenian Genocide.

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Figure 1

"Turkish Soup" is mounted on a cart so that Meguerditchian can bring it easily to many venues, including public spaces, to increase its viewership. The work is entirely unsubtle, in the manner of thousands of political artworks over the centuries. Critics who demand nuance and decry bluntness in art should be reminded that there was nothing nuanced or subtle about the mass murder, torture, and rape of Armenians a hundred years ago. Likewise, as I suggested in my Armenian presentations, there is little subtlety about racism, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism that motivates artists to express strong visions about these and other social and historical evils.

Another Armenian American artist I showed in Yerevan, Robert Barsamian, has also drawn on his heritage as the son and grandson of survivors to comment on the Armenian Genocide in his visual work. Based in Dallas, he has exhibited widely throughout his career. His Armenian Genocide works, among other themes, chronicle the journey of his mother, her parents, and her great grandmother as they escaped to America. The artist's Genocide works both address the atrocities of that horrific era and focus audience attention on the humanity of the victims and survivors.

His three-dimensional installations comprise drawings, paintings, and lighting and reveal a deeply personal perspective on this historical tragedy. "The Promise" (Figure 2), a detail from his installation "Ashfall," depicts two solitary figures behind lace and framed by twigs. The focus on two people is profoundly significant. Throughout my long teaching career, I have regularly informed students that a million and a half Armenians perished during the Genocide. But this number, like the six million Jews murdered during the Nazi Holocaust, is a remote abstraction. Such huge figures are seemingly devoid of real human drama, especially as these tragedies recede into history.

Barsamian's artwork returns audiences to the flesh and blood reality. The finest art engages an emotional understanding of the human consequences of political and social injustice. Like Arshile Gorky's iconic "The Artist and His Mother," Barsamian's work conveys a depth of emotion that transcends the coldness of many narrative historical accounts. By encouraging viewers to see the faces of real people — real survivors — they can understand the genocide more deeply and comprehensively.

Another key Armenian Genocide visual source comes from the poster group ArmenianGenocidePosters.org. It sponsors an international competition that has produced many outstanding posters that leave powerful impressions on viewers' consciousness. Their posters are not directed against the Turkish people, but rather are historical correctives that contribute to genocide education throughout the world. By emphasizing remembrance, the artists contributing to this exemplary project encourage audiences to assume active roles in the continuing struggle to learn more accurate history to empower themselves as active public citizens.

Of the many posters I showed to my Armenian audiences, "Ottoman Empire History" by Yervant Herian (Figure 3) appeared to evoke the strongest reactions. This design incorporates the white crescent and star of the Turkish flag, derived from the former Ottoman flag. They are superimposed over a series of history volumes from 1914 to 1919 — with the glaring exception of 1915. Few viewers can miss the dramatic symbolism of this composition: Turkey's continuing denial of the Genocide renders the historical record inadequate, incomplete, and false.

The artist underscores the poster's message with the two details at the bottom. The first is textual: Complete The Ottoman Empire History. Recognize The Armenian Genocide of 1915. The second is photographic: a heartbreaking image of starving and dying Armenian victims from that era, a visual reinforcement of the human tragedy that is exacerbated by the refusal of the current Turkish government to acknowledge its historical responsibility.

During my Armenian speaking tour, I gave several presentations on American social and political art, a topic that has occupied my teaching and research attention for over 40 years. Most of these talks were in university settings and I used examples from such iconic figures as Jacob Riis, Reginald Marsh, Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange, Leon Golub, George Tooker, Barbara Kruger, Elizabeth Catlett, and many

Wikimedia Commons

Figure 2

Art by Robert Barsamian

others. Audiences were generally pleased with these efforts because most of these artists were new to Armenian students.

In several venues, I also showed the powerful sculpture "Gay Liberation" by George Segal. Now located in New York's Christopher Park across the street from the Stonewall Inn, the powerful artwork honors the gay rights movement and commemorates the 1969 Stonewall riots that catalyzed the continuing struggle for LGBT rights. Most of my student audiences responded to this work with dignity, even if they were disturbed by its unambiguous pro-gay message.

In Gyumri, however, a few students loudly objected when I showed the Segal slide. They vigorously proclaimed their Christian beliefs and condemned homosexuality. I used this as an opportunity to generate substantial class discussion, while presenting my own vigorous defense of gay rights as human rights. I argued that a population that had suffered genocide had a special obligation to be sensitive to all groups experiencing persecution and oppression. I noted my personal experience as a second-generation Holocaust survivor as the foundation for my long civil rights activism. Subsequent evaluations from the U.S. Embassy in Armenia, the sponsor of that presentation, concluded that the educational impact of the event was excellent.

Of my numerous speaking engagements in Armenia, perhaps the most emotionally engaging was my talk at Pink Armenia. That Non-Governmental Organization (Public Information and Need for Knowledge) is the only LBGT organization in Armenia. Founded in 2007, Pink Armenia seeks to increase public awareness about the rights of the LBGT minority in the country. It offers numerous services, including sexual health, legal and psychological assistance, and informational resources. Above all, it provides a safe space for women and men who must live in a homophobic society where insults, discrimination, and even physical assaults are common occurrences. When I went to the Pink Armenia headquarters in Yerevan, I was distressed to find that it was located behind locked metal gates in the rear of a building. During my visit, I spoke to people who had been assaulted and who told me of egregious acts of hostility on the streets of Yerevan and elsewhere in Armenia.

Pink Armenia is not an artistic organization, but it disseminates various documents that have an engaging visual appeal and that advance a progressive vision of LBGT dignity and equality. The organization sponsors an annual "Day of Silence" in order to eliminate and prevent bullying and humiliation in educational institutions in the country. As in the

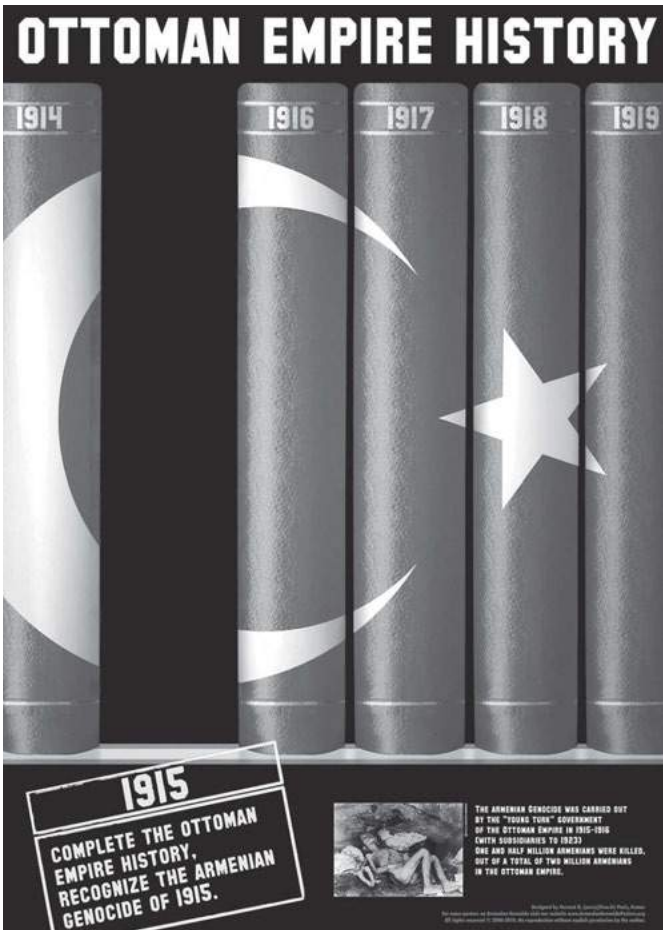

Figure 3

United States and throughout the world, bullying represents a severe emotional and physical threat to children, teenagers, and young adults.

On the 2012 Day of Silence, Pink Armenia issued a postcard that highlighted the human significance of this widespread human rights abuse. It shows eight young people, victims of bullying and harassment in Armenian schools and universities. But their silence is finished. In both Armenian and English, the postcard proclaims, "I am erasing my mask of silence." The figure in the front of the composition uses a hand gesture to end the silence that signifies the (understandable) fear that victims feel when they encounter classmates who demean or attack them because they are different.

Eliminating the silence is a necessary first step. The other figures in the picture look apprehensive, but the leadership of one or a few can empower others to be silent no longer and fight back against their tormentors. Collectively, abuse victims can join groups like Pink Armenia and mount systematic media and political campaigns to respond to this crisis. In a nation where millions still suffer the emotional consequences of genocide denial, such appeals should have receptive audiences even though the longer struggle against homophobia remains challenging.

