Tikkun

POLITICS + SPIRITUALITY + CULTURE

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

SUMMER 2017

THE WORLD NEEDS REPENTANCE

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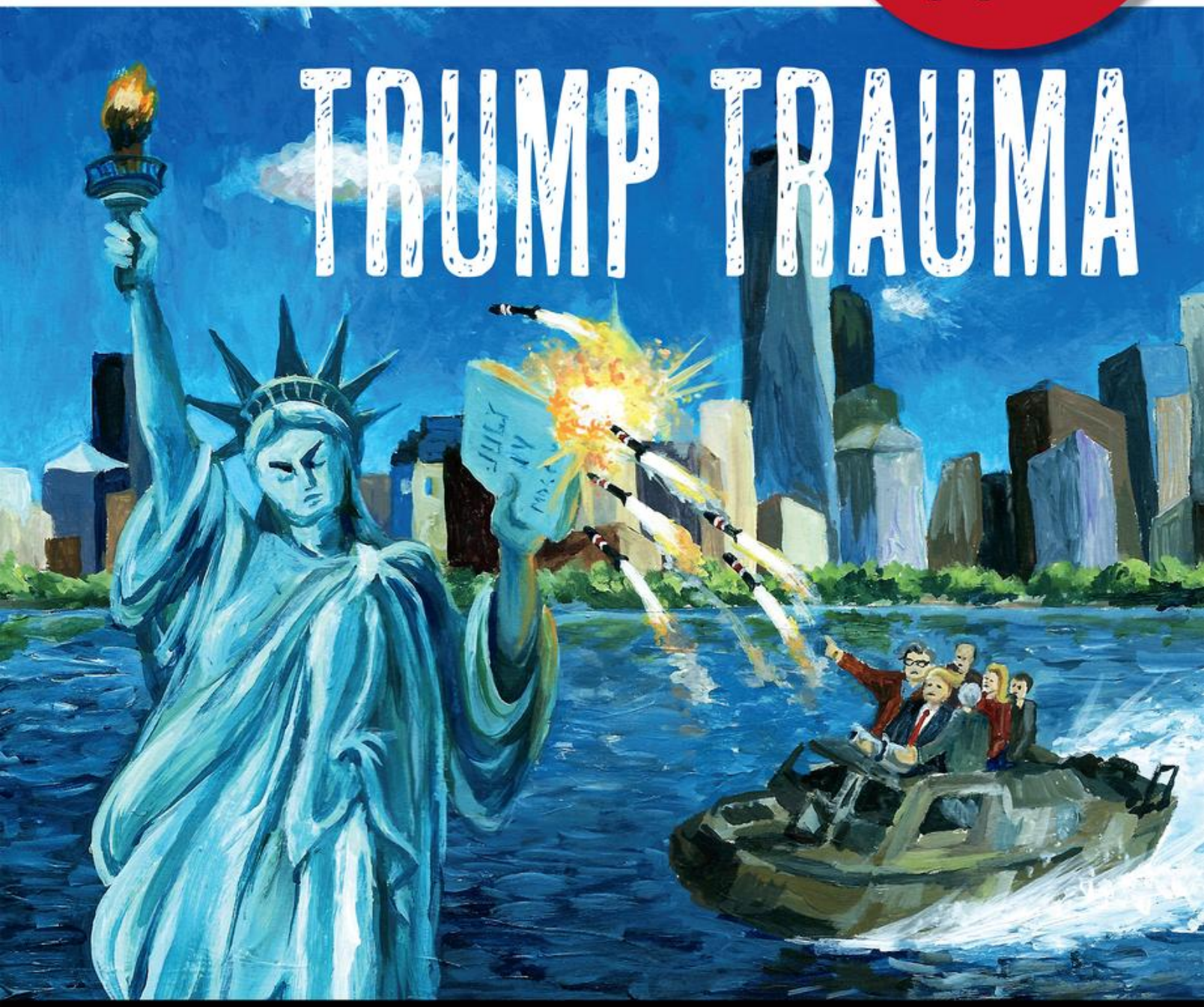
TRUMP TRAUMA



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A Critique of Religious Zionism | Marge Piercy on Adrienne Rich
Kurzweil's Flying Couch

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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.

RE: STRATEGY FOR PROGRESSIVES

I've read Michael Lerner's strategy for dealing with the new political situation we face. Yes, working people in all of their diversity are allies and have much in common when it comes to basic values, vulnerabilities, and wishes for a better life. Respect, not disdain, can bring us together to change the world. Yet, how do we translate our underlying values into actions that address the very real and immediate issues in people's lives?

Democratic socialist Michael Harrington argued that we on the left should build "the left wing of the possible within the Democratic Party." That still strikes me as good counsel. Political power in the US is transacted through the electoral system of mainstream parties and the state, and if we are to be effective, we'll have to engage with that system.

It's worth keeping in mind also that there are many progressive Democrats in Congress and state legislatures, and if we roll up our sleeves and get to work, there will be more. Together, we have the capacity to bring an end to repressive mechanisms such as voter suppression, gerrymandering, and Citizens United.

If more spirit-minded folks were willing to work within the Democratic Party, then who knows what can be done to carry out the specific strategic recommendations made in the pages of *Tikkun*? This might be a good time to form "Sister Democratic Clubs" and "Sister Cities" linking red and blue districts and advocating for the humane vision that *Tikkun* elaborates. There are already groups in existence that are devising nationwide collaborative strategy of this kind, e.g. The Sister District Project and Swing Left.

The sister city concept encourages people-to-people relationships that link a city council, religious congregation, Democratic club, or professional association to its counterpart in another city. Sister Democratic clubs, for example, could work out principles of unity that reach beyond the Party Platform in support of the creation of a fundamentally better social order than the one we inhabit today. These principles will of course draw upon the spiritual values of openness and generosity. This is one way in which grassroots activism could reshape the entire Party.

—Raymond Barglow, *Berkeley*

Dear Rabbi,

I am one of your subscribers and I have been reading you for years. I am female, African and a Christian. I agree with you that we should de-emphasize our differences and obey all the holy books which speak of love. God is love, please keep up your good work.

—Hon. Justice Nogi Imoukhuede,
High Court Judge, *Nigeria*

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.

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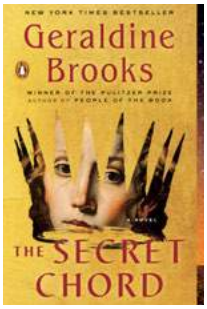

The Secret Chord
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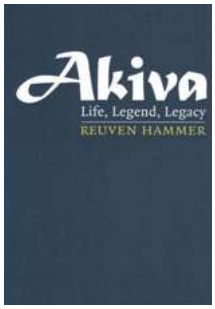
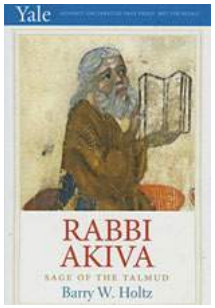
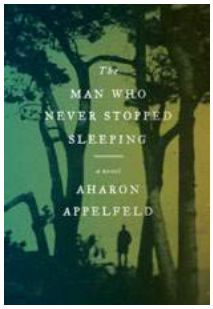
Penguin Books 2015



Akiva: Life, Legend, Legacy
Reuven Hammer
Jewish Publication Society, 2015



Rabbi Akiva Sage of the Talmud
Barry W. Holtz
Yale U. Press, 2017



The Man Who Never Stopped Sleeping
Aharon Appelfeld
Schocken Books, 2017

If you want to taste some of the diversity and complexity in Jewish thought, these four books offer a wonderful way in. Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Geraldine Brooks brings the reader into the mind of Natan, one of Judaism's earliest prophets, as he tries to make sense of his own life as a collaborator and spiritual guide to a murderous King David who managed to conquer and then create Jerusalem as the Jewish people's fantasized "eternal capital." Unlike many of the prophets who eventually had a book written by or about them in the Bible, Natan shows up only in the stories about King David, most significantly when he challenges David for having stolen Batsheva by sending her husband, a commander in David's army, to a mission designed to be certain death. This was the classic moment of speaking truth to power at the risk of having that power also kill the truth-teller. Building on the Bible, but with her own imaginative creativity, Brooks brings us to the midst of the intrigues that is said to be the family of a future messiah.

Eleven hundred years later a similar courage contributed to making Rabbi Akiva, one of the most important figures in the Talmud, a folk hero because of his refusal to abandon the practice and teaching of Judaism commanded by the Roman occupiers of Judea. Supporting the revolution started by a militant named Bar Kokhba, who for a few short years is able to present a military challenge to the Romans, Akiba ends up imprisoned, and if the story is to be trusted, is tortured to death, a consequence he not only knew was likely, but preached to his students as the correct path to serve the one God in the face of tyrannical imperialists (who eventually prevailed by brutally repressing the rebellion at the cost of thousands of Jewish lives) some historians have claimed tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands who either died or fled from the Land of Israel and into Galut (exile or Diaspora). Yet Akiva's fame in future generations who looked on the revolution against Rome as a tragic error rested in part on two other aspects of his life: brilliant and rational articulations of the "Oral Law" that was supposedly given at Sinai and became the vehicle by which the rabbis justified their own brilliant attempts to make ancient Judaism's *temple and sacrifice based* religion into a *home and prayer based* religion which could travel globally with an indigenous Jewish people expelled from their land by Roman imperialism. Yet this super-rationalist was also an amazing mystic whose venture into a state of alternative consciousness was said to have inspired him into making the claim that even if the entire Torah had never been given, the Jews could have learned it from the sensual love in the Song of Songs, as which Akiba taught was about the love between God and Israel. No wonder then that this scholar, revolutionary, and mystic would live in the memory and widen the contours of Judaism for the two thousand years following his martyrdom. Reuven Hammer and Barry Holtz, both associated with the decidedly not revolutionary or mysticism-welcoming Jewish Theological Seminary of Conservative Judaism, each provide a taste of what this founding father of Rabbinic thought contributed to the Judaism that subsequently evolved, do both books are worthy of your attention. Holtz in particular goes out of his way to remind us that we should not look at the stories about Akiba "as historically accurate accounts of events, but rather a literary representations of crucial issues in the life or rabbinic culture. And for that culture, no issue is more troubling or compelling than that of the nature of [rabbinic] authority."

Survival, not martyrdom, is the subject of Aharon Appelfeld's latest novel. Appelfeld has been one of the most sensitive and creative portrayers of the Holocaust, capturing the humanity of its victims, including its many survivors. Brilliantly translated from the Hebrew by Jeffrey M. Green, the reader is tossed into the world of those who brought the trauma with them to the Land of Israel, where it still shapes the consciousness of the Jewish people and keeps them from making the rational choice to collaborate with the Palestinians in creating a different kind of future. Unlike those who have built a religion around the Holocaust, Israel and the IDF, given their inability to continue to believe in God, Appelfeld has managed to come to grips with his memories even as they shape his prodigious and distinguished career as an Israeli writer. It may be through the novels rather than through the politics, that Israel may eventually produce Jews who have reclaimed the ethical tradition that Akiva did so much to foster.

Trump's Evil Policies, Democrats Aligning with the Deep State, and the Left in Shaming and Blaming

This summer 2017 edition of *Tikkun* has several articles focusing on the trauma that the Trump presidency has generated. While many liberals and progressives responded to this trauma and horror in the earlier months with mass demonstrations and a commitment to resistance, it soon became clear that, as important as they were for reviving the spirit of people on the Left, the demonstrations did not make much of a dent in the consciousness of the tens of millions of people who voted for Trump.

Sadly, the liberal and progressive forces continue to demean, shame, and blame all those who did not vote for Democrats in the 2016 election. This takes the form of suggesting that all of these tens of millions of people who voted for Trump and other Republicans (or who did not bother to vote) did so because they are racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, coarse, bullies, or just ignorant. Though this accurately describes many of his supporters and a large number of the people that he has appointed to key positions in his administration, these characterizations do not fit everyone that voted for Trump. The liberal viewing of Trump supporters as the Other has done little to win people to a progressive way of thinking. In fact, in many instances they only served to push some decent Trump voters further to the Right even when they had doubts about some of Trump's policies. A substantial number of people vote for the Right not because they agree with its policies, and not because they are racist, sexist, etc. but because they are sick and tired of feeling demeaned and looked down upon by the liberals and progressives.

The mainstream Left fails to put forward a truly visionary alternative to the "solutions" of the Right, and slips into a posture of fighting off the bad instead of building the good while casting all Trump voters as the "Other." This pattern reached a new peak during the Clinton campaign with the repetition of the unofficial campaign slogan "At least she's not Trump." This reactionary strategy did not work; and despite its repeated failure, we are witnessing the Left fall into the pattern again by using Russia's interference with the elections to attack Trump. While this strategy may lead to a Trump impeachment (which would be a good thing) it will do little to transform the dynamics at play and support the emergence of a just, compassionate, environmentally sensitive and love-supporting society that is badly needed.

Times Are Urgent

Like many liberals and progressives, we find the Trump presidency a huge disaster. The Trump Administration is in the process of undoing all the good that was done in a slow and piecemeal way by several generations of liberal legislators: they are dismantling environmental protections and withdrawing from the Paris environmental Accord; accelerating the Obama-developed process of mass deportations; enabling even more brutality by taking procedural restraints away from ICE; promising to use presidential powers to undermine Obamacare if the Republican Congress continues to fail to find a way to eliminate it through legislation; reducing support for public education; eliminating and weakening safety and health protections for working people; and attempting to fill the judiciary with right wing ideologues.

The Response Has Been Tried Before

The outrage at Trump is legitimate, but the mainstream liberal and progressive forces have refused to face the fact that for the past several decades they have been a minority in Congress and are continuously becoming less relevant to people whose lives are filled with pain at the way they are treated in a society whose materialistic and "looking out for number one" values have been undermining families, friendships and community. That undermining is actually caused by the internalization of the values of the capitalist marketplace. Many on the Right blame the undermining on the Left. Many on the Left insist that the only pain worth our attention is that of those identity groups seem unaware of this societal-wide pain and focus only on economic deprivation or on identity groups that the Left recognizes as oppressed, labeling everyone else as privileged and benefiting from the suffering of others. This approach makes many people feel worse about themselves, and then, in the not too long run,

angry at those who have mistakenly claimed that they were living lives of privilege when in fact they are suffering from the system as well.

For years "pragmatic" legislators were so focused on compromise and "realism" that they rarely worried about articulating a worldview that could explain to the American public how these piecemeal changes would contribute to the kind of world that might appeal to people not yet part of the liberal or progressive world. Thinking that they were so clever and pragmatic, Meanwhile, local single issue organizers consciously avoided speaking in a visionary language for fear that they would be dismissed as ideological. As a result, while the small battles were being won, there was no unifying theme that could speak to the growing pain and upset in the lives of many Americans, a pain that was rooted in the individualism and materialism of capitalist society.

The quintessence of this failure was the Obama Administration's failure to champion "medicare for everyone." Universal health care that built on the Medicare program that already served tens of millions of retired Americans was very popular, and had a proven record of providing people with all the choices they needed without siphoning off money to the health care insurers. We at *Tikkun* told Obama that he should be framing a universal health care ideal within a larger frame for his presidency—"The Caring Society—Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth." Instead, Obama ruled out even discussing how a single payer system might be expanded to the whole population. If the health care system is dismantled it will not be because it was too progressive, but because it was not progressive enough. It appeared to many Americans as just another instrumental bureaucratic tinkering because it was neither visionary nor framed as part of a larger vision for our society.

The lack of a positive and inspiring vision of the world we want is an important element in why the Right has been winning so dramatically on the state level in many parts of the US. The Left does not recognize Trump as a symptom of deeper problems rather than as the major cause. By the "Left" here, we mean the mainstream left. The Left has always been populated by visionaries like Martin Luther King Jr., Michelle Alexander, North Carolina's Rev. William Barber, Christian Ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Princeton University's Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, and many writers in *Tikkun*. Instead of listening to the visionaries, the Left has focused ever since the 2016 election on how to catch Trump in some impeachable offense—and come up with very little that could possibly move Republicans to impeach one of the own.

A Left Divided

There are three factions within the Left. Let's call them the Mainstream Left, the Radical Left, and the Visionary Left. **The Mainstream Left** is primarily the Democratic Party, the Democratic Congressional Representatives and Senators, elected Democrats on the state and local levels, the array of wealthy donors who play an important role in shaping the direction of the Party, the array of think tanks and policy institutions seeking to influence the Democratic Party policy shapers, plus the Democrats' mass base of tens of millions of voters. Obviously there will be many differences of worldview and opinions in this kind of broad configuration. However, because the Democratic Party is not democratically constructed, the opinions of most of the mass base are frequently ignored, and so in this editorial when I talk about the Mainstream Left I will be referring to the leadership of the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Party elected representatives in Congress and state legislatures, and the wealthy donors, as well as people like Hillary and Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, their entourage of advisors, former members of their Administrations, and the media sycophants who quote them and thereby can count on them for story leads or quotes. **The Radical Left** includes the Green Party but also many who vote for the Democrats and were attracted to Bernie Sanders' campaign. They often have deep critiques of mainstream institutions and economic arrangements, and some of them even are overtly critical of the capitalist system as a whole for its failure to deliver the political rights and economic entitlements to the American people that the Democratic politicians are always promising

Omitting Beauty and Green

after Hikmet

My hands advance, the light
is hungry, a road through

my eyes runs. The world must
somewhere be blooming

enough. I like being
inside mulberries, captured.

The point is the window.
The sunny infirmary

can't smell the carnations.
Beside hopeful trees, the prison

surrenders.

—Andrea Cohen

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but rarely delivering even when they have won control of the Congress and presidency or the State Houses and Legislatures. **The Visionary Left** shares many of the criticisms of the capitalist system and of the failure of the Mainstream Democrats to deliver the political rights and economic entitlements about which they talk during elections, but largely forget afterwards in the name of being "realistic." But the Visionary Left adds to the discourse an ethical, psychological and spiritual analysis and articulates a vision of the world it seeks couched in a language of empathy, generosity, love, and the sacredness of humanity and the Earth.

Since the 2016 election, we have seen the Mainstream Left and the Radical Left moving closer to each other as they rightly see the importance of challenging the Trump administration's policies. They hope to increase their chances to win back control of Congress in 2018 and of the presidency in 2020. Yet most of their energy has gone into attacking Trump himself far more than his policy ideas (except for the Democrats' resolute opposition to the Republican health care plans, for which the Dems deserve our appreciation). The terrain of their attack on Trump, central to their hope to undermine the credibility of the Republican Party, has focused on Trump's relationship with Russia, and the way people central to his 2016 campaign, his current Administration, and/or his personal family may have had some role in encouraging or at least unfairly benefiting from Russian interference with the election outcome.

The mainstream Democrats have a powerful ally in this focus on Russia: a constellation of institutions that Peter Dale Scott, Dennis Kucinich and others have dubbed "the Deep State." The Deep State is a label for the people who for many decades have run the foreign policy of the US no matter which political party won the latest election. The Deep State includes the CIA, NSA, and FBI, the military industrial complex that includes major defense industries and oil and gas interests; media opinion shapers including the NY Times, Washington Post, LA Times, Wall Street Journal, NBC, CBS, ABC; and an array of policy institutes from liberal to right-wing.

The Deep State serves as an agent of America's ruling elites, supporting foreign policies whose implicit goal is to protect American corporate interests and maintain the global capitalist system. Most rank-and-file supporters and activists of the Mainstream Left are more interested in promoting democratic, human rights and environmental sustainability-oriented policies. Yet they often find themselves supporting national leadership, presidential candidates, and Congressional leaders who, in the name of "being realistic," capitulate toward the policies of the Deep State (even though some of these mainstreams Dems started out in politics with a genuine interest in the same values as those who elected them). Indeed, those leaders who do not tilt toward the policies of the Deep State on foreign policy issues are often dismissed by the major funders and media as unworthy of attention, support, or in most cases even of media coverage.

This helps us understand why many leaders of the Democratic Party, while continuing to insist that their commitment is to a world of democracy and equality, only rarely implement policies that would promote democracy and equality around the world. We can see this in the way that when Democrats had control of Congress and the presidency in Obama's first two years in office they did not shut our torture centers (particularly Guantanamo), did not implement a Global Marshall Plan (though Obama had personally promised me he would support that), did not make U.S. support to Israel conditional on ending the Occupation of the West Bank, escalated drone attacks on suspected terrorists (killing more civilians than actual terrorists), failed to cut off aid to Egypt after a military dictatorship overthrew the (admittedly misguided but democratically elected) government of Egypt, worked out a huge sale of military goods to Saudi Arabia as it continued its human rights-denying policies, and wildly escalated the roundup of "undocumented" economic and political refugees and jailed or expelled them. So the Democrats' current alignment with the Deep State in demonizing Russia is not a total break with its past.

For the skeptics among us, it's helpful to remember that the Democratic Party controlled by the Mainstream Left has rarely been the champion of democracy and human rights when it was the one actually implementing foreign policy (how many of them loudly protest drone attacks and deportations which occured during the Obama administrations?).

All of the pious outrage about the electoral from Russia must seem ludicrous and hypocritical to those around the world who have watched as the CIA, the US military, and other agencies interfere in the internal politics of country after country. Through most of the past several decades, the reality of international interference in domestic elections is familiar to anyone who knows how the US has engaged with Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Libya, and the list could go on. This is just the first time that Americans are watching the practice we refined hit our own society.

The Deep State first coalesced in order to secure US economic and political hegemony by attempting to overthrow communist and nationalist regimes which the Deep State theorists perceived to be a threat to US economic and political hegemony. For several decades the US was able to set the terms of trade, and together with its junior partner NATO allies, benefit by controlling much of the world's economic dealings. As communist regimes in Europe collapsed and Russia and China emerged into capitalist economies with

authoritarian regimes, new tensions were born that brought the dominance of the US Deep State into question. Russia and China began competing with the US for new markets, labor, and sources of raw materials. This competition was perceived to be a potential threat to US global economic dominance, and the Western elites that benefitted most from it.

The US (the Right, the Mainstream Left, and the Deep State) needed to employ new tactics and narratives to assure US dominance and profit in a new age of competition. Most importantly, they needed to keep the gears of the military industrial complex churning so they could benefit from the payments to defense contracts and maintain military superiority. We saw that tactic employed as the US began a never-ending "war on terror" that was used to justify huge military budgets even when there was no plausible enemy that could be fought with the weapons the US was building.

The success of the efforts to fix public attention on the (real and not totally exaggerated) evils of Russia under Putin has given the Deep State what it has been looking for, a potentially credible "evil other" around which it can build mass support for escalating military spending and possible interventions, if not against Russia directly than against its allies in Iran, Syria, and most immediately against North Korea (all of them states which we at *Tikkun* frequently critique). All this helps distract Americans from the escalating classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, and xenophobia in the US and the increasing militarization of American police forces in municipalities around the US.

The Mainstream Left may be going along with the anti-Russia discourse because their interests are truly aligned with the Deep State, but why is the Radical Left following suit? It seems odd that so many Bernie followers are de-facto legitimating and building popular hostility to Russia that could revive the Cold War or even lead to a hot war. Especially considering Noam Chomsky's point that developing friendly relations with Russia thereby undercutting the likelihood of war with one of the nuclear powers that could pose a danger to the future survival of life on this planet, is the only good thing that Trump has done.

The Democratic Party is focusing on the dual enemies of Trump and Russia to avoid the question that they most need to answer: what have they done wrong to lose so much support in the US? They won the popular vote but lost the presidency in 2000 and 2016; they did nothing in President Obama's first two years when he had a Democratic Party majority in the Congress to create a constitutional amendment to make elections more democratic in the U.S. They keep losing in important ways, and instead of asking why, they blame their losses on the Other, first Trump and his lies and manipulations, then on his alleged alliance with Russia. All their charges may prove 100% correct, but what is motivating them on a deeper level is the inability to reflect on their own errors.

Meanwhile they avoid considering the dangers of a Pence presidency should Trump be removed from office, and the pivotal question that the 2016 elections posed: What needs to change in our strategies and ways of communicating to the American public in order to win enough popularity to be able to create a truly progressive agenda that would ensure that our government and country prioritize the well being of people and the planet over money and power? As we've argued for the past 30 years, to achieve this the liberal and progressive movements would have to stop the shaming and blaming of people not yet on our side, develop an empathic and compassionate approach to them, and educate people about the self-blaming inherent in the meritocratic fantasy that underlies capitalism's self-justification for immense disparities of wealth and power in Western societies.

We have to talk about building a world of love and kindness, social and economic justice, environmental sanity and the need to overcome the discourse of "we are more oppressed than you so you should feel guilty and feel bad about yourselves"—and instead help people understand that what is needed now is a movement that affirms the humanity and fundamental decency of everyone who is not actively and explicitly advocating for hate and oppression of others. To advocate for a "New Bottom Line" based on promoting love, generosity and justice, to call for "the Caring Society: Caring for Each and Every Person on Earth and Caring for our precious Planet" would be far more effective than critiquing Trump for wanting to build peace with Russia and sharing Israeli reports of Al Qaeda or ISIS (the Islamic State) or exposing his or his son-in-law Jared Kushner's disreputable money-making schemes.

None of this is meant to argue against impeachment.

Trump is so unpredictable that it is not impossible to imagine him seeking to prove that he is not a puppet of Putin and the Russians by switching his policy toward that of the Deep State, but doing it in such a provacative way that Putin felt he had to respond in kind. Without intending to, Trump might find himself in circumstances that would lead him to believe that the only way he could be seen as a successful president would be to launch a first strike nuclear war against Russia or North Korea or Iran. In fact, Trumpists have already been at work to reverse previous laws that prevented the US from conducting a first strike. The very possibility of Trump stumbling into a nuclear war, analogous to the way European nations stumbled into the First World War, is enough reason to want to see him replaced, even if the immediate consequence is to strengthen the reactionary forces that would inherit the White House. So if impeachment is a matter of life and death, then we choose life. ■

Trish Vradenburg z'l 1946–2017

In Memorium

Trish Vradenburg, my only sibling, was co-publisher of *Tikkun* magazine from 2001-2010 with her husband George Vradenburg.

Growing up in our house in Newark, NJ, Trish was already by age six a bright star, a light of joy in our family that was still mourning relatives murdered in the Holocaust. As she recalled, it was hard to get herself noticed in the heavy political discussions that our mother, father and I jumped into every night at dinner, so she turned to humor to get her voice heard.

That humor eventually led her to become a writer for two television shows, *Designing Women* and *Kate and Allie*.

Yet it was a special kind of humor that she developed — incisive yet gentle, blending insight with kindness, never the nasty kind of humor that makes people famous. As a result, she could make important points but never really hurt anyone.

Trish was an atheist with a deep belief in what I describe in my book *Jewish Renewal* as the God of the universe: namely, the Force in the Universe that makes possible the transformation from that which is to that which ought to be — not a big man in heaven. She embraced our notion that being "realistic" is idolatry, and instead believed the possibility of possibilities.

It was that, along with her deep love and support for me, which made her understand and want to support *Tikkun* — the voice of liberal and progressive Jews and our interfaith allies. And it was this belief that inspired her to take on the seemingly unrealistic task of seeking a cure for Alzheimer's.

Trish's political involvement was not motivated by personal advancement or financial reward, but rather by a burning commitment in the last two decades of her life to enhance awareness of the growing scourge of Alzheimer's disease that took the lives of both my mother and grandmother. She wrote a Broadway play "Surviving Grace," that focused on the decline of my mother, mixing the deep sadness we both experienced with a light humor that made the play both tolerable and even hopeful. The play portrayed a romance between the daughter of an Alzheimer's patient and a doctor who was on the path of finding a medical advance that would both reverse the disease and prevent it. In the Trump years, and particularly since he has said that the U.S. is withdrawing from the Paris environmental accords, we need her hopefulness even more.

Together with George, Trish formed UsAgainstAlzheimer's and organized thousands of people to actively pressure Congress to increase the pathetically small amount of research money directed to the cure and prevention of Alzheimer's. They succeeded in doubling the funding this past year, but that was starting from such a small amount that she then formed a "Women Against Alzheimers" focus within UsAgainstAlzeheimer's, in recognition that women not only get that disease more than men, but that they also are far more likely to end up at the primary caretaker of those suffering from this disease. She feared succumbing to the disease, though as is typical of Trish, she turned her fear into humor by saying in public talks, in which she would point out that 50% of the children of parents with Alzheimer's also contract the disease, "poor Michael." The one blessing of this early death at age 70 was that it came with a heart attack rather than the painful decline we witnessed in my mother and grandmother.

A great light has gone out. I am in deep grief at the loss of my amazing and wonderful sister.

