Tikkun

POLITICS + CULTURE + TRANSFORMATION

(tē·kün) To heal, repair, and transform the world. WINTER/SPRING 2018

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The Network of Spiritual Progressives
A Path to a World of Love and Justice

Are you tired of leaving your activism at the door of your spiritual life? Do you yearn for your activism to be steeped with spiritual values? If so, this is the place for you!

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Chris Philpot at 510-644-1200 or chris.tikkun@gmail.com

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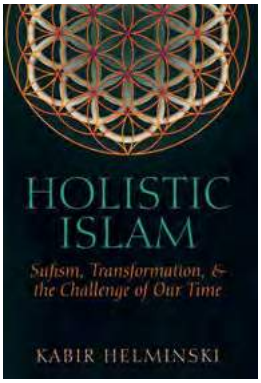
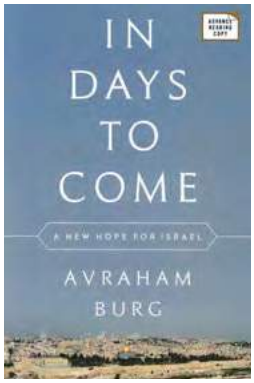
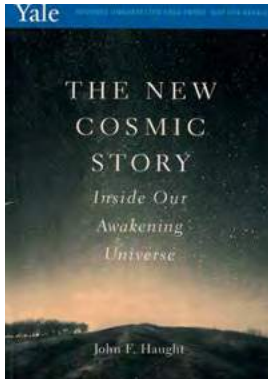


Holistic Islam
Kabir Helminski
White Cloud Press, 2017



In Days To Come
Avraham Burg
Nation Books, 2018

Renovatio
The Journal of Zaytuna College
Vol. 1, no. 1, 2017



The New Cosmic Story
John F. Haught
Yale, 2017

Some of the most creative philosophical thinking is happening today in the realm of religious studies. While the anti-religious authors attack conceptions of God or religion from the middle ages and that survive largely in the teachings of fundamentalists in every religion, the newest thinking is fresh, exciting, provocative, often environmentally engaged and spiritually rich.

We welcome as a sister publication to Tikkun the new journal Renovatio which, under the brilliant editorship of Hamza Yusuf (a founder of the progressive Islamic college Zaytuna) is seeking to do for the Islamic world what Tikkun seeks to do for the Jewish world—provide the intellectual and metaphysical foundations for a religious tradition that has been hijacked by fundamentalists and those who are spiritually dead. Grappling, with the same issues that Tikkun takes on, for example, can materialism explain the mind, the objectivity of ethics, technophilic addictions, can science and economics honor nature, Renovatio is a breath of fresh air. And as if this was not blessing enough, we also celebrate the publication of Kabir Helmisnki's *Holistic Islam* which presents a Sufi version of Islam similar in important ways to much of Christian and Jewish liberation theologies, which opens up the reader to the creativity, beauty and wisdom of this spiritual tradition. Reading Helminski will give you new insights about why 1.5 billion people on our planet are attracted to Islam.

Talking about metaphysics, Georgetown U professor James Haught's book invites us to consider the New Cosmic Story from the perspective of each of us being inside our wakening universe. Critical of "Big History" accounts that tell the story of the evolution of humanity from the standpoint of the external validatable perspective of an empiricist worldview, Haught invites us instead to the inside story of the universe that has produced conscious human beings and spiritual/religious traditions and perceptions. Haught is careful to note that religions are at times mixed up with monstrous evil, but that since human life is itself in the middle of an evolutionary process which is far from complete, what we see is only the partially evolved humanity and its partially evolved religions, though even those at this unfinished state of evolving nevertheless assume "the existence of an interior life and of the need to undergo awakening and transformation. They nourish a sense of obligation" and they seek a world made "right." These are not the values and insights that get taught in universities or promoted by our culture, corporations or political movements.

Avraham Burg's book may appear to be mostly autobiography, but within it as he affirms a new hope for Israel he paints a picture of a religious sensibility disentangled from what we at Tikkun have called "settler Judaism" and embraced what we describe as "a Judaism of Love." Burg is best known for being chair of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization and then chair of the Knesset. Yet his most important book in our is his commentary on Torah "Very Near to You" with its rich theological interpretations, and in this new book he once again embraces the hopeful message of Tikkun—that a Judaism that can survive must be one that treasures genuine caring for everyone on earth and for Earth itself. Coming from this most brilliant Jewish leader to emerge from Israel gives us hope for Israel, which someday may embarace Avraham Burg as president, though what we need is for him to become the Israeli prime minister, the first he takes Judaism's highest ethical teachings seriously and rejects the worship of power that has become the pernicious legacy of the Holocaust.

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.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I learned so much by reading Tikkun's analysis of the Left's condescending attitude towards working class and poor Americans. I have to admit that I, someone who had parents that were anti-Vietnam war activists, environmental activists, feminist activists, etc., recognize that they had a feeling of being on a higher plane, just as you put it. Even though I have been a very low income earner, I've managed to enjoy rural living and growing my own healthy food. I have been subjected to the overt disapproval, and big ego of wealthy back-to-the-landers! So I know how it feels to have scorn heaped on me by others on the Left, for not being "more successful." I find myself understanding how the more uneducated white folk feel about the "higher plane" Left, as you state in your writing, having been victim of the privileged Left myself. Since I had parents on the educated Left, I've accepted some of their way of seeing things, and as a result cannot accept the working class or poor voting for the right. Even though I understand why people vote for the right, I have little luck bridging the culture gap or trying to steer friends who vote for the Right towards the Left candidates. . . .It is an unfortunate situation left, right! Thanks for your work and insight, JK (name withheld at author's request)

EDITOR'S RESPONSE:

In our view, a section of the Right (those who are not deeply racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic and/or anti-Semtic) can be moved to identify with the liberal and progressive forces (many did in 2008 when they voted for Obama, and others did in the presidential primaries when they voted for Bernie Sanders but then moved to the Right and supported Trump). However, that won't likely happen until the Left itself changes. It must overcome its shaming and blaming of all men and all whites as "privileged" (true for some, not true for many others); stop assuming that only possible reason people have not yet voted for the liberal or progressive forces is that they are racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. (some are, but others on the Right are voting for the Right out of outrage at the Left's demeaning of those not yet with us); reject the deep religio-phobia that permeates much (not all) of the liberal and progressive world; and apologize publicly and repeatedly for these sins (including publicly disassociating from Hillary Clinton's infamous dismissal of Trump voters as "a basket of deplorables"). So this is a 2-step strategy: First, change the culture of the Left in the ways just mentioned; and then second reach out to the section of people who didn't vote at all in 2016 or did vote for Trump out of distaste for what they experience when they connect with liberal or progressive activists and movements but who are already seeing that the destructive and hateful elements of Trump's program can also have very negative consequences for their own lives and the lives of their children or grandchildren. The good news is that Tikkun's outreach arm The Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP) has created a training program for activists in the Trump years that is giving people the skills necessary to engage in this process—details at www.spiritualprogressives.org/training.

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.

THE LIFE OF THE JEWISH SOUL SUCKED OUT

by Abby Caplin

The Jewish soul walks into a synagogue, finds the sanctuary
and sits down among the musty pews,
picks up a siddur and pretends to read Hebrew.
It's looking for something to feel holy,
what it knows is inside, but wanting to suck
the outside in to feel real.
But there is nothing to suck in except the closet smell
of dead grandparents.
There are no real grandfathers anymore.
There are no real grandmothers anymore.
The soul looks around for someone to be with.
Everyone is either a busy rabbi or a busy rabbi's receptionist.
The soul is not sure what they are so busy about.
The soul wants to shove the letters of Torah
into its trembling mouth, ride a roller coaster on Mount Sinai,
argue the Occupation with Moses, and have a schnaps
with the Ba'al Shem Tov, whose faint humming
echoes in the buzz of the Eternal Light bulb.
The soul remembers when it belonged,
how the key of A minor unlocked its heart and fed it stuffed cabbage.
When "Tumbalalaika" and a campfire meant family.

For the soul, it's all gone,
the life of the soul sucked out of the sanctuary
and into the gift shop, where it fingers mezzuzot made
in a shiny Holy Land, a new land
that doesn't look like a grandmother or grandfather.
The soul sees a mob of knitted covered heads spitting
and shouting, *Kill*,
a shitstorm of bowing to walls, sous chefs cutting stone to build a third Temple,
cooking up a Jewish soul shopping center.
There goes the Left, the secular Jews,
the Reform and Conservative Jews.
So long pretty Jerusalem, women's rights, people for peace.
The soul sees an old man's olive trees on fire,
Palestinian grandmothers and grandfathers muscled out of their homes to the curb.
It browses the books in the gift shop
and stares at a menorah made of bullets.

Remember when we sat up till midnight talking Marx and eating blintzes?
We sang Sabbath songs and partisan songs for hours until we knew what to feel.
And when we sang, it was then, and only then,
that we belonged.
The soul sees the cantor riding his mourner's solo like a sideshow,
the letter Vav a bent cigarette hanging from his mouth.
The soul has had enough.

It goes outside to find the tree grandmothers and tree grandfathers,
who smell old and strong and holy
and who sing to the soul and after awhile,
they sing it to sleep, its belly full
of noodle kugel. ■

ABBY CAPLIN is a lay leader of Jewish ritual and many of her writings reflect her experiences as a progressive Jewish feminist.

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Psychedelics, the Spiritual and Consciousness—an Evolving Confluence in the Cultural Stream

PHIL WOLFSON, MD

In this time of ever ascendant materialism, greed, and pathological narcissism, when the delusion of the disconnected dominant individual grows stronger, the contrary life-affirming stream of connection and respect is gaining strength even as it is suppressed, vilified, and criminalized. This stream, which we can call 'awakening consciousness,' is the motor of civilization. It moves in the direction of the ultimate recognition of interdependency and the need for cooperation. Some think of this stream as the altruism of the individual and recognize it as a successful evolutionary survival strategy—the group versus the individual. The truth is more complex: the stream is the necessity of balance, cooperation and sharing as inherent principles, behind which are the complex deep pleasures of love, validation, respect, and nurture.