In 2014, Pink Armenia sponsored a photo contest that attracted several engaging entries. The winning photo (Figure 4), by "Peghq," ("Peghq" was created by Arno Hovhannisyan and Samson Martirosyan) depicts three couples holding hands. Subtler than many other artworks, these couples are clearly affectionate, but their sexual orientation is not entirely obvious, a point reinforced by the absence of faces in the photograph. Viewers must look closely and even then they cannot be entirely certain about the gender of each person in the image. That is the central point: human love is to be valued and cherished, regardless of the gender of the persons involved in whatever relationships they create with one another. Whether intentionally or not, the photographer distorts audiences' perceptions about gender and sexual orientation. The work challenges conventional attitudes and invites viewers to reflect and possibly modify their stereotypical assumptions.

My experiences in Armenia have reinforced some of my values that are fundamental to my personal identity and professional role as a teacher and writer. Above all, humane people and civilized nations throughout the world should vigorously confront the continuing Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide. Turkey's active campaigns against recognition and its overt lies and distortions in its educational and media institutions should be resisted and condemned. It should follow the German example and fully acknowledge the tragic flaws of its history and bring legitimate historical justice to the Armenian people in Armenia and in the Diaspora.

More than a century after the Armenian Genocide, moreover, the world is now confronting a refugee crisis of comparable gravity. Since the start of the Syrian civil war, millions of displaced Syrians have sought refuge throughout the world, seeking refuge in Turkey (despite its recent political turmoil), Lebanon, Jordan, and in various European nations. Images of bedraggled men, women, and children have pervaded the media; and some pictures of starving and dead infants and young children have become poignant symbols of early 21st century human suffering and horror. They are eerily reminiscent of the Armenian refugees on their death marches, illustrated photographically in the Genocide Museum in Yerevan.

Some European countries like Germany have demonstrated strong humanitarian commitments by providing asylum for many thousands of these displaced persons. But their presence has also generated a frightening xenophobic backlash, from nationalistic governments like Hungary and Poland, and protests from resurgent right wing and neo-Nazi groups throughout Europe and increasingly in the United States.

People of goodwill should resist these tendencies. The arts can play a crucial role in mobilizing humane and effective opposition to xenophobia, racism, and homophobia. The future of humanity for the rest of the century is truly at stake. ■

Left: Designer: Yervant Herian Project: Armenian Genocide of 1915 in Contemporary Graphic and Art Posters | Facing page: Art by Peghq (Arno Hovhannisyan and Samson Martirosyan)

Figure 4

BOOKS

Is Everything in God's Image?

KABBALAH AND ECOLOGY: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World.

by David M. Seidenberg

Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015.

REVIEW BY ARTHUR GREEN

I HAVE TO BEGIN with a confession. Theologizing about the environment in 2016 does feel more than a bit like the proverbial rearranging of deck chairs on the Titanic. It is but small comfort to me that I am not a novice at this effort, suddenly discovering that we religious folk had better have something to say about the most urgent global issue of our times. I have been thinking and writing about these issues over three or four decades, and pride myself to think that I might have had a milligram or two's weight of influence on the level of concern about them in our Jewish community. But we, like the rest of humanity, have been preoccupied with issues that seemed more pressing or immediate, allowing awareness of the impending environmental disaster to be pushed to the outer edges of our consciousness. Even those of us who know how serious and urgent the matter is sometimes find it simply too big and daunting a challenge to face. Better to concentrate on smaller and more solvable issues, like Middle East peace or the future of American democracy.

Ashamnu, bagadnu. "We are guilty, we have betrayed" the truth we know all too well, and that responsible scientists confirm regularly. By sometime in the next century, partly due to the gross irresponsibility of our generations, major human population centers along our seacoasts will be devastated by rising oceans. The extinction of species familiar to us from throughout human history will increase at a rapid pace. Societies will be ravaged by wars over the basic resources of survival, including food and water.

We stand now at a crossroad of prevention and adjustment. We are too late to avoid catastrophe altogether, but large-scale changes in human attitude and behavior can do something to postpone and mitigate its impact. Meanwhile, there is much we need to do in order to prepare our descendants for the changes that will come upon us. We must help them to find within our legacy of civilization the moral strength to cope with life in an era of far less comfort and complacency than anything we denizens of the first world ever would have imagined to be our children's lot.

Both of these tasks have everything to do with religion, a far greater force in human affairs than anyone would have dreamed would be the case half a century ago. At the core of our problem stand the mythic structures that underlie the way we understand our existence on this planet. What does it mean to be a human being, living for this instant of evolutionary time,

Illustration by Hanna Barczyk

passing on our genes (cultural as well as biological), and then fading into memory? What is our role on this planet, this surprisingly verdant splinter of rock spinning its way through space for so much longer than we have existed on its surface? Clearly we have evolved from species that came before us; we bear memory of that evolution within our DNA. Of course we are a part of the natural world and subject to its ways. But does human awareness of the broad sweep of planetary history, increased tremendously in the course of recent centuries, make us somehow different than all other creatures? Is there a human responsibility that comes out of a sense of human uniqueness, or only a license for rampant destruction? Does awareness, including awareness of our own destructive powers, lead us to, even demand of us, a sense of responsible stewardship over the natural order? Or is stewardship itself an outdated concept, betokening a kind of biospheric colonialism that belongs to another age? Where, then, do we stand?

All of these are core religious questions. If we are to equip ourselves in any serious way for adjusting to this new era, we need to turn inward to retool the myths by which we live, to ask again what sort of creature we are (and does that very word imply Creation?), what this long evolutionary journey has meant, and what it means to be alive in these generations when the very existence of a future — human and far beyond — is in question. What wisdom might our respective traditions, both separately and taken together, have to offer us for this unique era? What resources might we find in those esoteric teachings that modernity had so vapidly cast aside, thinking them too primitive or medieval to be of interest is a time of supposed scientific enlightenment?

Here and there, amid the din of indifference and avoidance, a few religious leaders are beginning to step up to these questions. On the public stage, Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama are most prominent among them. Some Western meditation teachers, inspired by a combination of Buddhism and Gaian neo-mythology, have begun to speak for the essential link between inner spiritual awareness and the need for radical environmental activism.

Meet David Mevorach Seidenberg. An independent Jewish scholar, living outside the academy and on the edges of the organized Jewish community (a perch I happily share with him), he has spent a couple of decades deeply immersed in the best of Jewish mystical sources, reading with a sharply critical eye, to try to discern within them a pathway toward such a new-age Jewish religious consciousness. The result is his hefty tome *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*, a work of remarkable scholarship and deep challenge to assumptions taken for granted across the spectrum of rabbis and Jewish theologians.

Through a myriad of complex literary, theological, and linguistic debates (and quite a few hundred learned footnotes) the book carries forth a single sustained argument: Seidenberg's claim that the "image of God" should apply, in one degree or another, not only to human beings, but to all the natural (or "created") world. To some, this might seem to be a far-fetched, indeed an almost offensive assertion. The phrase "image of God," which serves as the basis of all of Judaism's ethical teachings, derives from the Genesis account of the sixth day of Creation: "God said; Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness, and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the earth and all that creep upon it. And God made humans in His image; in the image of God did He create them, male and female He made them." (Gen. 1:27-28) The terms *tzelem* and *demut,* repeated a few more times in Genesis and occasionally later in the Bible, are never applied to any non-human creature. They are taken through much of Jewish literature, including many of the sources Seidenberg cites, as the basis for Judaism's claim for human uniqueness, a belief adopted throughout Christianity and Islam as well. Most famously, it is because humans are in the divine image, while animals are not, that Judaism and its sister/daughter traditions consider the random taking of a human life to be murder, a capital crime, while the slaughter of animals for food was, though perhaps grudgingly, permitted (Cf. Gen. 9:4-7; Ex. 20:13; Deut. 12:15-19).

Jewish theology of the late twentieth century was deeply influenced by religious existentialism and especially by Martin Buber's view of religion as belonging to the interpersonal realm, where God too was to be addressed in essentially personal terms. A. J. Heschel, J. B. Soloveitchik, Emmanuel Levinas, and Eugene Borowitz, to name some key figures across denominational lines, would all have agreed that this privileging of the human was essential to the Jewish worldview. Heschel in particular, with his insistence on the irreducibly personal nature of God as manifest in His loving concern for humans, especially the most downtrodden and needy among them, would have brooked no fudging of the line between humanity and the rest of Creation. His early volume of Yiddish poems, *Man: The Name of God*, in fact set the agenda for much of what motivated him later, both as a theologian and as an activist for human rights.