And her relatively young age should remind us that all of us are going to die, and not necessarily at the moment of our own choosing. ■

Rabbi Michael Lerner, Editor, *Tikkun*

If you want Tikkun's voice to continue, please put in your Will (or create one even if you are only in your twenties) a bequest for Tikkun magazine's parent body The Institute for Labor and Mental Health. It would be a beautiful way of affirming Trish's life and Tikkun's vision!

Trump Trauma

Where Reality TV Meets 'Reality by Decree'

BY CHAIYA HELLER

It's 2004 and, despite my best intentions, I'm a pop-culture junkie. While my one-year-old daughter is napping, I watch an episode of a new reality TV show, *The Apprentice*, hosted by New York real estate mogul, Donald Trump. The show's premise: Sixteen to eighteen individuals, divided into two teams, test their business acumen by competing in a series of moneymaking challenges. At the end of each episode, Trump calls the losing team into an ersatz boardroom where he delivers his signature tag line, "*You're Fired!*" to the individual he determines most guilty of gumming up the works.

I remember noting what seemed to me an unprecedented televised celebration of US capitalism with its corresponding culture of authoritarianism and non-empathy. Before ordering contestants out of the boardroom, Trump denounced each one with epithets such as *stupid, terrible*, or *loser*, all while the camera zeroed in on the very face of human shame and vulnerability. After viewing a few harrowing instances of this, I turned the damn thing off.

During the last decade or so, I've watched from afar as *The Apprentice* gave rise to *Celebrity Apprentice,* finally plopping Trump dead center in our political theater. When Trump won his run for the White House in 2016, I, along with most of the country, blinked in bewilderment, asking, *How the f#%k did this happen*?

Shows like *The Apprentice*, along with toxic right wing radio and Fox News, did much to reflect and bolster a culture of Americans who see humanity as inherently greedy and who regard empathy as being for losers and wimps.

If Trump excelled in reality TV, he is now shoring up to master what I'll call *reality by decree*. In Trump's world, truth is plastic and entirely relative; events and facts become true once they're rubber-stamped—announced—by right-wing news outlets like Breitbart or Fox News. Each time Trump decrees a *fake-fact* such as Obama wire-tapping Trump Tower or "illegal immigrants" stealing the popular vote—each time he distorts reality and is not held accountable for doing so—he rules reality by decree.

There are indeed psychological implications of Trump's reality by decree. Since his presidential win, there has been ubiquitous discussion of the impact of a Trump presidency on survivors of social trauma: this is because social trauma rests on a distortion of reality.

As social primates, we humans rely on a shared reality principle, a collective sense of what is factual or fictional, just or unjust. The fabric of our shared reality is unthreaded each time someone who has power over us abuses that power, destabilizing our reality by creating a world in which notions of truth are relative, mercurial, and unstable.

Trump purposefully manipulates the truth like a street performer twists balloons into animals. With each new bizarre and menacing decree, trauma survivors feel unable to hold onto a vision of a rational and just world where people wielding tremendous authority and power are held accountable for their words and actions.

We women wince upon hearing about Trump's "locker room talk," mortified even more when he decrees his own "tremendous respect for women." Survivors feel gaslighted, driven into a world where everything is profoundly unpredictable and unsafe.

Trump's reality by decree—while common under dictators—is unprecedented in US history. Each day, we awaken into an Orwellian dystopia in which the "Ministry of Truth" controls not just the material and political conditions of life, but also the conditions of human perception.

Perhaps it is we, survivors of rape, incest, and other abuses, who especially sense the steadily emerging danger associated with power-driven reality distortion. Maybe we of the the

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US president Donald Trump creating an Orwelian dystopia and a poor example for the youth

women's and queer liberation movements have a key role to play in fighting against Trump's blatant attempts to deny an objective ground for truth and justice.

Maybe my once napping toddler—now a young woman of fourteen—will join a generation hungry for reality-based politics based on principles such as transparency, democracy, and accountability. I look forward to thousands taking to the streets in the coming months and years, organizing national strikes, consumer boycotts, as well as marches, protests, and revolutionary movement building. Our collective reality-based rallying cry? *"Donald Trump, you f#%ked with our reality: You're Fired!"* ■

Tania Advani

Handling Jewish Trauma in the Trump Era

BY CHERIE BROWN

I was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1949, only a few years after the Holocaust. My grandmother had barely escaped from the Cossacks. Her family got her out of Russia, and she traveled alone as a 12-year-old to the US. My father changed his name from Brownstein to Brown in 1941, and only when I was 40 did I learn that a large part of his family had died in the death camps.

I knew intellectually and taught in my anti-oppression work that anti-Semitism was a centuries-old cyclical oppression, and could always resurface when a scapegoat was needed, even in places of relative safety for Jews.

But deep inside, I held an unshakable belief that I was safe in the US. It couldn't happen here. Then Trump got elected. Suddenly the invisible loose noose that I had been teaching Jews about just tightened. Trump put out anti-Semitic campaign fliers. Trump chose an avowed anti-Semite to be his most trusted adviser in the White House. Was this how it began for my father's relatives in Europe? I imagine that they never believed it could happen to them either. Suddenly I was awake most nights, terrified, struggling to find the reassurance necessary to fall asleep.

I have been counseling Jews since the election on similar fears. Here are a few principles I offer:

1) The present is informed by unhealed discouragement from the past.

   The present moment is extremely difficult. Decades of progressive work is being undone each day. Yet our current fears are triggered by past unhealed discouragement. When I counsel Jews on their current fears, I always ask, "what does the current period under Trump remind you of from your own early life?" Many share memories of early abandonment or betrayal. I want to be very clear. It's not that the present conditions under Trump aren't awful. However, our ability to respond effectively to the present crisis requires us to have separated out and healed any of the ways that the present moment triggers unhealed earlier trauma.

2) We want to refrain from "scared active" behavior.

   In workshops with Jews and non-Jews, I often teach that Ashkenazi Jews and non-Jews can have different responses to what scares us. When a middle class non-Jewish person is scared, they might hide out in their bedroom. When an Ashkenazi Jewish person is scared, they might build 10 new organizations. The fear for survival can propel Jews towards action. Activism is important. But activism on top of unhealed fears is not always well-thought-out activism. I have noticed since the election how many of my Jewish buddies (and I) are rushing into action. Action and resistance are necessary. But it's worth taking a few minutes to slow down, notice our connections to each other, try and notice that we're not alone, and learn to take on urgent issues with relaxed confidence.

3) We cannot mobilize people effectively on the basis of painful emotion. It is always best to organize people with a hopeful "we can win this" message.

At Shabbat services last week, my rabbi asked the members of our community during the Torah discussion to speak to something that had given us hope during the past week. I listened carefully—and people couldn't do it! I watched my Jewish chevra (friends) try valiantly to come up with one thing during the past week that had given them hope. They would start out speaking about something hopeful, but then their attention kept being diverted back to one more horrible thing Trump had done.

For some of us, particularly in difficult times, finding reminders of what brings us hope is not easy. Let's remind each other regularly: Acts of resistance in the face of oppression are hopeful. Building alliances with Muslims, Jews, women, scientists, environmental activists, Black Lives Matter activists, and LGBTQ+ activists is hopeful. Rebuilding a movement is hopeful. The current moment *is* hard, but there is all the hope in the world. ■

CHERIE BROWN is the founder and executive director of the National Coalition Building Institute, an anti-oppression leadership organization based in Washington DC. Brown is also an adjunct faculty at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

No Hate, No Fear

BY DAVID VÁSQUEZ-LEVY

"No hate, no fear! Refugees are welcome here," chanted the growing crowd at JFK Airport on Saturday, January 28. They gathered—"out of nowhere" according to a *New York Times* report—in support of refugees and others detained at the airport as they sought to enter the country in the hours following President Donald Trump's executive order the day before.

No fear . . . Encounters between humans and the divine in sacred texts often begin with precisely those words, "do not fear." That is the heart of the good news. It is the message proclaimed by the angels at the moment God broke into the world in the form of a child. "Perfect love casts out fear," says the author of 1 John.

We are at our best when we embody this message of love and resist fear. By contrast, governing by fear is deeply antithetical to our sacred call.

Through his barrage of executive orders, impacting thousands of immigrants and refugees, President Donald Trump has framed his leadership of the world's most powerful nation by means of fear. He has amplified the fear of those who, believing our claims to be the land of the free and the brave, desperately seek refuge in our land. He has manipulated the fear of our citizenry by legitimizing the false claims that refuge-seekers, particularly those who follow the traditions of Islam, are a threat to our wellbeing. With his Islamophobia and his call to build a border wall, President Trump has portrayed us as a nation fearful of the world.

Fear is particularly dangerous when it is claimed by the powerful. That is the basic reality of the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible, where Pharaoh sows fear among his people through the equivalent of an outrageous and unfounded Tweet: "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we." Through a series of executive orders, Pharaoh manipulates reality "so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites."

The key in the Exodus story comes in the resistance to that fear by those who have the courage to stand up to Pharaoh. Shiphra and Puah, two Hebrew midwives, refuse to be coerced into the campaign of fear, and instead creatively continue their task of bringing life into the world. Moses' mother and sister scheme to ensure that the river Pharaoh intended to turn into a place of death remains a place of connection. Even Pharaoh's own daughter, standing on the other side of that river, sees the humanity of the child who is crossing that border against the law and chooses to stand by him. "I will call him Moses," she says in defiance to her father's executive order, "for I took him out of the waters."

In this time of deep uncertainty, it is imperative that we draw on these stories and the many others in our religious and civic traditions that remind us of who we truly are. "A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph," warns the book of Exodus. The new Pharaoh forgot Joseph and failed to remember that it was on the dreams of that immigrant that the well-being of his nation had been built. Donald Trump's executive order, ominously issued on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, forgets who we are in terms of our strength and place in the world, as well as our very make up as a nation of immigrants. It is our sacred task as educational institutions and communities of faith to remember, speak, and act.

The warning issued by Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut to his colleagues in the US Congress echoes true for us all: "To my colleagues: don't ever again lecture me on American moral leadership if you chose to be silent today."

Following the example of the women in Exodus, may we as individuals and communities show our creative strength, intellectual capacity, deep faith, and courage, as we join angels and protesters proclaiming, "No hate, no fear! Refugees are welcome here!" ■

REV. DR. DAVID VÁSQUEZ-LEVY is President of Pacific School of Religion.

The Winter of Trump

BY FRANK BROWNING

It seemed fitting that the yellow hair with the tiny hands capable of annihilating the whole world would surface in the depths of winter darkness. January and February for me, as for many millions, equal darkness. Physical and spiritual. And where I live on the 48th parallel in France (about the same latitude as Duluth), thick river valley clouds turn the days still shorter and darker. What could be more appropriate than that with the scrawl of a photo-op pen these presidential hands would soon after make it legal for certified madmen to purchase military weapons to eliminate all of us whose skin and sex and regard they don't like. These hands who trained at the feet of the closet-case gangster attorney Roy Cohn have converted Murder Inc. into a drive-by franchise.

My qualifications for falling into their sites might seem to come from my generally celebratory books and reporting on homo sex life. For the moment this commander in chief has not issued such a direct order—daughter Ivanka apparently has too many homo pals in the fashion sector—but when he is shown the impeachment door, his rabid evangelical successor seems almost sure to sharpen the testicular knives. These are moderate concerns of the dreams that visit me at 3AM.

Greater anxieties, however, bordering on the terrain of trauma, circle and hover around roots: the roots I share with *Hillbilly Elegy* author J. D. Vance. His people and many of mine in hardscrabble Kentucky are already being led blindly onto the slaughterhouse ramp, a ramp that until a year or so ago led them to cancer screening clinics, birth control counselors, and black lung care. All of that is set to give way very soon to the passive slaughterhouse now being constructed by all the tiny hands and tinier minds shuttling between Capital Hill and the smudged doorways known as the White House.

Recently a visitor to my and my husband's home in France lost patience one evening when the supper table talk turned to this impending hillbilly slaughter. "Maybe they shoulda worked harder in school and had the sense to get outta there. Stupid people get what they deserve! You didn't stay there, didja?" My first reaction was that I shouldn't have poured the guest such a large shot of bourbon. He couldn't have been serious. But he was. He ranted further about how he too had come from a family of dead-end workers in New Jersey but they'd had the gumption to get out and learn how to use computers.

Our New Jersey expat visitor wasn't altogether wrong. Many clever kids do see early on the necessity to escape as he had, serving in the Marines where he learned how to become a line cook and later hooked up with a well-paid international civil servant. Why *didn't* my and J.D.'s kindred do the same? The question is real and deserves reflection. J.D.'s much-celebrated book offers a partial answer. In certain parts of America, as in many parts of France, kinship and attachment to place count for more than ambition and health. The usual response is that in such places economic privation—no jobs, no roads, no doctors, no investment—propels the desperate into a spiral of ever deeper desperation, at which point they lurch at whatever salvation rope floats by. The latest of those illusory ropes has been tossed by the current White House occupant.

Right now, this year, many of the hillbilly grandchildren of the withered Great Society are busy. They are agitating and documenting what it is there that is worth saving—not just individual lives, but a still living culture that has not yet lost its sense of soul and community. If they have not left, it is because flight spells nothing less than the shredding of the collective soul where the the tiny-handed president's rescue ropes offer nothing more than nooses that will drag them into the final slaughterhouse. That is the darkest specter of today's trauma. And while I did escape long ago to another culture facing its own globalized traumas, I cannot help but wake up in the night traumatized by the fate facing the place of my origins. ■

FRANK BROWNING's many books include *The Fate of Gender: Nature, Nurture and the Human Future*. A former correspondent for National Public Radio, he now lives in France and says the election of Donald Trump provoked him to get a French passport.

Contra Trump World

Hold Fast to True Words, Real Facts

BY MAXINE CHERNOFF

Where does it hurt? Everywhere . . .

Dreams of black water, no moon or stars, celestial compass missing.

Each day more offenses accumulate. We are frightened for our planet's survival.

No protections for the sanctity of life: global destruction for a profit motive, lack of intention to disguise the plundering of our resources—human, environmental, and material. Will we recognize our country four years from now?

How many more bodies tossed on beaches and bombed into oblivion? How many lives lost, opportunities wasted?

Fruit withered in the groves, human hunger growing. The delusional man's nightmare wall, the stuff of his dreams—now the tools of our master of destruction. (Is that his advanced degree?)

In action with others, strong bonds of community can create mass demonstrations and interventions when those who are vulnerable are threatened.

I think of the courage of the White Helmet workers in Syria; of the Greek islanders who save Syrian refugees; of those preparing to provide shelter for our undocumented workers—possibilities to reclaim life in a time of war and upheaval. We must be those saviors. Not martyrs, but active presences in the lives of those affected: We must build a wall—of resistance.

Whether we write prose or poetry, we must use our words scrupulously to counter the lies and ignorance of Trump and his minions, redeeming the value of language by speaking clearly and movingly of what we might lose, what we can save. We must challenge the debasement of language, the manipulations and confabulations generated by Trump and his alt-right alternative-reality gurus. Truth as a sieve, a sifter. We must not let words be spirited away by the dark magic of alternative truths.

As so many thinkers have said, we live in a broken world, whose cracks have become rifts. We must fill them with facts, with brave opposition to the lies, with the unambiguous letters of our alphabet, building words to oppose the reckless, swollen, blasphemy of the new regime.

Against the blasphemy of the new regime:

Every fact counts. Every poem counts. Every word. ■

MAXINE CHERNOFF is professor and former chair of Creative Writing at San Francisco State University and is the author of fourteen books of poetry and six works of fiction. In 2013 she was an NEA Poetry Fellow; she is also the winner of the 2009 PEN Translation Award for her work on the German poet Friedrich Hoelderlin. Her next book "As If," will be published by Omnidawn in spring 2018.

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Gift

Here's something I
have two of, someone

said, which meant
much, and then

someone without
a word handed

me the one
thing she had—

and I could
barely, in my one

head, hold it.

Bible Study

How does a five-
year-old learn

to play dead?
Under what

sun can she
unlearn it?

—Andrea Cohen

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Omitting Beauty and Green

after Hikmet

My hands advance, the light
is hungry, a road through

my eyes runs. The world must
somewhere be blooming

enough. I like being
inside mulberries, captured.

The point is the window.
The sunny infirmary

can't smell the carnations.
Beside hopeful trees, the prison

surrenders.

—Andrea Cohen

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The Dream of the Soul

Speak It. Keep It Safe.

BY THANISSARA

I WAKE WITH FRAGMENTS of a dream. I am in a crowd, fearful. Yet a stronger need pushes me toward a platform. I have something to say but the words dissolve before reaching my tongue. I stand before the Senate, before power players. I look out to a grey fog rolling in. The dream breaks with my pleading words, "I ask you to reconsider." As daytime awareness arrives, that terrible body blow of dread, disbelief, then anger.

Sit up. Bring feet to the floor. Make tea, move to the meditation mat, light a candle, breathe—feel—breathe. Mindfulness of breath within embodied experience. Hold soft awareness to what is felt beneath thoughts that ricochet around the halls of our descent. Mix breath-infused awareness into feeling tones. Keep going, patiently, until pain dissolves into light. Envelop everyone in prayerful light waves. Meet them with your diamond conscious knowing. The putrid patriarchs who grab and crush, who push us back into dungeons of white fear cages. Know them; shadow kings who plunder through sadistic prostitution, who sell nature's Eros in fetid marketplaces.

The abusive tweet storm, rants of idiocy, and the hateful ripping apart of community that is projected daily onto our collective body, services only this. The displacement of inordinate pain held within a shattered soul. No amount of destruction will ever soothe such a rabid appetite for revenge. Instead, we are pulled into a vortex of trans-marginal stress as psychological safety nets are continually breached. The abandoned unformed agony held in the body spins into a harming fest of paranoia and rage. The self-structure, losing ground, spirals into a disorienting fog. This daily ritual of cruelty ignites our shared wounds over and over. So, be mindful, be steady. Hold your ground.

We are not receptacles for the pain of shadow kings. We, the resistance, are awakening to the power of our collective soul. Speak her truth, even at vulnerable platforms where we cry out our dissent. As I grew up, I had no voice. I hardly knew I existed. As a teenager, I once painted myself as a wisp behind an ill-fitting mask. I was someone who hid, until *her* voice started to rise. Ironically, the catalyst was the excruciation of misogynistic monastic Buddhism within which I had encapsulated myself. There, the resistance to patriarchal repression began its ascent.

She, Pachamama, the immune system of the planet, is about ready to roll over us. But, for a few more geological seconds, she begs us to come to our senses, literally. Feel her pounding heart within you. In the midst of swirling shadows, we must reclaim her sacred way. I believe, I suppose, we have brought ourselves to this terrible mirror so we can study fully the reflection of our ego madness: like the handsome portrait of Dorian Gray hidden in the attic, only to be unmasked as the twisted sadist, there, underneath all along. But let's not finish here, scrambling around in the swamp of nightmarish trolls.

Last summer, in the gentle pastures of England, I met Anne Baring. Five o'clock cake and Darjeeling poured from a proper teapot into china cups in a hobbit land of cricket lawns, cottages, and pubs along the Chaucer pilgrimage route. Anne, a wise elder, produced a vital guide in her magnum opus *The Dream of the Cosmos*. Speaking with me, Anne expressed dismay that a Trump presidency would shatter the higher dream of the world. That stark reality has come to pass, and her worst fear is our daily nightmare. I wonder, though, about this shattering. Perhaps it will finally take down the last stand of this colonizing, racist, misogynist mindset. Perhaps it will set our dream free.

But we must quicken the nightmare's demise by midwifing the new world struggling to be born. We must make sure the dream of our soul is not stillborn, that the emerging child is not crushed under the feet of a degenerate and jealous patriarchy. We must herald the child's arrival with joyous voices loud and clear. It's a challenge, no doubt, but we must hold the faith. As a great man said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." ■

THANISSARA, ORIGINALLY from London, is an international Buddhist teacher and author. Her latest book is *Time To Stand Up, An Engaged Buddhist Manifesto for Our Earth*.

To My College Students

My Heart Goes Out to You

BY ALEXIS LATHEM

I WANT TO APOLOGIZE. To my students who are new immigrants from countries on Trump's list of banned peoples. To my students from Somalia and Iraq, Iran and Sudan. To those who came here as refugees from Bosnia, most of them Muslim, and also from Myanmar, also Muslims. I want to apologize to all of my Muslim students. And to my Nepali students who were forced to leave Bhutan because of their ethnicity and because they are Hindus. The Muslim ban affects them too, because it says that even here in America, you can be persecuted for your religion or your ethnicity, and that even your status here as legal residents does not protect you.

These students—with their elegant head scarves, kangas, and long skirts, with their many languages, their musical accents, their dedication to learning and deep listening—are an essential part of our community and the Muslim ban has struck a deep wound into its heart. I say its *heart*, even though immigrants are a small minority, because the order offends the very idea of a public college, which has been the portal for immigrants into American life throughout our history. And I say *heart* in the sense of the part of us that feels sorrow and is the source of our compassion. These immigrants, especially refugees, are human beings, often traumatized from living too close to the existential edge. The threat against them looms over us all, as a harbinger of worse things things to come.

I want to apologize for the lack of curiosity Americans show towards you, who will simply say about you, borrowing that formulaic phrase, that you came here because you "wish to have a better life," as if it were merely better to survive than to be killed by a car bomb or an airstrike or to drown at sea.

I apologize that we have allowed this to happen, that we have so poorly understood you. I apologize that we did not fill the streets and the airports—the way we did in response to the Muslim ban—when our government dropped bombs on your cities, or profited from the sales of weapons used against you. That we have done nothing to stop the fossil fuel burning that has turned your lands into deserts.

I am sorry that we have been so ungrateful for the gifts you bring. I teach at this community college *because of you*. You lend meaning to words that I would never have imagined. *I lost two cities. Lovely ones. Whole continents.* Because you help us to see the world through new lenses; because you help us to see ourselves.

Since the election, we have already been wounded by the assault on the values we uphold as educators—on curiosity, on learning, and on critical thought, and by the crude bludgeoning of language coming directly from the highest office in the land. And now, with the Muslim ban, there is a darker cloud that has descended upon the classroom, which no longer feels like a safe place for the exchange of ideas, where there is self-censorship and suspicion.

I am sorry that you, immigrants who want so badly to learn, have arrived in this time and place, when we are so confused as a country that we have brought on this chaos and division, and that you, who share no blame in this, are caught in the middle of it.

We have seen this before—when groups of people are singled out, marked, and excluded. Who are feared for their Otherness. That is why the Muslim ban has struck such a nerve. That is why we will not stand passively by. That is why a genuine apology will require so much more than words. ■

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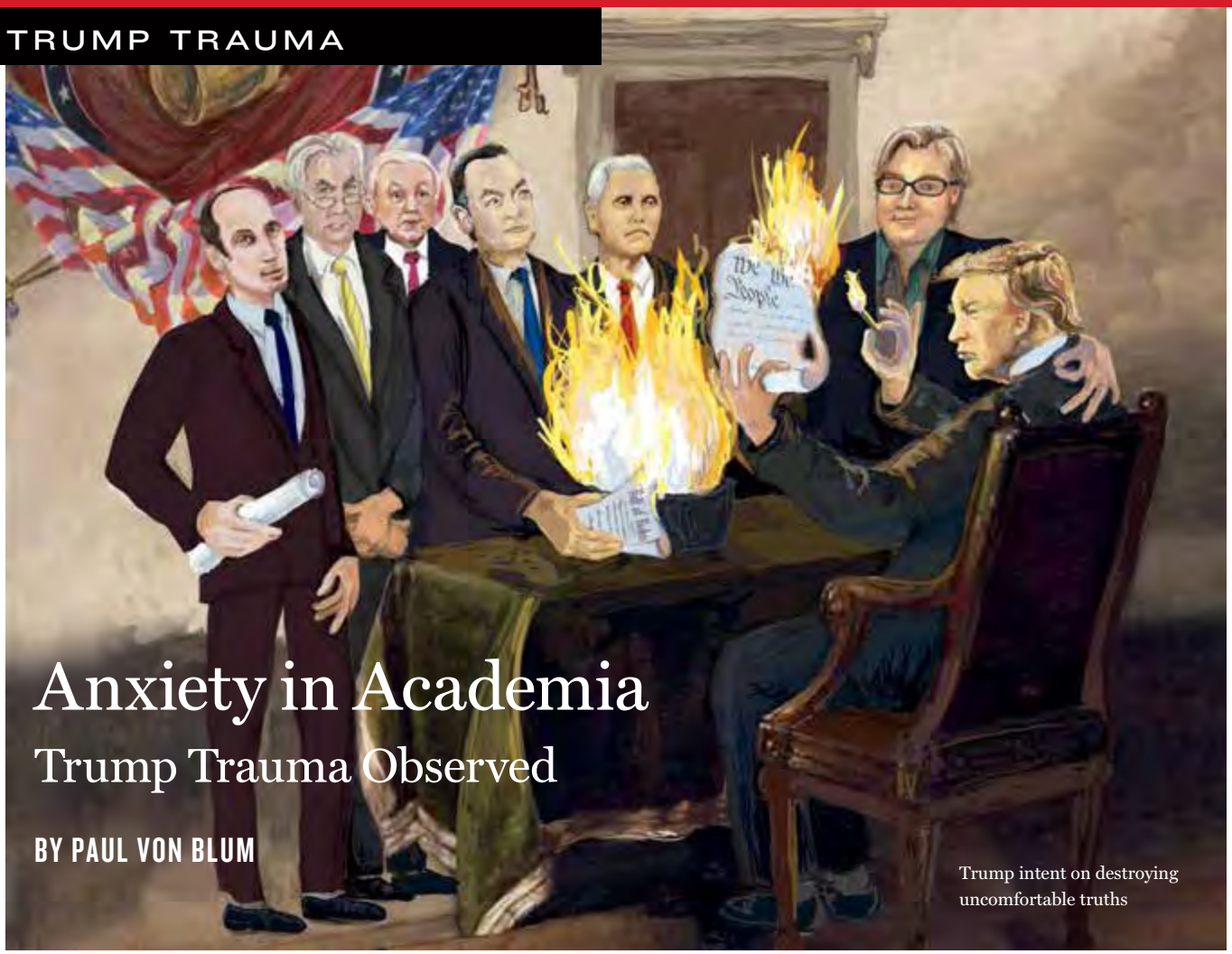

Anxiety in Academia

Trump Trauma Observed

BY PAUL VON BLUM

Trump intent on destroying uncomfortable truths

Clare Wilderson

Since the Donald Trump election victory, I have spoken to hundreds of students in my UCLA identity community. Most have expressed severe distress, telling me of their anxieties about the future. Young women and men seeking to work for environmental change, for racial and gender justice, or to pursue creative careers in the arts have been disheartened by Trump's retrograde actions and appointments and his sexist, racist, and xenophobic rhetoric before and since his inauguration.

I share these reactions entirely. But these conversations have taken a far grimmer turn when I discuss Trump and his policies with DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) students, Muslim students, and others whose anxieties are more immediate and more intimately personal. Some examples are distressingly revealing about the state of anxiety at UCLA and probably hundreds of American college and university campuses.

Regularly, I hear about students, siblings, and parents who may soon lose healthcare coverage. This is potentially catastrophic: finances, health, even lives are at stake. I also have DACA students from Belize, Bolivia, and Mexico. Each is frightened about her future. Will DACA continue? Will her parents be deported and her family broken up? Will she herself be deported? Can she plan for her educational and professional future in the US? The specter of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sweeps hover over their lives. Their anxiety is palpable.

My students from Trump's suspect nations fare even worse. One young Syrian woman has a boyfriend in detention seeking asylum. I see her anxiety as she worries about him while struggling with her personal academic responsibilities. Other students, from Iran, wonder what might happen to relatives there: can they even travel to America? Can the students themselves travel to see them in Tehran? Will they be harassed—or worse—at US airports by overzealous or racist Homeland Security officials?

These are real worries and they must not be trivialized. The Trump election has caused widespread emotional trauma on the nation's campuses. My best advice to my students is to resist, personally and politically. ■

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After Inauguration: 2017

BY ALICIA OSTRIKER

Chapter One

And yes, a new king rose over Egypt
a rabid creature in the shape of a man
without a conscience
a man with small hands
a rubbery pink mouth
that poured lies like oil
emitted hate like carbon dioxide
greedy to devour men, women and children
an abomination
And the spirits of the women rose up,
and on a determined day they marched
in the capital city and many other cities
they marched for kindness
and dignity in this world
they filled the streets and highways
with love and song
they took photographs of each other's clever signs
they mocked the king
they marched with babies and men of good heart
they rallied
they returned to their homes
but the king was still there—the king still sat
on his throne of money

Chapter Two

—with a nod to "Paradise Lost," Book II

A stroke of the pen
what good what harm
a stroke of the pen
like a twist of the arm

a stroke of the pen
like a puppy's turd
a stroke of the pen
many acts of murder

A stroke of the pen
in the war against women
the smirks of the men
are always well-hidden

Except for the man
most powerful on the earth
finger above the button
he smirks and smirks and smirks

A stroke of the pen—
a keyboard tap
in the devil's den
the devil's crap.