The stream of awakening consciousness is the essential mammalian evolutionary lineage, moving historically into ever larger, more interrelated, and integrated social formations. All basically sane humans (those not bludgeoned into revenge seeking, suffering from complex PTSD, aggressive reactions, or seeking dominance because of their individualistic delusion) all wish for a healthy and equitable distribution of civilization's prospects for good lives. The cultural transcends biological evolution and morphs it in its own selections of who survives. Ever burrowing—enlarging and faltering—threatened with obliteration by bomb and ecocide, this stream amplifies as the tools for liberating consciousness spread, as freedom of mind and association erupts.

We often hear of disruptive technologies that claim to manifest, support, and often lead this awakening process. "Disruptive technology" is a recent term for new entries that foster powerful changes in how we function, in opportunities for transcendence of older technologies, and consequent changes in how we think and relate: the Internet and the atomic bomb are obvious examples. "Disruption" is similar to Kuhn's notion of paradigm shifts—except disruptive technologies are more material and practical while Kuhn's framework focuses more on worldview and conceptual schema.

New technologies can support the process of awakening when appropriately distributed, used, and accessed; but they threaten that process when they are used for dominance, control and territory. The uncontrolled profit motive fosters this negative tendency. In our past century, its destructiveness has taught us that there needs to be some form of balance between the individual and the larger community, between the private and the cooperative, and that this is best obtained by full participation in educated discussion and the deliberate resort to persuasion by reason and dialogue. We have learned that this remains a difficult process—with successes, failures, changing social formations, distortions and consequences. Yet the continuation and development of our skills in this process is essential.

We understand "disruptive technology" on terms that are overly mechanical because we often neglect two important points: (1) Consciousness (and its amplification over time) is the engine behind all disruptive technologies; and (2) Consciousness grows in earlier times within the complexity of the Darwinian process, and then is exceeded in pace and morphed by the motor of cultural evolution. Like the Darwinian, there is no endpoint, endless possibility, dead ends, constraints, regressions and advances.

Technical innovation is a sprout growing from a soil rich with biological and social capacities that comprise the fundamental framework of being human. This soil contains the stunning interrelated integration of the prehensile thumb, bipedalism, the enlarged cortex, the hidden estrus, and the functional social capacities of tool and weapon making, nest building around the campfire, communication leading to

language, group formation with cooperation, sharing, coordination and joint operations for food (foraging, hunting and later agriculture) and role differentiation within the group. Technology has an important role in the awakening process, but it must come second to an understanding of the stream that makes fertile the soil in which it grows.

There are two strata to this stream of awakening consciousness: the collective conscious and its deep and often determinative unconscious. Conceived in this way, it appears metaphorically as an oscillating widening stream, dark periods of history contracting its flow and width—and bright and innovative periods expanding its breadth, complexity, and civil nature. Integration of units of people grows ever tighter and more unitary, with larger and larger social formations, and attenuation and removal of boundaries. This leads to both progress and reaction. Alterations and extensions of consciousness are interactive and ripple through social formations, at times visible and striking, like waves affecting minds, even when the means and direct causation to do so may not be apparent. The cultural unconscious is then its assumptive underpinning, particularly influencing us through social formations that are taken for granted, such as the structure of the dominant business/financial edifice. When awakened awareness of the nature and impact of dominant structure occurs, an alternative view can emerge which informs and cultivates change in myriad ways. That movement can be defeated but often persists in the conscious strata. It has moral fiber and a sense of the *real* to it.

Changes in consciousness that are disruptive are reciprocally connected to individual innovations, group modifications, and acceptance/rejection. Historically, within hierarchical, class-based, and sexist social formations, innovations must be accepted and embedded within the ruling group/class, remain heretical and marginalized until a shift in the dominant group or its paradigm occurs, or, a mass movement and adoption of the new technology—progressive or regressive—moves the set point.

Peter Rodulfo

In this sense, Baruch Spinoza impresses me as the first individual unattached directly to a religion and standing outside social convention to elaborate a personal view that is at the same time emanated from his religious background and the Enlightenment that was starting to sweep Europe. Spinoza could do this because of the limited tolerance of bourgeois Dutch society, and because he was meagerly supported by a few who admired his unconventionality.

In this same sense of awakening consciousness, our notions of the spiritual morph and evolve. At various times historically, religion and its subsequent modifications have been disruptive technologies both in progressive and reactionary ways. Repeatedly throughout history, religion has served for implementing its own social formations in the form of rules and regulations that are both introjected and applied by force. This aspect has tended to be far more prevalent and influential than the emphasis on internal personal development. It is of note that the origin of the word religion is 'to bind'. Never able to entirely smother the internal personal experience of awe, dream, and connection with its own finite imagination, religion has also been the site of awakening. Individual inspiration has played a major role in religious innovation, arising both through social critique as religion spreads its constrictive net creating privileged elites, and as breakthroughs to new levels of awakening mind.

When the term 'spirituality' is mingled with religion and the coercive binding it too often entails, the relationship between the subjective and the external form become conflated. Spirituality is then commodified and sold as belonging to particular 'pews'—form-ridden and desirable to 'get,' to not miss out on—be part of, to be inspired by. In the form filled realm, spirituality can be divided into the 'hows' of getting the most intense mystical experience; being in the most powerful church; accessing the biggest best truths, the ultimate truth; closest to G(g)od and validated and ennobled thereby. Of course, this leads to territorialism and self-aggrandizement. Notice these are all feeling-based spiritual materialisms, for the translocation from desire to behavior—acting as if you have gotten it—at least for the moment—all comes from our myriad of complex feeling tones.

The 'spiritual' is of a different nature. It has its evolutionary source as the capacity for awe, love and connection. Mammalian nurture is one source. A second lineage is the capacity for awe, which need include appreciation for a sense of beauty, discriminating wisdom, sense of momentary safety, expressive ability, submission of individual importance. Awe is certainly complex neuro-psychiatrically. It is accessed from what Buddhists elegantly call 'equanimity'—balance, lack of desire, greed, aversion and hate. It tends to be here and now, fully experiential, and formatted with untainted

emotion. It may lead to feelings of 'this is it' and 'I want to share it and spread the word.' Often, we do wish to share what we experience as the good and great, as the pleasure of clarity and what feel to be unconstructed elevating extraordinary experiences that make our lives vital. And while we endlessly try, verbal descriptions do little justice to the primacy of these experiences.

Indeed, we can create shared vehicles to enhance our access to the spiritual as we come to recognize them. And these tend to improve in quality and pleasure as they are equalized and distributed with respect and discourse. Take the ever-widening potentiality of sexuality as spiritual experience: this increasing equality of the sexes creates the ability for women to have pleasure, condemning male predation as non-sexual but rather aggressive and dominating. Democratization tends to spread the ability to access the spiritual. On the other hand, our history and present situation is replete with the regulation of both the pleasurable and the spiritual, creating obstacles and control of the entry points—for whose distorted sense of benefit is always clear beneath the sales pitch.

The pure religious impulse is the desire to share experience and the pleasures of awe, love and connection—without coercion. As soon as this morphs into 'I've got it' and 'You don't!' and 'You need me to get it for you'—dominating territorialism exerts itself. Voluntary unions of those of like mind building community with a vision and developing each other and their format appear to me to qualify as 'religions'. The covenant is to not oppress but rather inspire and support expanding consciousness and the investigation of life.

A Truly Disruptive Technology

Throughout time, people have longed for deep spiritual connection. Religions that emerged to help satisfy this need through various forms of experience regularly became ossified, coercive, plagued by power struggles, and opposed to the type of awakening they purported to cultivate. Psychedelics represent an incredibly powerful disruption to this process because they can foster the kind of experience that people often seek to get through religious institutions, thus lessening the hold of those institutions and deepening people's connection.

Psychedelic experiences are one of these potential vehicles for spiritual access and experience, especially when we support them with education, safety, conducive settings and knowledgeable guides. Psychedelics are fairly reliable in opening the imaginal, in reducing or eliminating the ego for varying periods of time, and for attaining a broader view of 'ordinary reality' by breaking through cultural and personal held assumptions. Evangelical psychedelicists tend to hype the moral vector of psychedelic experiences and find them self-sufficient as a practice. Yet, un-situated psychedelic experiences, while often of value, tend to the individualistic without integration with community and spiritual practices that lead to balance. Being a whole human takes a lot of effort, grounding, connection, and feedback. It is really not that simple or easy to get through this life with poise, clarity and equanimity.

Within the psychedelic community, there has been a tendency to view the hallucinatory and imaginal—that many psychedelics evoke—the mystical—as the goal and the desirable state. In fact, the psychedelic experience is as broad as the human spiritual capacity allows. Psychedelic mystical states indeed can foster a sense of the cosmic, of color and landscapes that are not accessible with ordinary mind, of the incredible breadth of unrestrained imagination, of the profoundest of recognitions of our infinitesimal presence in the universe, and our modest and flawed experience with our immediate context and beings. Psychedelic mystical experiences take us into the realms of unfettered mind, what we call in other languages Dzogchen, Primordial Awareness, the Self. Having these experiences in a heightened state makes our capacity for similar experiences in non-enhanced states more available, more recognizable, and facilitates our living in the state of open-mind, and here and now potentiality. In this remarkable way, the psychedelic mystical state has democratized access to the spiritual and affirmed its various natures in our various beings. It negates privileged priesthoods dictating what is kosher to think, feel, and experience and therefore creates a liberating theology. For millions and millions of humans it has created clear personal ownership of personal spaciousness that can be enhanced by other formats such as the religious, but cannot be reduced to them—really, never could be. How I view Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, the Buddha, etc. has always been up to me—suggested in forms by the dominant social format, but always my exclusive realm.

But the mystical with all its potentiality is far from the only psychedelic influence on the spirit. There has been an unfortunate tendency to separate out what psychonautical commentators call the 'classical psychedelics' (LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin mushrooms) in part to distinguish from the ever-widening expanse of synthetic new psychoactive molecules. This leaves out even more classical—that is with hundreds of more years of use and development—psychedelics including shamanic DMT, ayahuasca, ibogaine, and marijuana. Humphrey Osmond invented the term psychedelic to mean mind manifesting—and it is inclusive of MDMA, 2CB, ketamine and others fit into the descriptive term—psychedelic. We have come to call some of these 'empathogens' because of their ability to induce experiences of self and others that are more balanced, broad-based, accepting of flaws that can then be worked on, and conducive for processing trauma by enabling it to be relegated more to the past and less influential on present mind and behavior as if the trauma is still working its damage. All still may produce

visionary states and enhanced states of love and connectedness. Some refer to psychedelics as 'entheogens'—this is controversial (to agnostics, atheists, and again too encapsulating of experience), just as G(g)od is. Better to call them wowees, or awe-genics, or, neo-experi-genics, or, just-plain-amazing.