How then does Seidenberg have the audacity to make such a claim? He stands on multiple sets of shoulders, mine among them. Much broader and more important than mine, however, are those of such philosophical and mystical giants as Maimonides, (twelfth century), the Kabbalists Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi (fourteenth century) and Moses Cordovero (sixteenth century), and the early Hasidic masters Shneur Zalman of

Liadi and Zev Wolf of Zhitomir (eighteenth century). In each of them he finds passages that extend beyond the personal images of the deity, reaching toward a notion of God as universal soul to the world as body (an image, as he shows, that reaches back to Plato), to a structural parallel between God, the cosmos, and the human limbs, to a notion that *shekhinah* or divine presence embraces all of being, and a host of other metaphors and symbols. He takes all of these as indications of a half-hidden belief in an "image of God" that extends far beyond humanity. In close readings of one passage after another, he seeks to continually push open the doorway toward a Judaism that sees divinity reflected everywhere, each creature a new manifestation of God in yet another garb. All of them, so he claims, are "in God's image."

Seidenberg's project is incredibly impressive, both for its daring independence of thought and for the richness of its scholarship. On the latter score, one notices how very many of the sources within the Kabbalistic and Hasidic corpus he has discovered as well as how thoroughly he has read the scholarship in this field. His treatments of Maimonides, the seventeenth-century *Two Tablets of the Covenant,* the Hasidic *Or ha-Me'ir*, and the writings of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav are illuminating and interesting. He combines great respect for the sources with original usages and courageous and daring ways of putting things together.

Seidenberg credits my theology (in fact long ago expressed in an essay in *Tikkun,* "A Kabbalah for the Environmental Age") as a step on the way to his own views. I am especially touched that he opens the volume with an homage to my late and much-lamented student Seth Brody, who was an important mentor to him. Had Brody lived beyond his fortieth year, this is a book that he, scholar-theologian such as he was, might indeed have written. But Seidenberg takes the panentheistic viewpoint considerably farther than I, Brody, or others have until this point. Despite my rather abstract and panentheistic notion of the deity, I am still a Heschel student in the sense of being deeply drawn to the ethos of the second-century sage Simeon ben Azzai, who insisted that faith in humans as the image of God is the *klal gadol*, the most basic teaching in all of Torah. I take that claim so seriously, in fact, that I use it as a standard to judge other claims both inside and outside of Judaism. It is clear to me, for example, that the declaration that woman is acquired by her husband as property, the rubric of traditional Jewish marriage, violates my seeing her fully as the image of God. Hence I believe that formula must be changed. The Torah's statement that the homosexual's act

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of expressing his love for another is an abomination and a mortal crime has kept us for many generations from extending a full sense of humanity to that portion of the human race. It is on the basis of this *klal gadol*, most basic rule, that every human be fully recognized as God's image, that I insist that we find a way to reinterpret those verses in Leviticus. It is *inconceivable* to me, because of my faith in that *klal gadol*, that the Torah could demand this denial of the gay person's fullest expression of his life and his appreciation of his beloved as God's image. "Image of God" to me means a recognition of each person's essential humanity. It is the basis of the ethos that many Jews, even those who think they are distant from religion, have in fact inherited from our tradition. I am loathe to tamper with it.

I therefore find myself mightily resisting Seidenberg's tug. If everything is God's image, I hear myself saying, then perhaps nothing will be. Will the great moral claim of Judaism be watered down, I ask, if Seidenberg is allowed to make us Jews into Jains, theoretically as concerned with swatting a mosquito as we are with taking a human life? But then I recall that the same claims have been used against my own work. "If *shekhinah* is everywhere," they say, "might it turn out to be nowhere?" Of course this goes back to the debate about Spinoza. Is he "the God-intoxicated man" or did his equation of God and nature lead down the road toward the secularization of consciousness, as history seems to suggest was the case? I know well that the claim (which I share with Seidenberg) that all things exist within *shekhinah* can be well documented in the Hasidic sources. Indeed, it is these sources that have allowed me to find a place within the realm of Judaism. But the question of how absolutely to proclaim this truth is still a delicate one. To say that everything reflects the divine hand is easy, to say they are all embodiments of the divine presence goes a bit farther. To call them all the image of God once again moves the marker. Yes, Seidenberg does have some sense of varying degrees in this claim, but the whole thrust of his argument is a reading of the tradition that moves toward a claim that all of nature is God's image.

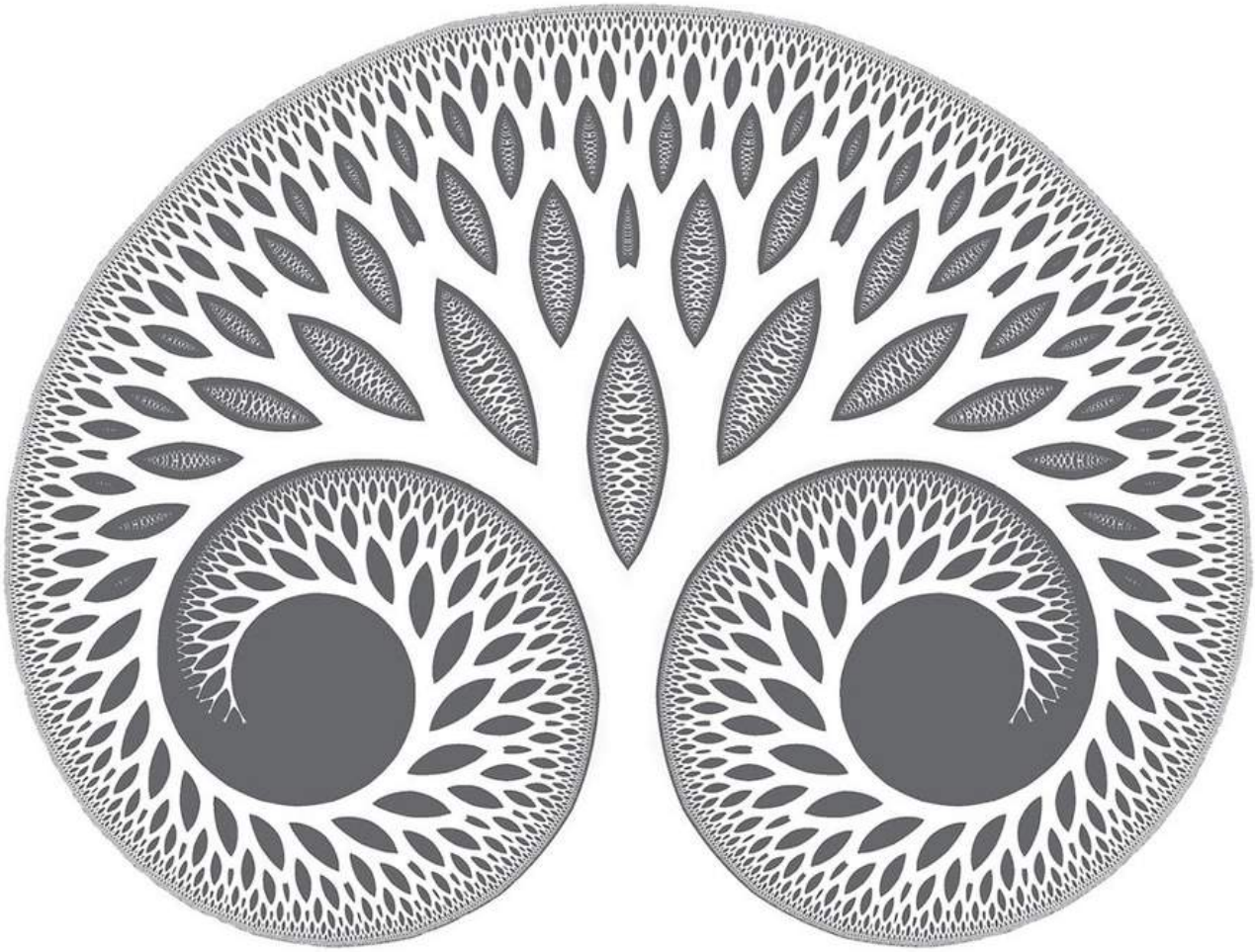
> **It is because humans are in the divine image, while animals are not, that Judaism and its sister/daughter traditions consider the random taking of a human life to be murder, a capital crime, while the slaughter of animals for food was, though perhaps grudgingly, permitted.**

I think I would have been happier with Seidenberg's work if he had issued it as a clarion call based on the needs of the hour, rather than as a scholarly tour-de-force trying to insist that this was the real if hidden meaning of the tradition all along (he claims that he is doing both of these, but much of the extensive effort of this book is devoted to the latter). I think I might be convinced, to return to the urgency with which we started, that our situation demands of us that we rethink the categories of our inherited tradition and take the radical step of now pronouncing that all living creatures are the image of God. He then might have marshalled Cordovero and all the rest to show me that such a new step is possible and not entirely without precedent. Instead, Seidenberg has let the scholar get the better of him, and argues through footnote after footnote that this is the correct way to read the traditional sources. In choosing to do so, he arouses the footnote-reader in me to disagree with him in just enough cases that I find myself ill at ease with his claim. There is too much marshalling of Hebrew terms and concepts (*qomah, nefesh*, etc.) that are quite distinct from the language of "image" as evidence that the wider vision that he seeks to offer has been the true meaning of tradition all along. But I very much recognize that this is not the point. I do feel the urgency of what he seeks to do, and I want to be open to it.