Chapter Three

Eight-Word Lines
Speeding through the funhouse tunnel, catching glimpses of
myself in the funhouse mirrors, unlike the mirrors
of the proletarian park in Coney Island where
my father saved up to take me every
fourth of July back when America was famous
for spacious skies, amber waves of grain, liberty
and justice for all, the funhouse mirrors could
expand and contract you, lengthen and fatten you,

distort you but only temporarily, because America was
a free country, we could giggle at ourselves
and walk away, we Jews were especially lucky
living in this free country, a country without
pogroms, we could vote we could defeat tyrants
and bigots we could end persecution and poverty
and I can't quite remember getting on the

train that brought us to this funhouse where
the dim-lit corrugated latex tunnel like the interior
of a large insect whips us along waving tendrils
waving mirrors twisting our images to images of
the king smiling at us in our baskets

ALICIA OSTRIKER is a poet and critic whose most recent collection of poems is *Waiting for the Light*. As a critic she has written about American women's poetry and about the Bible.

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in the rushing Nile loudly wailing and screaming
bodies of infants bobbing in the surrounding water

this chapter does not include the king's daughter

Chapter Four

"Sorry, the page you're looking for cannot be found," is
the message Internet users get when trying to access the
Spanish version of the White House page . . . created in the
months following President Barack Obama's swearing in in
2009. Up until Jan. 20, the site also had a blog dedicated to
issues considered of interest for the Hispanic community.
—Fox news

"Sorry the page you are looking for cannot be found"
—my laptop screen

Because there is nothing new under the sun
let's look for precedents: Emperor Shih Huang Ti
built the wall and burned the books
in the third century before Jesus so we have
an idea what to expect: say goodbye to the Spanish
language version of the White House web page
and the associated blogs thereof, goodbye to science
and jurisprudence, hello informers, hello more and more
  massive
accumulations of wealth, hello gulag, hello to the songs
of resistance, the poems inscribed on toilet paper
and slivers of soap, memory sharpened
like a steak knife, all borders closed,
a time to wait. A time to refrain from waiting.

Chapter Five

In the Shadow of Liberty

Winter's been warm and rainy, here in the city,
although the day we marched, bright sunlight
filled millions of hearts already opened
to radical entries of hope and fear.

It was like this all over the planet—
we trust the photographs, we trust our women's
hearts like the open borders we march for,
sunlight, as if there's a god, and clever signs,

Hope dominant, moms and dads, so many young—

then we go home and fear greets us in the kitchen,
we go to bed with fear. Meanwhile a piggish

king signs statement after statement, invisible
missiles striking Liberty, Mother of Exiles,

she who welcomed my grandparents
fleeing pogroms . . . by now, my son is preparing to spend
a weekend setting taps for our sugar maples
in Chester, Massachusetts, on our small piece

of the "natural world," and if I close

my eyes, I am there with him, it's sunny
and cold, maybe a dust of snow, we breathe
the sparkling air, we look around at pillars
of maple, pine and oak trunks, tangles of branches,

Leaves crunch under our feet,
fear leaves us, for a moment, and then
eyes open, I am back in the city, it's rainy
and I do not know how anything will end.

Gaia Pours Chai, Watching Over the Parapets

It is a beginning
such as I have never seen
in America

or anywhere on the planet
it is a beginning if they continue
to keep their hand on that plow

hold on, if they vow
no more auction block for me
or for anyone, and get your rosaries

off my ovaries—that sign made me laugh

and think Oh women, and Oh dear men
in your many millions
keep up the good work ■

Beyond Trauma, Beyond Trump

BY MATT MEYER

Tending a fire for a sweat in Standing Rock, ND at the home of one of the direct descendants of the great Lakota Chief Sitting Bull, I couldn't help but contemplate the many layers of trauma and resistance that have been permeating the US this past fractious year. For so many in left and progressive circles, the tumult can be quickly summed up by simply saying "Trump."

For those searching, however, for a deeper understanding of both the causes and cures of our current moment in history, we must look far beyond Trump to find our way out of this time of injustice and violence. Centering our work around Trump and his circle may not only prove ineffective in dealing with these symptoms of a society in crisis; it may lead us to worsen the divides that got us here.

Traditional indigenous elders, who have once again emerged as inspiring leaders, remind us of the true meaning of *Lakota*: Allies of the Spirit. In our efforts to organize beyond our traumas and travails, we would do well to take their lead and learn how to become better allies.

Just as Brecht asserted that in dark times there will still be singing, we would do well to celebrate victories when they do take place. We have a lot to learn from the people of Puerto Rico, who have been exuberant about the long-term successful campaign to release political prisoner Oscar Lopez Rivera. The jubilation at the granting of his clemency was for the man himself but also based on the pride of a nation that stood up; support for Oscar came from every political party and religious perspective, including Republican-oriented Pentecostal congregations and a call for release from the Pope himself.

There is no doubt that great differences still exist, even regarding approaches towards decolonization. But there was little shaming or sectarianism in a movement which focused on areas of agreement, and on speaking with one voice for the freedom of their countryman.

There is much to be learned from the decentralized Movement for Black Lives (MBL), with a particular need for allies to accept that beyond the sanctity of life itself, Black *Leadership* matters. The inherent problems of not accepting such leadership should be obvious; when supporters from non-oppressed groups plunge into solidarity work without an appreciation for or sensitivity to people's history and self-determination, racist, patriarchal, and other divisive practices seep into our attempts at support.

While we need to build groups and communities where all people are welcomed and appreciated, the decades-old call for whites to stand up for racial justice in our own communities has too often been unheeded or misunderstood. The MBL platform outlines clear ways in which ending the war on Black people, working for reparations, strategies for investment-divestment and economic justice, and struggles for community control and political power can be waged using different tactics for different folks.

Finally, we would do well to reflect on the fact that a President Pence might be considerably worse than a President Trump, with extremely similar or even more draconian policies, more carefully packaged in a less outrageous exterior. Pence would be better able to unite a now fractured GOP around a hard-right agenda, using subtler and thus more dangerous methods of repression.

We would do well to also remember that neoliberal corporate executives are not true voices of the 99 percent—and that their reasons for opposing Trump, or for supporting aggressive polices against Russia, are not ones we should unite around. The US left has failed in part because instead of boldly imagining and building loving alternative structures, we tear ourselves apart making priority lists of the things we oppose.

As allies of the spirit, let us stand *with* Standing Rock, the MBL, our Puerto Rican colleagues, and so many others; let us not, as one Native brother noted, just stand *on* indigenous land, or stand at the front of other's demonstrations. Together, let us build new strategies, refusing to choose between Martin and Malcolm and the false dichotomies that divided past movements. With the vision of all great revolutionaries who understood that the basis of our work must be profound love for the people, let us create anew. ■

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Clare Wilderson

Listening to Leonard Cohen in the Time of Trump

BY DAVID A. SYLVESTER

This era of Donald Trump and Trumpism has unleashed a wave of physical and emotional violence so venomous that by now, it's clear that this is more a form of spiritual assault than an aberrant political ideology. It contains a lust that won't be satisfied by attacking any particular group of victims because it really seeks to destroy values. Donald Trump himself and those around him seem to delight in smashing the ethical norms and traditions that have historically provided the spiritual foundations for the healthy functioning of civil society. Peter Wehner, a conservative commentator, has accurately summed up this new *zeitgeist*: "Donald Trump is a transgressive personality. He thrives on creating disorder, in violating rules, in provoking outrage. He is a shock jock."[1]

For those of us who consider ourselves both spiritual and progressive, or perhaps simply people of good will: How do we respond? What do we do about this transgressive spirit that inspires hate crimes, attacks on mosques and immigrants, and denigrates women?

Certainly, it's essential to take direct political action, such as the Women's March last January and the spontaneous demonstrations at airports to protect the rights of immigrants threatened with an ill-conceived travel ban. And it's also clear that staying spiritually centered is equally important through prayer, meditation, and community spiritual practices at a time of fake news, lies, and the mockery of sacred values.

However, I think there's a more fundamental challenge: How do we combine outer action with inner peace? How do we confront the poisonous spirit of the counter-demonstrators in the streets without becoming poisoned ourselves? How do we respond to haters without hating or to the rageful without becoming enraged? How do we lead by exampleship, by being an example of our values of cooperation, dignity, and respect for all people in our behavior, not just our words? And do we sincerely mean to include the Trumpistas in that phrase, "all people"?

In reflecting on this, I had a surprising insight shortly after the presidential election last November. I went back in a reverie to the 1960s and remembered how the horrors of the Vietnam War made the appearance of everyday normalcy seem ghastly and surreal. How did we maintain our sanity then? What came to me was this: Our musicians saved us—and specifically, our folksingers. Ever since the Depression and civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, the demonstrations, protests, and marches had been accompanied by the songs of Woody Guthrie, Paul Robeson, Pete Seeger, the Freedom Singers in the south, Phil Ochs, Mahalia Jackson, the early Bob Dylan and later, in the 1970s, Holly Near. The music maintained a connection to people's spiritual core during the turbulence of protest. In 1963, when Joan Baez led the people at the Civil Rights March in Washington DC in singing "We Shall Overcome," she was not only strengthening their faith and hope but also making a public assertion of victory. Baez, and the tradition of spiritual and socially conscious music, helped us find prayer-in-the-midst-of-action.

This unexpected revelation emerged from my musings when I heard that, as fate would have it, the great prophetic and mystical Leonard Cohen had passed away at the age of 82 during the night before the presidential election. It seems too harsh to say Cohen died, because his mournful, meditative incantations seemed to presage his passing for years. Compared to the depth and beauty of his sensibility, his end seemed incongruously mundane. Apparently, he fell during the night of Monday, Nov. 7, went back to bed and drifted off into what his manager called a "sudden, unexpected and peaceful" death.[2]

Compared to the more political folksingers, Cohen was different. There was no mistaking the message of songs like Phil Ochs's "I Ain't Marching Anymore" and Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a-Changin'." Instead, Cohen sang from a quieter angst. He sounded as if he knew what it felt like to stop marching entirely and to struggle against old patterns of living in the changing times. So one morning, after reading

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Leonard Cohen

Olivia Wise

both the tributes to Cohen as well as the anguished reports about Trump, I clicked onto YouTube to console myself with some of his music, and I was transported back to the moment when I heard a Leonard Cohen song for the first time.[3]

It was 1967, and a group of us were gathered at our friend Sally's house, 16-year-olds about to be ejected into this allegedly adult world. We were sitting around her family's dining room table, trying to make conversation, somewhat excited yet embarrassed to be together in our adolescent way. Sally was chattering as she put on the record *In My Life* by one of the new folk-singers. Suddenly, a voice emerged as delicate as a child's first song and feminine as the sky is blue:

Suzanne takes you down,
to a place by the river.
You can hear the boats go by,
You can spend the night forever.

And you know that she's half-crazy,
that's why you want to be there,
and she feeds you tea and oranges
that come all the way from China.

We fell silent, mesmerized by the mystery of words we had never heard before and a human voice more beautiful than I could ever imagine possible. We felt a presence that invited us into a place of tenderness, a haven for us to inhabit in the midst of anxiety and turbulence, a place of solace:

And just when you want to tell her
that you have no love to give her,
she gets you on her wavelength,
and lets the river answer
that you've always been her lover.

And you want to travel with her,
and you want to travel blind,
and you think you maybe trust her,
for she's touched your perfect body
with her mind.

Later, we may have wondered what the words meant, but somewhere inside, we already knew. These songs, written by Cohen and sung by Judy Collins, brought us together and gave us communion as friends and later, as a subculture. They floated into our consciousness and formed in us an interior space for healing and retreat from the world into which we were about to be plunged.

Fifty years later, I was returning to the same songs, and I closed my eyes and found myself flowing back into this benevolent center, this most intimate self, and being comforted. Then, something quite startling began to happen. On the periphery of my awareness, other sensations began to crowd in, intrusions that seemed to make no sense. I resisted for a moment, then allowed them—and remarkably enough, the feelings of the song remained like an oasis while they were surrounded by vibrations and shocks of the earth convulsing, blinding lights and scalding heat, screams and wailing of villagers, perhaps families, running in lines down dirt roads with their peaked hats and babies, the B-52s roaring in, strafing and napalming the village and the forest.

Yes, it was true, I thought to myself, that's how it was. Then, as now, we lived in a double reality. Almost everyone seemed to go about their normal lives as if nothing unusual was happening, and yet over the horizon, even 8,000 miles away, the agony of the Vietnamese people came to us through the images on television and in the newspapers, in our conversations and demonstrations. Our country had invaded Vietnam, but Vietnamese were invading our spirit. We may have left their country, but their ghosts came and stayed with us.

This fragmentation of American consciousness is what made songs like "Suzanne" so necessary. After the election of Trump, this brief auditory hallucination reminded me that no matter how bad things got in the outer world—and they got a whole lot worse after 1967, with the riots, anti-war demonstrations, the Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy assassinations, the election of Nixon and his "madman theory" of war[4]—we had Leonard Cohen's vision to remind us of an elemental goodness in life, no matter how darkened by passing events. He did not sing of a simple, sunny goodness but one filled with grief and lamentation, yet charged with erotic longing and beauty all the same. He spoke about darkness, but he sang as if he felt surrounded by angels of light. His song *Anthem* comes from his album *The Future* in 1992*:*

Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack, a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.

Anyone familiar with this image will know it comes from Jewish mystical tradition. As Jonathan Freedland wrote in *The Atlantic*:

> According to the 16th century rabbi and mystic, Isaac Luria, God created vessels into which he poured his holy light. These vessels weren't strong enough to contain such a powerful force and they shattered: the sparks of divine light were carried down to earth along with the broken shards. Put another way: There is a crack in everything, it's how the light gets in.[5]

This perspective came from Cohen's reading of the Jewish mystical treatise, *The Zohar,* and he always identified as Jewish, both growing up in an Orthodox Jewish home in Montreal where his father and uncle were lay leaders, and specifying burial in an Orthodox ceremony.[6] However, in spite of this, Cohen was a committed eclectic. His spiritual path delved into the Gnostic Gospels, Zen Buddhist meditation, grief, suffering, depression, drugs and multiple affairs that never culminated in marriage.[7]

This eclecticism gave his music a mystifying poetic quality that eludes easy categorization. On stage, even in his late 70s, he was a magnetic presence, bowing down underneath a black fedora. He looked like "a Rat Pack rabbi, God's chosen mobster," as Sylvie Simmons put it in her biography of Cohen.and he groaned out his words to gorgeous and haunting melodies.[8] For instance, "Dance Me to the End of Love," released in 1984:

Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin.
Dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in.
Lift me like an olive branch and be my homeward dove,
And dance me to the end of love.
Yeah, dance me to the end of love.

The mood of yearning and tenderness is unmistakable. Who would guess that it's a meditation on the Holocaust? In an interview with the CBC Radio in 1995, Cohen described the source of the song:

> . . . that came from just hearing or reading or knowing that in the death camps, beside the crematoria, in certain of the death camps, a string quartet was pressed into performance while this horror was going on, those were the people whose fate was this horror also. And they would be playing classical music while their fellow prisoners were being killed and burnt. So, that music, "Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin," meaning the beauty there of being the consummation of life, the end of this existence and of the passionate element in that consummation. But, it is the same language that we use for surrender to the beloved, so that the song—it's not important that anybody knows the genesis of it, because if the language comes from that passionate resource, it will be able to embrace all passionate activity.[9]

His signature song, "Hallelujah," has become wildly popular; k.d. lang performed it at the 2010 Winter Olympics and the Beyt Tikkun Synagogue of Rabbi Michael Lerner has incorporated it into its Shabbat service. But the words themselves defy explanation. At times, they are Biblical; at other times, lamentations over loves lost and humbling confessions:[10]

You say I took the name in vain.
I don't even know the name.
But if I did, well really, what's it to you?
There's a blaze of light in every word.
It doesn't matter which you heard,
The holy or the broken hallelujah

Hallelujah . . .

I did my best, it wasn't much.
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch.
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you.
And even though it all went wrong,
I'll stand before the lord of song,
With nothing on my tongue but hallelujah

Is this a holy or a broken Hallelujah? Or both?

In the last two years of his life, Cohen was suffering from fractures in his spine and sitting in an orthopedic chair at home, but he kept composing. His son Adam helped him finish his final album, "You Want It Darker," released three weeks before his death. The title song is classic Cohen. He speaks in a common vernacular, echoes the opening line of the *Kaddish*, turns to the agony of Jesus and closes with Abraham's response to God's call: *Hineni*, "Here I am":

If you are the dealer, I'm out of the game.
If you are the healer, it means I'm broken and lame.
If thine is the glory then mine must be the shame.
You want it darker,
We kill the flame.

Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name.
Vilified, crucified, in the human frame.
A million candles burning for the help that never came,
You want it darker.

Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my lord[11]

From one perspective, Cohen's darkness seems to lack the traditional prophetic call to repentance, *teshuvah,* with the promise of renewal, or faith in the goodness of a transcendent God, even in the midst of chaos. He echoes the words of the *Kaddish* but misses its distinctly Jewish affirmation of His Great Name sanctified while mourning the death of a loved one and remembering the undying faith that links one generation to another. Cohen sees the tragedy of Jesus crucified but not the Christian joy of resurrection. His Judaism seems more regretful than compassionate, more repentant than merciful, more *Selichot* and *Yom Kippur* than the exuberance of *Simchat Torah*, the Joy of Torah.

Cohen has been called the poet of "erotic despair," but I think it is the songs, not just his words, that take us to a deeper reality, a place where *eros* and *thanatos* are fused, where a person's all-too-human unloveliness is part of the sacred, not to be scorned but to be embraced gently, tragically. To my ear, Cohen's affirmation comes in his lovely melodies, the collage of images, and the trance he casts. To me, Cohen stands in the tradition of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher who calls himself a son of the King of Jerusalem and begins with:

Utter futility!—said Koheleth—Utter futility! All is futile!
What real value is there for a man
In all the gains he makes beneath the sun?
One generation goes, another comes,
But the earth remains the same forever.

Yet these lines are so beautiful that Ecclesiastes is one of the most quoted books of the Bible. As Jean-Paul Sartre once wrote, a song of grief transcends grief. Cohen has this same authenticity when he speaks of Jesus. It's as if he, as a *kohen*, knew the true meaning of the words when he sang them in "Suzanne":[12]

And Jesus was a sailor
when he walked upon the water,
and he spent a long time watching
from a lonely wooden tower,

and when he knew for certain
only drowning men could see him,
he said, "All men shall be sailors then
until the sea shall free them."

This Jesus of Leonard Cohen was not the Jesus of the Christian churches, just as Suzanne was not some woman offering a romantic tryst. For Cohen, they are personal presences who offer to accompany us on our journey through the difficulties of this world.

But he himself was broken
long before the sky would open;
forsaken, almost human,
he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone.

And you want to travel with him,
and you want to travel blind,
and you think you maybe trust him,
for he's touched your perfect body with his mind.

For me, these words speak far beyond any literal meaning of one person's experience; they capture the mood of our childhood in the postwar years, when it seemed, as it does now, that the whole world was being broken and the sky was opening and the ghosts of the dead were rising up, haunting our steps, troubling our sleep.

These ghosts came from all over the world, speaking in accents that we couldn't understand as children. For those of us born after the end of a world war, there were the ghosts of the 6 million, strangers who became friends and family from the photographs we lingered over and stories were read and reread, each with a smile, a name, a fate. There were the ghosts from one fireball in Japan, then another, and their faces came in death like particles in the wind and settled on us children, like a dust that stuck to our skin as we played. There were the tens of thousands burned alive in atomic blasts, and fields of death in Normandy, Sicily, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Later, the Vietnamese began to arrive in those waking moments at 4am, and the Jewish athletes in Munich, the Palestinian mothers, wrapped in headscarves, the families of Gaza, the *campesinos* of Guatemala, Monsignor Oscar Romero and the Catholic priests of El Salvador. In my subterranean life, they are all still with me, and Judy Collins and Leonard Cohen are still keeping me sane.

Fifty years later, I can return to that moment as a 16-year-old, with Bob, Sally, and Kathy, gathered at that dinner table, taking refuge in this place of comfort amid the flames of this world, even in presence of the millions who died in America's "good" years.

Suzanne takes you down to a place by the river,
you can hear the boats go by,
you can spend the night forever.

And the sun pours down like honey
on our Lady of the Harbor,
And she shows you where to look
among the garbage and the flowers.

We are now in the midst of the battle for the soul of America. However long Trump remains in power, he has validated the most outlandish proposals of the most marginal of political figures, including Christian fascists[13], neoconservative militarists[14], neo-segregationists and white supremacists[15], anti-science climate deniers[16], plutocrats who are both incompetent and unprepared,[17] as well as Wall Street and corporate predators. All have walked across the stage as the sorcerer's apprentices in this unreality show of imperial power.

As fate would have it, the Trumpists are also inheriting a governmental apparatus well prepared for them by George W. Bush and Barack Obama: national electronic surveillance, rule by executive orders, the Patriot Act, detention centers and mass deportations, drone assassinations in seven countries, and endless, futile foreign wars. At this writing, the imperial militarism that we directed at other countries seems destined to return home, and the anti-democratic style of government we imposed on so many other countries is now being imposed on us. The conservative Peter Wehner may have been accurate in his prediction when he said that "Donald Trump has given us many reasons to worry. A man with illiberal tendencies, a volatile personality and no internal checks is now president. This isn't going to end well."

Yet this is not a time for despair and inaction. For this, we can thank the tradition of prophetic folksingers for offering us what Rabbi Michael Lerner calls "the holy moment." He adds:

> Prayerful energy can keep us from sinking to Trump's level, help us stop the police agents who always try to provoke demonstrators to violence and keep us on the spiritual level of nonviolence and love that are the only hope of transformation."

We need the holy moments of spiritually conscious, socially engaged music now more than ever as brutality gains strength. Last January, Mikhail Gorbachev became alarmed about the belligerence of military leaders and warned that the world "looks as if it is preparing for war."[18] If so, tens of thousands may perish and become ghosts that will haunt

us and our children for decades. We can only hope that the 16-year-olds of today will find those interior havens of spiritual wisdom and solace that folksingers like Cohen helped us find decades ago, places that can protect, comfort, and ground us in a spiritual reality deeper than the chaos of the storms we all now face, a place for heroes and children, as Cohen sang at the ending of "Suzanne."

There are heroes in the seaweed,
there are children in the morning.
They are leaning out for love,
and they will lean that way forever,
while Suzanne holds the mirror.

And you want to travel with her,
and you want to travel blind,
and you think maybe you'll trust her,
For you've touched her perfect body
with your mind. ■

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—Judy Collins & Leonard Cohen—"Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye" 1976
—Leonard Cohen—Anthem.
—Barbra Streisand Avinu Malkeinu Live in Israel
—Barbra Streisand-Ave Maria)
—leonard cohen dance me to the end of love
—Leonard Cohen—Hallelujah (Live at the Montreal Jazz Festival 2008); also: Hallelujah + Lyrics.
—k.d. Lang—Hallelujah (Live Olympic Games 2010 Opening Ceremony).avi.
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—You Want It Darker (Lyric)

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Why Muslims Must Help Counter Totalitarian Islamism

BY KABIR HELMINSKI

When almost forty years ago I naively set foot on the Sufi Path, inspired by its humanity, refinement, and love, I never imagined I would find myself on this battlefield. And yet now there is no way I can leave it, a battlefield on which innocents have been turned into enemies, religious discourse has been degraded, and where the ineptness and hypocrisy of Western Powers have caused millions to leave their homelands and seek refuge in foreign lands.

There are a hundred, perhaps a thousand facts that are not explained by the official narrative about 9/11. But most, as if hypnotized by the trauma of the event, accepted the story offered by an administration that lied about so many things. And the tragedy continues to unfold.

Anybody who knows a little about the Middle East, knows that in 2001 Islamist movements were failing both politically—rarely drawing more than 10 percent in elections—and ideologically, unable to provide solutions to social problems. Al Qaeda had a few hundred followers, and our government had a handful of people working on counter-terrorism. Quite suddenly a new enemy could be created to replace the communist threat: Islamic Terrorism.

Anyone should be able to reason that it is virtually impossible to defend a society from terrorist acts, especially if we have given terrorists good reason to want revenge. But America initiated a bogus War on Terror that has cost trillions of dollars, and the net result is . . . more terror. Oh dear, where did we go wrong? Why didn't our punishing attack on Afghanistan for harboring Osama, our pre-emptive invasion of Iraq, our "humanitarian" intervention in Libya, our support for "moderate rebels" in Syria, and our special operations in a hundred other countries end or at least diminish this threat to our freedom and existence?

And during this period, hundreds of millions of dollars have been poured into the Islamophobia industry. We are reminded every day of the threat of Islamic terror, portrayed as an evil, monolithic force bent on conquering the world, already established as a fifth column in our own countries, seeking to replace our democracy and rights with the barbaric shariah law. Learning about Islam from the internet has become like learning about love from a porn site.

What began as a kind of farce has become a self-fulfilling prophecy to some extent. There is now a growing movement of totalitarian Islamism and it is directly the result of our illegal and barbaric interventions, our hate-mongering, our disrespect of 1.5 billion people. But this "totalitarian Islamism" derives its rationale from the Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia, which was installed by the British early in the 20th Century, which benefitted from the riches of the kingdom was able to spread its toxic ideology, contradicting and opposed most of traditional Islam, propagandizing through all Sunni Muslim countries, and displacing the spiritually tolerant approach to Islam known as Sufism.

Let's be very clear. There are, broadly speaking, two forms of Islam: 1. a non-traditional totalitarian form, a Shia version of which can also be found in Iran, while the Sunni version is sourced in Saudi Arabia, and 2. the traditional Islam which has historically established multi-religious, multicultural societies, coexisting side by side with Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. It is this second form of Islam which is the greatest defense against the first, except that the West seems to be moving in the direction of further humiliating all Muslims, failing to see that traditional Islam is, generally, an ally in the project of establishing human dignity and social justice.

Two cogent examples of the Muslim attempt to extend a hand of friendship to the wider world are **A Common Word**

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and **The Covenants Initiative**, neither of which have been given nearly the attention they deserve by Western media. A Common Word was a document that originated with Nobel Peace Prize-nominated Prince Ghazi of Jordan and was signed initially by over a hundred Islamic world leaders and major religious figures and scholars. This document proposes that the more than 50 percent of the world's population that identify as Christians or Muslims could affirm their friendship and peaceful coexistence on the basis of two principles common to both communities: *Love of God and Love of One's Neighbor*.

Another example is the **Covenants Initiative** based on documents of early Islam and published as *The Covenants of the Prophet with the Christians of the World*. The Covenants emphasize a direct command from the Prophet Muhammad to protect Christians and their places of worship "till the end of time." The Jewish communities were already reconciled through the Covenant of Medina, as long as they were not engaged in sedition, and the fact that the first governor of Jerusalem after it came under Muslim rule was himself a practicing Jew!

To underline the main point here, traditional Islam has generally been a multicultural, multi-religious phenomenon. But, the Islamophobes will say, religious minorities were declared "dhimmis" and did not have the same rights as a Muslims. Yes, they paid a special tax of a few percent, were freed from the obligation of military service, and were free to follow their own religious law even when it contradicted Islamic Law—for instance, being free to sell and consume alcohol.

Again and again the Islamophobes try to make the case that real Muslims are out to kill non-believers and establish their tyranny over the whole world. They point to the atrocities of ISIS as if it were the ultimate expression of Islam, and yet the true origins of ISIS need to be carefully researched. It has already been shown that ISIS grew out of the remnants of Saddam Hussein's Baathist command and was modeled on the East German Stasi, then finally given "Islamic packaging."

But let's not suggest that we do not have a serious problem. A certain number of young Muslims, often disenfranchised in their own societies and enraged by the disrespect shown their identity, are being radicalized and drawn to the most extreme expression of their anger. They are unlikely to be swayed by theological arguments, any more than the gang members that have made much of Latin America a living hell will be swayed by arguments to be good boys. More than religious or political movements, these begin as alpha male phenomena that under certain circumstances of extreme injustice and the collapse of civil society develop into murder, rape, and torture. In the Middle East these elements are further funded and weaponized for purposes that serve other geo-strategic interests (but that is a story for another day).