This great democratization of psychedelic potentiated experience also moves and widens the life serving cultural stream. It amplifies our imagination, our dream lives, our creativity and sense of justice. It serves especially when we apply our new knowledge reciprocally with other spirit practices—myriad as they are—and in the building of community and peaceful ecologically-embedded lives. Suggestive is a just published paper. The English investigators, Nour and Carhart-Harris, utilizing an anonymous internet format surveyed 893 participants about the results of alcohol, cocaine and psychedelic use and found that psychedelics led to: *'Ego dissolution experienced during a participant's "most intense" psychedelic experience positively predicted liberal political views, openness and nature relatedness, and negatively predicted authoritarian political views'*. Not so for alcohol and cocaine.

No vehicle is without its possibilities for distortion, dominance and harm. Psychedelic experiences are no different. They are often difficult and generally scouring of the soul. Psychedelics tend to be safe physiologically (when pure and not adulterated) and non-addictive. And they have been employed, for example, by the CIA, and KGB types of organizations, the Mansons of the world, and in the violent ending of the Weathermen. Delusion comes of isolation, greed and desire for dominance—the loss of the egalitarian principle of persuasion leading to the totalitarian impulse of persecution. Like all mental experiences, the psychedelic can be entrained in negative frameworks, paranoid producing settings, used on the unsuspecting and to manipulate.

Drugs seem everywhere. Psychedelic experience has, without doubt, widened and deepened the cultural stream. Search virtually anywhere, in any culture whether repressed or relatively free, and the evidence of psychedelic mind in art, music, expression, notions of freedom and the experiences of depth and presence on the high ground are impregnably present and enlivening. Even in the debased forms of advertising, social control, and dominant media, the psychedelic has been incorporated.

The war against drugs has only resulted in masses of imprisoned for possession and minor dealing, the destruction of whole nations where horror reigns for many millions and a parasitic police force dedicated to doing something that they know is impossible. It's a living of sorts I guess. Virtually nothing has changed in the consuming states, especially here. The consumers continue to create the draw. An epidemic of opiate overdoses and deaths afflicts our nation as attention is diverted from domestic Pharma producers of these drugs and from sources abroad like China, India, and North Korea.

Within the psychedelic realm, making substances illegal only led to mass production and sales underground. Have a hundred million people used LSD, MDMA, mushrooms, and ayahuasca from the Amazon tribes? 500 million? None of us know. The illegalization makes impossible a constructive approach to drug dependence and safe and educated use. It results in D.A.R.E. and "Say No!", rather than "let me help you know the truths and the best way to go about this." Illegality drives the information and the dialogue underground and keeps folks from truly sharing. Remarkably, the resistance to this has developed on the Internet and there is a feast of information and interaction. Check it out.

As is often the case, the cultural stream of awakening has its twists and turns.

State of the Psychedelic

In the last decade, research with psychedelic medicines has resumed in limited but expanding fashion, as the FDA has approved some studies. New tools in basic brain/mind research have enabled visualization of subjects before and after psychedelic use and even during actual use, such as in recent fMRI research. While each psychedelic substance tends to have its own 'signature', generalizations are emerging. MDMA tends to down regulate the amygdala and its influence on emotion, enabling higher cortical regions to exert more considered influence on emotion and traumatic experience. This, in turn, enables the relationship to self and others to be more positive and improving tolerance for the exploration of negative emotions. This corresponds to the effects of MDMA as experienced and studied in practice. Psychedelics such as psilocybin (mushrooms) have been shown to suppress the default system for brain activity and in this reduced state foster the emergence of the interconnectivity of other regions that produce the psychedelic phenomena.

Overall, there is an increasing awareness of the complexity of brain interconnectivity and the interaction of sensory, perceptual and interpretive regions producing a much wider synesthetic effect than we have previously recognized. The brain is constantly making new connections and downgrading and pruning older ones. This has come to be termed neuro-plasticity. It does not mean we grow new neurons—we tend to be stable in that way, save for a few regions such as the hippocampus and the olfactory perceptual area. It does mean, however, that we are capable of change, growth, and life-long learning.

On the molecular level, there is ever-expanding information on neurotransmitters, and intracellular events that lead to higher level neural and then mental events. It remains safe to say that we are early in our understanding of our extraordinarily complex brain and truly at the edge of understanding mental events.

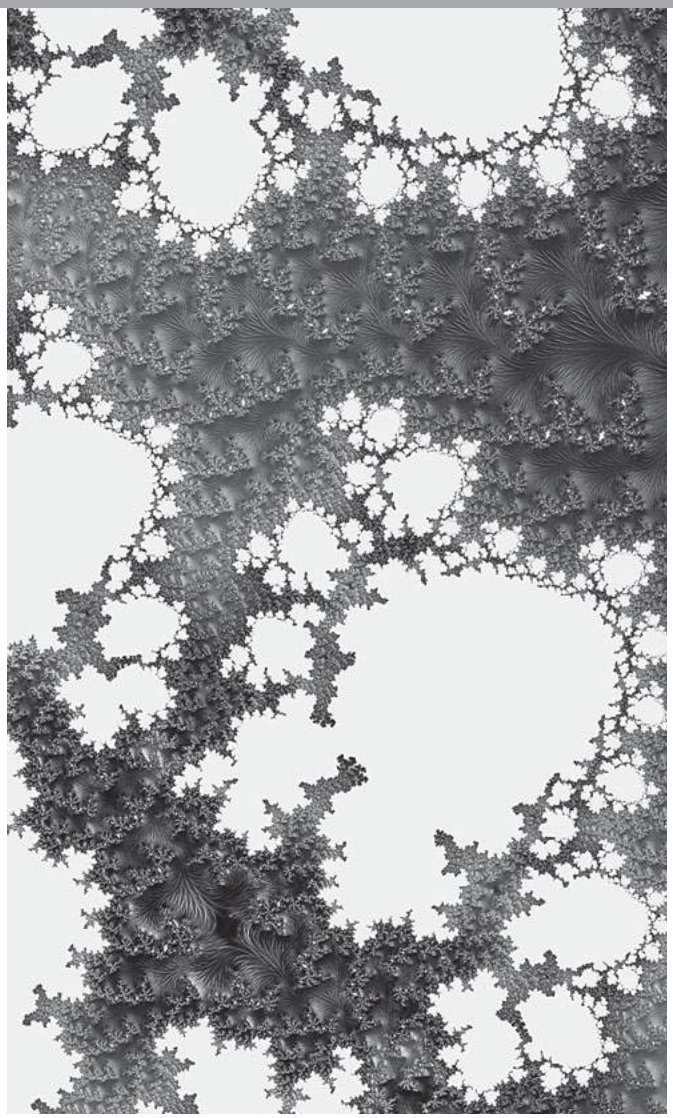
Within this partial loosening of the regulatory knot enabling some study of potential psychedelic medicines

previously subject to politically motivated Schedule I illegalization (MDMA in 1985), we have recently concluded our MAPS sponsored, FDA approved Phase 2 study. 18 subjects with anxiety (depression, PTSD, community trauma) due to life threatening illnesses (cancer, systemic illnesses) were enrolled in our protocol using MDMA in what may well be the most intensive psychotherapeutic experience—privately financed by donations—and free to subjects.

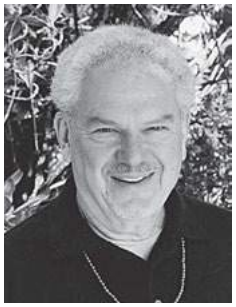
We are processing our data. What is clear is that all our subjects, despite the risks of recurrence and continuing illness (one of the precious beings involved unfortunately had a recurrence and died before completing the study), reported having different experiences of themselves with respect to the conduct of their lives and relationships in what unknowable times they have left (a dilemma we all share). Life threatening illnesses are traumatizing to the individual and their supporters from their start, to diagnosis, the impact of treatment, and its aftermath with impact on mind, fear, choices, relationships and body. As the global population of survivors drastically increases, our duty and need to be with this complex impact on lives becomes ever more urgent. Understanding the trauma and assisting the traumatized is a gratifying and deepening experience for those attending. The therapists are also impacted in spirit and heart. The 8 hour sessions with placebo and MDMA (3 sessions for each subject) over many months with ongoing relationships has demonstrated the profound and gratifying effect of psychedelic psychotherapy—in this case MDMA supported psychotherapy. As MDMA assisted psychotherapy moves into larger Phase 3 studies aiming at legal prescriptions hopefully by 2021, we are continuing this work with Ketamine Assisted Psychotherapy (KAP) in our practice.

Underground use of psychedelics continues to grow and proliferate throughout the world. Obtaining a prescriptive medical basis for psychedelics—MDMA and psilocybin (mushrooms) are most likely given the orthodox evaluation of them under the FDA framework for proof of safety and efficacy—and joining the Schedule 3 already in use ketamine (KAP in our case) will put into effect tools for assisting and growing mind, heart, and spirit and alleviating trauma—this within the medical context. In no way is this a slam dunk. Oppressive political decisions can, as has been true in the past, suppress the demonstrated benefits of these substances. However, their attractiveness and benefit to humans has been demonstrated overwhelmingly. For in fact, there has been a massive opposition to illegalization of beneficial medicines and that movement to experience and expand consciousness so far has overwhelmed the forces mobilized by oppressive government to suppress.

The path of civilization wobbles and has its Kaliyugas—its truly dark periods. There can be an obliteration of all that is good, of our format of natural exuberance—certainly its awful alteration is in process. There can be



an end to enlightening, awakening mind. Fortunately, this has yet to happen. When we are in our spirit selves, there seems to be one path. Littered with obstacles—personal and cultural—we do know the score, we do know that kindness is best for all. And we do feel the pleasures of exploration, connection, love and sharing. This is the ever-widening confluence, the cultural river carrying us, staying afloat together, making waves that inspire, rowing our boats without crashing too frequently, apologizing when we do, repairing the damage, respecting depth and risk, singing our way forward, a chorus of many, many voices trying for a semblance of harmony. ■



PHIL WOLFSON MD is a founding member of the Spiritual Emergency Network, principle investigator for the MAPS sponsored MDMA study, editor of "The Ketamine Papers," and practitioner of Vajrayana Buddhism and Extreme Gardening.