Perhaps we need to find another rubric that is a little less totalistic than "image of God." As an example, the tradition understands that non-Israelites as well as Jews stand in a covenantal relationship with God, as "Children on Noah." This covenant is being taken more seriously than ever these days, both by some Orthodox Jewish thinkers (ranging from Yitz Greenberg to Chabad) and by sympathetic Christians. Similarly, might we not find a powerful way of addressing God's presence throughout existence ("The power of the Maker within the made?" "The whole earth is filled with God's glory?") without undermining the insistence on human uniqueness, and therefore the ultimate valuing of each human life, expressed by "the image of God?" With minds as serious and brilliant as Seidenberg's on the case, I think we might. I understand he is currently preparing a more popular version of this book. I look forward to it and hope it will have a wide impact. ■

RABBI ARTHUR GREEN is the Irving Brudnick Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Religion and Rector of the Rabbinical School at Hebrew College.

DOI 10.1215/08879982-3769527



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Being Here Now: This Creation is the Divine Image

BY DAVID SEIDENBERG

Response to Arthur Green's Review of *KABBALAH AND ECOLOGY: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*.
Cambridge University Press, 2015

Art Green and I agree on so many important issues — not only on the environment, the rejection of religious triumphalism, and the embrace of human and ecological diversity, but also (and perhaps most importantly) on the role of theology in the ethical evolution of humanity. Yet I believe we disagree in some fundamental ways about how to do theology, specifically Jewish theology, and about what the best theology looks like. Green also understands my work very differently than I do. I never make a claim that all creatures are equally in God's image; on the contrary, if we follow the lead of the Kabbalists, all of being participates in God's image, but in different ways and to different degrees. This makes for an important and meaningful debate, and I hope *Tikkun's* readers will indulge me as I explore its various dimensions.

Green and I agree that the most pressing issue of our time — indeed the only issue that matters if as a species we are to have time left — is our relationship to this planet. But do we need more clarion calls? Jewish environmentalists, like environmentalists of all stripes, have been exhorting us for half a century. Will one more exhortation make the difference? I do not think so. When there are so many issues competing to be the most pressing one, sounding one more clarion can do little except reassure people who are already convinced that their issue is the right one.

Of course, many pages in *Kabbalah and Ecology*, especially in the introduction and conclusions, do sound a clarion call. (I encourage *Tikkun's* readers to go to kabbalahandecology.com and download the introduction in order to listen for themselves.) But such clarity and intensity of purpose is the reason for doing theology; it is not theology. Admonishments without deeper ethical transvaluation can only bring us so far along the path. What we need instead is a transformational theology, which requires us, as Hillel says,

to "go and study." Theology cannot just be about ethical assertion, nor can it be only a matter of making one's old religion line up with one's modern (or post-modern) values. Theology is about reading one's tradition coherently, accounting for all its moving parts — both the ones we agree with and the ones we do not — and learning from the way all those parts are interrelated.

This is exactly what Jewish eco-theology has yet to accomplish. We have mostly taken for granted that our Jewish values are correct, and that our personal values are also correct. It goes without saying that theology may realign a religious tradition in accordance with one's own values, but it should first and foremost bring insight to the tradition and uncover its inner dimensions. Moreover, what theology uncovers must have the power to correct the values one starts out with, so that we are changed by what we learn.

Our eco-theologies, however, have tended to be woven together with apologia explaining how environmentally sensitive Judaism already is, just as we would wish it to be. These apologia use such poor examples of Judaism's bona fides as *bal tashchit* (the Torah-rooted obligation not to waste) and stewardship. What is wrong with those by now old chestnuts? In a nutshell, in Jewish law, destroying something in a way that makes a monetary profit is not considered wasting. And stewardship teaches us the vastly incorrect lesson that we are somehow wise enough to become managers of the planet, when a fundamental root of the crisis is our very human arrogance. In the same way, declaring along with Green and Isaiah that "the whole earth is filled with God's glory," which Jews have already been doing for two-plus millennia, is probably not going to change much. The best translation for this verse, by the way, is "the fullness of the whole Earth is God's glory" (which is also a much stronger statement on behalf of the Earth).

Doing better theology is important for more than its own sake. The problem we face, as Green so rightly notes, is not just pollution, or climate change, or the exponentially increasing rate of extinctions, and the solution is not just technological or political. Fundamentally, we need to understand who we are, and how and why we are in relation to the more-than-human world, in new ways. Moreover, the spiritual solutions we come up with must be useful to us both now, when we might still change what happens, and later, if the worst of the climate crisis and the predicted wave of extinctions unfolds. As I wrote in *Kabbalah and Ecology*:

> [W]hen we have to confront a world in which beauty has been driven from our presence, in which Spirit will seem to have abandoned us . . . humanity will also face the twin spiritual challenges of mourning for what has been lost and of sustaining compassion for each other and all Life. (p. 344)

To do all this, we need to draw on deep spiritual resources, rooted in a more textured and in-depth theology.

The central theological problem that occults and distorts our ability to meet these challenges is anthropocentrism, the idea that humanity is the center and purpose of Creation. Nowhere in the Jewish tradition is this problem more evident than in the idea of the image of God. Because we see ourselves as being created in God's image, "*b'tzelem*," we make God in the image of humanity, separating both God and humanity from Nature. However,

> [t]he idea that humanity stands apart from Nature, and that the more-than-human world exists to serve our needs in whatever we desire, is as untenable as it is demeaning to "what the Creator has wrought". (p. 6) [Furthermore,] if we understand humans to be the only creatures in God's image, then we isolate those qualities that set human beings apart . . . repressing those aspects of our own being that unite us with all life. (p. 32)

Focusing only on humanity's uniqueness, we also lose sight of "the diversity inhering in what we call God," which is an aspect of God's infinitude. (p. 34) But, as Green would heartily agree, divinity is vaster than anything we can be or represent. Thus, a strongly anthropocentric understanding of God's image alienates us not only from the abundance and blessing of the natural world, but also from our own nature and from divinity itself. This would be the case even if we were not facing an environmental crisis of world-shifting proportions.

Of course, it would be wrong to deny that anthropocentrism is a major theme in Jewish thought, but it was medieval radicals like Saadiah Gaon who distorted the tradition to say that this was the truth of our religion. Surely, one could point out, the Talmud teaches that everyone must say *bishvili nivra ha'olam*, "the world was created for my sake." But that is one voice, which is tempered in typical rabbinic fashion with contradictory voices, both in our ancient texts, and in more recent voices, like the voice of Rebbe Nachman, who says, "If the world was created for my sake, I better pray for the whole world." Or the voice of Simcha Bunim, who said that a person should have in one pocket the saying, "The world was created for my sake" and in the other, "I am nothing but dirt and ashes." Or the voice of Yosef (Joseph) Ashkenazi, who in the thirteenth century wrote that when the midrash puts human beings at the center, it is because we include within us and stand for all the creatures of the universe, who are altogether called "Adam." Or the voice of Maimonides, who says that anthropocentrism is fundamentally a mistake that distorts our view not only of God, but of evil, of the nature of the living universe, and of our ethical obligations to other species. In fact, the *p'shat* or original meaning of *bishvili* may be that each person is as unique as a whole species — with the concomitant

implication that each species also has ultimate moral significance. (p. 117)

I am piling on these examples to make a point: though it may be a real and valid perspective to see ourselves at the center, it is not the whole truth of the matter, nor the truth of Judaism, but a facet of a larger truth that includes opposing perspectives. That kind of conjunction of opposing ideas is in fact a common pattern of rabbinic thought, what Max Kadushin called "organic thinking."

How then does Judaism need to transform in order to be more at home upon the Earth, and at home with biocentrism, the idea that all Life and all species are of ultimate value? One way is to arrive at a more complex view of the image of God and of the Jewish tradition. Can biocentrism become a lens to sharpen our sight so that we can achieve this? Can we transform Judaism in a way that is deeply respectful of the trajectory of the tradition and the path it has taken — all the way from Sinai? In what ways do our modern interpretations of Judaism need to be displaced, so that we can hear the biocentric tendencies already woven within the tradition? These are all questions that require vaster resources than what we can learn from our opinions or our politics, from science, or from our modernist or humanist values.

Here are some insights that illustrate what I mean. In *Kabbalah and Ecology*, I demonstrate that not a few Jewish thinkers saw the universe as the greatest image of God, and human beings as an image of that greatness. I demonstrate that some Chasidic rebbes used the term *qomah shleymah* (meaning "a complete body") to indicate that Creation itself was God's image, while the Baal Shem Tov used the same term to refer to levels of God's image within the more-than-human world, even if some of those levels were attenuated compared to the image of God in each human being. I demonstrate that Kabbalah almost universally saw fruit trees, rainbows, and certain other natural phenomena as images of God. Though radical-seeming, there is nothing "Jainist" about these conclusions. Here's the ringer: they are scholarly conclusions, and even someone who has no interest in ecology or the environment can agree that the texts say this.