As a Muslim, what I fear is the growing politicized Islamism (not Islam) bereft of spiritual content, fueled by rage against the injustices of interventionist wars and drone attacks, and the Islamophobia industry that distorts traditional Islam beyond recognition. It was Islam that tempered war with the prohibition against killing civilians and noncombatants, using fire as a weapon, or even destroying agricultural property. It was Islam that routinely showed magnanimity on the battlefield as when Saladin sent his personal physician to treat his enemy, King Richard the Lion-Hearted. And it was Islam that gave refuge to Spanish Jews when they were expelled by King Ferdinand. And it is Islamic Law that preserved the Christian and Jewish holy sites and communities of Jerusalem for the last 14 centuries.

The answer, then, to the question, repeatedly asked of anyone who tries to bring some balance to the discussion, "Why are Muslims so violent?" might be another question, "How many innocent Muslim civilians have died in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and now Yemen?" Let's start at more than a million and keep counting. Perhaps the question deserves to be reversed: Why are the US and its allies engaged in perpetual war?

But not until recently has the entire and diverse Muslim population of the world come under suspicion and been blamed for this situation, at least in the minds of some.

One solution to the problem of increasing resentment and radicalization among a minority of Muslims is for the US to recognize that Muslims themselves are willing to engage in the struggle against extremism—intellectually, spiritually, and practically. The Muslim community has never been more aware, motivated, and educated. They know this is a battle for the soul of Islam that can and will be won by Muslims themselves, but the job is being made more difficult by the policies, hypocrisies, and rhetoric of the Islamophobia industry, which is itself one of the greatest threats to world peace. It needs to be recognized that there is also a reawakening and renaissance among Muslims. More and more they are looking critically at how their tradition can and must be recontextualized on the basis of moral values that have always been present even when they have sometimes been obscured by narrow-mindedness and political circumstances.

Islam is not the enemy. The rationale of perpetual war must be confronted. It is one of the greatest present dangers, diverting our wealth and productivity, dividing humanity. We can have an adequate defense against aggression, and, at the same time, preserve our good will and magnanimity. ■

Human Rights on the Mountain of God

Contra 'Religious Zionism'

BY SHAIYA ROTHBERG

Few would take issue today with the claim that religious Zionism is the most particularistic and self-centered of contemporary Jewish identities. While many streams of Judaism and Zionism place the well-being of humanity at the center of their world view, mainstream religious Zionism seems only concerned with Jews. This trend is most painfully apparent in Israel's religious Zionist political party, "The Jewish Home" whose flagship projects consist of Jewish domination of Arabs (including spearheading brutal discrimination on the West Bank), Orthodox domination of Israeli society, and shifting Israeli public school curriculums away from democracy and towards Jewish particularism. For some of its most prominent Knesset members, the "Jewish Home" is also virulently homophobic.

Clearly, something has gone very wrong in the place where Jewish religion and nationality meet. But it cannot be denied that there is tremendous energy and allure in this combination. Judaism, like many religions, is a treasury of what's most beautiful about the human spirit including powerful techniques for achieving spiritual transcendence. The religious striving for higher spirit, combined with the moral vision of the prophets and the organic vitality of Jewish national identity grounded in the Land of Israel, is potent indeed. Here are all the necessary materials for a spiritual politics of meaning. And since both Judaism and Zionism include universalistic streams, it cannot be that their combination must necessarily result in collective narcissism. Surely, there is also great potential for good. For these reasons, and despite the dangers, I count myself a religious Zionist.

Where did religious Zionism go wrong? Seduced by Jewish supremacism and fundamentalism, undeniably prominent streams of Jewish tradition, we directed our energies to the morally vacuous ideal of conquering the "Greater Land of Israel." On that altar we sacrificed the ideal of justice for all. This historic moral failure of Judaism must be understood in light of the trauma of the Holocaust and our ongoing struggle to survive in Israel. But I also believe that the return to the land in which we were forged ignited an underlying tribalism that has overpowered our commitment to humanity. We chose ethnic domination over Judaism's historical goals of spiritual transcendence and global justice. It is time for religious Zionism to embrace an alternative vision.

Such a vision was offered in 1919 by the deeply learned religious Zionist sage Rabbi Chaim Hirschensohn (1857-1935). Born in Safed, he grew up in Jerusalem of the Old Yishuv while studying in his father's yeshiva. After being excommunicated by the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi establishment for advancing modern Hebrew in schools and openness to modernity, Rabbi Hirschensohn moved to Turkey where he directed some of the modern era's first Hebrew-speaking schools. Then, from roughly the turn of the century until his death in 1935, Rabbi Hirschensohn lived in Hoboken, New Jersey, where he maintained a passionate love affair with American democracy—a love that was powerfully reflected in the Torah that he taught.

Rabbi Hirschensohn's literary legacy is of immeasurable value for anyone interested in a deeply rooted and thoroughly humanistic interpretation of Judaism. I hope that readers working to accomplish Tikkun's mission of grounding progressive politics in profound spirituality will find in his teachings a potent resource. The rabbi wrote thousands of pages of Biblical and Talmudic commentary, halachic responsa and works of philosophy in an early modern Rabbinic Hebrew. While he had no students to speak of, he corresponded with dozens of rabbis, including figures such as Rav Kook and Rav Uziel, and published their deliberations about his works in

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his response. In recent decades, an impressive array of academics has focused on his writings, including Daniel Elazar, Eliezer Schweid, Avi Sagi, David Zohar, Ari Ackerman, Yossi Turner, Amos Israel, myself, and others.

The vision that Rabbi Hirschensohn published in 1919 was of an international court of law on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. I believe that it captures the essence of an enlightened religious Zionism. The rabbi opens his discussion with the question of what will be done with the Temple Mount in modern Israel (Malki Bakodesh I, pg. 13-16 in David Zohar's Edition; online here; my translation):

> Among the issues that stand as a serious obstacle for any religious [Jew is] . . . the question "what will we do in the place of our Holy Temple?" which is exalted from the beginning to establish the glory of God's praise even now, so that the nations will fear the name of God and all of the kings of the earth [will fear] God's glory, and every person shall pour out their soul in prayer and supplication before God, in this place, where God has made God's name to dwell.

First, let us notice the ambiance of the question. Clearly, for Rabbi Hirschensohn, the Temple Mount evokes the awe and radical amazement characteristic of the religious impulse. The Temple Mount is an ultimate liminal space, where one feels the smallness of oneself as a creature, like when standing on the edge of a great body of water or when peering into the sky. It is the place of God's glory.

There is also something unsettling about his talk of nations fearing the name of God. Are we again witnessing the dangers of religion? And yet, in our world of cynical demagogic and exploitative political leaders, I'd love to put the fear of God into them, properly understood. I think the rabbi has the right idea in mind. To further unfold his vision, we need to revisit the prophet Isaiah's much more ancient vision of global justice centered on the Temple Mount:

> 1) The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. 2) And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. 3) And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4) And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:1-4)

This vision is the root of Rabbi Hirschensohn's alternative ideal. The goal is not to Judaize and dispossess but to achieve justice for humanity. Isaiah's vision exemplifies for me the positive potential of the connection between Judaism and the Land. I imagine that the prophet was a sort of Israelite Gandalf who sprang from the bedrock of Jerusalem to give voice to Israelite religious consciousness. Something cosmic had awoken in Jerusalem that sought to change the global order and protect all human beings. The prophet reached into the ocean of religious symbols that animated him and clothed what had awoken with words. Those words went on to imprint the religious imagination of billions with a divine ideal of justice for all Homo sapiens. The rabbi finds in Isaiah's vision the core of the Jewish religious-national ideal.

But in the context of religious-national ideals, we must pay close attention to the shadow of domination in Isaiah's vision. The prophet imagines a world in which all people are ruled from Jerusalem by a God called YHVH. It is probably enough for most readers to replace Jerusalem with Tehran, and YHVH with Allah, to see the potential for an ideology of domination. I myself stay closer to home and imagine Israel's Chief Rabbinate on steroids. Either way, read like this, the prophet could today find work as a Member of Knesset for the Jewish Home.

"The Temple Mount is an ultimate liminal space, where one feels the smallness of oneself as a creature; like when standing on the edge of a great body of water or when peering into the sky. It's the place of God's glory."

However, we can emphasize different elements of the vision than those. Isaiah makes clear that the global order will be based on consent ("Come you, and let us go up to the mountain . . . ") and achieve global peace ("Nation shall not lift up sword . . . ") resulting in a shift of resources from the military to human security ("and they shall beat their swords into plowshares . . . "). No matter how attractive, a Jewish crusade for world domination seems unlikely to achieve those results. So we might interpret "the rule of God" as identical to the consent-based global order of peace described in the vision, rather than as Jewish triumphalism. Read this way, the prophet would feel more at home at the International Criminal Court in The Hague than among the members of Israel's Knesset. Adopting any ancient religious text as a contemporary ideal requires that we take full moral responsibility for how we interpret it.

The Hertzl Museum

Let's explore Rabbi Hirschensohn's interpretation. We'll start with a point he found perplexing. Traditional Jewish liturgy includes praying three times a day for the reinstatement of the sacrifices. And yet in his vision of the End of Days, which we might think of as the very last date that something can happen, the prophet sees no sacrifices. Rabbi Hirschensohn remarks, "it is exceedingly strange that Isaiah did not mention the sacrifices . . . " And he explains:

> And we can only explain this by saying that Isaiah prophesized about a time like the present one when we are not yet obligated to build the Temple for sacrificial worship . . . [but] already then "the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains . . . and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." And the simple meaning of this passage is that "He shall judge among the nations" refers to the "Mount of the Lord's house": That "the Mount of the Lord's house" shall judge between the nations . . .

To explain the lack of sacrifices in Isaiah's vision, Rabbi Hirschensohn invokes the idea that there are two stages of redemption and we are presently in the first stage. During this stage, humans are meant to accomplish two goals through their own action without miracles: The resurrection of the Jewish body politic in Eretz Yisrael and the global rule of justice. Only in the second stage of redemption will there be sacrifices, alongside prophecy and miracles. Since the prophet's vision is of the first naturalistic stage, they aren't included.

The rabbi's interpretation is Zionist midrash: God's traditional roles as the ingatherer of exiles and establisher of global justice are replaced by human activism (with divine inspiration). We're not meant to just pray to return to the Land but also to buy a ticket. That's why the rabbi emphasizes that the House of God, rather than God, does the actual judging. His reading is based on the Hebrew "hu" which can mean either "he" (will judge the nations) or "it" (will judge the nations). If we need God to judge, we need a miracle. But we are meant to accomplish Isaiah's vision by ourselves. So the House will judge, without miracles, in the form of an international court of law:

> . . . "The mount of the Lord's house" shall judge between the nations. And this is because in this House will be the Palace of Peace. But not like the Palace of Peace in The Hague, where the peace representatives prostrate themselves before the glory of those whose power casts its shadow over the world, and even the hint that a powerful country has done

wrong is not tolerated. And it will be more than the League of Nations . . . which has more good will than legal power.

Rather it will be the "Court of the Nations," which will judge the peoples in justice and the nations with righteousness . . . And the corrupt idea that nationalism justifies evil and iniquity will be obliterated. And justice for every nation will be like justice for every individual, for each has the right to develop in their unique way but without damaging their fellow; and there will be no more tyranny: not by one person on another, nor by one nation on another nation, nor by a person on a nation, nor by a nation on a person; nation shall not take up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore.

The Court of Nations is the rabbi's interpretation of the prophet's vision. For both, God's mountain in Jerusalem symbolizes the global reign of justice. Rabbi Hirschensohn understands global justice in light of a critique of the international law and government in his time. The Peace Palace in The Hague was established in 1913 and was involved in the implementation of the early Hague conventions (1899 and 1907) setting out limitations on warfare, protection for non-combatants, and the like. The League of Nations was established in 1920 and its goals included global peace and health, protecting minorities, and labor standards.

The rabbi's critique of these institutions is that they lack the will and power to accomplish their mission. It is not their goals, but their failure to accomplish them, which is the problem. This positive evaluation of the goals of international law in his time dovetails with Rabbi Hirschensohn's halachic analysis, appearing in other places, according to which international law is a branch of Torah law. He argues that in halachic terms, the treaties upon which international law is based constitute "the covenants of the peoples", and that such covenants are absolutely binding in Torah tradition (think of the covenant at Sinai, for example). He cites the Talmudic ruling (Gittin 46a) that violating a covenant with a foreign nation is a desecration of God's name and forbidden even if compliance with the covenant contradicts an explicit commandment. His conclusion is that obeying international law is an absolute Torah obligation for modern Israel even when Jewish law contradicts international law.

But the rabbi's vision extends beyond the conception of international law prevalent in his day. He envisions a law that protects not only vulnerable populations like national minorities but the rights of every individual in every country. This profound limitation on state sovereignty, intervening even in how states treat their own citizens, anticipates the human rights revolution which began with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. By including the most important innovation of human rights in his 1919 vision, the rabbi substantially offers a vision of global human rights three decades before the Universal Declaration.

However, just as in regard to Isaiah's religious-political vision, here too we must watch vigilantly for the shadow of domination. For instance, as far as I know, Rabbi Hirschensohn never states his plans for the Dome of the Rock or the Al Aqsa Mosque in modern Israel. Given his commitment to international law, citizen equality, and religious freedom, I cannot believe he envisioned destroying Muslim holy sites. Even so, in light of religious Zionism's weakness for Jewish supremacism, the rabbi's silence is irresponsible. Taking moral responsibility for Judaism requires that we leave no door open for the politics of domination: No text and no thinker are above criticism.

"Taking moral responsibility for Judaism requires that we leave no door open for the politics of domination: No text and no thinker are above criticism."

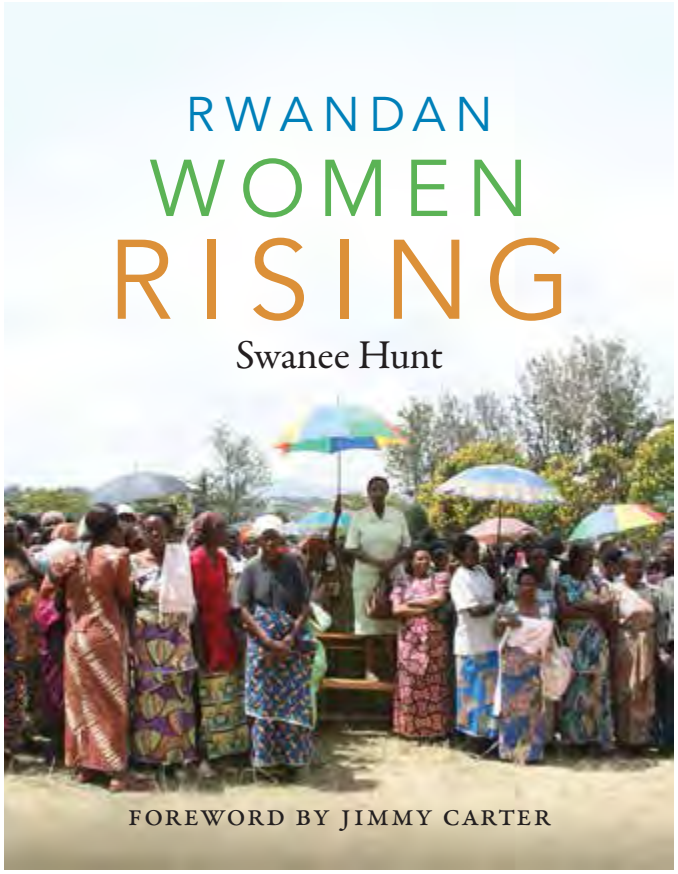
In the rabbi's vision, the Court of Nations stands on the mountain in Jerusalem. But must it be there in his view to fulfill its purpose? We saw that the rabbi's problem with the Peace Palace was that it failed to achieve compliance, not that it was in Europe. Furthermore, in spite of that failure, the rabbi recognized the international law of his day, centered in The Hague and Geneva, as authoritative Torah law. Clearly, if a "Court of Nations" arose in Europe and achieved global compliance with the international law that he ruled was binding from the Torah, Rabbi Hirschensohn would be the first to proclaim its sacred authority. The rabbi's halachic logic is clear: The Court of Nations need not be in Jerusalem. And thus he clearly rejects the "Jewish domination" interpretation of Isaiah discussed above. But if so, what's the point of his vision of the court on the Temple Mount?

Rabbi Hirschensohn watched the international community labor at the task of protecting humanity through the global rule of law. They sought to prohibit the cruelest war tactics, to protect non-combatants, to defend national minorities, to establish labor standards, and to prevent war. The rabbi yearned to express the colossal religious significance he saw in these efforts. He envisioned the Court of Nations on the mountain of God not because he expected it would be erected there but to express the sacred importance of its task. And he framed global compliance with international law (expanded to include the human rights ideal of protecting every individual in every country) as the realization of the prophet's

vision of global justice in keeping with the naturalism of the first stage of redemption. Rabbi Hirschensohn's vision seeks to express the Jewish religious and national significance of global human rights. I don't think that greater significance could be expressed using Jewish symbolism.

Here is the rabbi's alternative religious-national ideal in a nutshell: Thousands of years ago, in the place where Jewish religion and nationality meet, the divine ideal to protect all humans through a just world order was awoken. The prophet Isaiah bequeathed it to the world in his vision of global justice. Following the this-worldly logic of Zionist midrash, we must accomplish that vision through our own human efforts. And thus the two-fold mission of our era becomes clear: rebuild Jewish national life; and achieve global human rights. Global justice is the flip side of self-determination. In this Jewish Home, ethnic domination is not welcome: A Jewish nationalism which turns its back on human rights desecrates God's name.

We'll conclude with one practical implication of this vision: There can be no greater act of loyalty to Israel than critiquing her policies in light of human rights. Your investment in the struggle for human rights in Israel is the ultimate expression of love and commitment. Before you read a report on human rights in Judea and Samaria, you should recite, "who has sanctified us through the commandments and commanded us to protect human rights" because Halacha teaches that one should bless before performing a commandment. The energy unlocked by Judaism's return to the Land was not meant for collective self-aggrandizement. That energy is *kodesh*—consecrated—for accomplishing Israel's mission to protect and nurture all human beings in the light of the divine ideal. ■



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Luther against the Jews

Repudiating a Reformation Legacy

BY CRAIG L. NESSAN

At the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, which Protestant churches will be observing in 2017 in remembrance of the posting of Martin Luther's 95 theses on October 31, 1517, Christians must reckon with Luther's writings and engagement against the Jews. We must repudiate how Luther's devolution into binary categories against his enemies has had catastrophic consequences over the centuries and even up to our times. Though Luther embraced the centrality of the Jewish Torah's command to "love your neighbor as yourself," his actual practice in relation to Jewish neighbors was hateful rather than loving. This is something that we in the Protestant world must challenge, using the Reformation anniversary to undo whatever can be undone of the vast damage his words have helped spur against the Jewish people. In doing so, we must remind our own community that the Torah's command in Leviticus is not only to love one's neighbor as oneself, but also to "love the stranger." The Jews are the classic "other" or "stranger" in Christian Europe, at least until millions of Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. While Luther knew well the central ethical command of neighbor love, repeated in various forms 36 times in Torah, he was oblivious to how this command applied to actual Jewish people. Here is the story of how Luther failed Jesus by ignoring this command.

The logic of Luther's political theology should have led him to a different conclusion. Luther articulated the centrality of neighbor love for ethics, especially in his treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian*. However, instead of defending the Jewish people according to the imperative of neighbor love, Luther targeted Jews as enemies through vicious polemic—advocating the burning of synagogues, confiscating prayer books, prohibiting Jewish prayer and teaching, abolishing safe travel for Jews—that has continued to echo over the centuries. Luther's ethical conclusions require critique, deconstruction, and repudiation. In controversy with his theological opponents Luther deviated from neighbor politics, in order to oppose and destroy his religious foes. Luther's polemic and writings against the Jews not only had disastrous consequences in his own time but his position continues to undermine the integrity of the Protestant theological and ethical heritage 500 years later.

Luther against the Jews

Luther's writings against the Jews call into radical question not only his ethics but his entire theology. The ethical integrity of the Protestant Reformation becomes severely questionable if the conclusions drawn by Luther in his writings against the Jews are not repudiated. Where did Luther go wrong? Is it possible to draw upon Luther's own theological arguments to arrive at other conclusions? One key for interpreting, criticizing, and deconstructing Luther's thoughts involves unmasking how intolerance of the religious other undermined the foundations of Luther's own neighbor politics.

The conventional view—that Luther began his career with certain openness and generosity to the Jews in anticipation of their conversion to the gospel, who only later in life turned toward animosity and hatred against them—is demonstrably false. From his earliest writings onward, Luther demonstrated contempt for the Jewish people, not only on biblical grounds but because of his conviction that they had rejected Jesus as the Christ not only in the New Testament but in rabbinic Judaism. Although one could not have predicted that his utterances against the Jews would lead finally to Auschwitz, the legacy of anti-Semitism ignited by his pen and perpetrated by his followers is the most disastrous of all Luther's ethical missteps.

Luther knew precious little about living Judaism: "He had neither Jewish conversation partners nor Jewish friends. His knowledge of Judaism was primarily dependent on what he read, and those readings were dominated by overtly anti-Jewish treatises, some of which were written by Christians and some by Jewish converts. Luther consistently maintained the view that Jews were an apostate people and therefore

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blameworthy for their own subsequent mistreatment in Christian history. He employed the argument that for 1500 years the Jews had been living in defiance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The only sensible explanation was that Jews were handed over to Satan by God because of their unforgivable refusal to admit the reason for their abandonment by God. The reason was, in Luther's mind, that the Jews intentionally rejected Jesus as Christ and thereby forfeit their status as the "chosen people."

For Luther, the promise to Abraham's seed was in reality the promise of the Seed, that is the Messiah/Christ (Gen 3:15). The physical seed of Abraham, the Jews, were God's chosen instrument in Old Testament times as bearers of that promise. But Abraham's true descendants/seed, even in Old Testament times, were always those who believed in the promise of the Messiah and not those who relied on physical descent. This is understood by Luther, an Old Testament scholar, as the fundamental error of the Jews, who trusted that they had been born into grace, that they are bound to God by birth, and thus that God owes them God's benevolence. For Luther, this constitutes a theological obscenity, because the grace and benevolence of God can *only* be accessed by faith, and it has never been otherwise.

Already in Luther's early Psalm lectures (1513-1515), there is evidence of this fundamental posture against the Jews. Commenting on Psalm 1, Luther wrote: "For to deny that it is a sin to have crucified the Lord is worse than to have perpetrated the sin itself, that is, to do the crucifying. Therefore the last error and the last sin are unforgiveable" (*Luther's Works* 10:13).

> "To this very day they crucify him within themselves, as the apostle accuses them (Heb 6:6), because they keep the truth pierced through and continue to stab it with their extremely hard iron lies (which are their goads). Thus to this day they do not know what they are doing, just as they did not know then. They scourge, stone, and kill the prophets and scribes in the same way as did their fathers" (*LW* 10:19).

Luther held out hope that some Jews would be converted through the preaching of the gospel as it was newly proclaimed through the Reformation. In his Commentary on the Magnificat (1521), Luther wrote:

> "When Mary says, "His seed forever," we are to understand "forever" to mean that such grace is to continue to Abraham's seed (that is, the Jews) from that time forth, throughout all time, down to the Last Day. Although the vast majority of them are hardened, yet there are always some, however few, that are converted to Christ and believe in Him . . . We ought, therefore, not to treat the Jews in so unkindly a spirit, for there are future Christians among them, and they are turning every day" (*LW* 21:354-355).

Luther did not hold that all Jews would remain reprobate until the eschaton. However, conversion was the condition placed upon their being accepted. This view was elaborated in *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (1523): "If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either" (*LW* 45:229).

One key text for understanding Luther's Old Testament hermeneutics and thereby his concept of Judaism is *How Christians Should Regard Moses* (1525). Here Luther addressed the question: what from the Law of Moses, that is, the Old Testament, still applies to Christians? He offers a threefold answer, each point related to his theological concept of law and gospel. First, the Mosaic laws that conform to the natural law remain binding for Christians. All other laws, ceremonial or ritual specific only to Israel, are no longer binding. Second, the Law of Moses is binding wherever it conveys Christ and the promise of the gospel (for example, Gen. 3:15 or Deut. 18:15). Third, the Law of Moses is useful for instructing Christians through examples of righteous living, for instance, Abraham. While retaining key aspects of the Old Testament for Christian faith and life, Luther's hermeneutical method accords with his judgment of rabbinic Judaism as being apostate in the period following the New Testament.

In his correspondence, sermons, treatises, and biblical commentaries, Luther perpetrated to the end of this life a basic posture against the Jews. Commenting in 1538 on Genesis 17, Luther argued: "God does not lie. His promises are true and firm. They do not promise that some dregs of a people will come from Abraham; they promise kings and peoples. Where, then, has the kingdom remained during these 1500 years? Where have their laws remained, the institutions of the fathers, and their worship? What else are the Jews today than a body miserably torn to pieces and scattered throughout the world?" (*LW* 3:150).

Luther's body of work against the Jews culminated in the treatise, *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543). Contrary to conventional interpretations, his shocking recommendations to both civil authorities and clergy about how to deal with the Jews cohere with Luther's stance throughout his career. The occasion for this writing was a rabbinic rebuttal of his own arguments against the Jews, which Luther earlier had published as *Against the Sabbatarians* (1538). At the same time, Luther was offended by slanderous claims against Jesus and his mother which were transmitted in certain medieval Jewish texts and by the information conveyed to him by a Jewish convert.

Luther asserted his views regarding the Jewish problem of this own time: whether Jews should be tolerated or expelled. While he would prefer for Jews to take up residence in lands not occupied by Christians, Luther argues that the Jewish blasphemies can no longer be tolerated.

> "What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing, and blaspheming. Thus we cannot extinguish the unquenchable fire of divine wrath, of which the prophets speak, nor can we convert the Jews. With prayer and the fear of God we must practice sharp mercy to see whether we might save at least a few from the glowing flames. We dare not avenge ourselves. Vengeance thousand times worse than we could wish them already has them by the throat. I shall give you my sincere advice . . . " (*LW* 47:268).

In *On the Jews and Their Lies*, Luther makes his infamous proposals regarding policy against the Jews by both civil authorities and the clergy. To the civil authorities Luther advocated the following measures: burn down synagogues, destroy Jewish homes, confiscate prayer books and Talmudic writings, forbid rabbis to teach, abolish safe conduct for Jews (making them vulnerable to attack), prohibit usury by Jews, and enforce the Jews in manual labor. To the pastors and preachers, he recommends that they encourage the authorities to burn down synagogues, confiscate prayer books, Talmudic writings, and the Bible, prohibit Jewish prayer and teaching, and forbid Jews to utter the name of God publicly. To the end of his life and even in his final sermon, Luther advocated harsh treatment of the Jews.

Historical Force of Luther's Writings against the Jews

The force of Luther's public testimony against the Jews took on a life of its own over the centuries. The path leading from Luther to *Kristallnacht* and Auschwitz is long and twisted. But one can arrive there from here. One major factor involves the immense stature of Luther as an authority figure for all of German and Protestant history. Each generation has tended to project upon Luther its own agenda, in order to claim his authority for its purposes. This phenomenon is complicated by Luther's thoroughgoing Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, which distorts the historical character of the Hebrew Bible as an inherently Jewish book.

In the time immediately following the Reformation into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there are two distinguishable trajectories regarding the interpretation of Luther in relation to the Jews. First, among orthodox theologians there was a tendency to appeal to Luther's later treatise, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, to argue for the Christianization of society and the suppression of Jewish existence according to Luther's most severe measures. Second, in the Pietist traditions, there was a tendency to appeal to Luther's earlier treatise, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, to mobilize attempts to convert Jews to the Christian faith. While the latter was in many respects less violent, it still negated the integrity of Jewish existence. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there emerged an Enlightenment portrait of Luther, who was understood to have been a defender of the Jews according to the standards of religious tolerance. Never, however, in these centuries was the anti-Jewish legacy of Luther fully suppressed.

In the late nineteenth century, aspects of Luther's proto-racist concept (his references to "the nature of Jews") became fused with pseudo-evolutionary thinking that categorized people according to national characteristics (*Volk*) and as races. During this period compendiums of Luther's writings, new editions of his works, monographs, and pamphlets began to appear that progressively intensified the presentation of Luther as an anti-Semite. The case of the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life, founded in 1939, demonstrates how extensively and with how little opposition the anti-Jewish interpretation of Christianity could prevail. Jesus was depicted as an Aryan, an enemy of Judaism, in the extensive publications of the Institute's academic director, Walter Grundmann. As commented by Siegfried Leffler, Institute director: "So we cannot think of Adolf Hitler without Martin Luther." The conflation of Christian theology, racism, and anti-Semitism made them inseparable. The publications and speaking events by members of this institute extended its influence broadly, lending religious and moral authority to the Holocaust, in particular the authority of Luther.