Should Heroin Be Medically Legalized? From A Daughter of a Deceased Addict

BY SHARON LEDER

My father had a long-term addiction to heroin that began in 1939 in New York City and ended when he overdosed and died in 1963, at age 42. He tried all the ways known at the time for treating his addiction—cold turkey, psychotherapy, shock treatment, and methadone. None of these treatments kept him away from mainlining heroin, which he did because he believed he needed it in order to function in the world. He often said he wished that heroin were legal, so that he didn't have to find illegal, black market ways to score, either by purchasing the narcotic clandestinely from pushers whom he knew in Greenwich Village and Harlem, or by buying it on the streets of the Bronx or Manhattan from someone he would meet by chance in the "right" neighborhoods.

As it was, my father had to keep his problem hidden. He and my grandfather were local Kosher butchers in a Jewish area of the southeast Bronx. No one in the two dominantly Jewish neighborhoods where we lived—first in the Bronx, then in Queens—could know about his addiction. I learned much later, after my father died, that our family moved to Queens not so much for the usual reasons of better schools and suburban upward mobility, but to break my father free from his drug contacts in the Bronx and to better hide his addiction from neighbors and customers. The local wisdom was *shikker iz der goy*; drunkards and addicts of all sorts were non-Jews. Jewish communities adamantly denied that addiction, or alcoholism, was a problem among Jews; to be a heroin addict and a Jew was a contradiction in terms. Heroin addicts were seedy criminals, morally flawed, selfish, weak-willed. My father's problem was a *shandah*, reflecting shame on the entire family.

On the Sunday morning of the day he died, he was with my younger sister in Crotona Park in the southeast Bronx, near where he and his father still operated their butcher markets. My sister remembers him getting a small bag of something from a man who met him in the park. He dropped her off at home in Whitestone, Queens and returned to the Bronx. He told the family he had errands to do at his father's shop, closed that day, but in reality, he went there to take his fix. My father claimed he was keeping clean on methadone. Maybe he was, but that evening, he felt he needed to shoot up heroin. My family still conjectures that he overdosed because he purchased "bad" stuff.

In the 1960s, the "bad" stuff that was circulating was either from Mexico or the Golden Triangle (Laos, Thailand, Burma). This cheaper heroin was cutting into the over ten

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million dollar a year heroin market dominated since the end of World War II by the Sicilian Mafia.[1] Addicts like my father didn't know if the stuff they paid for on the streets was more crude or more potent than what they were used to, but either way it was responsible for a post-war urban epidemic that was causing the highest percentage of fatalities among young adults in New York City.[2] My father was most likely among those particular casualties.

Today's Heroin and Opioid Epidemic

My father's story resonates today, except the current heroin epidemic has grown exponentially, and the bad stuff has become even more lethal. The black market industry now nets over a trillion dollars by supplying heroin laced with opioid additives like fentanyl and carfentanil that are largely responsible for today's unprecedented number of overdose deaths. In 2015, overdose deaths rose to more than 52,000 people across the country. Robert N. Anderson, a statistician for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was quoted as saying, "I don't think we've ever seen anything like this. Certainly not in modern times." New York Times columnist David Brooks remarked that there were more Americans dying from opiate addiction over a two year span than died in the entire Viet Nam War.

And the numbers of overdose deaths are still growing, as the victims become younger and younger. In my community on Cape Cod alone, high school students have watched their fellows die before their eyes, when they are playing hooky from school and orally taking heroin they've gotten from "friends" to try for free, not knowing the opioid fentanyl has been added. Carfentanil is an elephant tranquilizer five thousand times more potent than heroin and even more deadly; it is so toxic that it can kill if it's simply absorbed in the skin or unwittingly inhaled. Would-be rescuers of victims of carfentanil overdoses must wear gloves and face shields to protect themselves from the substance's lethal potential. The detox drug that can revive a victim of heroin overdose, Naloxone (also known as "narcan"), is not necessarily effective against the more potent opioids fentanyl and carfentanil.

> **Today's crisis is complicated by the role the pharmaceutical industry plays in fueling the opioid epidemic.**

Until recently, I fully shared my father's view that medically legalizing heroin could diminish the tragic damages caused by the black market. Legalization could ostensibly control the content of opioids and monitor a user's dosages

Peter Rodulfo

in order to keep users alive and functioning. Legalization could also reduce the bloody trail of gang violence left by illegal traffickers and distributors of heroin and opioids from Mexico to locations in the United States. Legalization would also serve to lift the stigmas of criminality and shame that haunts those unfortunates like my father, who, alone and unhelped, remain trapped in the shadows and addictions for fear of punishment and social shunning.

However, today's crisis is complicated by the role the pharmaceutical industry plays in fueling the opioid epidemic; and legalization must not become an avenue for pharmaceutical companies to exploit. Most assessments hold today's exorbitant rise in heroin addiction accountable in large measure to the over-prescription of legal painkillers, like Vicodin and oxycodone, that have been pushed by some pharmaceutical companies. For example, one company, Purdue Pharma, has been taken to court by multiple states for making billions in profits from the sale of OxyCotin without disclosing abuse and addiction risks and allowing pills to enter the underground market. Purdue Pharma has already settled a suit of close to nine million dollars won by the state of Massachusetts for the company's fraudulence; and there is some belief that medical associations, hospitals, and doctors have been complicit in similar sorts of deceptions. The skyrocketing prices of these prescribed medications have sent thousands to use illegal heroin, which became much cheaper and readily accessible on our streets after Mexican cartels lost the marijuana market in the United States when cannabis was legalized. So today's opioid epidemic is caused not only by black market heroin and dangerous additives, but also by an explosion in demand created by overprescribed painkillers, both phenomena driven by the enormity of profits to be

made. What guarantees do we have that medically legalizing heroin won't result merely in shifting profits from the black market to the medical-pharmaceutical industry?

The Root Causes of Today's Epidemic

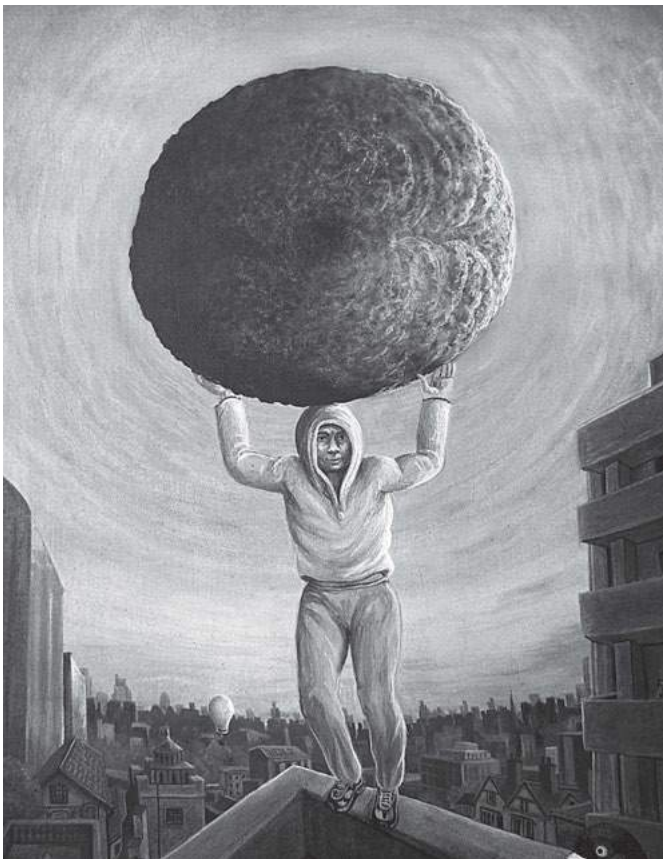
I have come to understand that ultimately the strategy of legalization alone to alleviate the ravages of opioid addiction will not work because legalization does not address the root causes of the problem: the reasons people in such large numbers are seeking solace in chemical dependencies. I now look at today's widespread demand for heroin and opiates through a psycho-spiritual critique of contemporary culture that I first heard articulated by Rabbi Michael Lerner and the Network of Spiritual Progressives. The Network's vision for reducing addiction, as well as the despair that has over the past decades been tragically alienating people from themselves, from others, and from the environment, is called The New Bottom Line. A world culture guided by The New Bottom Line—consisting of generosity, compassion, and a reverence for life and the natural world—would not prioritize the market values of profit, power, and self-interest. We have unfortunately internalized these values as markers of our own worth, and they are the very the same values that have resulted in the election of Donald Trump as president.

If we are unemployed, poor, people of color, or otherwise without power or influence, we can feel like losers in a system that privileges the employed, the "winners," those with money and status. It should come as no big surprise that areas hit hardest by the opioid epidemic are states in the Rust Belt, where unemployment and hopelessness have turned countless numbers of people to temporary and lethal escapes from their depression and grief.

> **I now look at today's widespread demand for heroin and opiates through a psycho-spiritual critique of contemporary culture.**

But in truth, today's demand for opioids, like yesterday's demand for crack cocaine and meth, cuts across class, racial and ethnic lines. In Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic (2015), journalist Sam Quinones shows how the root causes of addiction today reach into suburbia and

devastated cities alike. The overwhelming economic pressures and insecurities of our current way of life reinforce all classes of people's profound sense of isolation and lack of community. These root causes were recognized as cultural crises as early as 1991 by Rabbi Michael Lerner in Surplus Powerlessness and again in 2006 in his national bestseller The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country From the Religious Right. Rabbi Lerner's analysis was based on research he did as executive director of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, funded in part by the National Institute of Mental Health. "The research we did . . . unveiled the powerful role that self-blaming has in making people feel relatively powerless and leading them to be less willing to reveal to others their inner pain and fears since they often believe that doing so is only revealing what a failure they feel themselves to be [. . .] They come away from work [. . .] with a strong belief that [. . .] the 'real world' [. . .] is filled with people who will do almost anything to gain power and economic success [. . .] and they increasingly come to feel that the only rational way to live is to maximize self-interest or else be dominated, manipulated, and controlled by others." But "the more that people see each other through a narrow utilitarian frame, the less they are able to build and maintain strong relationships." This circular dynamic "is a central dimension of the spiritual crisis generated by the capitalist marketplace and



Top & Bottom: Peter Rodulfo

causing immense pain in the personal lives of those who have been shaped by marketplace consciousness."