I believe that this kind of theological progress can move the dial. What has also moved the dial, in a practical way, is the gathering of Spirit in the renewal of Judaism with song and davening, with connection to the land and to our bodies, through many different paths, whether they be farming, Zionism, wilderness, dance, etc. Even though Green describes this realm that we both have a hand in evolving as "the edges of the organized Jewish community," what we are really talking about are the growing edges, growing into what is no longer marginalized but rather becoming more and more embraced by the organized Jewish world. In fact, where I live in Northampton, Massachusetts, environmentally-conscious Judaism is both the norm and backbone of much of our synagogue life, and I am grateful to be very much within the center of that community.

So even though we live in a scary time, we also live in a special time, when the radical depths of the tradition are opening up to us, even as we reforge our tradition. Green's discomfort with some of those depths stems from his ethical anxieties, rather than from a better reading of the texts that I lift up in *Kabbalah and Ecology*. But I do not mean to make light of those anxieties. They ought to be taken very seriously. I only begin to address them in *Kabbalah and Ecology*:

> [C]ould expanding God's image to the more-than-human world and removing humanity from its pedestal have the unintended effect of trivializing human life? If we do so consciously, I think not. When we come to expand *tzelem's* reach, its original meaning is also intensified. Imagine, or remember, the awe you feel standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, or descending into a forest, or witnessing an extraordinary storm or sunset. What would it be like to look at another person and feel that kind of awe? Imagine regarding a bus driver or a stranger who sits down beside you, or even an enemy, with those eyes. Imagine or remember what it is like to see a lover or a child with those eyes. (p. 313)

As the reader may already understand, theology is not enough — praxis, conscious practice of meaning and value in our real relationships, with people and with the more-than-human world, is needed. We also need to be conscious of what our theology does and how it can be used or misused. Green's concerns are important, because the value of each unique human life is a central teaching of Judaism, a teaching our world needs. For this, I appreciate that theologians like Art Green, who share a love of the Earth, are also watching with a wary eye. As we move forward into a new world and not just a new interpretation of Judaism, we need to be bold in our questioning, resolute in our vision, and conserving, in the best sense, of our tradition's wisdom. ■

RABBI DAVID SEIDENBERG is the creator of neohasid.org and the author of *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World* from Cambridge University Press. The paperback version of the book is also available for $32.99. Purchase using discount code KEDMS14. For more info, go to: kabbalahandecology.com.

DOI 10.1215/08879982-3769539

Illustration by Olivia Wise

The Blessings of Metonymy

The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai
Ed. Robert Alter
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015

REVIEW BY RODGER KAMENETZ

WHAT MAKES POETS great to begin with is a living presence we feel in their words, the way we can "read" the body and the voice of the poet. That is why it is so hard to believe it is now fifteen years since the death of Israel's greatest poet, Yehuda Amichai. His adopted Hebrew name Amichai — he was born in Germany in 1924 as Ludwig Pfeuffer — which means "my people live." This name he made for himself also became prophetic because through his poetry his people surely live. Working with and helping to mold the freshly born language of modern Hebrew, he gave poetic voice to a "new-old" nation. For Israelis, he spoke as a national poet, but his work took on a life beyond that.

Rare are the poets whose vitality crosses over from one language to another, as Amichai's did, from Hebrew to English. There are many reasons for this successful migration. But for those of us in the diaspora, most basic was our own need to receive him. If Walt Whitman was right that great poets need great audiences, that quality of need for a Jewish voice like Yehuda Amichai's remains palpable. It is a longing. This is why this new and generous collection seems so welcome.

Robert Alter, the scholar of Hebrew literature, translator, and editor of this collection, is right to say in his introduction that the poet's huge success in English may have created an oversimplified image of his work. Alter takes pains to explore some of the inevitable mistakes made over the years. He points to a rendering of Amichai's "*shatnez*" as "linsey-woolsey" — as if the earthy Israeli were suddenly a New England Puritan (I can almost forgive this lapse because it made me laugh out loud). The most delicate things of a culture just can't be brought over — but

one can be extremely grateful for how much Alter and the other esteemed translators, among them Stephen Mitchell and Chana Bloch — were able to recover for us.

Yet Yehuda Amichai himself, who with Ted Hughes translated some of these works, counseled us not to "get excited, for a translation/ must not get excited." "Quietly let us pass down/ words from one to another, one tongue to other lips/ unawares."

The fact is, errors or not, his words were passed down in an intimate way. Almost alone among Israeli poets of his generation, Amichai made a tremendous impact in English. The reasons for this success have much to do with qualities that make his poetry not only explicitly Jewish in content, but intrinsically Jewish in method.

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An obvious source of his universal appeal is Amichai's frequent resort to Biblical material — often for ironic purposes. In this he captures the sensibility of a modern Jewish consciousness that cannot quite forget its past. It would be imprecise to say that Amichai makes Biblical allusions. That implies there was ever any separation between him and the Tanakh or the *siddur* which there was not. Rather the Tanakh and the *siddur* and Jewish culture in general were in his blood and breath. For him Judaism was not an *-ism*, it was a force in his nervous system, something electric and familiar and immediate that could be brought to bear at any point of time. It would have been unnatural for him to allude to what was already at hand.

We can see the fusion of Biblical overtone and erotic presence in "Jacob and the Angel" (translated by Robert Alter), which centers as so many of his poems do, on the intensity of romantic encounter.

> Toward morning she sighed and grabbed him
> so, and defeated him
> And he grabbed her so, and defeated her.
> The two of them knew that the hold brings death.

The Biblical story of Jacob's wrestling with an angel suffuses the poem. The "hold" is a lover's embrace — a last early morning embrace after an active night of love — and yet it is also the hold of the angel on Jacob's thigh at dawn and the hold of Jacob on the angel — the hold that brings injury, but also may be a blessing. In Genesis, the angel asks Jacob's name but will not tell him his own name. Likewise, in the poem the partners have agreed not to share their names; but then this pact is broken:

> After they called her suddenly from above
> twice,
> As one calls a little girl from her game in the yard.
> And he knew her name and he let her go.

Yehuda Amichai's poems, with their seemingly simple surfaces, also engage us in a mystery of depth: of how earthy love is an opening to soul, how