Luther served as an indispensable figure for authorizing the anti-Semitic propaganda and policies of the Nazis. In its most extreme form, Luther was cited against the church itself, which was accused of attempting to suppress the "true" anti-Semitic Luther. *Kristallnacht* was interpreted as the fulfillment of Luther's prophecy. Such anti-Jewish views were shared so broadly among Christians that even in the Confessing Church (that portion of the Protestant church opposing the Third Reich's program to Nazify the church organization and its teachings), resistance to Hitler was undermined by the prevailing anti-Semitic interpretation of Christian teaching shared by the majority of Christians in Germany.

In the post-war years the churches in Germany were slow to acknowledge and account for their failure to oppose measures against the Jews during the Third Reich. Anti-Semitic convictions continued to be perceptible in church publications and theologians who supported an anti-Jewish interpretation of Christian teachings during the Nazi era continued to teach and publish. Gradually, regional church bodies began to issue statements validating God's inviolable

covenant with Israel, breaking from Luther's legacy. In 1983, at the five hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth, the Council of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) declared Luther's late anti-Jewish writings as "disastrous." However, there has been no repudiation by the EKD of Luther's writings against the Jews.

Only in 1994 did the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopt a statement rejecting Luther's anti-Jewish writings and their legacy. While an official document on the part of any single church body is woefully insufficient to address the catastrophic legacy of Luther's writings, it does provide a point of departure for the emergence of a truth and reconciliation process.

By contrast, on the very eve of the 2017 observance, the EKD continues to represent a cautious and mitigating approach to Luther's culpability in its "Declaration: Martin Luther and the Jews. A Necessary Reminder on the Occasion of the Reformation Anniversary." This declaration perpetuates the false interpretation of a shift in Luther's approach between his earlier and later career rather than making a direct repudiation of Luther's writings against the Jews: "First he argued for a friendly, persuasive approach to Jews, and then resorted to invective, demanding that they be deprived of their rights and expelled (#3). In light of the historical record and the state of current scholarship such an approach is no longer acceptable.

Fallacy in Luther's Ethical Theology

Luther's ethical theology is embedded in the late medieval apocalyptic worldview that pitched God in a cosmic battle of life and death against Satan. Because the end of the world was drawing near, the Devil had intensified efforts to gain control of the world through those who sought to deceive and delude many from believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Jews were among those (though not the only ones) through whom Satan was raging on the eve of the Apocalypse. Luther saw himself justified in waging war against these enemies of God.

Luther's writings against the Jews expose a tragic fallacy in his ethical theology and pose incisive questions that must be addressed. Is there anything worth salvaging from the wreckage of Luther's intemperate and vilifying utterances, which not only have led to the suffering and death of many in the 1500s but also have contributed to the hatred, persecution, and murder of countless vulnerable people in subsequent centuries? How might Luther's legacy of contempt and destruction executed in the name of Jesus Christ finally be brought to an end? Is there any alternative to the outright rejection of Luther's theology, when the ethical consequences have been so lethal? Three correctives are imperative.

First, it is necessary to deconstruct and disarm Luther's binary thinking against enemies. While the apocalyptic battle between God and Satan was the framework for Luther's theology, wherever opponents become identified as Satan's minions, all things become possible as means to their destruction. Luther vividly experienced spiritual attack (*Anfechtung*). The devil and demons raged as agents, threatening his cause on every side. The danger to which Luther succumbed, like the danger befalling many contemporary religious leaders, involved demonizing opponents. Once others are objectified through dehumanizing categories, every form of eliminationism is legitimated. Luther's rhetoric against the Jews deprived them of their status as neighbors worthy of protection under the aegis of the law. It is imperative to guard theology against constructing binary opposites that authorize evil against those deemed less than human.

Second, it is necessary, without exception, to safeguard by rule of law the status of neighbors, including those neighbors with whom we are in conflict for religious or ideological reasons. Luther advocated that by defending neighbors from harm, civil government contributes to preserving the common good. However, in his own brand of "enthusiasm," Luther advocated harm against those neighbors, the Jews, whom he opposed for religious reasons. Thereby Luther suspended his own theological logic about the proper function of government, summoning civil authorities to engage in violent action against Jewish neighbors, not only because he opposed their politics but especially because of their religious convictions.

Although it is anachronistic to expect Luther to adhere to any modern doctrine of separation of church and state, the nascent foundation for such a doctrine is implicit in his own teaching about the two kingdoms. By failing to uphold the responsibility of the civil authorities for protecting neighbors according to a rule of the law, including those he opposed for religious reasons, Luther neglected the primary function for which God instituted government. According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, it is imperative to restrain religious institutions from doing harm to religious enemies by upholding a universal rule of law that provides physical protection of all neighbors and safeguards their rights. Article 18 reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."

Third, it is necessary to repent of past failures not only by the confession of sins but through the restoration of right relationships with those who have been harmed. The five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation affords the occasion for the churches of the Protestant Reformation to confess the sins of their forbearers against the Jewish people at the time of the Reformation and to repent of the legacy of persecution and violence in the subsequent centuries. Although there have been declarations of guilt and processes of

truth and reconciliation in recent ecumenical relations, the Reformation anniversary provides the opportune moment (*kairos*) not only for solemn acts of contrition but the possibility for initiating truth and reconciliation processes, whose goal is the restoration of right relationships with the Jewish people and others offended at the time of the Reformation.

A Call for Truth and Reconciliation

One current effort at truth and reconciliation is the "Radicalizing Reformation" project, an international movement aimed at critical engagement with the legacy of the Reformation in light of the contemporary crises that endanger life in our times. 94 Theses have been issued for debate engaging, criticizing, and reinterpreting the Reformation in relation to global economic injustice, violence and peacemaking, and our endangered environment. Thesis 47: "Hear the cries of those who have suffered violence, especially those made victims by followers of the Reformation—such as peasants, Anabaptists (Mennonites), Jews, Muslims! Hear the cries of those suffering violence today—whether through domestic abuse, economic exploitation, violations of human rights, injustice against creation, state imperialism, and ongoing wars!" Six volumes of essays have been published by the Lit Verlag Publishers (http://www.lit-verlag.de/reihe/rera) providing research to undergird this project, which is coordinated by Ulrich Duchrow. The scholars and church leaders supporting this initiative seek to provoke serious deliberation of the entire Reformation heritage, including the catastrophic legacy of Luther against the Jews.

While truth and reconciliation processes about the injury caused by the Reformation deserve formal actions by denominations and global church organizations, such truth telling, repentance, and dialogue needs also to extend to local communities and religious congregations. For those committed to the Reformation legacy of Luther, this process requires remembering the history documented here and acknowledging the harm caused to millions of human beings as Luther's writings contributed to a historical trajectory of defamation, persecution, and acts of physical violence, including murder.

> In our post-Holocaust context, and knowing more than Luther did about just how far human beings—including Christians—can go down the road of Jew-hatred, we are following the tracks that are shameful and that require honest remembering. Because of the atrocities of the Nazi era, and because of ongoing expressions of anti-Semitism in our time as well, it is only proper to bring to continued inspection and prayerful reflection words such as Luther's, so that we better continue to tell the truth, repent, and strive for justice and protection of the dignity of life, in accordance with the worthy principles of our respective religions.

How can honesty about the Reformation in relation to the history of Luther and the Jews lead toward reconciliation with Jewish neighbors in our time? This would require the churches of the Protestant Reformation to initiate such truth and reconciliation processes at every level—local, regional, national, and international.

What might this truth and reconciliation process mean in practical terms? There are very specific measures that the Lutheran churches (perhaps all Christian churches) should do to confront the ongoing legacy of Jew-hatred that Luther advocated. It is imperative in teaching about the Reformation (and specifically about Luther) that every Lutheran seminary, college/university, church body, and parish school teach about how the New Testament accounts, especially as they have been interpreted by Luther and in the Lutheran tradition, have fostered hatred of Jews. We must renounce the common slurs against Jews based on Christian tradition by explaining exactly how these are mistaken. Most urgent of all, we must address the fallacy of blaming living Jews for what Jews did (or most likely did not do) in regard to Jesus while he was alive and before he was crucified by the Romans. Teaching young people about this major sin at the birth of the Christian tradition, as exacerbated dramatically by Luther, would go a long way toward making a "truth and reconciliation" process meaningful.

The limits of Luther's social ethics are profound. Luther's political reasoning and advocacy against the Jews must be categorically repudiated. His counsel and conclusions reverberate across subsequent history in the arguments and actions of those who have appealed to his precedent, both by their rhetoric and through acts of persecution, violence, and murder. Only by deconstructing the logic of Christian anti-Semitism, both then and now, can Luther's ethical framework be reconstructed in service of a neighbor politics that has its clear purpose in defending the weak from harm and safeguarding the welfare of the most vulnerable in society, regardless of their religious convictions. ■

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Deconstructing Historical Prejudice

Luther's Treatment of the Turks (Muslims)

BY CHARLES AMJAD-ALI

Introduction

Modern-day expressions of Islamophobia have deep roots in Christian history and have been remarkably consistent, in spite of various social, ideological, and structural permutations, even when our vocabulary of prejudice has undergone euphemistic modifications. While some work has been done on Luther's writings about the Jews because of Hitler's use of Martin Luther's execrable texts, his writings on the Turks have been largely ignored. Luther's sophistry against Islam is, in many respects, no different than some of our contemporary expressions, especially since September 11, 2001. Luther's vicious tirade against Judaism was continuously used by the Church for its ever present reprehensible anti-Semitic practices and rhetoric, reaching its most evil, efficient, and devastating expression in the Shoah some 400 years later. This leads one to logically fear that the rhetoric of the crusades and Luther's many writings against the Muslims (Turks), used incessantly against Islam by the Church over the last five centuries, may fuel modern Islamophobia (against the Turks and the Muslim immigrants) with potentially devastating consequences.

Deconstructing Some Fundamental "Truths"

There is a common assumption that until recently the West has been exclusively Christian and that its current religious pluralism is unique and the cause of many of its current consternations, especially in relationship to Islam. This view ignores the fact that in the centuries prior to the Reformation, Europe already had a religiously and culturally pluralistic experience. Its westernmost region, the Iberian Peninsula, was largely under Muslim rule from 711 until the *Reconquista* in 1492. Mutual philosophical, scientific, and cultural influencing between the three Abrahamic religions (the convivencia) created one of history's more robust experience of pluralism. After 1492 the Spanish Jews and Muslims were forcibly converted to Christianity and/or expelled. Further, large portions of central and Eastern Europe were under Ottoman control, starting with the battle of Kosovo (1389), followed by the fall of Constantinople (1453), and then Greece (1460). This status remained largely unchanged until World War I, a period of over five hundred years. These multi-religious experiences belie the mono-religious Christian claim of Europe, and demand a critical demythologization of this taken-for-granted universe.

Ottoman expansion into Europe was the immediate context for Luther and helps explain the character of his writings and sophistry against the Turks. The Turkish threat had generated many responses: Catholics wanted a new crusade, Protestants wanted defensive strategies, both wanted to study Islam, some hoped to convert the Turks through missionary enterprise, Anabaptists emphasized pacifism, and a few of them even hoped for Turkish victory. While critical of all these existing positions, Luther used them to develop his own approach, never having directly engaged with a Muslim or with Islamic culture. Though he often wrote as if he was in a mono-religious Christian milieu, he actually dealt with Judaism and Islam quite comprehensively, if negatively, and did his theology with these other faiths in mind. Unfortunately, most scholars and theologians still maintain the mono-religious Christian exclusivity when writing about the Reformation.

In dealing with Luther, the Reformation, and Islam, we must seriously address the issues of centuries-old misunderstandings, malice, and contrived vilification of the Muslims,

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and their Prophet, scriptures, religion, and culture: we must overcome ignorance about Islam as a whole. For the last three centuries, the Western sense of superiority in every sphere of human endeavor has scarcely been challenged, both in its imperial colonial and postcolonial expressions. It has become part of our overall heritage, most painful to adjust to and seemingly impossible to abandon.

With a sleight of hand, the West emphasizes its enduring and unmediated continuity with the Mediterranean Greco-Roman civilizations and sees itself as the successor of the Roman Empire and Greek philosophy and ethics, with little or no contribution from Africa and Asia. Ironically, this chimera has its origins in Constantinian Christendom, whose capital on the Bosporus was in Asia. This Christendom had little if any contribution from what the Greco-Romans referred to as the European "barbarians" (Goths, Visigoths, Huns, Vandals, Franks, Angles, among others) who had threatened the Roman Empire and forced the move of its capital from Rome to Constantinople ("the New Rome"), coinciding with the "conversion" of Constantine (c. 337). Christianity only then became the religion of imperial Rome. Constantinople is therefore the original location of what came to be called "Christendom." At the beginning of this period there is only one Roman Empire (no such aberrations as the Western and Eastern Roman Empires) that moved its capital from Rome to Constantinople.

For Muslims, this was *Rum,* the only Rome they knew as Islam emerged in the 7th century, well after this shift. The Muslims became the inheritors of this Roman Empire and of most of the Mediterranean, beginning with the initial period of Islamic expansion and conquest, culminating finally in the capture of Constantinople in 1453. With the control of the Mediterranean, Islam inherited its intellectual traditions, which were then transmitted to the West through Muslim scholars like Al-Farabi (870-950), Ibn Sina/Avicenna (980-1037), and Ibn Rushd/Averroes (1126-1198), who "provided the impetus for the flowering of scholastic philosophy and theology in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus."[1] St. Thomas (1224-1274) under Islamic influence (no sword involved here) reexamined Christianity and insisted on the perspicuity of the sacred text, as in Islam. This, later, influenced Luther's *sola scriptura*.

The Pervasive Fear of Islam and the Crusades

Islam posed one of the most far-reaching problems for medieval Christendom. As a practical problem it raised the possibilities of crusade, conversion, coexistence, and commercial interchange. As a theological problem it raised questions about Christianity's providential role in history: Was Islam a symptom of the world's last days or a stage in Christian development? Was it heresy, a schism, a new religion, a work of man or devil, an obscene parody of Christianity, or a system of thought that deserved to be treated with respect?

As a major post-Christian religion, Islam posed a serious challenge to the sufficiency and efficaciousness of Christianity. Just as Christianity saw Judaism as *praeparatio evangelica* (preparation of the gospel), Islam saw both Judaism and Christianity (its monotheistic predecessors) as *praeparatio Islamica,* to coin a phrase. Its rapid growth and conquests immediately following its founding caused deep fear and consternation exacerbated by its capture of all the Biblical lands and occupation of three of the five founding patriarchates (viz., Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and later, Constantinople. Rome was the exception). It was therefore a challenge for Christians theologically, geographically, numerically, politically, and economically. Islam perceived these successes as clear indications of its validity and efficaciousness.

The Crusades further added to the fear and awe of Islam. They were a series of Christian "holy wars" against the Muslims carried out from 1096 till 1270 mostly in larger Syria and Palestine that played a significant role in all aspects of European medieval life and were critical for the theological development of the Reformation. Pope Urban II's initiation of the Crusades in 1095 gave them religious and spiritual foundation during their time; though historians tend to think of them as "a long act of intolerance in the name of God." The First Crusade was successful but the failures of the subsequent seven shook Christianity because of the ubiquitous religious conviction that victory shows God's favor.

Turkish Threat and Luther's Response

By the sixteenth century a Turkish victory over Europe seemed palpably imminent with apocalyptic implications. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 (thirty years before Luther's birth in 1483) was a devastating blow to European Christendom, but Ottoman expansion into Europe, especially the 1529 attack on Vienna, was existentially debilitating. Though this attack was repelled (at the heavy cost of some 30,000 lives—dead or enslaved) the sense of impending Turkish threat was not diminished.

Luther also saw Islam as a theological threat—a judgment of God upon a highly corrupt and venal Catholicism. Calling Islam "the rod of God," Luther argued in 1518 that to "fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod." In response to Pope Leo X's call for a new crusade against the Ottoman Turks, Luther argues that many, "even the 'big wheels' in the church, now dream of nothing else than war against the Turk. They want to fight, not against iniquities, but against the lash of iniquity and thus they would oppose God who says that through that lash he himself punishes us for our iniquities because we do not

punish ourselves for them."[3] As late as 1529, he still maintained that the Turks are the "rod of God's wrath" by which "God is punishing the world."

Luther saw Islam and Catholicism as the two horns of the devil. As George Forell argues: "For Luther the devil was always God's devil, i.e., in attempting to counteract God the devil ultimately serves God,"[4] so Satan (the Turks) was being used by God for God's purposes. Luther rarely talks about the Turks without also mentioning the papacy although he "almost always viewed the papacy as the bigger threat than Muhammad and the Turks. He often remarked that compared to the Pope, 'Muhammad appears before the world as a pure saint.'"[5]

Though well within the tradition of negatively evaluating Islam, Luther is one of the earliest major Western theologians to acknowledge its critical role. This is present in many of his writings and he advised that "in whatever way possible the religion and customs of 'Muhammadanism' be published and spread abroad."[6] Luther therefore argued in 1530, in his preface to *Libellus de ritu et moribus Turcorum* (Book of the Rites and Customs of the Turks), that it was critical for Christians to know the Islamic Scripture and Muslim culture and to study it:

> "Since we now have the Turk and his religion at our very doorstep our people must be warned lest, either moved by the splendor of the Turkish religion and the external appearances of their customs or displeased by the meager display of our own faith or the deformity of our customs, they deny their Christ and follow Muhammad."

Earlier in this text he argued,

> . . . we see that the religion of the Turks or Muhammad is far more splendid in ceremonies . . . than ours, even including that of the religious or all the clerics. The modesty and simplicity of their food, clothing, dwellings, and everything else, as well as the fasts, prayers, and common gatherings of the people that this book reveals are nowhere seen among us . . . which of our monks, be it a Carthusian (they who wish to appear the best) or a Benedictine, is not put to shame by the miraculous and wondrous abstinence and discipline among their religious? . . . *Not even true Christians, not Christ himself, not the apostles or prophets ever exhibited so great a display.* . . . I sincerely believe that no papist, monk, cleric, or their equal in faith would be able to remain in their faith if they should spend three days among the Turks. . . . *Indeed, in all these things the Turks are by far superior* (emphasis added).

It is particularly interesting that towards the end of his life Luther was critically instrumental in the publication of a new translation of the Qur'an. This, for whatever reason, is not given much publicity; perhaps because of the much more infamous publication of *On the Jews and their Lies* in the same year. Theodore Bibliander published the reworked version of Robert Ketton's seminal 1143 Latin translation of the Qur'an upon Luther's request. Luther used his influence on the Council of Basel to lift the ban on its publication, and even wrote its preface when it was published in 1543. There, Luther argued for "the clear presentation of the teachings of Muhammad so that by contrast they might be more readily refuted by the clear teachings of the church about Christ, the incarnation, his death for our sins, and the resurrection, and so that Christians might thereby be armed in conflict with the enemy by a sure and certain knowledge of the central tenets of their own faith."

So Luther's approach was to attempt to overcome the existing lacuna vis-à-vis the Turkish religion. According to Southern, this was because "he looked forward to the probability that Christendom would be engulfed in Islam."[7]

Luther on Christian Vocation and the Two Kingdom Theory

While not explicitly endorsing or condemning military measures against the Turks, Luther completely rejected the idea of a new crusade. In 1518 when his opinion was solicited about the papal plans for another crusade he responded:

> It seems to me if we must have any Turkish war, we ought to begin with ourselves. In vain we wage carnal wars without, while at home we are conquered by spiritual battles . . . Now that the Roman Curia is more tyrannical than any Turk, . . . the clergy is sunk in the depth of avarice, ambition and luxury, and . . . the face of the Church is everywhere most wretched, there is no hope of a successful war or of victory. As far as I can see, God fights against us.

Luther had been very negative toward the Pope, publicly declaring him a "tyrant" of Christianity and the "Antichrist,"[8] even stating in 1520 that the true "Turks" were the Pope's servants in Rome, his "lackeys and whores."[9] The Pope's response was to threaten to excommunicate Luther by declaring his and scandalous teachings. In *Exsurge Domine* (1520) the Pope even summarized an early statement of Luther's that "to fight against the Turks is to fight against God's visitation upon our iniquities."

Luther's response to the Papal bull of excommunication sought to clarify:

> This article does not mean that we are not to fight against the Turk, as that holy manufacturer of heresies, the pope charges . . . rather . . . we should mend our ways and cause God to be gracious to us. . . . All the pope accomplishes with his crusading . . . is to lead Christians with their lives into death and with their souls into hell. This is, of course, the proper work of the Antichrist. God does not demand crusades, indulgences, and wars.[10]

This does not mean Luther was a pacifist, something for which he strongly condemned the Anabaptists, who while agreeing with Luther that Islam was the Rod of God sent to purge Christianity, saw his resistance against the Turks as un-Christian, and against God's ordination and design. Rather, Luther endorsed a military response against the Turks, c.f. the *Türkenbüchlein*—the Turkish writings. He describes the opponents in *On War Against the Turks* (1529):

> "stupid" preachers amongst us Germans . . . who are making us believe that we ought not and must not fight. Some are even so foolish as to say that it is not proper for Christians to bear the temporal sword or to be rulers . . . some actually want the Turk to come and rule because they think our *German people are wild and uncivilized* (emphasis added).

Luther argues that his non-fighting position was against the Pope pushing for a Holy War in the name of Christ (which he found extremely offensive). Although repentance and reform were still valid spiritual means, Luther now demands that Christians must fight the Turks as part of their **secular vocation**. This was not to be a holy war against the Turks, but rather a **secular war**, led by secular nonreligious leaders, against an invader. He urged everyone to take up arms against the Turks not for religious reasons but as an imperative of Christian vocation, theologically expanding that concept beyond the exclusively sacramental priestly calling. He therefore encourages Christians to embrace the vocation of soldiery, because they "should know that they were merely defending themselves 'against the Turks in a war started by them,' which they were entitled and even obliged to do . . . for in battling the Turks one was 'fighting against an enemy of God and a blasphemer of Christ, indeed, the Devil himself.'"

Two of the central tenets of Luther's theology—the Two Kingdom theory, and the expanded understanding of *vocatio dei*—were deeply influenced by the Turkish attack, the corresponding Catholic invocation of crusade, and the Anabaptist imperative of pacifism. Luther countered both the Catholic crusading and Anabaptist pacifism through his innovative expansion of *vacatio dei*. He thus reconfigures just war theory itself. For Luther it was not so much a definition of warfare at issue, but two sets of governance—civil and religious, as well as an expansive notion of Christian vocation. Warring is in the domain of civil governance, to be initiated and conducted by this side of the two kingdoms, not to be undertaken as a holy war or crusade initiated by the Church which had no place in this vocation.

Muslimfrage and the Turkish Minorities in Germany

Cooperating with the overcoming of old ethnic nationalist identities and the consolidation of a "united European identity," the question of "the Other" has become more significant. The presence of Muslims, with their growing radicalization, challenges some of the fundamental assumptions behind secularization, liberal democracy, and the rights regimes that have been in place in Europe. The negative language, imagery, and political sophistry once applied against the Jews is now applied with impunity against the Muslims (with minor adjustments).

Take Germany for example. It needed serious reconstruction after six years of devastating wars. Having no major colonies to draw upon and with a large number of its own young men killed and maimed during the two World Wars, it was forced to recruit foreign labor. This need was exacerbated by the demands of the American Marshall Plan, the loss of half of Germany to the Soviet Union (especially after the 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall), and the ever-expanding demands generated by its *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) of the 1950s. So Germany entered several bilateral labor agreements, largely with Muslim countries, most significantly with Turkey. In 2009 it was estimated that there were 4.3 million Muslims in Germany (5.2% of the population), about 65% of these were full German citizens, and around 63% of those were of Turkish descent (2.7 million, or 3.0% of the population).[11] This gives some sense of the numerical strength of religious minorities and becomes especially noteworthy when compared to Germany's pre-WWII Jewish population, which consisted of only about 500,000 members or 0.75% of the total German population.[12] If that insignificant number of Jews was unacceptable to Germans after 1933,[13] one wonders what the current Muslim presence could lead to if some trigger is set off. The Muslims have been facing the *Muslimfrage*, in various forms; now the worry is that it could be converted very easily into a more violent structured removal of these contemporary "others," with consequences similar to those faced by Jews in WWII.

The Muslims now represent the new "enemy-ness" with almost apocalyptic implications for Western social values, for they are viewed as a threat to its "normative virtuous life." During the five-hundred-year celebration of the Reformation there is a clear demand for a radical hermeneutic of Luther's texts, their contexts, and an assessment of this tradition, keeping in mind the contemporary European *prejudicium*. We must go beyond both the justification of the Reformation texts and our favored doctrinal and dogmatic certitudes. Instead these Reformation texts should provide critical clues for a new self-understanding of our situation so that we have a more virtuous approach to the contemporary *other*. The Lutheran Church should work hard on developing such a virtuous approach, and if that entails denouncing Luther's theology, ideology, and social prejudices, then so be it. This will also help in de-hagiographizing Luther and placing him on the human scale of things with all his foibles and weaknesses. For Lutherans this will entail a deep confession and a broad penitent acceptance of Luther and their resultant sins

before any talk of an appropriate absolution. His prejudices vis-a-vis the Other, whether it was the Jews or the Muslims, deeply contradicts his overall theology, especially his understanding of grace and forgiveness. Neither an avoidance of reading these texts, nor burying them from intra-Lutheran discourse, and inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogues, will help matters; rather it is the open and full acknowledgment of these egregious texts which will give an appropriate confessional recognition and lead to ethical and moral practices in the present. ■

Notes

1. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadows of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 18. See also, the present author's *Islamophobia: Tearing the Veils of Ignorance* (Johannesburg: Ditshwanelo Car² as, 2005), Ch. 1.

2. Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades* (New York: Harper and Row, 3 volumes, 1967), 480.

3. See, *Explanations of the Disputation Concerning the Value of Indulgences,* popularly known as the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* in *Luther's Works*, trans. Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 31. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Fortress Press, 1957), 79-252, esp. 92.

4. George Forell, "Luther and the War Against the Turks," in William Russell (ed.), *Martin Luther, Theologian of the Church: Collected Essays* (St. Paul: Luther Seminary, 1994), 127.

5. Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 83-4.

6. Sarah Henrich & James Boyce, "Martin Luther—Translation of Two Prefaces on Islam: Preface to the *Libellus de ritu et moribus Turcorum* (1530), and Preface to Biliander's edition of the Qur'an (1543), *Word and World*, Vol. XBI, No. 2, 1996, p. 255.

7. R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962, 3rd printing 1982), 105-106.

8. *Eyn Sermon von den newen Testament,* in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35:107.

9. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 35:90.

10. Luther's Works, vol. 32:89-91

11. Sonja Haug, Stephanie Müssig & Anja Stichs, *Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland im Auftrag der Deutschen Islam Konferenz*, (Berlin: Bundesampt für Migration und Flüchtlinger, 2009) [Muslim Life in Germany, published on behalf of the German Islam Conference by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees], available at: http://www.bmi.bund.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/566008/publicationFile/31710/vollversion_studie_muslim_leben_deutschland_.pdf.

12. See, "Jewish Population of Europe in 1933: Population Data by Country" in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, at http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005161.

13. For the comprehensive involvement of the German populace in this morally dark period, see, Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

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A Blessing for the New Jewish Year

for Stanley and Jane

BY YEHUDA AMICHAI

Even years have religions
And are either circumcised or baptized
Even years have Paradise and hell
And a Year-god.
In Hebrew we wish a good and sweet year
But we now know that sweet and good
Do not always work well together.
If we were Chinese
We would say "Have a sweet and pungent year,"
If we were on a diet
We would say "Have a sweet and low year"
But then "sweet and low" is worse
Than sweet and high.

So let's go back and stay happily
In our low-keyed time
Where prophecies and visions and miracles
Are fed into a computer
And thrown up out of it again
And recycled again.
So let's stay in our dull
Imagination-less democracy
Where freedom of speech and of will
Have their way
And where you have to choose
Your own personal blessing.
Because blessings are intrusion
Into private life
Like Curses
Only Less Effective.

So my blessing will have
A frame which you will have
To fill out yourself.

I also think of the blowing of the Shofar
This too loud and too wild voice
This obnoxious belch of
Stomach-sick history.
I would rather have
A failed shofar-blow
A shame of the synagogue
A disgrace of the old voice in the desert.
But more like a sigh
Almost a sigh of relief
And nothing but a gush
Of good human air.

So here at your house
We shall watch the horizon
Where the divine accountant
Is sitting over his book of life
And like a good accountant
Let him make little mistakes
In our favour
And sum us up on the good side
Of the book for another
Happy and sweet,
Yes sweet,
Year. ■

This year, try an extraordinary spiritual experience. You don't have to be Jewish to go through the amazing transformations that happen at High Holidays with Rabbi Michael Lerner. In the past people have flown in from Australia, France, the UK, and Israel. And they've been deeply moved. You will be too. It's worth the trip to the San Francisco Bay Area in beautiful northern California (a few hours from Yosemite National Park and from Big Sur National Park). Yes, you could just sign up for one or two of these services, though the transformative impact is greatest if you come to them all (and maybe go to one of the national parks in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur).