It was actually the connection between the marketplace and addiction that led to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous, one of the organizations most successful in helping addicts find recovery worldwide, as well as other Twelve Step programs developed since the 1930s. Co-founder Bill Wilson was in the throes of Wall Street speculation when his drinking problem assumed unmanageable proportions right before the stock market crash. "The inviting maelstrom of Wall Street had me in its grip. Business and financial leaders were my heroes. [My drinking] continuing all day and almost every night" destroyed friendships "and I became a lone wolf." Wilson lost everything in the crash of 1929, but instead of jumping to his death like others, he went straight to the bar. Alcohol became his master for five terror-ridden years. In and out of hospitals, he admitted defeat. His alcoholism was about to kill him when an old school friend, a former drinking buddy, contacted him about having become sober. The miracle occurred when the friend admitted he had no power over his addiction and needed to put trust in a higher power. For Bill Wilson, serenity "meant destruction of self-centeredness [. . .] if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die. Then faith would be dead"[11] The founders of Twelve Steps came to understand through personal experience that addiction was rooted in spiritual crisis, an overemphasis on self and the obsessive drive to accumulate material wealth.

Rabbi Lerner's research uncovered a similar spiritual crisis underlying current levels of despair. The new twist is that if our lives feel unfulfilling, instead of holding market

place values accountable, we are encouraged by the culture to blame ourselves. "What we discovered [. . .] was that most people hate being in a world dominated by materialism and selfishness [. . .] They yearn for a life in which love, caring, being seen deeply and authentically by others, and contributing to the common good and a higher purpose are more prominent, and yet at the same time they suppress these yearnings because they've been so fully indoctrinated by the dominant ethos in society that 'you can make it if you deserve to' and if you haven't made it in your personal life with a fulfilling relationship and work [. . .] it is solely your own fault."[12] Suffering under such a double whammy — utter loneliness and self-blame — is it any wonder people are turning to quick fixes, turning to pills and chemicals to relieve their depression and pain?

Seen in this perspective, addiction is not the problem per se, but the wrongheaded solution to the deeper, more profound problem of society in spiritual meltdown. Not legalization, but working towards The New Bottom Line is the long term vision that can address the problem at the root. We need to restructure the corporate-economical, health-medical, political, and educational institutions of society so that they reinforce, rather than undermine, the core spiritual values of generosity and caring, values that faith traditions historically have emphasized but with which we, in an age that glorifies money, profit and power, have unfortunately lost touch.

Religious leaders other than Michael Lerner have identified our spiritual vacuum as the primary cause of addiction. In *God of Our Understanding: Jewish Spirituality and Recovery From Addiction* (2011), Rabbi Shais Taub, a disciple of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Twerski, describes the addict as one who self-destructively confuses the self-obliteration that accompanies addiction with the desired end of self-transcendence and an authentic connection with spiritual meaning. Addiction is therefore, from this perspective, a sought-for solution to the problem of not having that "wholeness" of well-being that derives from feeling oneself in connection to others and the world.

The words of addicts themselves about why and how they got hooked reinforce this analysis. At the Elaine Breslow Institute at Beit T'shuvah in Los Angeles (a residential rehabilitation and recovery community for Jewish and non-Jewish drug addicts, alcoholics, gamblers and ex-cons) for example, the residents say they've gotten caught up in "our materialistic and competitive society" where they've watched their "kids struggle to maintain GPAs that will get them into the

best schools, and then the best graduate schools, and then the best, whatever." They have struggled with competing with their neighbors in the race for "whoever has the most stuff wins." They describe today's world as making one feel either "the best or the worst," which is how "they measure their self-worth"

Today, in the Rust Belt, where economic recession has caused massive lay-offs and left communities decimated, residents are no doubt feeling they are the "worst" for having lost in the race to have "stuff."

I recall my father often saying he needed heroin "to take the edge of off of his life." A few years before his death from overdose, the Kosher meat industry was being taken away from local butchers by larger supermarket chains. My father was being caught in a struggle to survive financially. Earlier, in the 30s and 40s, he was a second generation youth caught in the drive to assimilate and shed restrictions on Jews that were brewing in the advent of the United States' entry into World War II. By the 60s he had already lost touch with the Jewish values that had anchored his parents and enabled them to survive the Great Depression. Like Bill Wilson, he sought a chemical solution to his fears, frustrations, and anxieties.

Viable Solutions

If the root cause of addiction is the spiritual vacuum created by the pressurized race to "win" in a competitive marketplace that only values profit, power and self-interest, then in the current context the move to medically legalize heroin will not accomplish what is needed to alleviate the problem.

What addicts need in this context of the competitive market place is not free access to drugs but rather caring communities where people feel valued for who they are and not for how much money they make or the possessions they have. Thousands of addicts worldwide have found such caring and valuing in communities, like Beit T'shuvah, that are modeled on the Twelve Steps developed by Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, communities that have effectively helped addicts save themselves by following universal spiritual principles. Better still, the demand for drugs itself could be reduced if the society at large offered the same kind of compassion and values that addicts find in Twelve Steps.

Two countries, Portugal and Canada, offer promise when it comes to lowering opioid drug use and/or death by overdoses. Both countries, which have free public health systems, show how medical legalization of heroin can work under the right conditions. Putting people and the common good before profits and taking private profit out of the medical-pharmaceutical system seems necessary in order for legalization to work.

Sixteen years ago, Portugal decriminalized the possession of all drugs — from marijuana to heroin. Today, drug offenders are ordered to appear before "dissuasion panels" made up of legal, social, and psychological experts. Most cases are suspended. Individuals who repeatedly come before the panels may be prescribed treatment, ranging from motivational counseling to opiate substitution therapy." Over the past fifteen years, drug use has fallen. Drug use in Portugal, as we have seen in the United States, depends on economic conditions, increasing when economic conditions are poor.

In Canada, when two-hundred fifty-six people died in four months during 2016 from overdosing on fentanyl in bad batches of heroin, Health Canada influenced the government to legalize heroin for medical use in cases where traditional treatment for addiction has failed.

It would be a leap worth taking if we in the United States were able to legalize heroin and medically control its usage. We would need to have renewed trust in our medical institutions before we could be confident that legalization would not result in greater drug abuse, since medicine's collusion with the market system has allowed for profits to dominate over service when it comes to opioids. Resistance to Trump's ascendency gives me hope, though, since more and more people are seeing that the glorification of profit and power does not bring economic well-being to the majority of Americans. Could it be that in my lifetime, or in the generation that follows mine we will see our nation and others saving lives by adopting the caring of the New Bottom Line that measures the success of our institutions to the degree that they sustain people and the environment? It's up to us! ■

SHARON LEDER is a member of the Cape Cod branch of the Network of Spiritual Progressives and author of the novel *The Fix: A Father's Secrets, A Daughter's Search* (KiCam Projects, 2017).

Cautionary Universal Lessons from Jewish Identity Politics

BY RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

Daniel Kelin

I FIRST GOT INTRODUCED to identity politics growing up during and after the Holocaust. For large numbers of Jews at that time the murder of one out of every three Jews on the planet Earth who were alive in 1940 was a trauma that shaped our lives and consciousness. That trauma was also passed on to many in the next several generations of Jews. God had failed to show up and save the Jews. Much of the rest of the world failed to intervene to save Jews. The U.S. turned away refugee ships and most of the countries of the world were unwilling to open their doors to Jewish refugees who were often forced to return to countries dominated by the Nazis, from which they were soon sent to their deaths.

Equally traumatic for many was the gross failure of the communist parties in Europe to overtly challenge the anti-Semitism used in the 1920s and 1930s by rising fascist movements to attract support among Christians who inherited the never quenched hatred of Jews perpetrated by the Catholic Church and intensified by Luther and his Protestant followers right through to the end of the Second World War (and in some places beyond). During the Second World War there were frequent stories of Jews escaping the ghettos of Europe and fleeing to become part of partisan resistance forces, only to find that their partisan allies were themselves filled with hatred of Jews, and in some cases actually turned on their Jewish members. After the war, Eastern European and Soviet communist movements then turned on their Jewish members more systematically, often expelling them from their leadership positions or even from the communist party itself, while the international leader of the communist movement, the Soviet Union, implemented discriminatory practices against their own Jewish population.

No wonder, then, that Zionism became the Jewish identity politics that most attracted new members in the second half of the 20th century.

Yet, as I grew up, I came to understand that the logic of our identity politics was also leading in a very destructive direction. In the course of creating our own state, we caused hundreds of thousands to lose their homes, and these Palestinians were later joined in exile by tens of thousands of others who lost their homes in subsequent Israeli wars.

Sadly, when I joined with fellow progressive Jews, Palestinians, and other allies to criticize Israeli treatment of Palestinians, I found that our criticisms were dismissed as anti-Semitism by many other Jews.

The terms of those criticisms often get repeated today in some Jewish identity politics formations. "You have no right to criticize our Zionist movement or the realities we created in Israel. We crawled out of the crematoria in Europe—you never experienced the pain that we went through. During the Holocaust itself, and then in the years 1945-1948 when hundreds of thousands of European Jews were in "displaced persons" camps, the Palestinians, and their allies in surrounding Arab states, used the power derived from Arab oil to successfully get England to forcibly stop Jews from getting refuge in Palestine. We were the homeless immigrants. You lefties who oppose U.S. immigration policies toward people desperately seeking refuge from oppression should be able to understand why Jewish refugees during and immediately after the Holocaust reacted to this Palestinian close-the-gates attitude by rejecting the voices of Jewish internationalists. These circumstances caused the Zionist movement to move toward its most right wing side and left those of us who continued to believe in reconciliation and harmony viewed

as naive idealists. Even to this day a significant section of the Palestinian people identify with Hamas which seeks to destroy our country of refuge and send Jews back to Europe where most Israelis living today never lived, a bit like the reactionaries in the U.S. which sought to do something analogous to DACA youth. "

I understand these feelings, but think they are fundamentally mistaken. The tragedy of our Jewish identity politics, when not joined simultaneously to a recognition of our interdependence with the rest of humanity, and not rooted in the Torah's command to "love the stranger/the Other," leads to behavior which promotes an equally insensitive identity politics within the Palestinian world. Right wing Zionists and Hamas both produce a hatred of the other side which continues the struggle and weakens the chance that either side will ever achieve the justice and security to which they are both entitled. And Tikkun's message has always been that Israel has the greater power and hence the greater responsibility for making huge efforts at reconciliation through repentance and generosity to help build an economically and politically viable autonomous Palestinian state.

"Oppressed people are the experts on what that oppression feels like and how damaging it is . . . but that oppression doesn't always give the oppressed a special expertise on how to end that oppression!"