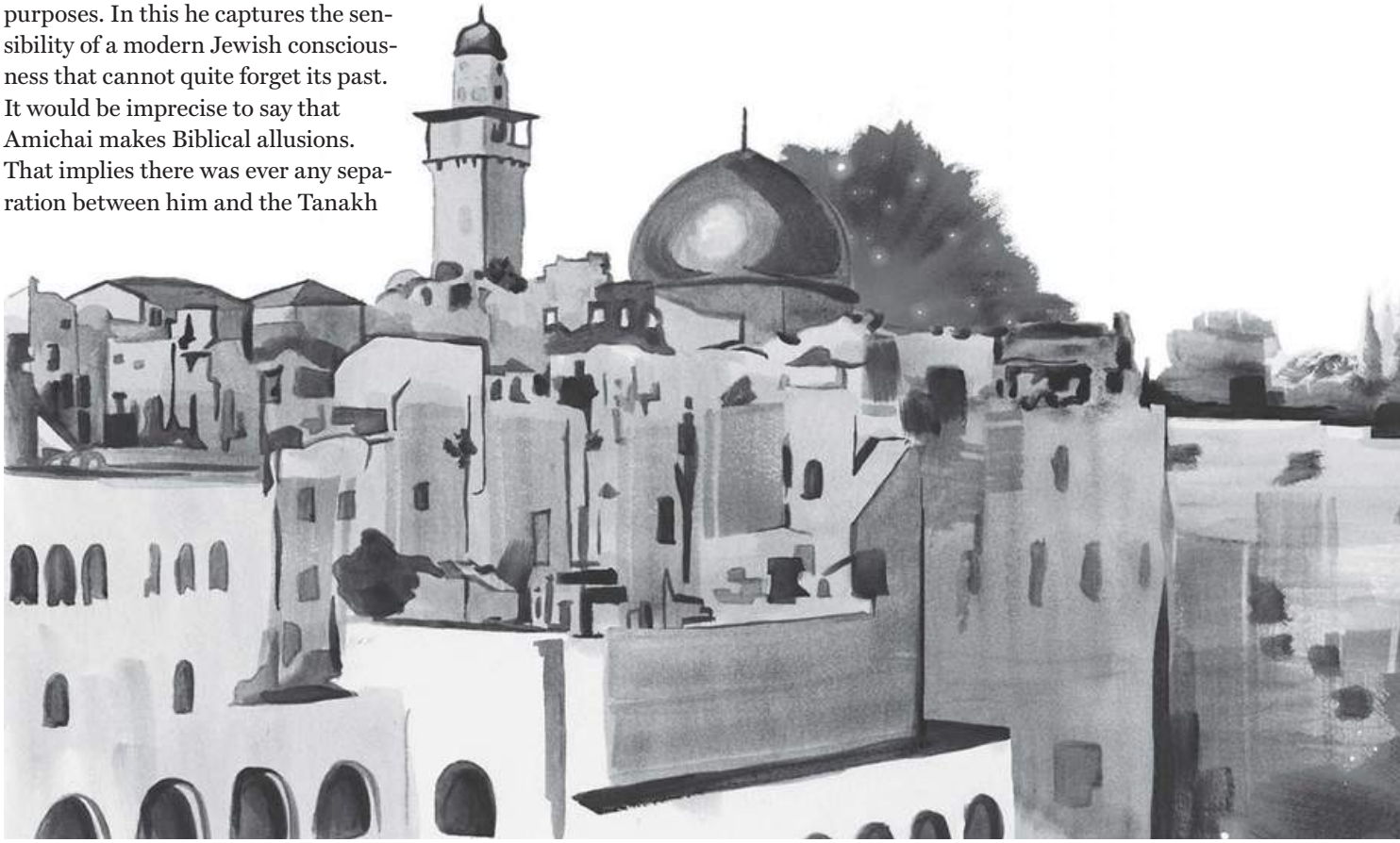

Illustration by Olivia Wise

the need of the body can also be a door to the holy. In this poem, we see how a woman, or a man, could become a part-time angel, and still be a person.

That depth can even touch down to the mystical Jewish theology that teaches that the divine presence, the Shekhinah went into exile with the Jewish people, that the Shekhinah lies in the dust of exile. The divine presence is no longer to be found exclusively in the holy Temple, but in every place and every moment. This comes across, in "Lying in Wait for Happiness," with the force of a sacred encounter:

> On the broad steps leading down to the Western Wall
> A beautiful woman came up to me: You don't remember me,
> I'm Shoshana in Hebrew. Something else in other languages . . .

Given that he meets "Shoshana in Hebrew" at the Western Wall, the "something else in other languages" acquires an archetypal resonance. A midrash states the Shekhinah, or divine presence, "never moved from the Western Wall" and this is repeated in the Zohar. Amichai keeps the encounter embodied, and makes no direct reference to these mystical ideas — yet the poem remains open to such languages, for there is a spiritual intensity in the questions he asks "Shoshana:"

> What are you doing here between the promised and the forgotten,
> Between the hoped for and the imagined?
> What are you doing here lying in wait for happiness
> With your lovely face a tourist advertisement from God
> and your soul rent and torn like mine?

> She answered me: My soul is rent and torn like yours
> But it is beautiful because of that
> Like fine lace.

To discover the deepest meaning of exile from a moment's encounter was the work Yehuda Amichai did for us again and again in his long career as a poet. In a time of alienation, he showed us a pathway out of the dusty materialism of mere facts into the sacred.

I can see the logic of those who see his work as strictly secular. He certainly had no patience with the norms of piety. When I hung out with him in Jerusalem in the summer of 1986 he described to me with glee his notion that oil would be discovered under that same Western Wall where he met "Shoshana" — so that all the theocratic politicians would have to choose between money and religion. When I told him I was going to a *kabbalah* class in the Old City he scoffed that *kabbalah* was just "bad poetry."

Nonetheless, his poems always from start to finish are in deep and profound conversation not only with Hebrew text, but with the essence of Jewish spirituality, which is finding the blessing in the particular, the transcendence in the everyday.

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I knew him just a little bit — I met him first in an airport in Baton Rouge where I had the beautiful duty of hosting him for a reading. His face was lined and worn, but he was light and almost silly. He insisted he had flown through Pepsi Cola and I couldn't convince him it was Pensacola. It was in 1985, a very difficult time in my life. I had recently lost a son. Yehuda came out of the air like a father on to the unlikely ground of Louisiana and though I don't remember speaking of those matters much, we agreed I would see him that next summer when my family and I would be living in Jerusalem. It was an act of generous consolation.

Yehuda had been asked by the Israeli government to make speeches when invited by local Jewish federations. I don't think he was really comfortable in that role but he did his duty. He told me he was a Labor party man. Nine years later he was asked by Rabin to read poetry at Oslo on the occasion of the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize. Those days are gone — those old hopes of peace are almost gone — but Yehuda Amichai's poetry was designed to survive political machinations and *mishegas*, fake piety, and murderous religiosity. He built the brokenness into the poetry.

In the last poem in this collection, "A Jewish Time Bomb," he speaks of a rock on his desk. It is a fragment from a Jewish cemetery with one word carved on it, amen. And "Amen" comes in answer to the terrible brokenness of life, to the binaries he lived of love and of war, and those emotional polarities he speaks of in another poem as "the precision of pain and the blurriness of joy." At the same time, his poetry comes to blur for a time the pain and to make more precise the joy. Amen to that.

Yet the blessing is not easy. The "Jewish time bomb" is full of broken pieces, and the broken pieces become "the touchstone no one touches, more philosophical /than any philosopher's stone ... more whole than any wholeness." It is a touchstone because, as in the Lurianic *kabbalah*, brokenness is one phase of a process that also leads to *tikkun*, to repair.

It's fitting that the last poem of this collection touches on "Amen" because Amichai's poetry, as secular as it surely is, also makes a powerful prayer, even if it is never entirely clear who, or if, the God is that Amichai implicitly addresses.

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I don't remember his political speech in Baton Rouge in 1985 but I do remember the reading. Yehuda was asked by a student that impossible question. "What is poetry?" Yehuda answered walking from the lectern. "It is like this, you are walking down the street — and then you start to stumble" — here, he play stumbled — "and you are about to lose your footing but you do a little dance to recover it" and then he did a little cartoon shuffle. "Poetry," he said, "is that little dance."

To see him dance like that was especially wonderful because his body was so solid. It was like a line in one of his earlier poems ("Autobiography in the Year 1952"), where a woman's body "is heavy/ And full of time." (p.7)

Yehuda Amichai was full of time. He fought in four wars: World War II, the war of Israeli Independence 1948-49, in 1956, and again in '73. He was not a man of war, but he knew war and its necessities; he was not a poet of war, but a poet of love interrupted by war, by the sorrow of parting and of never returning.

The poem he read at Oslo for Rabin — who was murdered a year later in the terrible war that is still going on between Jew and Jew and which we are all losing — was from his first book. It speaks of how God "takes pity on kindergarten children" but on grownups, the poet tells us, God has no pity left:

> Sometimes they have to crawl on
> all fours
> In the blazing sand,
> To get to the first-aid station
> Dripping blood.

One great power of his poetry arises from the very compact landscape of Jerusalem that is simultaneously heavenly and earthly. When he looks around that landscape, he can see the actual places where he fought and the actual places where he loved. In the same way that the heavenly and the earthly, the biblical past and his own present are interfused, so too are love and war.

While the juxtaposition of love and war is an ancient poetic theme, Amichai brings to it, the jarring particularities of one who has been in battle:

> People in the dark always see those
> In the light. This is an ancient truth,
> since the creation
> Of sun and night, people and darkness
> and electric light.
> A truth exploited by warriors
> For an easy kill in ambush . . .
> ("People in the Dark Always See")

The imminence of war and the intensity of love and how they crowd each other is something Amichai shared with all Israelis. His poems are rooted in what the rabbis of the midrash on Genesis call "the world of two," the dialectical world we live in since eating from the tree of good and evil. This is a world of divisions between male and female, sacred and profane, Jews and the other, the present and the past, and definitely, love and war.

Amichai crowds together the dichotomies in his work until they spark. This dynamism suggests the compressed pace of the Israeli history he lived, including the four wars he fought from World War II to 1973. He cannot think a thought without contemplating its opposite; he cannot consider the past without also bringing the poem up to the present. He cannot talk of a child without talking of a parent, or of love without thinking of war. A dynamic unfolding of oppositions governs his composition to a large degree — and this quality in his work of energetic juxtaposition is eminently translatable. It also has a profound emotional meaning. In Amichai's work, composition is a form of composure. And because the anxiety of Israeli life is so great, the need for composure for an Israeli poet is also great.

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Raised to Orthodoxy by parents who emigrated to Palestine from Germany, Amichai left the formalities of Jewish religion early on, but religion never left him. Instead it emigrated into his poetry and made his poetic practice intensely Jewish.