Rosh Hashanah Eve: Sept 20
1st day: Sept 21
Second day: Sept 22
Yom Kippur Eve (Kol Nidre): Sept 29,
Day: Sept. 30

Information and registration: www.beyttikkun.org/hhd or call 510-644-1200. The services are at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA. They are conducted in English and Hebrew, with enough Hebrew to satisfy those who love the traditional prayers and music, and enough English so that people who know no Hebrew can still have a fully meaningful, psychologically and intellectually sophisticated, spiritually deep, and love-filled experience. ■

Tania Advanti

Paul Ehrman

Finding Thomas Merton

BY JOHN SMELCER

Sometimes the best stories come to you when you least expect it.

At least that's the way it happened to me.

Ever since I left upstate New York a little more than two years ago, I've been living in a small town in the Midwest where the only place for a writer to sit and write and have a good cup of coffee is the local grocery store. The place has none of the ambience of a coffee house. No warm and complementary colors on the wall. No wood furniture. No art on the walls. No jazz or alternative music. It has all the characteristics of a junior high school cafeteria without the food fights.

But it's all I got.

I've become somewhat of a fixture here. People even joke that there should be a placard fixed on the wall by the booth where I always sit: "Writer at Work." I often refer to it as my office. The other patrons—almost entirely retired farmers—don't know what to make of me, sitting in the same booth every morning, seven days a week, writing and bobbing my head and swaying rhythmically to whatever music I'm listening to on my blue Skull Candy headphones, clad in a flamboyant shirt and sporting an English-style cap. To them, I must appear altogether too happy for someone living in the Bible-Belt. I get a lot of looks followed by low whispers and the occasional finger-pointing. Some people smile weakly as they pass me in a way that seems to say, "Why don't you get a real job?"

But, for the most part, people are friendly enough.

I had been working on the finishing touches of a novel that is influenced by Thomas Merton, widely considered one of the most influential thinkers, philosophers, writers, Christian mystics, and social activists of the twentieth century. His mega-selling *The Seven Story Mountain* is often compared to St. Augustine's *Confessions* as a coming-to-faith autobiography. In all, he published sixty-five books. During his lifetime Merton communicated with many of the world's greatest writers, artists, and social rights activists, including Martin Luther King Jr. and the Buddhist peace activist

JOHN SMELCER is the award-winning author of over 50 books, including his new mountain climbing novel, *Savage Mountain*. His writing has appeared in hundreds of magazines around the world, including *The Atlantic*. Learn more at www.johnsmelcer.com

Thich Nhat Hanh. He was one of the most vocal critics of the Vietnam War. James Laughlin published Merton's first book of poetry at New Directions, and shortly thereafter Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who was then founding City Lights, published Merton's poems in a proto-Beat anthology with the likes of Dylan Thomas and Allen Ginsberg. In his speech to Congress on September 24, 2015, Pope Francis mentioned Thomas Merton numerous times, praising him as one of the greatest Americans, alongside Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, and Abraham Lincoln. For a week afterward, Thomas Merton became one of the most searched topics on the internet as millions of people wanted to learn who this guy was. The Thomas Merton Center in Louisville and the Thomas Merton Center for Social Justice in Pittsburgh were inundated with calls and media interviews.

One day last spring, while I was working on the book in the cafeteria, a fellow brave enough came over and asked me what I was working on. I replied that it was a novel influenced by Thomas Merton, certain that a local would have no idea who Merton was.

Instead, his answer floored me.

"Oh, I know all about Merton. A little old lady I used to work with used to be good friends with him, and she has these trunks full of his personal belongings from the Gethsemani monastery," he said quite matter-of-factly.

My jaw dropped.

"Really?" was all I could muster in reply.

"Yep. She was a nun back then. I think she lived at the convent a few miles away from where Merton was. That's how they became friends."

"Do you remember her name?" I asked eagerly.

"Helen Marie [not her full name]. We worked at the same place back then."

"And she told you she had these trunks . . . of stuff?" I asked.

"Yep."

"Do you think she was telling the truth?"

"Nuns don't lie. Besides, I've seen them . . . about twenty, twenty-five years ago."

I didn't know what to say. My brain was racing, red-lining with a million questions.

"How did she come to have them? Do you think she's still alive? Where does she live? Do you think she still has them?"

Several conversations with this intriguing fellow ensued during the following weeks, and I couldn't let it go. Each time I saw him I asked about the trunks full of Mertonalia and the little old nun. Finally, after some phone calls, he told me that she was still alive and living in Kansas City, a three-hour drive southwest of where I was living. We called and made an appointment to visit her on June 30th. The day came and we drove down to see her in his little truck. I was as excited as I could possibly be. Did she still have the trunks? What was in them? Would she show them to us? If she did, what then? With my training as an anthropologist, archaeologist, oral historian, writer, and as a post-doctoral student of religion at Harvard, I knew the value of such a discovery. My mouth was dry with anticipation. At the same time, I tried to prepare myself in the event that it was all just a big snipe hunt.

We arrived on time and Helen Marie greeted us at the door. I was at once impressed by her openness, by her sense of jubilation, and by her kindness. She was in her mid-eighties, lean and fit for her age, and she stood only a little over five feet tall. She kindly invited us into her living room, which was otherworldly, overflowing with angels of every variation: porcelain doll angels, stuffed animal angels, pictures on the walls of angels, crystal angels. The assortment even included a table lamp shaped like an angel. An enormous portrait of Jesus hung above the fireplace, which looked as if it hadn't been used in years.

"Oh, I know all about Merton. A little old lady I used to work with used to be good friends with him, and she has these trunks full of his personal belongings from the Gethsamani monastery."

For almost two hours, Helen Marie told us about her friendship with Father Louis, as Merton was known during his twenty-seven years as a monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani (1941-1968), just south of Bardstown, Kentucky. As she spoke, I furiously scribbled notes on a yellow legal notepad. Her story went something like this: In 1966, after fifteen years as a nun in a convent in Brooklyn, she wanted to go meet Merton. She, and many of the other nuns, had been reading Merton's books, and Helen Marie felt a burning desire to learn from him. She had been having doubts about her life in the convent. She wanted a spiritual teacher to help guide her. Other nuns told her that someone as famous as Thomas Merton wouldn't make time for someone like her, an uneducated scullery maid who had spent her vocation washing and scouring dishes in the convent kitchen.

Apparently, they didn't know Sister Mary Pius, as she was called back then.

She was a plucky and feisty force to reckon with. She told the abbot, Father Campbell, of her desire to meet Merton, certain that he would try to dissuade her as did her fellow sisters. To her amazement and relief, the abbot encouraged her to go, with certain provisos, namely, that she not write or call the Abbey of Gethsemani to arrange a visit. Instead,

he urged her just to go. Just show up on their doorsteps. It would be more difficult for them to turn away a nun who had traveled half way across America. He reached into his own wallet and gave her the money for round-trip Greyhound bus tickets. On January 13, 1966, after a long and eventful journey that began at Manhattan's Port Authority Building, Helen Marie showed up at Gethsemani's gate during the biggest snow storm in years. The hour was already late. She had no means by which to go back to Bardstown or Louisville at such an hour. So the abbot did the only decent thing he could do under the circumstance—he put her up for the night in their guest house outside the walled monastery.

For two days, Helen Marie waited in the guest house for Merton to come see her. But she was told he was at his hermitage up in the hills, and that, because of the snow, he wasn't going to see her. But the little nun that could was determined. She wasn't going home without meeting Thomas Merton.

And so she waited.

Finally, Merton showed up. He had heard how far she had come to meet him. He told her that he admired her tenacity. They sat and talked in the guest house for a couple hours, and it was decided that she would return to the nunnery in Brooklyn and that he, Thomas Merton, the most famous monk in the world, would work with her abbot back home to get her reassigned to be closer to Gethsemani so that he could become her spiritual teacher and adviser.

In no time at all, Sister Mary Pius found herself assigned to the Sisters of Loretto, a convent for the care of aging and infirm retired nuns. She was also granted dispensation from the convent back in Brooklyn, a formal sabbatical, of sorts. She was further instructed that she could not wear her habit during this period, though she was required to uphold all other vows and religious observations. Only a dozen miles away from the Abbey of Gethsemani, the Sisters of Loretto was a place where nuns came to die and to be buried with other sisters in the beautiful cemetery up on the hill.

For the next two years Helen Marie worked at the motherhouse caring for elderly nuns. Every Sunday she and several other nuns took a bus for the thirteen-mile ride to Gethsemani to attend Mass. At Gethsemani, Helen Marie met a monk by the name of Brother Irenaeus (his worldly name being Robert, "Bobby" to friends). Br. Irenaeus had already lived a busy life at the monastery for fifteen years. He ran the tailor shop. As a kind of quartermaster of clothing, his duties required making religious habits and issuing clothes to fellow monks as needed. His "shop" was surrounded by shelves laden with shoes and socks, denim shirts and blue jeans, and habits and oblates of all sizes. He also stored the monks' worldly clothes and their trunks bearing their belongings with which they arrived at the gate of Gethsemani. With respect specifically to Merton, Br. Irenaeus was also responsible for storing the famous monk's suits, needed for those occasions when he left Gethsemani to travel. In addition he also repaired clothing damaged during the course of manual labor around the monastery, which was herculean. Physical labor, contemplation, the rigorous observance of ritual, chant, and silence comprise the hallmarks of Trappist monks.

Like many young men who had been in WWII, Br. Irenaeus sought a place of quiet refuge where he could escape the recurring horrors and scars of combat and search for meaning and, perhaps even, forgiveness (Merton writes about this in *The Seven Storey Mountain*). Robert had been a tail gunner in the Army Air Corps. His B-17 was shot down over Germany on his way back from his twenty-fifth and last mission. He managed to parachute out safely, but he was captured by the Germans and spent the last eight months of the war in a German POW camp, from which he escaped twice, only to be recaptured and returned.

"They sat and talked in the guest house for a couple hours, and it was decided that she would return to the nunnery in Brooklyn and that he, Thomas Merton, the most famous monk in the world, would work with her abbot back home to get her reassigned to be closer to Gethsemani so that he could become her spiritual teacher and adviser."

After Mass, Thomas Merton (Fr. Louis), Helen Marie, and Br. Irenaeus would go for "Sunday drives" around the countryside in the monastery's doorless, four-wheel-drive Ford Bronco. Br. Irenaeus always did the driving, Helen Marie sitting by the passenger side door, with Merton in the middle. Br. Irenaeus came along as a chaperone as required by the abbots of both the monastery and the nunnery. Although Helen Marie hitched a ride to Mass with other nuns, she alone stayed at Gethsemani for much of the rest of the afternoon and, therefore, had to frequently walk home back to Loretto. Did I mention that this little woman was determined? Over all those Sundays, a friendship was forged among the three.

But how did Helen Marie end up with the worldly possessions of Thomas Merton?

On December 11, 1968, Father Flavian, the abbot of Gethsemani, received word that Thomas Merton had died under somewhat mysterious circumstances the day before in a small community near Bangkok, Thailand. He had been attending an interfaith conference where he met and counseled with the Dalai Lama, among other religious figures. Father Flavian, immediately worrying that souvenir and relic hunters would descend on the monastery in droves, directed Br. Irenaeus to collect all of Merton's personal possessions, especially his clothes, and to get rid of them discreetly. The abbot himself didn't want to know what he did with them.

So instructed by the abbot, Br. Irenaeus took two empty trunks from the storage room, drove up to Merton's hermitage in the hills, and filled them with his dead friend's belongings, many of them now iconic. Among the items included were Merton's personal psalter—a heavy, over-sized, leather-bound and metal-clasped book published in France in 1888 by the Trappists (Gethsemani is a Trappist monastery). Also included were his white habits, his black monk's cowl, his now-iconic denim jacket seen on so many book covers, work clothes, sleeping clothes, blankets, his ceremonial flagellation whip, the colorful hood he received with an honorary doctoral degree, and other objects. Even the pillows from Merton's narrow bed were placed into the trunks. Inside the pockets of one pair of denim jeans were two used and wadded up handkerchiefs (it is known that Merton was having severe allergies that summer and fall). Perhaps most sacred of all was Merton's rosary, which he had given to Helen Marie a few days before he left on his fateful trip. They were standing below the statue of Joseph atop the grassy hill overlooking Gethsemani and the surrounding countryside.

"I don't think I'm coming back alive," he said, as he placed it into her open palm and gently pushed her fingers closed around it.

"I'll hold onto it until you come home," she replied, concerned by his comment.

After almost a half century, she was still safeguarding it for him.

Days later, when Merton's body was returned via military flight and eventually to Gethsemani, Br. Irenaeus added to the trunks some of the clothing attending his body, including the new white habit Merton wore in the iconic photo of him posing with the Dalai Lama, and some suit ties he had bought and worn while in Bangkok.

With their friend gone, there was nothing to keep Helen Marie and Br. Irenaeus at Gethsemani. For some time preceding Merton's last journey, the couple had sought Merton's counsel about their growing love and the possibility of marriage. Merton had advised them to follow their hearts and get married, saying that they could still find ways to serve God and others as laypeople. Within days of Merton's burial, Brother Irenaeus loaded up the heavy trunks, and went to collect Helen Marie. They moved to Louisville, only a forty minute drive north, marrying shortly thereafter. The monks from Gethsemani baked their wedding cake. A few years later, they moved to Kansas City where they both worked for almost a quarter century in the prayer room at Unity Village, a popular interreligious education campus and retreat. It was there in the mid-1990s that they worked with the gentleman who first set me on the trail of this amazing story.

* * *

After listening to the history of her friendship with Thomas Merton in her curious living room of angels, I asked Helen Marie if she still had the materials. In reply, she changed the subject. But I had already learned a lesson from this determined little woman. Although respectful, I was . . . tenacious.

"You know," I'd say every five minutes, "if you have them stored in the basement or in the attic or in the garage or buried under boxes, I could move them for you."

Eventually she took us downstairs to her garage and pointed out the trunks, which were buried under twenty or more boxes. We had to dig them out. I was absolutely amazed at the treasure trove when we at last opened the trunks. I recognized many of the objects from photographs of Merton. Seeing my reverence and enthusiasm and commitment to finding the proper homes for the items, Helen Marie told me to take them.

'I don't think I'm coming back alive,' he said, as he placed it into her open palm and gently pushed her fingers closed around it.

Over numerous subsequent visits and interviews, Helen Marie brought out more materials to give to me, including photo albums full of letters and notes and photos that no one had ever seen before, photos of the inside of Merton's hermitage around the time of his death. My favorite is a photograph taken by Helen Marie of Merton with a Budweiser at one of their picnics (monks invented beer). There was also a rather prescient poem that Merton had written the day before he died in Thailand. Br. Irenaeus found it inside a pocket when Merton's body was returned.

Helen Marie told me that I wasn't the first writer to have approached her about the story. She told me that back in the mid-1980s, another writer approached her, having heard a rumor that she had been friends with Merton. It turned

out to be none other than Irving Stone, author of such great works as *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, the story of Michelangelo painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and *Van Gogh,* still a classic biography of Van Gogh's life and death (though we have learned new facts about the circumstances of Van Gogh's death since Stone wrote his book). She turned him down flat. When I asked why, she replied, "Everyone in the story was still alive back then. Now, I'm the only one left."

For half a century, Robert and Helen Marie safeguarded the possessions of their departed friend, but over the decades, numerous unscrupulous people, many friends and family, preyed upon Helen Marie's generosity and naïveté (a result of having been a nun for so long). For example, her boss when she worked briefly as a waitress at a restaurant in Louisville in 1970 hounded her to give him something. Fearful of losing her job, she surrendered and gave him the doctoral hood. Robert's own sister begged and pleaded for one of the long white, hooded Trappist monk habits and numerous other objects. She eventually donated the habit to the Thomas Merton Center for Social Justice in her hometown of Pittsburgh and the other items to the Thomas Merton Center in Louisville. Helen Marie tells me there were many objects so pilfered from the trunks over the decades. Some have never been seen again.

"Alone, and devastated, for years Helen Marie prayed for an answer as to what she should do with the belongings of Thomas Merton."

She regrets having let even one item slip away from her.

In 2004, Robert had a debilitating stroke; a blood clot left him completely paralyzed on the left side of his body and institutionalized. Helen Marie retired from Unity Village so that she could spend every available minute of every day at his side until the staff asked her to leave at the end of visiting hours. Robert died five years later in August of 2009. Alone, and devastated, for years Helen Marie prayed for an answer as to what she should do with the belongings of Thomas Merton.

Then one bright and sunny day in the summer of 2015, I arrived at her doorstep, an answer to her prayers, or so she tells me every time we talk. More than that, Helen Marie insists that she believes that Thomas Merton himself guided me to her. She believes he hand-picked me out of every living soul to be the one to whom she would finally surrender the collection of his possessions, knowing that I would do the right thing by them, and by him, and would find the right homes for them. For Helen Marie, It was Merton who led me to northeast Missouri and to that grocery store cafeteria booth so that I could meet and talk to the gentleman that fateful day. I have to say that such a notion filled me with some trepidation. What a troubling responsibility. I have actually wept struggling to comprehend my role in all this. Helen Marie wanted the items to be made freely available to the world in institutions and museums, so that the millions of people who have been touched by Merton's writings and by his example can come closer to the man who was the most famous monk in the world. The transfer has been bittersweet for Helen Marie. While happy to be free of the burden, she nonetheless found it painful to let go of something that had been so much a part of her life for half a century.

Obliged with a sense of purpose, I spent the summer on a pilgrimage, of sorts. I rode my motorcycle halfway across America to meet with institutions such as the Thomas Merton Center in Louisville, Kentucky. It was there at Bellarmine University that Merton himself wanted his archives to go. I drove down past Bardstown to visit the Abbey of Gethsemani and to spend some time talking to Merton at his graveside. I apologized for my failings; I thanked him for the privilege; and I pledged to do my very best to find the right places to donate his belongings.

After that I drove the backroads through a torrential rainstorm to the Sisters of Loretto, where Sister Helen Marie had lived and worked those two years. I took lots of photos of the trip, which I later shared with Helen Marie. She marveled at the changes rendered by fifty years. Trees that had been little more than shrub height lined the main boulevard, concealing the three-story red brick buildings. The cemetery for nuns had expanded considerably. For me the visit to the monastery and the convent was an intense emotional experience, after which I took a brief detour to the Maker's Mark whisky distillery just down the road.

But the story doesn't entirely end there. There are sidestories of intrigue and subterfuge. I was cautioned not to make my "discovery" public for fear that some overzealous Merton collectors might break into my home to steal the relics, thereby endangering my family. Toward the end of summer, Helen Marie was diagnosed with stage-four lymphoma, for which she has been receiving treatment, including chemotherapy. Her hair has fallen out, and she feels tired most of the time, yet she remains, as always, cheerful and certain that whatever happens to her is God's will. A nun to the end. But the prognosis is good. She seems to be responding well to her treatments. She plans to accompany me and my family to Louisville in late January to attend the unveiling of a Merton exhibit at the Frasier Museumt hat includes some of the objects from the two trunks. I can see why Thomas Merton

befriended Helen Marie. She is so joyful and kind, simple and humble, and her heart is so full of love for others, more so than anyone I have ever met. While other friends wrote tell-all books about Merton after his death, Helen Marie has kept their conversations confidential almost unto her death bed. But after half a century, she feels there are some things that need to be told, and so she has been telling them to me.

This fall, after Pope Francis told the world of his admiration for Merton in his September 24 address to Congress, I wrote to the Pope, offering to donate at least one of the iconic artifacts to the Vatican, one that embodies the simplicity and humbleness of Merton's life. After all, Thomas Merton was a Roman Catholic priest beloved by more than one Pope (Pope John XXII gave Merton a gold-embroidered liturgical stole, and Pope Paul VI gave him a bronze crucifix, saying that Merton was among his favorite Christian writers in history).

Now that the artifacts have found homes, or are earmarked to go to specific appropriate institutions, I was able to go public with the story. I did an interview on National Public Radio. An hour in the studio was condensed down to six minutes on air. Helen Marie and Paul Pearson, the director of the Thomas Merton Center in Louisville participated in the interview. This article is the first written account of the story.

This is a story that was meant to be.

The coincidences and confluences are plenteous: 2015 is the centennial celebration of Merton's birth. At the outset of the story he had been gone for almost half a century. I, who was a boy when he died in 1968, am now the same age as he was at the time of his death. More than that, Merton spent a week in Eagle River, Alaska during his fateful 1968 journey to Thailand. I'm from Eagle River (I didn't know about the connection beforehand). We both studied at Cambridge (Merton at Clare College; me at Caius College). Br. Irenaeus had already passed away, and in her mid-eighties, Helen Marie is getting near her end as well. She was certain the trunks would have been discarded as junk by family members tasked with emptying her house to prepare it for sale in the event of her passing. Her disease was diagnosed shortly after giving me the Merton collection. The fact that I was living only three hours away and finishing a book about Christian relics influenced by Merton is spooky. The fact that I bumped into someone in the cafeteria who knew something important about this story is spookier. It is not lost on me that this was a story destined to unfold precisely when it did. I will forever be grateful that I was the right person at the right place at the right time.

People often ask me what I have learned from the experience. My answer is swift. I have come to realize how much I am the product of American consumerism and capitalism and egotism, caught up with the insatiable yearning to "keep up with the Joneses" and to always want. I have learned to look deep into myself, into my soul as Merton would say, and to admit that I am not living my life to its fullness—a life of helping others, of hearing the suffering of others above the din of the earth shuddering from our collective selfishness, and, above all, of learning to surrender to the creative action of love and grace. I hope to become more like the man who came into my life when my eyes were wide shut. ■

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Amy Kurzweil

Lily (Amy's Bubbe) grieves the death of her family.
From *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir*

Culture

BOOKS

'I Feel Jewish . . . ': Roots and Reflections in *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir*

BY HANNAH BAKER SALTMARSH

Many memoirs advertise an impossible upgrade from impulsive self-sabotage to equally impulsive self-help, and still remain the most accessible literary genre. Graphic memoirs, although they entice readers with a seemingly naïve aesthetic or confessional narrative voice, aren't the work of amateurs: if anyone can write a memoir, hardly anyone can draw one.

A compelling graphic memoir such as Amy Kurzweil's *Flying Couch* evokes personal and cultural memory by way of gestures, poses, angles, text written sideways, poetic fragments, and arrow-flung words imitating perception itself. Each pencil mark of Kurzweil's reminds you that the book is handmade, and is meant to be held, pored over; Kurzweil's graphic memoir reminds you that all books aspire to be as artful.

The obsessively layered density of creative expression page-by-page in *Flying Couch* attests to the fullness of life scrawled upon the templates of desk surfaces, computer screens, open suitcases, purses, windows, and couches. Words are images and vice versa: photo captions, computer filenames, Post-it notes, thought bubbles, nightmares, and book titles on shelves feel imagistic like memory, functioning beyond language. The sharp lineation of birds, roots, branches, couches, and windows are transformed into a way of speaking.

The title of Kurzweil's debut graphic novel encapsulates the way Jewish womanhood is passed from generation to generation on the sofa in the living room where women hold court, sit with each other, laugh, dream, or wander to other worlds in therapy and in books—except, notably, couches are not heirloom furniture in Kurzweil's work, but like Wordsworth's "Spots of Time," Coleridge's "Winged Thought," or Woolf's "Room of One's Own," they are the furniture of self-telling.

The book itself, and the author's role in creating a graphic memoir with three central characters and voices is a response to the distances we sense between the people we love the most. What woman has not thought about a beloved matriarch? "I think about my grandmother all the time . . . although actually talking to her is a different story." Kurzweil perfectly handles the tension in female relationships when she reflects upon her arguments with her mother: "I never really know exactly what we're fighting about, but it usually has something to do with leaving each other." Yet these women, though living in the Midwest, New England, and New York, clearly remain the most important people in each other's lives. What Kurzweil's Bubbe says of her own mother, "Sometimes, a world is one person," resonates with the bonds between grandmother, mother, and daughter.

Kurzweil portrays her mother and grandmother as women "with certain stories to tell," women who can articulate exactly who they are, while she is still trying to sort out where their lives end and where hers can begin. In the first chapter of the book, Kurzweil portrays herself as a child imitating her mother who is typing up psychological research. One page, the background of which is a blueprint of the Kurzweil family home, shows Kurzweil working in her bedroom on a different psychological study involving the effect of one pet hamster's death upon the other, brothers Sugar and Spice—a study conducted in crayon. Kurzweil playfully undermines scientific authority while also exploring the myriad ways in which girls imitate their mothers: the open window and the crayon bucket seem to offer women the chance to escape the merely rational. In Kurzweil's case, maternal imitation means aspiration, not only towards scientific conclusions, but also towards the dream-work of composing.

When Bubbe says, "I wish I could draw her," referring to her own mother murdered in the camps, Kurzweil joins Bubbe in "making the invisible visible" by illustrating and narrating a multi-generational family history. The women in Kurzweil's family, each in her own way, value empathy, independence, and reflectiveness. What gives this arresting graphic memoir its historical and cultural poignancy is not only the story of Kurzweil's grandmother, Lily Fenster, who escapes from the Warsaw Ghetto and evades rape, capture, and death. Kurzweil's mother, Sonya, a psychotherapist, embodies the way

Amy Kurzweil

At an imagined college "identity" fair, Amy considers several Jewish identities.

children of survivors bridge the gap between worlds of pain and of progress, for themselves and for their own children. What is left unknown in most Holocaust literature is how the next two generations respond to and carry the imprints of the past; what is unheard of until Kurzweil's brave, heartfelt book is how a Millennial Jewish-American woman finds a sense of belonging that transcends a traumatic history.

Throughout *Flying Couch,* Kurzweil has a love-hate relationship with the potential selves encapsulated not only by the women in her family, but also by her alma mater, Stanford. When Kurzweil the student tries to engage earnestly with every volume of Jewish political, cultural, and religious thought, she is attacked on all sides by Freud, Harvey Pekar, Will Eisner, Art Spiegelman, the biblical Jacob, and Theodore Herzl, who, like the monsters in her childhood nightmares, create chaos and crisis, arguing even with each other, filling her with anxiety and self-doubt. Kurzweil blurts out, almost as a surprise to herself, "But I just want to draw pictures," whereupon she flees the hyper masculine, judgmental apparitions, and abandoning also the stereotype of "the Expert Educated Jew." By the last chapter, Kurzweil has accumulated graphic novels by Jewish women, a subtle reclaiming of identity and community.

For a writer and cartoonist who has published work in *The New Yorker, Blackbird, Shenandoah,* and others, Kurzweil's modesty is refreshing. She laughs at her first attempts to write this book initially as her college thesis, presenting to her family over dinner a comic featuring trees of maternal attachment, charts of 100-degree fears, and a stick-figure Bubbe who's wearing rollers in her hair and a superhero cape, and stomping on a Nazi. Bubbe exudes with pride: "Ohh! My Stories! Tree times I read your book. I say, my granddaughter, she listen, all dis time she listen! My stories are not in vain!" and, in the next breath, to the server, "Vaitress! Bring me some vater please—you know I survived from HITLER!"

Each woman sees herself as the protagonist of Kurzweil's multi-generational story, and while Bubbe is honored, Sonya offers some edits, which reveals how she has rewritten her own life story, refusing to be locked into a traumatic past. Sonya suggests to her daughter, "And you should make me sexier. I mean, more dynamic. I'm not just a therapist you know. I write poems. I care about the environment. I'm in a book club. I love to dance. I'm a lecturer at a prestigious medical school. I lead a multifaceted and fulfilling life. I just don't want to seem like some . . . victim of history." Sonya's comment is representative of how the different generations relate to collective and personal pasts.

Kurzweil, for her part, researches and dwells upon Bubbe's stories in search of a family identity; "in the tradition of curious and dutiful sons and daughters before me," Kurzweil shares that she aims to "polish and publish [Bubbe's] history, immortalize it." Kurzweil recreates Bubbe as a teenager, having lost almost her entire family to starvation or the camps, alone, in disguise as a Christian orphan. Bubbe wonders "Am I even Jewish?" as she takes communion or struggles to "speak Jewish" to herself. Yet, Bubbe shows she is "Jewish in [her] heart" in the act of sneaking freshly baked bread to a man she suspects is Jewish. This story comes closest to Kurzweil's original, poignant definition of what it means to be Jewish, beyond all the identity politics. This definition is embodied in Bubbe's words and the tremendous courage of her empathy: "I gave that bread like a secret. I was so scared, but I gave it."