The powerful emotional argument of Jewish identity politics, as they dismiss those of us who are both proudly rooted in Jewish tradition yet critical of Israeli policies toward Palestinians, seems reminiscent of other forms of identity politics that are now prominent in American society. It goes like this:

"When we trusted our non-Jewish neighbors and thought they would stand in solidarity with us against fascism, they turned on us and betrayed us. You think you are safe living with Christians, but they have never taught their own children how their Christian doctrines were used to justify hatred of Jews. You think you are equal, but you live as a minority temporarily tolerated as long as you don't question why your society has its government buildings shut on the Christian Sabbath (Sunday) and celebrates Christmas as a national holiday, but doesn't give equal respect to Yom Kippur or Passover or, for that matter, Ramadan for Muslims. They continue to read the most hateful portrayals of Jews in their New Testament Gospels and are so deep into their Christian privilege (and this includes African American Christians as well) that they never even ask themselves what they need to do to repent for 1700 plus years of oppressing our people. Meanwhile, they tell you that you are 'privileged' and 'white' because you have material security. But we were economically successful in Europe too, and then wiped out. What you don't see is that the particular form anti-Semitism takes is to set up Jews as the public face of the oppressive feudal or (later) capitalist order, so that when people feel really angry and hurt, the ruling Christian elites can tell their ill-informed supporters that 'the reason why you are suffering is that the Jews have power and they control the media and they hate you.' Meanwhile, your leftie friends are more outraged at Israel's sins than the far worse sins committed by Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, China, Russia, Burma, etc. — and then tell you that this is somehow reasonable. No! Jews are the only ones who can decide how best to achieve our own liberation just as women are the only ones to work out their own liberation and African Americans the only ones to work out their own liberation. When they (including Jews among them) use double standards or pretend that Jews are suddenly free of any danger though Western societies, and particularly the Left in the US, this means that have never engaged in the kind of intense education about the specific ways anti-Semitism functions consciously and unconsciously in both Christian and Islamic cultures and are only weakening and dividing our people and setting us up for future destruction. So give Israel your support, because when push comes to shove, it is the only place that will protect you."

I think they have some legitimate concerns, but that in some fundamental way the position is mistaken. The path to security for Jews (or any other identity group) is a path that requires us to be as caring for others as we wish them to be for us and as committed to their liberation as we wish them to be committed to ours

There is no good reason to not seek to have a country that calls itself "the Jewish state" follow the highest ethical and most loving parts of our tradition (though we must acknowledge that our tradition has always been torn between those who heard God's voice as a voice of generosity and compassion and those who heard God's voice as one of triumphalist "power over" others. This is explored more fully in my theology book *Jewish Renewal*. Israel will be safe only if the whole world is safe. Its acting without care for the Palestinians or for the African refugees that it has been expelling has already created hatred of Jews in countries that never before had such consciousness, so Israel's insensitivity in these regards is not only immoral but also self-destructive for the Jewish people in the not-too-long run.

I'm saddened to see this same form of identity politics used by all kinds of other identity groups in the U.S. and elsewhere, with its tendency to silence those who raise questions about the legitimacy of the paths they have chosen to reach their own liberation.

I have come to one clear conclusion: while people who are oppressed are the only ones who really know how awful that oppression is or has been, its psychic consequences, and its distorting impact on one's life and thought, being oppressed does not give the oppressed a special expertise on how to end that oppression. On the contrary, oppression does not bring out the best in people, and sometimes even distorts their moral sensibilities or their ability to think strategically on how to liberate themselves. Sometimes an oppressed people can make choices that are exactly the opposite of what is best for them, e.g. Jews calling ourselves "the chosen people" to fend off the demeaning way we were being treated as "the other" in much of our history. It is precisely the distance from the suffering that, in some instances, gives others a better understanding of what is needed to protect the interests of the oppressed and give them the tools to end their oppression.

None of this leads me to reject my own or anyone else's identity politics, but it does encourage me to insist that a healthy identity politics movement must be one that embraces the equal importance of everyone else's identity politics, validates everyone else's suffering as well as one's own, welcomes advice and criticisms from those who are genuinely interested in providing assistance, and refuses to be silent when watching any identity politics movement leading to violence or put-downs of people in other groups.

So I propose that we use the following criteria to determine whether and to what extent any identity politics should be critiqued or praised:

1. Does it encourage people within its own identity group to see how much they have in common with other identities?
2. Does it help its participants understand that there is little chance of any one identity group actually achieving liberation until all such groups have learned how to respectfully engage with each other and support each other's struggles?
3. Does it recognize that each group has a set of privileges and distortions, or does it label everyone in certain identity groups as 'privileged' (e.g. all whites or all men) thereby pushing those groups to identify with the top 1% of wealth holders?
4. Does it welcome debates and alternative perspectives from people who have come to support their struggles, or does it insist that everyone who has a liberatory strategy give preference to the strategies of 'the most oppressed' and either shut up or leave rather than offer ideas which might at first seem off-based by the identity politics group in question?
5. Does it teach its members an analysis of the class differences even within its own identity group, as well as in that of other identity groups? Nuancing our critiques with a clear analysis of the role of class would make any identity group hesitate before asserting that "everyone" in group A, B, or C is really benefiting from this or that system of oppression.
6. Does it insist on respectful dialogue, or does it allow some speakers in a meeting to demean all members of some other group?
7. Does it teach its members to recognize the way that undercover agents of the state or of right-wing groups sometimes present themselves as the most militant members of a given identity group in order to push some of the participants into a path of violence which almost always leads to the discrediting of all the rest of the identity group's analyses and legitimate demands for social reconstruction and an end to all forms of oppression and bigotry?

None of this is easy. Calling for oppressed groups to see their connection to the suffering of others is not easily implemented, particularly when people are still being actively

assaulted by those who hate them. When many Holocaust survivors went back to their home towns in 1945 after they were released from concentration camps or emerged from hiding for years, hoping to restart their lives there in a variety of European countries, they found their property taken by neighbors who had once been friends but now no longer wanted to relinquish it. In some cases, the old friends even murdered the Jewish returnees. So what exactly were Jews to do in that situation? I try to answer that in my book *Embracing Israel/Palestine* (www.tikkun.org/eip) by discussing some options that were not followed, but I also recognize how very difficult it may be for people in the midst of being demeaned to allow themselves to adopt compassionate strategies.

We must vigorously critique racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and Islamophobic behavior, while building social practices that undermine these societal distortions, and yet do so without engaging in an across-the-board vilification of all those who are part of groups that may be partially benefiting from these distortions.

It was this understanding that made it possible for Nelson Mandela to reassure the leaders of the apartheid state that they and their followers would not face violence and endless hate were they to give up power. The Truth and Reconciliation process embodied this new energy in which people who had committed acts of violence on either side of that struggle could come forth and confess their sins and regrets without feeling threatened. Mandela's movement made the mistake of not dismantling the structures of capitalistic oppression, but they did succeed in creating a democratic society without further bloodshed precisely because Mandela's approach sought to reassure the oppressor rather than demean them.

Of course, no one outside the oppressed group has a right to demand that they reassure those in the oppressor group that they will be safe even if the oppression stops, but it would certainly be a smarter strategy than making them all feel endangered. The more that liberals and progressives can be experienced as caring and empathetic people who really care not only about ourselves and those we've described as 'the most oppressed' but also about everyone else in our society and around the world, and manifest that in our behavior, the more we have a chance of really winning the struggles against racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, etc. Variants of identity politics that make it harder for those who wish to end systems of oppression to work together are not in the interests of the oppressed.

The sets of essays that follow delve more deeply into identity politics. We invite you to write more on this topic for our website www.tikkun.org. These are issues that are not going to go away. These arguments and explorations might prevent us from building a unified movement until we approach them with an open heart and allow ourselves to accept the possibility that all of us can be part right and part mistaken, and see the latter as an opportunity to lovingly correct each other without eliciting harsh self-criticism or a sense of being silenced. The more open and accepting of other views the more we will be able to make inroads with others, without ever having to capitulate to racist, sexist or other obnoxious world views. ■

The Origins of Identity Politics

KAREN BRODKIN

Donald Trump and his cronies have ignited the most massive and broad-based resistance and democracy movement in my lifetime, maybe in American history. What's the place of identity politics (for want of a better catch phrase) in that resistance movement? What are its strengths and limitations? I'll let others discuss its downsides. I want to make a case for identity politics as a positive and healing force and as a creator of new visions of what democracy could look like. To do it, I'll contrast it with earlier political thinking.

The Federal programs after World War II exemplify the older way of thinking about identity; they greatly expanded the middle class and rolled back many racial barriers but had their limitations. As that war ended, with some 11 million vets returning, corporate leaders and the Roosevelt administration feared a resurgence of pre-war radicalism should the veterans return without any programs for reintegration into civil society. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, was the Roosevelt Administration's answer to this problem. It provided housing, jobs and the education. Its successful execution radically changed the class and racial structure of America—in a good but limited way.

Thanks to the GI bill the U.S. became a middle-class society in terms of education, home-owning and income for the first time in its history. The Veteran's Administration offered G.I.s home mortgages without down payments, preferential hiring, and free college education including living expenses. These programs stimulated a huge growth in colleges and community colleges, created a mass home owning middle-class, and produced a generation of workers educated to take on the new jobs of America's booming postwar economy. Non-veterans also benefitted from low-interest mortgages, and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) underwrote suburbanization and massive homebuilding by merchant builders. As Roosevelt said, "a rising tide lifts all boats"— but not all were lifted.

The race story is where things become ugly. Rather than ending racism and segregation against African Americans, post-war policies, established institutional practices kept it at the heart of American life. Although benefits were officially open to all veterans, African Americans were denied access to most of them. The US Employment Service, responsible for finding good jobs for vets and giving them preferential hiring, was openly discriminatory and restricted Black GIs to menial jobs. Black colleges were soon filled with African American GIs, but they were still denied entry to most white colleges. Most damaging, they faced racial covenants as homebuyers—a policy advocated and enforced by the FHA. The new suburbs that the FHA played a key role in creating almost completely excluded African Americans, and the FHA or the VA would not lend to Black GIs or underwrite mortgages in the areas where African Americans were allowed to live. To add insult to injury, African American and racially diverse neighborhoods were routinely redlined.

Before the war, Jews (and other Southern and Eastern European immigrants) faced many of the same restrictions as African Americans. Before World War II, antisemitism was widespread and institutionalized. Like African Americans, Jews were officially classified as not white and treated accordingly both institutionally and interpersonally. White colleges had quotas on Jews.