It is easy to see how the bulk of his work is Jewish in subject matter, deeply informed by Jewish texts, the Jewish calendar, and the landscape of Israel. Also, importantly, writing with real life-giving vulgarity, breaking away from any stiffness or formality, helped birth Hebrew into modernity as a poetic language.

The intrinsic Jewishness of his work is more subtle — the spiritual kinship between his poetic practice and Jewish practice.

To begin with, his poetry is a plea for the particular — in one poem he cries out that poets must give us "details." This parallels the rootedness of Jewish law in the everyday particulars of life. To be an observant Jew is also to observe what one eats, what one does, it is to live in details. To be an observant poet, likewise.

In this he's very much a modernist, he realizes William Carlos Williams' ideal of "no ideas but in things." But where in Williams somehow the details to often stay on the surface, Amichai's poetry always moves us through deep contemplation of particulars to metonymies. His poems parallel the practice of Jewish blessing, as taught to me by Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Man. A religious Jew is to strive to make a hundred blessings a day, so that each particular moment — seeing a beautiful person, eating a piece of bread, or drinking a glass of wine — has its own blessing, and thereby an act of perception can be elevated to its

highest power or plumbed to its greatest depth. In the same way Amichai elevates his "details," these moments of perception, into a poetic blessing.

The power of metonymy can be seen in *A Great Tranquility: Questions and Answers*, the title also of a 1980 collection (Amichai's poem follows a form similar to Whitman's "When I heard the learn'd astronomer"). Like Whitman, Amichai finds himself disenchanted with abstraction as people in a large auditorium "spoke about religion/in the life of contemporary man/ and about God's place in it." He just has to escape this lecturing tone:

> I opened an iron door marked
> "Emergency"
> and entered into
> a great tranquility: Questions
> and Answers

The door is not a symbol. It is an actual iron door — which is what makes this a moment of metonymy — an instance that speaks deeply to the whole.

He teaches us to see that in the simple events unfolding around us — opening an exit door — are possibilities of enormous depth. So his poetry is spiritual in an entirely grounded way. He is actively annoyed by talk about a God that is too abstract. God does not have a "place in the world" but as it is said, God is the place of the world. That too could be merely a pious or abstract statement. But the poet, doing his little dance, stumbles on the detail that opens a door into a great tranquility.

This focus on the possible depth of the particular is a way of looking at the world that rhetoric associates with the metonym. In conventional terms metonymy is the instance that deepens into a whole, as when one says, "the pen is mightier than the sword." But Amichai's constant recourse to metonymy goes much beyond that textbook explanation.

For me it is the figure where the specific moment becomes a sacred moment, and an object becomes a sacred object, not by force of metaphor but by depth of contemplation. Metonymy as my teacher, the mystical Jerusalemite Colette Aboulker-Muscat once told me, is "when the unique becomes the One."

Because this way of seeing metonymically was so innate and so much a part of who Amichai was — so natural — he fulfilled the deepest ideal of a Jewish return from exile — an ideal in which the natural landscape and occurrences in the local geography could be infused with the ever-evolving in a constant play and tension between the vulgar and the holy, "the hoped for and the imagined."

This interfusion presents a model for a grounded spirituality, cleansed of piety by desire.

Again and again in his poems he speaks of the "search for a new religion," or says, "This might be a new religion." What is the new religion he keeps speaking of? It is certainly not a return to synagogue or habitual piety. It is not Judaism or any other *-ism*.

I believe it is the practice of poetic perception itself, the deepening of details into metonymies, the lively alternation of opposites, all leading to a new world, a world between, where he can see "Sorrow and joy alternating/ like water and vapor and ice, sorrow and joy from the same substance."

In a late poem, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Why Jerusalem" he proclaims

"Why is Jerusalem, Yerushalayim, always two, the Heavenly and the Earthly

I want to live in an in-between Jerusalem . . ."

This is where his poetry lives, in the in-between. Detail by detail, metonymy by metonymy, his poetry builds the in-between Jerusalem.

The in-between is sensual, erotic, and given to depth of feeling. It is the missing dimension or world of religious experience that we hunger for, the mediation between the concrete material world and the lofty spiritual world — the mediation the kabbalists — those "bad poets" — called the world of *yetzirah* or formation. In the four worlds scheme of the Lurianic *kabbalah*, *yetzirah* is situated between the ground level experience of *assiyah* and the lofty ideas of *beriah*. It is said to be the realm of feeling, of metaphor, of dreams, and of angels. It is certainly the realm of poetry, and Yehuda Amichai both inhabited it and peopled it for us.

Emphasizing its meditating quality, Yehuda Amichai in several poems calls this dimension of experience he is always searching for, the place between.

> And what a wonderful between we
> made
> for each other between body and body.
> A between of eyes, between waking
> and sleep.
> A twilight between light, not day and
> not night.
> ("Between")

It is the place of possible relationship between man and woman, between love and war, between all the oppositions the rabbis of Genesis call "the world of two." The way into this "new religion" is through noticing the details, and then deepening them into metonymies.

In one very powerful evocation, he contemplates the shop of an Arab tailor in the Old City of Jerusalem and sees the Holy Ark:

> On Yom Kippur in 1967, the Year of
> Forgetting, I put on
> my dark holiday clothes and walked
> to the Old City of Jerusalem.
> For a long time I stood in front of an
> Arab's hole-in-the-wall shop,
> not far from the Damascus Gate, a
> shop with
> buttons and zippers and spools of
> thread
> in every color and snaps and buckles.
> A rare light and many colors, like an
> open Ark.
> ("Jerusalem, 1967")

The poet carefully notes the details of the hole-in-the wall shop, "buttons

and zippers and spools of thread," then he elevates them with a simile: the open door is "like the open Ark" where observant Jews in synagogue would be gazing on Yom Kippur, in a moment in the service of great spiritual intensity. But the poet is not in synagogue; his worship is in his poetry; his prayer is in his heart addressed to the unknown and unnamed "Arab."

> I told him in my heart that my father too
> had a shop like this, with thread and buttons.
> I explained to him in my heart about all the decades
> and the causes and the events, why I am now here
> and my father's shop was burned there and he is buried here.
> ("Jerusalem, 1967")

Historically, "Jerusalem 1967" is composed after the epochal moment of the reunification of Jerusalem. And this dating of the poem is important also because while Amichai was constantly deepening his experience of his world through metonymy and other poetic operations he could never fully escape the limitations of that world, and most especially the barriers between Israeli and Palestinian, though it's worth noting and rather unfortunate that he never came to use that term in his work. He speaks instead in his poems of Jew and Arab.

Yet in this poem written in the hour of victory, for Amichai and for Israel, there was an aspiration to reach out to "the Arab" and explain the parallels between the life of the "Arab" and the life of the Jew. He wished to point out that his father had a similar shop that was burned in Germany, and for that reason he fled with his family to Palestine.

Amichai is trying to explain how it is that a Jew named Pfeuffer born in Germany now has a claim on Jerusalem. Clearly this poem does not present a true dialogue with the other, it remains only a prayer, an aspiration. As far as there being an in-between Jerusalem, this is one place in his poetry he cannot quite find the imaginative in-between, or truly bridge the gap between him and the other. He is never quite able to find the place "between" the Israeli and the Palestinian.

Looked at now more than forty years later, it's hard not to notice this lack of dialogue. The poet says it is all "in my heart." We can see now more clearly that the "Arab" in this poem is only addressed, he is not given a voice. In many of Amichai's poems, the "Arab" is treated more as an object of contemplation than as someone with agency, and this contrasts greatly with the many dialogues in Amichai's work between men and women for instance, or between Jew and Jew.

I am not judging Yehuda Amichai for the limits of his time or his aspiration. He is a poet of Israel also in this limitation. Even in his longing for a dialogue "in his heart" he represents for me a great and painful lost ideal. The hope for dialogue with Palestinians embodied in this poem had a real political expression in the fall of 1993 with the handshake on the White House lawn. We all know what happened next, after 1995 when Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, and we are now living in what Rimbaud called the time of the assassin. And sadly there have been assassins on both sides.

In observing the effect of history on this particular poem, I am only following in Yehuda Amichai's footsteps. He was always and ever a poet engaged with the mystery of time, so why should his poems be immune to the effects of time? He was always and ever contemplating both joy and its departure, both joy and the sorrow of lost joy. Because he is a poet of detailed sensuality, this sorrow even has a specific taste, as in the poem when he remembers nothing of the letter he sent to a lost lover, "but the bitter glue of the stamp on his tongue."

In the last stanza, after the silent prayer in his heart, Amichai returns to the shop; only now the simile, "like an open Ark," has become a pure metonymy.