Weaving together Bubbe and Sonya's immigration to New York from Germany with her own coming-of-age in New York, Kurzweil scrawls a sign that welcomes immigrants and recent grads alike. By the book's end, Kurzweil patches together a life in Brooklyn, teaching dance, comics, and writing in after-school programs so far apart she spends most of her life on public transportation. She depicts her entire generation through an adaptation of *Chutes and Ladders* for twenty-somethings, with ecstasies like adopting a cat, finding a good apartment, falling in love, finding cheap furniture, and getting into grad school. Alternatively, the pitfalls of this age include getting mugged, breaking up, finding bedbugs, coming home to your dead cat, or waking up hung over. This set-piece is just one instance of Kurzweil's skill in selection and tone, and her ability to evoke through each woman depicted, a generation.

Kurzweil's college notes reveal that she first attempted to write *Flying Couch* with a "post-feminist lens" even as she questioned what that lens was, and depicted life stories that challenged all ideologies. In the portrayal of Bubbe fending off a Nazi from raping her, Bubbe's oral testimony appears in typescript, "He was strong. I was stronger," reclaiming some dignity within an unimaginable context. Kurzweil's *Flying Couch* reflects the post-racial, post-feminist identity politics of Millennial artists breaking traditional codes of storytelling. Kurzweil's work more than passes the Bechdel test, created by a fellow cartoonist, Alison Bechdel, which stipulates that a creative work that is truly feminist must "feature at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man" and that these women be named, it soars past it.

Beneath the metaphor of the flying couch, of the tangled, invisible roots of diasporic peoples, of the flights to various homelands, the attempts to fill in family trees, is a question of the artist's making: how to create a home of one's own out of Target furniture, a drafting desk, a bequeathed couch, a handwritten card from a student gushing "Dear Amy, U are my favorite teacher!," a mother's face on the iPhone's caller ID, and a grandmother's voice between the silences where Kurzweil can't bring herself to tell Bubbe what she means to her. Rewriting the notion of a solely traumatic past, Kurzweil reveals ways in which women bond across generations in their deepest desires to be known and to share stories. ■

POETRY

The Journey of Adrienne Rich

BY MARGE PIERCY

If Adrienne Rich had only written her first two books or continued in that vein, she would no doubt have had a successful academic career and won more prizes, but her poetry would not have had the strong and lasting impact it has produced on a couple of generations so far. Her early verse was formal, a bit distant, a bit chilly, and you could read through all of it without knowing she was Jewish or through most of it that she was female.

Beginning with *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963), her poetry slowly transformed. She began to confront the enforced limitations of being female, of marriage, of what was expected of her. The first sign of this came for me in "September 21," the last two lines of which imagines the winter solstice closing in:

> "names and voices drown without reflection. / Then the
> houses draw you. Then they have you."

But the examination of such constraint becomes overt in the title poem: "Your mind now, mouldering like wedding cake, heavy with useless experience," she addresses the mother-in-law of the poem:

> A thinking woman sleeps with monsters.
> The beak that grips her, she becomes. And Nature
> that sprung-lidded still commodious
> steamer-trunk of tempora and mores
> gets stuffed with it all: the mildewed orange-flowers,
> the female pills, the terrible breasts
> of Boadicea beneath flat foxes' heads and orchids.

She examines the narrowness of the expected roles but doesn't yet imagine a way forward:

> Poised, trembling and unsatisfied, before
> an unlocked door, that cage of cages,
> [. . .]
> [. . .] Pinned down
> by love, for you the only natural action
> are you edged more keen
> to prise the secrets of the vault? Has Nature shown
> her household books to you, daughter-in-law,
> that her sons never saw?

It's still an affluent cage she explores, like Emily Dickinson's endless housework. She writes about the cost of rebellion against that strait place women are held to:

> [. . .] labelled harpy, shrew and whore.
> [. . .] martyred ambition
> stirs like the memory of refused adultery

At the end of this poem, she imagines a free woman but not how to get there. The craft is less constricted, less academic but still far more conventionally literary than her work will soon become. She still uses rhyme frequently. There's still the archaic habit of capitalizing certain nouns like Nature or Object. There's a new urgency but also a sense of being blocked, not yet exploring a way out: "[. . .] dead gobbets of myself / abortive, murdered or never willed?"

Other women seem to exist only to oppress, like the dead mother in "A Woman Mourned by Daughters" or the glamorous women who haunt some of the poems. At this point in her life, she describes herself in "Readings of History" as "neither Gentile nor Jew." Yet *Poems 1955-57* includes "At the Jewish New Year," a poem that sees Judaism mostly as a history of pain, and yet it's also a beginning of her identification as a Jew.

One kind of poetry missing is the love poem. In "Marriage in the Sixties":

> Two strangers; thrust for life upon a rock,
> may have at last the perfect talk
> that language aches for; still—
> two minds, two messages.

A sense of being stalled even as she seeks to break loose characterizes these poems. She speaks of herself as aging already, which to me means she was feeling stuck.

It's in the next collection, *Necessities of Life* (1966), that her

One of the most prolific and influential writers of her generation, Marge Piercy has over 40 titles of poetry, fiction, and essays to her name, including memoir and drama. A noted feminist, environmentalist, and leftist thinker since the 1960s, she has brought her political commitments to repairing the world into her writing about contemporary Jewish life, including serving for ten years as the editor of the literary journal, Lilith, and poetry editor of Tikkun.

craft and her sense of herself as active in the world begins. It starts in the title poem, with a remaking, remodeling of that self.

One element that runs through her poetry all her life, even after she moved much later in life to California and brought its colors and landscapes into her writing, was a strong sense of the New England landscape. The wildflowers, trees, animals (particularly foxes, especially vixens with whom several times she identifies) are always specific, carefully and lovingly described. I've never seen this aspect of her poetry mentioned, but perhaps I'm very conscious of it because of my own love for nature mostly developed in New England.

"Abnegation"
The red fox, the vixen
dancing in the half-light among the junipers
wise-looking in a sexy way,
Egyptian-supple in her sharpness . . . .
she springs toward her den
every hair on her pelt alive

I notice farther along in the poems of her middle period, strong evocations of Manhattan, not glamorized, not sung in praises, but the gritty everyday sounds and sights, the streets and ordinary apartments. Being a cat lady myself, I also notice how many cats appear in her poems, often, I think, representing freedom.

In *Leaflets* (1969), she begins, just begins, to confront America, to write poems that apply her full intelligence to understanding what we have been, what we are and what we are becoming. These poems are in the mature personal voice that we recognize as Adrienne. They are becoming quite powerful and in her own craft, no longer coy or circumspect. In other poems she writes of her own sensuality, writes about sex and desire for really the first time in her work, although still tangentially.

In each collection from then on through the seventies, eighties, nineties, she pushed harder. Poets had been taught in universities and by critics that to write political poetry, poetry that seriously confronted contradictions and failures and horrors in society, poetry that placed one actively in history, was wrongheaded, naive, against the essence of art. Of course, poetry that simply assumed the current political climate, sex roles, division of power was not seen as "political" or "polemical" but simply an expression of values seen as universal. The way things are, according to those critics, (and should be, forever).

Such dogma ignored most of the history of poetry and the fact that most of the great and the talented poets had political and social ideas and expressed them in their work—and that in many countries, such as Russia and Chile and Nicaragua, that role of the poet was strong and sometimes dominant. She opened herself to the strong political movements of that time, the anti-war movement against the Vietnam war and, later on, our other adventures in the Middle East. She began to be more and more conscious of injustice and inequality. Poverty appears in her work for the first time.

In a section of *Leaflets* titled, "Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)," she found a form that worked for her. She brought this ancient Persian form into contemporary use; many poets have written ghazals after her, but none better. The juxtaposition, the cognitive dissonance and echoes and counterpoint of the lines and the stanzas gave her work power.

By simply titling the poem with the date, "7/24/68," she lends the poem an immediacy by claiming nothing more than to inhabit that time and to test it fully:

I can't live at the hem of that tradition—
will I last to try the beginning of the next?
Killing is different now: no fingers round the throat.
No one feels the wetness of the blood on his hands.
When we fuck, there too are we remoter
than the fucking bodies of lovers used to be?
How many men have touched me with their eyes
more hotly than they later touched me with their lips.

In ghazal "7/24/68 II," she asks questions we all asked through that time when we were fighting our government's policies and wars with everything we could bring to bear:

The eye that used to watch us is dead, but open.
Sometimes I still have a sense of being followed.

How long will we be waiting for the police?
How long must I wonder which of my friends would hide me?

Adapting the ghazal form was only one aspect of her internationalism. She translated from from Dutch, Yiddish, Russian, French and Spanish. Being a part of the anti-war anti-imperialist movement then was to be in touch with many

Rich (right), with writers Audre Lorde (left) and Meridel Le Sueur (middle) in Austin Texas, 1980.

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activists and political writers from all over. I know that in my own political activity I met activists from France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, South Africa, the Netherlands, Cuba, Greece, Vietnam. It was a time of widespread connection. We felt ourselves part of a movement that seemed to be everyplace.

Adrienne wrote an uncommon number of poems dedicated to individuals and often addressed to them and their situation, and a great many of them were from and living in other countries. In "Tear Gas," a poem about demonstrators being gassed (as we were again and again), she writes:

> The will to change begins in the body not in the mind
> My politics is in my body, accruing and expanding with every
> act of resistance and each of my failures
> Locked in the closet at 4 years old I beat and the wall with my
> body
> that act is in me still
>
> [. . .]
>
> I need a language to hear myself with
> to see myself in
> a language like pigment released on the board
> blood-black, sexual green, reds
> veined with contradictions

The next volume was called, in echo of the phrase I quoted above, *The Will to Change* (1971), dedicated to her three sons, I imagine because she was conscious of the responsibility of a mother influencing their politics and their attitudes toward women. She began to find women heroes—Caroline Herschel, Joan of Arc. There are too many resonant phrases in her middle period to count: "In America we have only the present tense."

> And: "I am a woman with certain powers / and those powers
> severely limited / by authorities whose face I rarely see." And:
> "The police arrive at dawn / like death and childbirth."

She opened herself to feminism and never let go. In those years, I awaited books of hers just as in the Sixties we devoured the Beatles expecting them to tell us something important with each new recording. Her strongest poems belong mostly to this decades-long middle period. Poems from these books give off a difficult, sonorous necessary wisdom. They are food for the mind and the will. In poems like the great "Diving into the Wreck," she combines an intense specificity of observation with glorious imagery "swaying their crenellated fans / among the reefs" with powerful emotion and an interrogation of language, our mythologies, our beliefs and actions:

> I go down
> rung after rung and still
> the oxygen immerses me
> the blue light
> the clear atoms
> of our human air.
> I go down.
> My flippers cripple me.
> I crawl like an insect down the ladder
> and there is no one
> to tell me when the ocean
> will begin.
>
> First the air is blue and then
> it is bluer and then green and then
> black

I believe one of the strengths of her political poems was that she felt herself a part of a movement. At the time we felt that radical change was not only possible but that we were making it happen. As much as we despaired of influencing the government, we believed in our own collective power. A strong sense of internationality permeated at least parts of the movement. Rich always retained that connection with other nations, other cultures. She not only translated but had friends and acquaintances abroad that kept her viewpoint and her poetry from being parochial. In writing about politics, and also writing politically, she never forgot she was writing poetry. She never slopped into rhetoric, slogans, never imagined that naming something is enough.

She imagines herself into lives different from her own and gives them speech, like the pregnant Black woman in the middle passage in "From an Old House in America." She tries to imagine a particular man's sexuality in "Re-forming the Crystal":

> desire
> centered in a cock
> focused like a burning-glass
>
> desire without discrimination
> to want a woman like a fix.

She also began in the late Sixties to open herself to her Jewish heritage that came to her through her father. We only spoke about Judaism a couple of times. I felt that for her it was not so much the religion as the heritage of both the Holocaust and the history of seeking social justice, the fight for minorities, and for equality. Unlike her other intellectual explorations, I never felt she went very far into Judaism, but she strongly accepted that identity. I thought she found my writing Reconstructionist liturgy a rather peculiar endeavor.

I can't play the impartial critic; I knew Adrienne over a number of decades and cherished the relationship. At times I saw a great deal of her; after she relocated to Santa Cruz, less. We had much in common: left and feminist politics, an internationalist perspective, Judaism, and poetry. We were different in many ways: she was in a loving marriage to a

woman and I to a man; I was more of an organizer and a hands—and body-on activist, in both left and feminist politics; she came from affluence; I came from poverty; I was more into Judaism as a spiritual discipline, practicing kabbalistic meditation. She taught as a vocation and with great seriousness, I, only occasionally and then as a way to tide myself through lean periods. Until late in her life, she was far more comfortable in academia although critical of much about modern universities. I was always an outsider there, a bit awkward.

More and more her poems arose in her body, her claimed identity, her examined experiences as a woman. She no longer sought or wanted the false universality of her earliest poems. She writes out of her life as woman, as lesbian, as leftist, as Jew. Those claimed identities do not, as some critics imagine, weaken her poetry but give it power and authenticity. She is never writing to get published, to win prizes, to win academic or New York poetry mafia acclaim. She is writing to find her way, to create her own knowledge, to speak as much truth as she can manage to discover, claim, and create in words.

From "Hunger" dedicated to our common friend Audre Lorde:

> The decision to feed the world
> is the real decision. No revolution
> has chosen it. For that choice requires
> that women shall be free.
> I choke on the taste of bread in North America
> but the taste of hunger in North America
> is poisoning me

More and more, too, she questioned language itself. *A Dream of a Common Language* (1978) questions poetry (which, to the end of her life, she never stopped doing) and silences.

Of course not every poem is wonderful, but always you can feel her full intelligence, her fine mind working at the subject, interrogating it and herself. She valued honesty and for most of her work, clarity. I was surprised to note as I read slowly through the entire collection how many of her poems concern poetry itself or language, especially in the poems of the last two decades of her life, and also how strongly as she went on in life she felt and was tormented by a sense of powerlessness. All of us who work for political, economic, and social change batter ourselves against the power of what is. We see the enormity of what needs to be rethought, rebuilt, reimagined, remade. But these poems never sink into despair.

Once she claimed her lesbianism, she began, especially in that long middle period, to write extraordinary love poems. This voice begins well before "Twenty-One Love Poems," but finds full flowering there. References to love, to sexuality occur often in her most overtly political poems. For Adrienne, the personal and the political were definitely of one

"The red fox, the vixen / dancing in the half-light among the junipers" An excerpt from "Abnegation" by Adrienne Rich

piece. Once she and Michelle Cliff formed their marriage, she had a foundation that she had previously lacked, an affirmation of her body and desires; and also a constant reminder of racism in our country, our history, and the world. Recognition of that would never again be far from her consciousness or her work.

She had always written longish and long poems over the years, but she began to write quite long poems oftener. Obviously she never worried about whether journals might publish them. She needed the space to work out her thoughts, her arguments, and her conclusions. She wrote frequently of the hold of the past on her and how she struggled to be free of it—past relationships, assumptions, traditions and tragedies. In all the poems up to this point, never did she refer openly, clearly to the suicide of her husband after she left him. Adrienne alluded to it often enough over the years, until finally she wrote directly about it in the poem about New England, her father, and her own Jewishness, "Sources." There she talks about him and finally to him.

In "Toward the Solstice"

> A decade of cutting away
> dead flesh, cauterizing
> old scars ripped open over and over
> and still it is not enough . . . .
> a woman's work, the solstice nearing
> and my hand still suspended
> as if above a letter
> I long and dread to close.

Seeking a new poetry, she compares writing a poem to a woman sitting at a table arranging:

> bits of yarn, calico and velvet scraps
> laying them out absently on the scrubbed boards
> in the lamplight, with small rainbow-colored shells
> sent in colon-wool from somewhere far away,
> and skeins of milkweed from the nearest meadow—

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original domestic silk, the finest findings—
and the darkblue petal of the petunia.
and the dry darkbrown lace of seaweed;
not forgotten either, the shed silver
whisker of the cat
the spiral of paper-wasp-nest curling
beside the finch's yellow feather.
Such a composition has nothing to do with eternity
the striving for greatness brilliance—
only with the musing of a mind
one with her body
—"Transcendental Etude"

She wrote often about women: Ethel Rosenberg and her death, burned alive as she says in the faulty electric chair; or her mother-in-law from her straight marriage, whom she returned to addressing:

I can't live on placebos
or Valium, like you [. . .]

I would try to tell you, mother-in-law
but anger takes fire from yours and in the oven
the meal bursts into flames

A growing number of her poems dealt with the lives of women, sometimes in the plural, sometimes an individual life, as in the poem "Grandmothers" about both of hers; Emily Dickinson; a young Black woman student beaten by a policeman and arrested; Simone Weil; a Native American woman selling jewelry to tourists; the writer Ellen Glasgow. She also revisited her family as in two of the poems I cited above, and in the long poem "Sources," where she wrote about her father, first as a patriarch and then as a Jew, and in so doing turns her intelligence on her own Jewishness:

The Jews I've felt rooted among
are those who were turned to smoke [. . .]

[. . .] this summer I lie awake at dawn

sweating the Middle East through my brain
wearing the star of David
on a thin chain at my breastbone

In the same poem she circles about the Holocaust she was obsessed with in poems written till her death. In "North American Time" she writes:

Everything we write
will be used against us
or against those we love
[. . .]
Poetry never stood a chance
of standing outside history

Even the lesser poems of this period have memorable lines, images so precise they catch in the mind like thistles, a sense of weight and urgency and the honesty of a mind that constantly examines. She even turns the pain of her crippling arthritis into poetry. Then there are poems like "Final Notations," a poem memorable and gnomic that conjures something different for every reader while creating its own perfect form. This is real mastery.

By 1996 in poems like "Midnight Salvage," a note of desperation and despair enters her poems, a sense of change that isn't happening, and of history moving backward and into a worse place. The left felt ineffectual, the women's movement was and is still fighting to hold onto or eventually retake gains we thought secure after much organizing and protesting and politicking. The poems frequently evoke images of torture, of murder, of persecution. Prose passages are often wedged into poems—as if she had begun to doubt she could encompass everything in her verse. She mentioned Robinson Jeffers now and again not only because she was living in Santa Cruz and he wrote so brilliantly of the land and its sea, but because he despaired of humanity and looked to other animals for a kind of comfort, and she was trying hard not to give up on us.

Fragments appear in the poems that require much of the reader. For instance, in the poem "Victory" a single phrase "Meister aus Deutschland" can't work in context unless you're acquainted with Paul Celan's magnificent poem in German, "Death Fugue." I feel as I read through the later and last poems that she was almost tearing poetry apart to make it do more than it could. There are poems that feel whole and clear like "Signatures," "Fox," "Behind the Motel," powerful like "The School Among the Ruins," "There is No One Story and One Story Only" but many poems feel as if they are coming apart, with occasional wonderful lines or images but not with the strength or coherence of her decades-long middle period. I suspect academics will make careers out of explicating the later poems, but I will never reread and again read aloud many of those poems as I do the ones I have praised.

Still, her oeuvre stands as a whole and is indomitable in its power, its integrity, its politics, its honesty, its relevance, and its music. I am grateful to have known her and to be able to read and reread her great poems. ■

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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.

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POETRY

The World and the Self Through Another's Eyes

BY DAVID DANOFF

There's a school of criticism that prefers to read poems as though the identity of the author doesn't matter. And there's another approach that assumes the poet's identity is paramount and poems can be taken as authentic expressions of the author's race, gender, religion, or sexuality. Neither approach accounts for the poet's ability to shape the way identity is expressed in the work. There are many factors to consider. Should the poems construct a narrative, and should the speaker of the poems be depicted playing a role in that narrative? Should recognizably personal details be included? How much tactile, physical reality should be embodied in the poems? How much personal "voice" should the poems have?

One of the first questions a reader tends to ask is: "Who's writing this, and why?" The answers suggested within the work help to frame how the work will be read. Three recent debut collections by young poets undertake different ways of representing the self within their poetry and using it as a tool to comment on pressing contemporary issues.

In *Look*, Solmaz Sharif offers a defiant meditation on America's military actions in the Middle East, anti-Muslim prejudice, and the dehumanizing effects of warfare and violence. She tells stories of refugees, detainees, casualties, and survivors through fragmentary details and scraps of disembodied quotation. Some seem to be drawn directly from her own life and family history, while others seem to be reported or even fictional—but they're blended together.

The speaker of these poems is the daughter of Iranian émigrés, raised in the West, but also a person moving through a war zone, identifying bodies, clearing rubble; an angry observer of America's post-9/11 landscape from her vantage point in California, and also the lover of an inmate in Guantánamo, writing him tender letters scored with censored white spaces. In effect, she merges her identity with all who have suffered; she makes her voice speak for them all.

One of Sharif's major concerns is the use and misuse of language by those who wield power. Throughout the book, words and phrases from the Defense Department's *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* are incorporated into the text, in all caps. Seemingly benign words take on sinister overtones when cast as military lingo, and the reader is drawn up short, wondering what specific meaning something like "THRESHOLD OF ACCEPTABILITY" or "READY POSITION" must have. Sharif describes a romantic moment in "Dear INTELLIGENCE JOURNAL":

> We were FRIENDLY beneath the gazebo's LATTICE . . . a
> LOW VISIBILITY
> OPERATION, which is what my OVER-THE-HORIZON
> RADAR was telling me.

The omnipresence of these terms, and the way they break into the text at seemingly random moments, suggests the way the language of warfare—intended to obscure and to distance us from the reality of state-sanctioned violence—infiltrates the language we all use, blurring our perceptions, and corrupting our judgment. In "Perception Management," the entire poem consists of a list of code names of military operations:

> ALOHA * FOCUS * FLOODLIGHT * HARVEST LIGHT
> * RED LIGHT * RED BULL * PITBULL * BRUTUS *
> HERMES * SLEDGEHAMMER * GRIZZLY FORCED
> ENTRY * VACANT CITY * RIVERWALK

The names are by turns aggressive, whimsical, jingoistic, and deceptively gentle, highlighting the uneasy ability of language to both reveal and obscure, to evoke and deceive. Sharif is hyper-aware of her own responsibility as a poet to name things rightly, and the poems enact a constant struggle between irony and sincerity. The title poem, "Look," begins:

> It matters what you call a thing: *Exquisite* a lover called me.
> *Exquisite.*

> Whereas *Well, if I were from your culture, living in this country*, said the man outside the 2004 Republican National Convention, *I would put up with that for this country*;

> Whereas I felt the need to clarify: *You would put up with TORTURE, you mean* and he proclaimed: *Yes*;

Sharif refuses to sugarcoat anything. In "Family of Scatterable Mines," when an elderly relative or friend wonders about her ailing brother "*does this mean he will die?*" Sharif's response is unflinching: "I say yes / without worrying it will

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Hillel Smith

Three poets' different uses of identity remind us that what we see is impacted by the windows out of which we look.

break her." She describes herself arriving at this approach to writing poetry almost unwillingly, as though it had been wrenched out of her or forced upon her. In "Desired Appreciation," she says:

> Until now, now that I've reached my thirties:
> All my Muse's poetry has been harmless:
> American and diplomatic: a learned helplessness
> Is what psychologists call it: my docile, desired state.

"Learned helplessness" leads her to a reflection on torture victims, on the forced tubal feeding, and on the minimal medical attention provided to ensure they survive. Then she reflects sarcastically on the sort of minimal attention provided to lift a nation's spirit by political leaders: "Must fistbump a janitor. Must muss up / Some kid's hair and let him loose / Around the Oval Office." She compares herself to John Brown on the scaffold, looking out at a country both beautiful and guilty, then concludes with a scrap of dialogue between herself and a psychiatrist:

> "So you feel dangerous?" she said.
> Yes.
> "So you feel like a threat?"
> Yes.

In a world where her family, friends, and co-religionists are presumed to be dangerous, she takes on this role in her work: she becomes the voice of the mistrusted aliens, the grudgingly accepted refugees, the families fractured and scattered, and those whose friends or loved ones have been caught up in the system of rendition, incarceration, and torture. She becomes dangerous, writing a poetry intended to sting. Whatever your previous views on this subject matter, Sharif's uncompromising work is likely to raise some uncomfortable questions and compel some fresh thinking. This is a fierce, unforgettable book.

The poems of Ari Banias, by contrast, use the identity of the speaker as a tool to probe, and place it as one of the chief objects of investigation. Throughout *Anybody*, the voice is heavy and close, intimate, chatty, a stream of consciousness. In a sense, the poems all take place inside the speaker's head, pursuing ideas sparked by the passing impressions made by scenery or events as they register on his consciousness. It's an intensely subjective—not to say narcissistic—poetry, and yet Banias is obsessed with the commonality of experience. He's perennially focused on his own body, its frailties and urges, and especially its gender presentation, but he's also always drawing connections between observations of his own and everyone's bodies. How does *everyone* make sense of what they feel, how do they forge an identity in the world? How do they find ways to bridge the incomprehension and selfishness that so often come between us?

Banias's poems move by associative leaps, as in "Exquisite Corpse" (named for a literary game in which each person adds one line to a poem in progress, without knowing more than the immediately preceding line):

> I had a nightgown once, which
> became a jellyfish
>
> so in order to wear it I had to go down:
> to punch myself into the form
>
> the content required,
> to hunker like a boulder under
>
> immeasurable pressure, as when
> minerals are transformed
>
> into their reverse.

The effect is playful, but also shot through with anxiety and distress. Bodies are unstable; the *self* can be unstable. Sexuality is both alluring (promising connection) and disturbing (threatening difference). Banias's poems describe an unhappy girl transitioning to become a boy, and they're constantly observing other boys or men, and observing the self, and making comparisons. In "Morphology":

> In mirrors, I eyed me;
> in storefront glass, in lakes. Touched tip of *I* to tip
> to make a loop. This way, I felt both long and bunched. I felt like guts
>
> some vultures who were me tore at.
>
> I stood against a wall, under consideration, a paint chip
> taped there, half-unseen;

The self is provisional, a series of attempts, forever in process. It's also a screen for playing out general social stereotypes or clichés. "An Arrow" begins:

> Too often I'd like some direction
> but am ashamed of this fact, still I ask for it
> though men are supposed to be bad at admitting
> they're lost, why men agree
> to fulfill this is lost on me.

The poem meanders through a discussion of the limiting binary conception of gender, then discusses pronouns, then discusses neighbors, and a "badly pruned bush / across the street," considers the inequality of the landscape, the mix of ugliness and beauty, remembers a cousin ("who once cared about art now he's a depressed socialist / vaguely entrepreneurial by necessity, as once I was / a slutty teenage girl they now call Sir"), and ends with the rambunctious neighborhood kids:

> I saw one kid the other day point a phone
> from their window into mine to take a photo of me I wanted to take
> one in response as reminder that hey it's a window
> not a mirror and the object talks back

Windows are as central to Banias as mirrors. What he wants more than anything is to bridge divides, and his task in these poems is—in part—to offer an unobstructed view of himself. Sometimes this involves a certain degree of voyeurism. "At Any Given Moment" concludes:

> I'm watching myself
> watch TV in the heat in my underwear from the next building over, and
> honestly, I seem overly angry.
> I think we should talk. Can we all come to our windows?

By putting on display his unruly thoughts, his random associations, his nagging worries, his shame, his lust, his tender hopes, he offers the reader an account of one person in the world, doing his best to make sense of the often senseless. By zooming in as close as possible, these poems paradoxically broaden to encompass the experience of "anybody."

Another way to present the self in poetry is by not presenting it at all. The poems in Nate Klug's *Anyone* could be described as "egoless." They're quiet, thoughtful, self-effacing. Like Banias, Klug is very interested in how people relate to one another. But he takes himself out of the equation. The poems record the ideas or impressions made by observations of landscape, weather, traffic, etc., but the tone is far more serene than Banias, the voice is far less chatty and intimate. The reader is being invited to peer through a nearly transparent pane of glass, to see what the poet sees, standing where the poet stands, without thinking about the poet as a person in his own right. The experience is often spiritual, in a slightly elusive way, as in "Gift":

> Not easy ever
> once you have been shocked
>
> to place your index finger
> on exactly the same spot
>
> yet you are compelled,
> indulged (by whom?), into
>
> repeating yourself—you
> who have been called

There's an air of mystery in these poems, a sense of weighty things being worked out, but at a distance. At times there are specific details, but they don't contribute to characterizing the speaker of the poems. They seem to function more as generic markers, placeholders for whatever details the reader might supply from his or her own life. "Milton's God" begins: "Where I-95 meets The Pike, / a ponderous thunderhead flowered." But the poem shies away from subjectivity, never dipping into the messy experience of the person who actually stands there getting wet, hearing the crack of thunder and the roar of passing cars. Instead, there's a quote by Milton, then an equivocal observation:

> standing, waiting, at the overpass edge,
> the onlooker couldn't decide
>
> until the end, or even then,
> what was revealed and what had been hidden.