The implementation of the GI Bill changed that radically. Rather than "lifting all boats," it merely shifted the boundaries of whiteness. Jews could now get mortgages for the new houses being built. They (and other Euro-descended GIs) received the same preferential hiring for a wide range of good jobs and professions as other whites—and colleges ended their widespread practice of rigid quotas on Jews so that they could now take advantage of opportunities in America's expanding economy.

In short, free college, good jobs and low interest home mortgages went a long way toward transforming Jews, and other Euro-descended groups, from a working-class and poor population into middle-class Americans by ending institutionalized discrimination against them and providing the wherewithal for a middle-class life. The institutionalized

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Governor George Wallace, confronted by Deputy U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, while attempting to block integration at the University of Alabama.

practices of excluding African Americans from these benefits helped keep the economic base of a racist and segregationist system firmly in place. In public culture, Jews became the measure of America's openness, perhaps from guilt at wartime Jewish exclusion (think of the St. Louis ocean liner filled with Jewish refugees turned away from US ports). Jewish humor entered the mainstream through the new medium of television as Jack Benny, Milton Berle, Sid Ceasar, Groucho Marx all hosted major shows.

There's a cautionary message in this tale. Post-war ideology and institutionalized practices also threw women out of good wartime jobs and ended support for a nascent, free early childcare and education program. These well-meaning programs were a set of top down creations designed by a relatively small circle comprised of mainly white male politicians and corporate leaders, and executed by local officials and civil service employees with much the same race, class, and gender profile. They were all limited by *their own* political beliefs. One of the more salient limitations was that the ruling Democratic party had a powerful, solidly segregationist Southern wing and had no intention of bucking it. Those who sought to disconfirm those beliefs, most notably a nascent and growing African American civil rights movement were excluded from the process of shaping policy. More than that, there was no mass activism on the part of Progressive and Left white groups that was equivalent to the movement growing in the African American community.

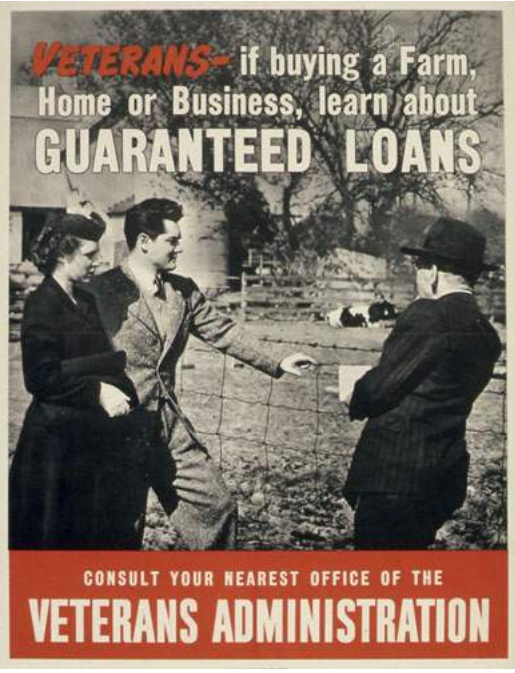
The result was that a set of post-war GI programs helped whiten Jews and people of European descent, and by excluding African Americans, kept segregation and racism solidly in place. It just shifted the boundaries of white privilege—and the focus on jobs for returning GIs excluded many service women, and many women civilian war workers lost their jobs and their child care.

So in the current resistance what's to keep us from building new institutions that perpetuate the same kinds of structural discrimination? The most obvious answer is that we have real grassroots movements, that are generating new social agendas from below. But there was a lot of movement activism during World War II.

I believe that identity politics is what has made today's social movements different from those of the mid-20th century. Today we think about social issues in a way that assumes plural identity perspectives and plural issue priorities are legitimate. I think we take this set of insights for granted, but it really marks a step forward in political thought from the progressive vocabulary of the post-World War II era.

After World War II, a strong African American civil rights movement fought segregation (including in the armed forces) and institutionalized discrimination. There was some white organizational support, but there was no political language for seeing how struggles of African Americans are intertwined with their own. The GI Bill and associated programs left in place underlying race-based structures that could harm many of its then-white beneficiaries in the long run. They saw it as making America middle class. But a class lens obscures what a race lens illuminates: that only whites can be middle class—even if who is white changes with the times and who is in power. We just saw that in Charlottesville Virginia as the white supremacists chanted "Us not Jews." The assembled fascists focused their hatred on African Americans, but they also hated Jews. They remind us that racism can threaten even those who are currently racially privileged.

In the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement gave birth to a radical shift in political thinking on the Left. As late as the 60s, many on the Left believed that the working class, regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, or anything else shared a set of fundamental interests which could only be won by toppling capitalism. These interests were placed at the center of agendas.



Top: Library of Congress | Bottom: National Archives

Kimberlé Crenshaw

Civil Rights and Black Power movements challenged this prevailing leftist thinking that only a movement based on working class needs could liberate everyone. Their new thinking argued that economic or class-based issues were no more fundamental than anti-racist demands, suggesting that the whole notion of a "fundamental" demand was a way of legitimizing some issues while downplaying others. That was the first conceptual step.

The next step taken in the mid 1960s was the birth of many identity movements, most notably African American, Chican@, American Indian, Asian American, feminist, and LGBT movements. As they became prominent, so too did wider recognition that each made different important contributions to what constituted social justice. The late 1980s and '90s saw the rise of issue-based and hybrid identity-issue based movements; for example environmentalists were thinking about natural ecosystems and environmental justice groups were thinking about how environmental issues impacted specific populations. The impact of identity and issue-based organizations broadened popular thinking about what a democratic movement needed to deal with. They also displaced the socialist, communist, and progressive political parties that had been so important in earlier movements' thinking about what social transformation would look like.

The third step began in the 1970s as Black and Latina feminists and lesbian feminists took the lead in developing a more sophisticated way of conceptualizing identities. It rests on the recognition that every individual is a complex mix of socially-ascribed identities. For most of us, some of our identities give us social privileges and others give us second-class citizenship—woman and white; Black and straight, etc. It's called "intersectionality," a way of thinking from the complexity and contradictory nature of individual and group identities. No identity (including class) really has a single essence. By complicating our identities, this perspective can help us get beyond fights over whose identity is more important to understanding how all our lives are interdependent.

Equally important, intersectional ways of thinking developed within a social movement landscape made up of many issue and identity-generated organizations. These organizations and conceptual tools help work to prevent the mistakes of the GI Bill. A modern day GI Bill would likely be subject to intense opposition from the Black Lives Matter Movement. These more developed ways of thinking have come to serve our current progressive political lingua franca. Thus by the early 21st century, progressives had developed a very inclusive social agenda, a landscape of many organizations, nationally networked around both identity and issue interests, and a sense that *all* were of pretty much equal importance and inextricably tied together.

Today's left is also relatively democratic in its ideological and organizational praxis. It is made up of lots of independent, not very hierarchical organizations, voluntarily networked together. Wherever their members' primary race, class or gender identities may lie, they also connect with other organizations that represent issues and identities they also share. For example, much of the power in today's environmental movement is a result of a merger of the environmental justice movement and longstanding preservationists. The former, developed by African American and Latin@ activists brought awareness of the dangers of industrial and urban pollution; the latter developed by preserving wild and beautiful places. In Los Angeles, a powerful coalition of both types of organization has brought major improvements to the nation's second largest Port.

Resistance to Trump has given a great leap forward to this kind of political thinking. The Women's March brought out more than women, and created space for more identities and interests. The Sierra Club supports Black Lives Matter. Los Angeles' Gay Pride celebration organizers turned it into an all-Resistance march. The list goes on.

Our current progressive landscape is a strong and flexible network of identity and issue-based organizations. It is a significant addition to representative democracy, but also a departure from it. Separately and together these groups enhance public awareness of the ways in which our world is unequal. They make visible and challenge the "natural social order" on so many fronts.

I think identity politics have helped us take a giant step forward for what democracy might look like. It demands conversation across boundaries, finding commonalities and wrestling with conflicts from positions of equality. It spreads power more evenly and relies on negotiation and consensus.

Could something like this work as government? I don't know, but I'd sure like to see us try. In the meantime, we should all learn and gain the needed skills by participating in this kind of Movement. ■

DR. BRODKIN is a professor emerita at UCLA, whose research centers around social movements, gender, political economy, theory, migration, race and contemporary North American cultures.

Top: Laura Flanders Show, 2011

The Evolution of Identity Politics

BY ERIC WARD

TIKKUN: How did identity politics become a central part of liberation struggles?

The modern emergence of "identity politics" occurs within the liberation movements that arose in the wake of the 1960's Civil Rights campaigns. Huge victories against segregation had been realized, shifting the country from a de jure white supremacist nation (with practices that are legally recognized by official laws), to de facto white supremacy (where discrimination is generally known to exist, even if not legally authorized). This was a significant victory, historic in its accomplishments. However, civil rights leaders and activists understood there was still much work to do. While segregation by law was defeated, underlying racial disparities in health, education, housing, employment and social access still existed, and if left unchecked, these gaps would prevent Blacks from achieving full opportunity in America. Even if everyone now had the legal right to unsegregated jobs, public transportation, housing, and education, deep underlying systems of discrimination continued to create disparities based on a person's race. This is evident today in terms of mass incarceration, infant mortality and graduation rates. Underlying systems of bias create unequal outcomes even though there is equality under the law. The 1960s Civil Rights movement's decision to address these systemic barriers to equality were met by a significant and sometimes violent backlash. Even in liberal centers as Chicago, Detroit, Boston and New York City, the demand for full equality was met with increased criticism by white northern and elected leaders arrogantly accusing the Civil Rights movement of being off course. Some government agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had already been undermining the Civil Rights movement but now, leaders and activists found themselves under political attack from former liberal allies.

After the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, and in the face of white America's refusal to address institutional forms of racism, the movement began to descend from its peak of influence. This was a serious loss. The Civil Rights movement had a powerful impact. It had a noble goal grounded in a moral imperative about who we are as a nation and who we wanted to be as a people. It was very profound in its visionary idea: by lifting African Americans up in this society, by lifting them past discrimination, all of us in this society would benefit. It wasn't simply about making the lives of Blacks better, it was about redeeming the soul of America. This was probably one of the most revolutionary concepts to ever emerge in the United States.

TIKKUN: How did this set the stage for the emergence of identity politics as we know it?