> When I finished, it was time for the Closing of the Gates prayer.
> He too lowered the shutters and locked the gate
> and I returned, with all the worshipers, home.
> ("Jerusalem, 1967")

The Arab's shop is no longer just a shop, its gates are no longer just gates. The simple gesture of lowering shutters and closing the gates, has acquired a sacred depth, so much so that the poet "returned, with all the worshippers, home." In the world of Amichai's poetry, the moment of sacred encounter can be found at any time and anywhere. There is hope in this gesture despite all the many failures to make it real. This is the "new religion" of his poetry, and it is a gift that can be translated everywhere. ■

RODGER KAMENETZ is the author of several books of poetry including *To Die Next To You* and *The Lowercase Jew*. He is also known for *The Jew in the Lotus* and *The History of Last Night's Dream*. www.kamenetz.com.

DOI 10.1215/08879982-3769551

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Before Rain

by Tom Sleigh

DOI 10.1215/08879982-3769563

Whatever you do, there are rockets falling,
and after the rockets, smoke climbing

up through walls that are exploding.
Trees grow up where there once were people, weeds

take over beds of lettuces and coddled flowers,
uprearing mole hills unpopulate the fields.

The bricked-in hours of the human have all been knocked down.

No one lingers at lipstick counters, no one
stares into a screen to escape the digital mayhem

of heroes hurdling over the heads of monsters.

The old bones on the mountain that stand upright
and shake when winds blow up from the shore,

old bones that shake when the winds roar

now dangle in the void of an unknown dimension.

Forget all this, says Earth to the stars.

OUTPOST

by Barbara Goldberg

DOI 10.1215/08879982-3769575

They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinom . . . —Chronicles II, chap. 28, v 3

An Arab boy in blue flip flops galloping bareback the length
of the valley, back and forth, over and over, cigarette clenched
between his teeth, cell phone pressed to his ear, faster, faster,
he's spurring the horse on now, steering him up the rim
of the valley and suddenly out into noonday traffic, out
of time, out of place, cars grinding to a halt, the rhythmic
clip clop of hooves pounding tarmac.
From the terrace
of a pricey café overlooking the valley I see dry trampled grass,
a small grove of olive trees, black-draped women gossiping
in the shade, children wrestling, can almost smell warm hummus
with ful, pickled turnips, mujaddara, this valley still called *gai ben hinom*, tophet, gehenna,
where children were offered
to the great god Moloch, the stench of charred flesh, of burnt offal
pervading the valley for centuries. To the left, the old walls of the city,
to the right, a dusty white village crouched on a hillock. I am eating
a thin crust margherita one leg outstretched
the other dangling
dangling over the edge

Illustration by Tania Advani | www.taniamaya.com

[Once there was a man . . .]

by Tadeusz Dąbrowski

Once there was a man who was neither happy,
nor was he sad, in his case this shallow state
grew deeper from year to year. Finally he landed
in a hospital for the nervously disturbed. To stimulate him,
he was told to listen to the news and read
the papers. Indeed, he listened and read, but it's hard
to say if it influenced his views or not
(nor is it known if he had any at all).
The doctors decided he should spend whole
days on end watching TV quiz shows, serials
and adverts, he was given gratis, boundless
wireless access to the internet, but his behavior
did not change at all. He was bombarded
with pornography, he watched doggedly, without emotion.
He was brought a whore, he took advantage, he was done
within the allotted time, and he said thank you. But
this had no effect on his usual state of mind. He was dropped
with a parachute, earlier he'd heard he was flying
on holiday to the mountains, with a tent on his back.
Connected up to his body, sensors of heartbeat,
blood pressure and brain waves failed to register
the slightest change. He was presented with
stacks of books by the French existentialists,
after Sartre he felt nausea, but it turned out
he'd been eating tainted fish. One evening, as
he was trying to sleep, from his eye there flowed
a tear. Instantly it was analyzed. Its chemical composition
was not at all different from that of a normal tear.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

[give me peace o my world . . .]

by Tadeusz Dąbrowski

give me peace o my world after all you can see I'm
not making it with poetry. words fail me don't send down
on me a brand new woman without any fingerprints
who'll infallibly prove to be not what I took her for.
don't send any cringing canvassers
to drag me out for a walk to a great big store
hindering my solitude. even so all of the garbage
in this house is mine and the contents of my pockets
testifies unequivocally against life. so
get lost life get out of me and get into
the trees of Amazonia so they can defend themselves
into unborn children so they can defend themselves
and into the whales. get into the genuine
poets there are so many old women spinning
unearthly yarns in keeping with
the rhythm of their own breathing.

Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

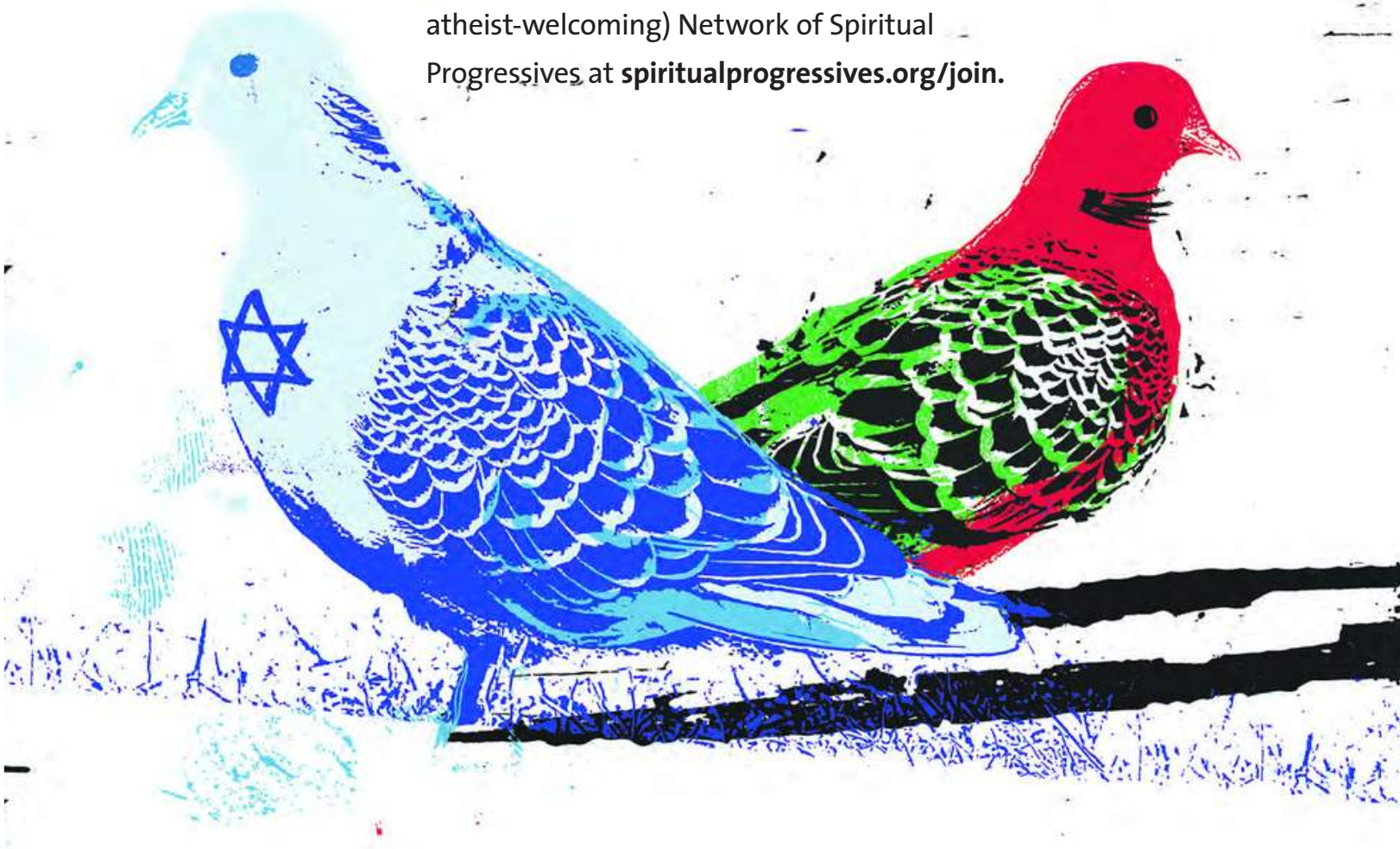
Illustration by Tania Advani | www.taniamaya.com

IN THE NEXT ISSUE (SPRING 2017)

How to End Israel's Occupation of the West Bank After 50 Painful Years

We will present a variety of fresh perspectives on how to end the Occupation, respect Palestinian human rights, provide safety and security for both peoples, and create a path to reconciliation, mutual forgiveness, and a new spirit of generosity in the Middle East.

If you agree that this must be the goal, please join our interfaith (and secular-humanist-and-atheist-welcoming) Network of Spiritual Progressives at **spiritualprogressives.org/join.**



תיקון

TIKKUN (tē-kün) . . .
to heal, repair and transform the world.
All the rest is commentary.

Illustration by Adolfo Valle