Klug's austerely beautiful poems are much quieter and less demonstrative than those by Sharif or Banias, but that doesn't mean they lack engagement with the world. There is violence in these poems, as well as sadness and longing, sickness and suffering. But experience is purified to abstraction; emotions are isolated, tested. Rather than a model of the self, with all of its headlong rages and passions as it crashes through an obstacle course of injustice and interpersonal conflict, Klug's poems enact the steady and patient movement of a mind doing the slow, diligent, necessary work to achieve understanding.

In "Observer," he describes a woman identified as K. (who seems to be his wife, but is never explicitly identified as such) observed unawares as she pedals through an intersection across from where he stands. He reflects on the dual nature of light, "the fact that photons // turn into tiny loyal billiard balls, / as soon as we start watching," and what this suggests about "an invisibly unstable world, // a shaking everywhere / that seeing must pin down and fix." The speaker doesn't call out or in any way interfere with the scene. He's not seeking to capture or memorialize the moment, whether for personal or aesthetic reasons, so much as to cite it as an example: one more transient moment. And what can we do in the face of impermanence? He concludes with something close to monastic renunciation:

> there has to be a kind of speech
> beyond naming, or even praise,
>
> a discipline
> that locates light and lets it go.

In their different ways, each of these books depends on the reader's sense of the identity of the speaker to inform the way the poems are understood. Sharif and Banias depict themselves—or personas that we are led to believe are very similar to themselves—as participants in active debates about (respectively) refugees, torture, and the War on Terror, and social conflict, cultural alienation, and transgender experience. Klug chooses a different route, eluding efforts to read his work as biography in favor of a more generalized presentation of thought and experience that could occur to anyone. He creates a sort of vacant space for the reader to step into. And the reader does step in: all three of these books offer a window on particular experience with universal resonance. They show us the world through another's eyes, making us see our own place in it differently. ■

BOOKS

Transformative Language in the Desert: A review of *Moses: A Human Life*, by Avivah Gottleib Zornberg

BY MARTHA SONNENBERG

Reading Avivah Zornberg's books requires some effort, and her new book, *Moses: A Human Life*, is no exception. Zornberg's books are well worth some effort, because she ultimately speaks to the complexities of the transformative process, both of individuals and of social movements, of leaders as well as the led—all compelling issues for readers of *Tikkun*. She writes in her own unique style, her words enhanced by frequent references to poets, psychoanalysts, philosophers, and Chassidic and Midrashic commentaries, especially those of Rashi, Rambam, and Nachman.

In this book, she presents a unique view of Moses. We often think of the biblical legendary Moses, Moshe Rabbenu, our teacher, as "the most perfect human being," in the words of Maimonides. Zornberg, however, departs from the iconic presentation, and reveals a Moses far from perfect, a very human man, riddled with insecurities, anxieties, and uncertainty in his faith in the God who has called upon him to lead the Jewish people out of bondage in Egypt.

Zornberg shows us Moses, born into a world of genocide, cast out into the river, and then shuttled between two mothers and two cultures, one of power and one of helplessness. He suffers from "a confusion of tongues" from these early life conditions, with a split in his identity—is he a prince or a slave? Thus when called by God at the burning bush to speak on behalf of the Jewish people, to "bring forth My people," he feels inadequate to the task: "Mi Anochi?," "*Who am I*, that I should go unto Pharaoh . . . ?" And further, "I am not a man of words . . . for I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." (Exodus 4: 10) This self-doubt, this speechlessness in Moses is, in Zornberg's view, one of the important reasons he is called upon to lead, for these qualities become a metaphor for a people in exile, the "galut ha-dibbur," exile of the word, which characterizes the speechlessness, the muteness, of slavery.

What transpires over the next 40 years, for both Moses and the people, is emergence from this speechlessness. Zornberg shows how language brings about change as it imparts power and consciousness to the speakers. She quotes Emerson who says language "can lead me thither where I would be." Finding the authentic voice as a leader and as a people is a transformative experience. In Zornberg's previous book, *Bewilderments: Reflections on the Book of Numbers*, she reminds us that the Hebrew name for this book of Torah is "Bamidbar," "in the desert," and that the word "midbar" contains within its Hebrew letters the word for speech, "dibbur." She develops the theme that it is in the desert, during their wanderings, that the Israelites *begin* to find their own voice as a people. So, too, for Moses. The last book of Torah, Deuteronomy, "Devarim" in Hebrew ("the words") is also about words, but now they are Moses's words.

It is in this last book of Torah, often discounted as mere repetition of the laws, where Moses finds his own voice and his identity, as he tells the story to a new generation of Israelites, and allows himself to become part of the story rather than apart from it. In the telling of the story, Moses takes responsibility for his own part in the failures, and missed

Moses' subjectivity and vulnerability provide us human insight into the mysterious prophetic character.

Hillel Smith

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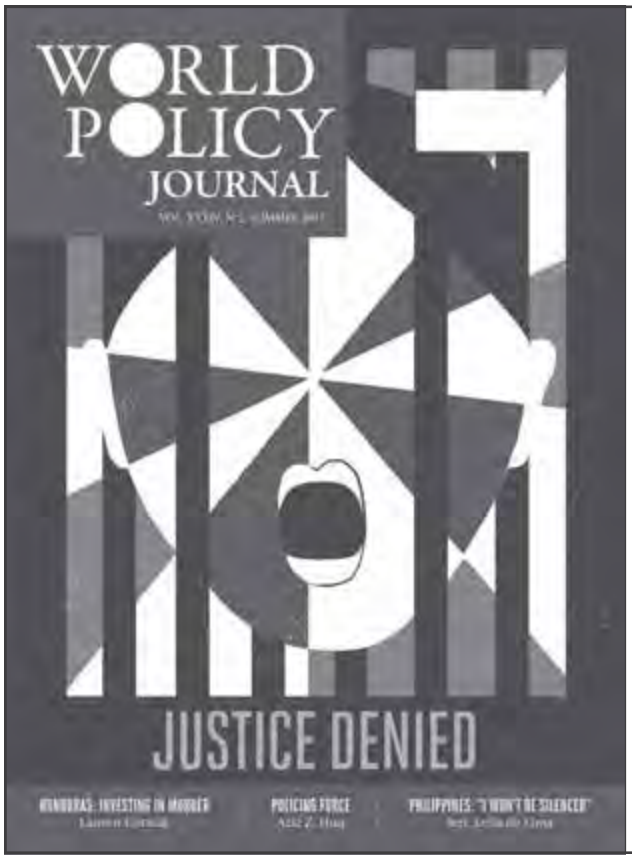
opportunities that characterize the peoples' journey from Egypt (Mitzrayim) to the Promised Land. He sees, for example, his part in the idolatrous episode of the Golden Calf: that the nature of his leadership, at that time, encouraged the people's dependency upon him. He himself became an idol for a people still traumatized by slavery and then by the rigors of new freedom, and left them unprepared to deal with his absence in any way other than to search for a replacement idol. Zornberg points out that following the episode of the Golden Calf, Moses' language regarding the people begins to change—instead of referring to them as "the people" or "Your people," he now identifies with them, and includes himself as part of them: "Forgive *our* iniquity and *our* sin." (Exodus 34:9)

A new relationship between leader and led evolves as Moses begins to answer his own question, "Who am I?" As Zornberg puts it, "His history, like theirs, only gradually emerges from exile and rupture . . . His birth into language plays out larger processes, divine processes of coming *to be* in the world." Moses's identity, and the identity of the Israelites, and of God himself ("I shall be what I shall be" Exodus 3:14) find expression in the desert world of "becoming." Moses begins to understand the harsh realities of the transformative process, and develops compassion for himself, and for the people he leads. As he loses his anger and his self-righteousness, his omniscience and omnipotence, Zornberg points out, Moses is able to allow his most vulnerable moment to be seen by the people as he recounts God's rejection of his wish to be allowed into the Promised Land. No longer only an impersonal messenger of God, he is able to claim his own subjectivity, and express his vulnerability and his humanity. It has taken forty years for him to see that his destiny and the destiny of his people are one in the same. In conscious solidarity with the people, he can speak from an authentic place and "stir the depths in those who hear him." And finally, he can watch his people go into the Promised Land, without him, and with their own voice—"And now, write for yourselves this song . . . " (Deut. 31:19)

Ultimately, Zornberg raises issues facing all of us, as we walk through our own lives and consider our relationships with children, loved ones, and in a larger context, with the social movements of which we are a part. If exile is the alienation of each of us from our inner truths, from each other, and from our relationship with God, then we are likely still in exile. In reading this book, I was reminded of the notion of alienation found in the early writings of Marx, that when human beings are estranged from other human beings, they are estranged from their essential nature as *social* beings. This book asks that we confront our own questions of self, address our own fears and uncertainties, and look honestly into our own hearts and minds before we try to change the hearts and minds of others. *Moses: A Human Life* is an evocative and provocative book; it suggests, profoundly and poetically, that we find our meaning in our relationships with others, and it enhances our consciousness as we "write for ourselves this song," on our individual and collective journey of tikkun olam, to heal and transform the world. ■



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Creation, the Sixth Day

One and Many in Both God and Human Beings

BY ANA LEVY-LYONS

OVER THE PAST YEAR, I preached a sermon series on the Torah's seven days of creation at First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, NY. In this series I lifted up the images of natural beauty and ecological abundance in this passionate text—a text that is too often claimed by (and ceded to) hardline creationists and climate change deniers. Far from the conservative politics that such voices promote, I see the Genesis text as a call for human humility and environmental stewardship. It highlights the gorgeous and fragile gift we have been given in our planet earth, celebrates its diversity, and casts humans as merely one thread in its living web. My interpretations in this series are partly my own midrash and partly the insights of traditional commentators. The following article is adapted from a sermon I delivered on the creation of humans. This is part 2 of the article on the sixth day of creation, begun in the fall, 2016 issue of Tikkun.

READING THE GENESIS seven days of creation from a human perspective, the Friday afternoon is really where the action is. This is when God makes the first earthling. The Hebrew word for it is *adam*, which comes from the word *adamah*, and means "earth." God makes an earth creature. And the way it's described is downright strange: "Then God said, 'Let us make an earthling in our image, according to our likeness.'" *Us?!* To whom is God referring? And if there's more than one, why is it "image" and "likeness" instead of "images" and "likenesses?" There has been something suspiciously plural-ish about this God from the start. The Hebrew name for God used throughout this story is *Elohim*. "Im" is a plural ending, analogous to adding an –s to the end of an English word. But when *Elohim* is the subject of a verb in this story, the verb is always in the singular. And now the plot thickens and we have the very first time that *Elohim* refers to itself. And *Elohim* calls itself, "us." Perhaps this is the author's way of expressing through creative grammar a God that is both many and one.

The early Hebrews weren't the only ones with this idea—it's actually a much older and much later concept as well. Trinitarian Christianity teaches the mystery of one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And a thousand years before Genesis was written, early Hindus were writing scriptures that described a plurality of gods and a profusion of life all emanating from one universal life force. They write, "Just as the seven colors exist within one ray of light, so too the various Hindu Gods exist within the Supreme, as names of its different qualities." Statues of Hindu gods are often explosions of life forms, with human and animal parts, three heads and multiple arms, each hand holding a different symbolic object. They burst outward, reaching to express the radical diversity of God. They're trying to capture in three-dimensional art something that lives in so many more dimensions as to be unimaginable. And it's all one.

Language, art, and religious expression are always inadequate. The artists and clergy among us are acutely aware of this. Sometimes our representations feel feeble in their efforts to convey the subtlety and diversity and magnificence of reality. But we try anyway. Perhaps God refers to Godself as "us" in the text in the same way that some gender-queer people ask to be referred to as "they"—to try to convey a layered, plural identity that does not conform neatly to a single category. It's awkward, but it's the best that words can do, and so it's worth doing. This is what we see here in this next piece of the Genesis text—a religious narrative trying to describe something infinite and indescribable in a way that people can grasp.

After we hear about God for the first time as "us," the text continues: "So God created the earthling in God's image, in the image of God, God created him; male and female God created them." So in one sense God is singular and creates

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one male earthling in his image; and in another sense, God is plural and creates male and female earthlings in their image. This is not science; it's theology. To create humans in the image of a plural God, humans have to also be plural. For male and female humans to both be made in the image of God, God must be both male and female. And perhaps much more than that. Perhaps we are meant to receive a picture of a God who is multifaceted, multidimensional, both many and one and of a human world that mirrors that diversity.

We know today that the world is even more complicated than the world of binaries suggested by a straight translation of the Genesis text. We know that the male-female binary is overly simplistic. While most bodies fit into those two categories, a significant minority doesn't. We humans impose binaries on what are really continua. We do this with gender and, of course, we do it with skin color. The Genesis story doesn't mention skin color. Maybe this is because the author didn't know anyone with different skin color, just like the author probably didn't know of anyone who wasn't male or female. Or maybe it was because skin color was not seen as a structural difference between humans. Modern research has shown that from a physiological perspective, race has no meaning, but we have taken the beautiful, subtle continuum of shades of brown that we humans come in, and imposed the artificial binary of black and white. We have piled all our cultural baggage onto what are inherently neutral variances in human bodies. And every time we've done this throughout history, it has resulted in one form or another of violence.

What was the author of Genesis thinking in setting the stage for these kinds of false dualisms? And why the confusion of grammar and gender and singular and plural? If the text was supposed to teach of a plural God, why didn't it just come out and say that? Because this text was written by a human being. Probably a man. He was trying to synthesize multiple streams of oral histories and he was probably deeply conflicted. On one hand, he lived in a patriarchal society that was probably even less enlightened on gender issues than we are today. On the other hand, it seems clear that this writer was a visionary and had wisdom and insights well beyond his place and time. The idea of a plural, all-encompassing God with male and female dimensions creating men and women together in its own image must have been so radical for that place and time as to be virtually unthinkable. One can imagine the author struggling internally between everything he had been raised to believe and this sweeping, mystical vision of a kaleidoscopic God mirrored by creation. He struggled to feel the edges of his own spiritual confinement. What we have passed down to us is a written record of that struggle. It's almost as if the author wrote, "God created him . . . I mean *them*."

The author went as far as he possibly could. But there were still binaries and the writer's God—*Elohim*—was still a masculine gendered God. He couldn't quite get himself to go all the way. But we can. We can take the author's vision a step further because there's a long Jewish hermeneutical tradition of extrapolating and extending the trajectory of the text. We can fill in things that aren't stated explicitly, as long as they are in keeping with the spirit of the whole. So where it says, "male and female God created them," it may also mean, "other sexes and genders God created them" and "all shades of brown God created them" and "all sizes and body shapes God created them" and "with all kinds of different abilities God created them" and "as different kinds of makers and as different kinds of lovers and with different kinds of understanding God created them. And with different laughs and different gifts and with different footprints and different voices God created them." All in the divine image.

The spectacular multiplicity of both God and human in this text can be a resource and a balm for a nation that is hurting these days. In a time of oppression and violence against women, people of color, and marginalized communities, this text offers a spiritual vision of universal embrace. It lifts up diversity as creative genius on the part of a constitutionally diverse God. The religious right, and the conservative politics that loosely track it, offer a more constricting concept—a God cast as male, a savior cast as white, and a corresponding default human who is also male and white. Spiritual progressives hold a vision, upheld by this text, that God and humanity are so much more than that. If only we could all break free of the ways our hearts and minds today are still limited, the ways in which we still believe the false binaries, and the ways we reduce the infinite reality to cheap substitutes, we would find not only "tolerance," but awe of one another. Truly if we could double-click on another human being, the entire universe would open up. And then maybe we could walk around seeing the divine in everybody.

If there's one thing that scientific and biblical accounts of creation agree on, it's that the universe is diverse. It's a fabulous spraying outward, exploding from a single point, made of all the same elements, but manifesting in generous expansiveness. All the wild variety of the world is a reflection of its cosmic origins. We are made in the image of the universe as a whole: what religion can do that science cannot is to call it "good." The creation story celebrates the radical diversity of life from start to finish. From an undifferentiated, formless and void watery darkness, each day the world gets more and more articulated, rich, detailed, and alive. Each step in the process, each evolution, is embraced by the divine. Each new manifestation is deemed good. Each is loved and accepted. Nothing is rejected; nothing is cast out of the budding universe. This love, this acceptance, this giddy joy at the dawn of the technicolor universe is the living heart of the creation story. ■

The World Needs Repentance

BY RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

Notes from the Jewish tradition that may be helpful to people in every tradition and to people who need to connect to ancient spiritual wisdom

What makes the Jewish approach to repentance and atonement relevant to North American and global politics is that it does not focus only on the ways we as individuals "sinned," (actually, the real meaning of the word sin is to miss the mark; not some sense of being drenched in evil, but just getting off course) but rather recognizes us as part of a community for which we must take collective responsibility.

North Americans are so used to the extreme individualism promoted by capitalist values that we rarely think of ourselves as having responsibility for each other. But that is precisely what is needed. So we at Tikkun, the interfaith and secular-humanist-and-atheist-welcoming Network of Spiritual Progressives, and Beyt Tikkun Synagogue-Without-Walls, have developed **a set of confessions in the form of "we have sinned when . . . " that mention many things that *you personally may never have done*, but which are taking place in and through the social, economic, and cultural arrangements in our society for which we have communal responsibility.**

We suggest that you bring together people in your friendship circle, and encourage them to sit together some day or evening and read these aloud, and afterwards talk about which make most sense and which someone has difficulty with. This kind of practice could be an important first step in creating a different way of approaching our problems that speaks more to the heart and reaches deeper into our inner being. And the discussion that it generates might be the first step in creating a different kind of culture within liberal and progressive circles. A new culture is exactly what is needed to offset some of what has made liberals and progressives unpopular with a significant section of American society, a section whose support we need if we are ever going to make the fundamental changes needed to end racism, sexism, homophobia, environmental irresponsibility, militarism and vast economic inequality.

When your group (could be as small as three or as large as twenty) assembles, take turns reading these out loud and wait until they have all been read. Break down into small groups of three people each to discuss their reactions to these ideas and to suggest what they'd add that isn't here and what they'd want to eliminate that is here.

Try it; you might be surprised at how much impact this little exercise can have even with people who normally seem shut off and unlikely to share their fears and hopes.

For Our Sins as Individuals and As a Society

Everyone reads this together: We take collective responsibility for our own lives and for the activities of the community and society of which we are a part. We affirm our fundamental interdependence and interconnectedness. We have allowed others to be victims, subject to incredible suffering; we have turned our backs on others and their well-being—today we acknowledge that this world is co-created by all of us, and so we atone for all of its miseries and injustices.

While the struggle to change ourselves and our world may be long and painful, it is our own struggle; no one else can do it for us. To the extent that we have failed to do all that we could to make ourselves and our community all that we ought to be, we ask each other for forgiveness–and we now commit ourselves to transformation this coming year, as we seek to get back on the path to our highest possible selves.

Now, each person reads one of these, until all have been read out loud:

For the Sins:
For the sins we have committed before you and in our communities by being so preoccupied with ourselves that we ignored the larger problems of the world;

And for the sins we have committed by being so directed toward outward realities that we have ignored our spiritual development; for the sins of allowing our government to put terror into the lives of undocumented workers and refugees rather than to open our borders and our hearts to those fleeing oppression and extreme poverty elsewhere;

And for the sins of dismantling environmental regulations that sought to restrain corporations or individuals from doing more damage to an already endangered planetary life support system;

For the sins of allowing our government to weaken the capacity of working people to obtain reasonable pay and benefits at work;

And for the sins of not spending more time and energy in defeating elected officials who support racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, Islamophobic, xenophobic and/or anti-Semitic policies and who contribute to the emergence of violence and hatred in our society;

For the sins committed of allowing a global capitalist system and its media to uproot traditional societies and impose the values of the capitalist market system, fostering materialism and selfishness around the world, supporting dictatorships that would give American corporations freedom to exploit the resources of other countries, dump waste materials, in the process impoverishing or maintaining in poverty many societies, and then being outraged when people responded with violence or by embracing reactionary forms of religion or nationalism as a way of retaining a sense of community against the extreme individualism that the marketplace fostered and the Western media preached as the highest form of psychological and intellectual development;

And for the sin of seeing every use of violence as "terrorism" except American use of violence in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, and the violence we used to achieve our ends around the world and in the US;

For failing to prosecute those in our government who enabled the torture of prisoners around the world and in American detention centers in the Obama years, and who denied them habeas corpus and other fundamental human rights—and for then "being surprised" when torture and other forms of abuse threatened to again become allowable in the Trump years;

And for the sin of not demanding that our elected representatives provide affordable health care and prescription drug coverage for everyone in the Obama years, and then "being surprised" when people lost faith in Obamacare as insurance companies raised the prices of health insurance and pharmaceutical companies priced medications beyond what many could afford to pay;

For the sin of not demanding dramatic changes that are needed to save the planet and lessen the power of big money to shape our democratic process, so that it no longer primarily serves the interests of the corporations and the wealthy;

And for the sin of dismissing the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the US Constitution as "unrealistic" while embracing lesser struggles for constitutional amendments far less likely to make a dent in the power of the 1 percent or to significantly restrain the ethical and environmental arrogance of the large corporations;

For the sin of those of us in the West hoarding the world's wealth and not sharing with the 2.5 billion people who live on less than two dollars a day;

And for the sin of supporting, through consumption and complicity, forms of globalization that are destructive to nature and to the economic well-being of the powerless;

For the sins of all who became so concerned with "making it" and becoming rich that they pursued banking and investment policies that were destructive not only to their investors but to the entire society;

And for the sins of blaming all Muslims for the extremism of a few and ignoring the extremism and violence emanating from our own society, which continues to use drones to kill people suspected of being involved in supporting terrorism;

For the sin of being cynical about the possibility of building a world based on love;

And for the sin of dulling our outrage at the continuation of poverty, oppression, and violence in this world;

For the sin of believing "homeland security" can be achieved through military, political, diplomatic, cultural, or economic domination of the world rather than through a strategy of generosity and caring for the people of the world (e.g. in creating a Global Marshall Plan to once and for all eliminate global and domestic poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate health care, and inadequate education);

And for the sin of believing that we can get money out of politics as long as corporations have the right to move their investments abroad to any place where they can find cheap labor or lax environmental laws, the threat of which is sufficient to have them get their way in American politics;

For the sin of not being vigilant stewards of the planet and instead allowing the water resources of the world to be bought up by private companies for private profit, energy companies to pollute the air, water, and ground, and allowing endless consumption to waste the earth's scarce resources and contribute to the rapidly increasing climate change;

And for the sin of allowing military spending and tax cuts for the rich to undermine our society's capacity to take care of the poor, the powerless, the young, and the aging, both in the US and around the world;

For the sin of not doing enough to challenge racist, sexist, and homophobic institutions and practices;

אָמַרְנוּ רָחַמְנוּ חָנַנּוּ וְעָנִינוּ כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים

And for the sin of turning our backs on the world's refugees and on the homeless in our own society, allowing them to be demeaned, assaulted, and persecuted;

For the sin of acting as though those who do not share our understanding of the need to fundamentally change our economic and political arrangements are either evil, dumb, deplorable, or without moral consciousness: thus shaming and blaming all of the tens of millions of people who did not support progressive policies and office seekers;

And for the sin of making people who have different cultural, religious or intellectual proclivities from our own feel that we are looking down on them;

For the sin of believing the myth that we live in a meritocracy and that therefore those who are "less successful" than us (either economically or in some other way) are actually less deserving;

And for the sin of not recognizing that the pain people feel that leads them to religious or nationalist fundamentalist movements is in large part related to not being adequately respected or cared for, and even demeaned by others and by the assumption that they have failed in their lives;

For the sin of not taking the time to train ourselves with empathic skills and reach out to those who share different world views and to try to find that which is beautiful in them or that which is in pain and needs to be healed;

And for the sin of not responding with empathy to people whose pain has led them in reactionary directions, even as we rightly continue to oppose their concrete political actions and resist oppressive or evil policies of our government;

For the sin of talking as though being white or being male makes all of us or them somehow wrongly privileged, thereby ignoring the huge differences in advantage between rich white males and middle income working people and poor people;

And for the sin of making men or white people feel guilty for crimes that some men and some whites have done but not all men or all whites;

For the sin of being so concerned about our own personal tax benefits that we failed to oppose tax cuts that would bankrupt social services;

And for the sin of not taking the leaflets or not opening the emails of those who tried to inform us of events that required our moral attention;

For the sin of missing opportunities to support in public the political, religious, spiritual, or ethical teachers who actually inspire us and whose teachings would help others;

And for the sin of being passive recipients of negativity or listening and allowing others to spread hurtful stories about the personal lives of others;

For the sin of being "realistic" when our Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, secular humanist and other traditions call upon us to transform reality;

And for the sin of being too attached to, too complacent about our own picture of how our lives should be–and never taking the risks that could bring us a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

For the sins we have committed by not forgiving our parents for the wrongs they committed against us when we were children;

And for the sin of having too little compassion or too little respect for our parents, our children, or our friends when they acted in ways that disappointed or hurt us;

For the sin of cooperating with self-destructive behavior in others or in ourselves;

And for the sin of not supporting each other as we attempt to change;

For the sin of being jealous and trying to possess and control those we love;

And for the sin of being judgmental when others need compassion;

For the sin of withholding love and support;

And for the sin of doubting our ability to love and get love from others;

For the sin of insisting that everything we do have a payoff;

And for the sin of not allowing ourselves to play;

For the sin of not giving our partners and friends the love and support they need to feel safe and to flourish;

And for the sin of being manipulative or hurting others to protect our own egos.

For the sin of seeing anti-Semitism everywhere, and using the charge of anti-Semitism to silence those who raise legitimate (though often painful to hear) criticisms of Israeli policies;

For the sin of letting the entire Jewish people take the rap for oppressive policies by the most reactionary and human rights-denying government the State of Israel has ever had;

And for the sin of blaming the entire Palestinian people for (inexcusable and vicious) acts of violence, kidnapping, and murder by a handful of terrorists;

For the sins that Israel committed by stealing West Bank Palestinian land and access to West Bank water; by

creating settlements of ultra-nationalists who regularly harass Palestinian children, uprooting olive trees, and otherwise intensify the evils of occupation; and for imposing checkpoints for Palestinians and building West Bank roads that are only available for Jewish Israelis; and by taxing West Bank Palestinians while not allowing them to vote in Israeli elections, and then pretending to be on a higher moral plane than the Palestinian people;

And for the sin of not challenging the Jewish institutions and leaders who provide constant defense of oppressive Israeli policies that they would themselves oppose if these policies were to be imposed on the Jewish people;

For the sin of being liberal on everything except Israel, which characterizes many in the Jewish world and in the Democratic Party and many other liberal or progressive political parties;

And for the sin of supporting Jewish organizations that support social justice and/or environmental sanity or an end to racism in the US but refuse to allow discussion much less involvement in these same issues when people ask them to address the struggle for freedom or equal rights and dignity of the Palestinian people;

For the sins of tribalism, chauvinism, and other forms of identity politics that lead us to think that our pain (in whatever ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sexual preference, nationality) is more important than anyone else's pain;

And for the sin of allowing communal institutions, colleges and universities, government and politics, the media, and the entertainment industry to be shaped by those with the most money, rather than those with the most spiritual and ethical sensitivity;

For the sin of not putting our money and our time behind our highest ideals, and not aligning our intentions with our actions.

And for the sin of thinking that our path is the only path to spiritual truth;

For the sin of not recognizing and celebrating (with awe and wonder) the beauty and grandeur of the universe that surrounds us and permeates us;

And for the sin of focusing only on our sins and not on our strengths and beauties;

For the sin of not transcending ego so we could see ourselves and each other as we really are: a part of the Unity of All Being, and a manifestation of the loving energy of the universe right here on Earth;

And for not seeing the beauty in everyone around us and the magnificence of this universe in which we are blessed to have a little time before we pass on and others take up our place on this awesome planet Earth.

Now discuss with others your reactions to these, add or eliminate what doesn't seem right, and use these as you reflect on the direction you want your life and the movements or causes or political parties or candidates you support to take on as their own.

* * *

Repentance is not meant only as an exercise to help us feel better, but also as the beginning of organizing our personal and communal lives to begin the process of changing. To join with others in this sacred work, please read our worldview at www.tikkun.org/covenant, and if it speaks to you, then please join as a dues-paying member of the (interfaith and secular-humanist-and-atheist-welcoming) Network of Spiritual Progressives at www.spiritualprogressives.org/join or donate to Tikkun at www.tikkun.org/donate to keep our non-profit organization functioning! Blessings for a world of love, generosity, caring for the earth and caring for each other in this coming year of 2018 and Jewish Year 5778. ■

Tania Advanti