Where a void exists, it will be filled. By the 1970s, the rise of new liberation movements in the U.S. began to fill space once occupied by MLK Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) turned away from an unresponsive mainstream and focused on building Black political strength, economic self-sufficiency and cultural influence as new agents of change. Known as the Black Power movement, some groups like the Black Panther Party and US Organization utilized the rhetoric of armed revolution. In the face of the rejection of broader opportunities for Blacks and unchecked rampant police violence in the North, these new leaders rejected what they saw as hypocritical calls for incremental change and utilized a more militant stance to get the attention of policymakers and the public. The rhetoric provided an opportunity for law enforcement agencies to aggressively increase their violent crackdown on liberation movements. Many elected officials turned a blind eye as law enforcement at the federal, state, and local levels violated civil liberties through actions that sometimes resulted in murder. By the mid-70s, the government's use of an FBI-led counter intelligence program aimed at disrupting and manipulating various social and political movements, including the Black Power movement, coupled with the internal tendencies of some Black Power organizations towards authoritarianism, toleration of misogyny and self-isolation led to the demise of Black Power. As the

70s came to a close, there was little left. So many leaders had been killed, jailed, burned out or driven into exile. A chill descended not only over Black America but also over communities of color and anti-racist whites who had adopted similar tactics. What was left of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, primarily turned its attention to the courts and shifted its priorities from the expansion of rights to securing those that had already been won. The mass movement for civil rights in modern America had for all sense and purposes, come to an end. It is within this context, identity politics, as it is commonly referred to, began to take form.

TIKKUN: There are many in America who see identity politics as a huge problem. Even in Tikkun's editorial board there are strong differences about its place in a transformative movement. What's your analysis of why it has become so controversial?

People have long identified themselves by ethnicity, gender and religion, but racial identification is something new. The pseudo-science of race (also known as race eugenics) was accepted in order to provide justification for conquest and exploitation of Black and indigenous cultures in the "age of discovery" and the following period of colonization. To be clear, it's not as if Black people, Chicanos, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, women, and the LGBTQ community just woke up one day and said, "let's create identity politics." Those who are most vulnerable rarely have opportunity to identify and name themselves. Historically, some of the largest struggles to expand rights, or create conditions for people to continue to exist, have often centered around the abilities of people to define themselves and their community. The truth is, identity politics exist because people of color, women and LGBTQ communities have been systemically shut out of larger society and this includes progressive and liberal spaces.

I reject the recent trend of blaming these communities for empowering themselves. However, I also strongly reject the growing practice by many leaders within these communities to treat identity politics as a final destination. It's not. Identity politics are supposed to be our bridge to rebuilding people centered movements for justice. Its purpose was to center us so we could recognize one another's common humanity.

TIKKUN: Could you give some examples?

In 1977, the amazing Black feminists released a powerful document called the *Combahee River Collective Statement*. The statement clarified identity politics, saying, "We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression." They argue quite persuasively that by centering the experiences of Black women, they would be in a better position to better understand the deep societal inequalities driven by sexism, homophobia, racism and class divisions. They also rightly believed that they would be more motivated to address these issues. Expanding on some of the amazing writings of Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith and others, they went on to write, "We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind. To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough." When you go back and read the works and speeches of all these powerful feminists of color, you see they clearly understood people are not simply one identity: no one is just simply white in this society; no one is simply gay, lesbian or trans; no one is simply Black; no one is simply Jewish; no one is simply wealthy or poor. We are made up of multiple identities that form who we are. These identities should not be used to separate ourselves, but rather as vehicles to recognize our common humanity. These visionary feminists understood embracing these multitudes of identities would help us realize whether you are a 65-year-old white male facing job discrimination, or a 16-year-old Black girl simply trying to walk home without being racially profiled, neither should face discrimination. Neither should be denied the right to live, love, or work. That is the essence of "intersectionality," a term created by civil rights activist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. She argued centering the most vulnerable, would expand opportunities that move all of us forward, together.

TIKKUN: In your view, is that the way identity politics manifests itself in today's movements?

Sadly, the clarity of these feminists of color, many of them LGBTQ, has been lost on many of us. Identity politics are often distorted and misused both inside and outside of these marginalized communities. It can often be used in ways that are more about power plays than about equitably organizing power in society.

Misrepresentations of identity policies treat race, gender and sexuality as static terms rather than fluid narratives used to expand and reinforce inequality in the United States. The problem with many claiming identity politics today is they often base their understanding of it on the belief that race is an actual, biological definition—ironically reinforcing the white supremacist narrative that race exists.

Race, gender and sexuality are about social construction not biological definition. Race does not exist. What exists is racism. It is a tool of social control and exploitation rather than a biological definition. This misunderstanding has resulted in the term *intersectionality* being misused to create new silos rather than centering Black women as a path to reinforce our shared humanity.

The problem with strengthening narratives that force people into a position where their only identity is only white, or male, or a woman, or a Jew, or Black, is that it strips them of

the fullness of their humanity. It simply doesn't speak to who we are as humans.

Quite frankly, it is a distortion of identity politics because it argues one's only role is that of an ally. The problem with the concept of "ally-ship" is that there is no stake or common destiny in being an ally. It treats the self-interests of others as a negative trait, it ignores relevant nuances of power and systems. Being subjugated to a role of an ally, ensures we'll never build a large enough movement or common identity that is viable enough to defeat systems of white supremacy or an emerging white nationalist movement. All we will do is leave inequality firmly entrenched.

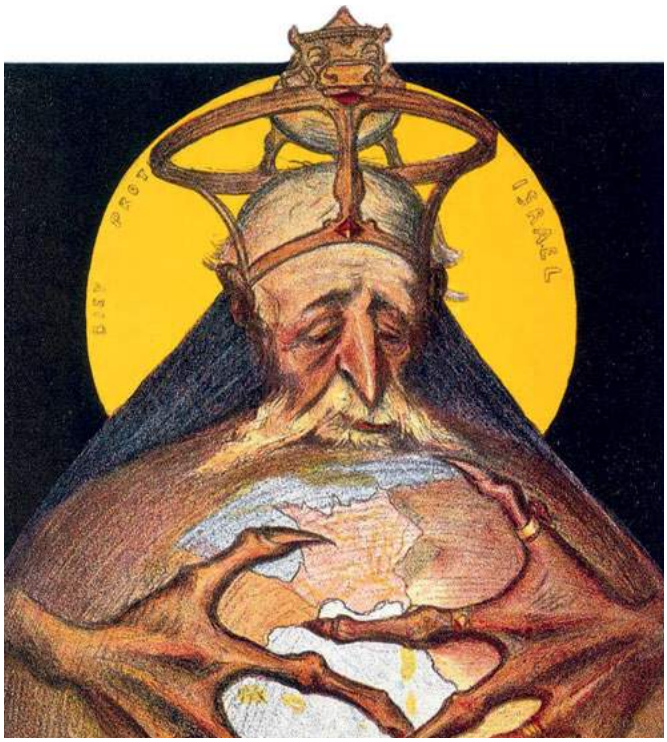
These missteps increase the ability for more reactionary individuals to expand their attacks on civil rights and other people centered movements. The task before us is to move beyond our self-made bunkers as well as the ones society imposes upon us.

Those of us empowered by identity politics must also be prophetic voices in our society—providing a broader vision of who we are as humans. Empowerment and consciousness isn't just a gift, with it comes the burden to create an inclusive democracy: this must be people centered, transparent and accountable. Frankly, it's time to ignore those in our communities who call for the building of new trenches that merely allow us the illusion of being able to hide from one another. Identity politics are not about dehumanizing others, they exist to move humanity forward. Identity politics are here to prepare us for running into the fire, not from it. That is the authentic truth of the politics of liberation.

TIKKUN: You recently wrote about how anti-Semitism fuels the growth of white nationalism in the U.S. Could you explain that?

As many in the Jewish community entered the 70s they found themselves facing less– not none, but lesser– discrimination. Jews found themselves in a situation where they were being defined as white not only by white society but also by anti-racists and elements of the political Left as well. A discourse developed around anti-racism so strict, it no longer allowed a self-identity for Jews, except to assume the primary role of "white ally." If leftist, progressive, and liberal Jews (of certain phenotypes) refused to identify as white, they found themselves without a space, without a home and as a result, many disengaged or began to claim whiteness as a primary identity so that they could belong somewhere.

Insisting Jews identify as white and therefore "privileged" no longer allowed a space for a conversation about anti-Semitism. The political Right was the only place to identify manifestations of anti-Semitism. How could a supposed "white ethnic" group's suffering compare to what was happening to communities of color or women? Jews were forced to suppress their own history and experiences



"Rothschild" by French caricaturist Charles Lucien Leandre.

within anti-racist circles. As a result, our society found itself defenseless as white nationalists intentionally used anti-Semitism to form its worldview, develop leadership and fuel its growing social and political power.

It's outrageous that the Jewish community on the Left never gets to lift up its experience with anti-Semitism, which is a form of racism in the United States. It is told who it is by others with very little agency to define itself within Left and progressive spaces. The truth is that the Jewish community has never been white, it has only been allowed temporary access to privileges. This provisional access to privilege parallels the rise of modern anti-Semitism in Europe where Jews were used as the scapegoats of the ruling class in Europe, a buffer between "the haves" and "the have nots."

Positioned perpetually as "the biological other," Jews often find themselves wrongfully cast as the existential evil behind every social disparity, scandalous leaders or societal disaster. This is largely how anti-Semitism functions in the West today.

We must accept there is anti-Semitism in America and none of us are immune, including our own movements for justice. Like all forms of bigotry, anti-Semitism evolves and adapts itself, and there are still specific roles and purposes to anti-Semitism in America today, the history of the 1960s I discussed earlier provides a good example: The Civil Rights movement achieved in the 1960s through its nonviolent struggle—making legal discrimination against African Americans illegal. That victory was helped in part by a broad multiracial coalition that embraced nonviolent direct action and fought to dismantle legally sanctioned

discriminatory practices. The loss of de jure white supremacy created a large problem for the advocates of white supremacy who long justified slavery and Jim Crow by arguing Blacks were inferior and whites were superior. If you believe you are superior, how do you explain this significant defeat? You can't say those who were inferior bested you, there must be another answer; and an adaptation of modern European anti-Semitism provided the explanation. In short, they decided a secret Jewish cabal must have been behind the Civil Rights movement. They argued, this was the only way Black folks could have won. It then became the "go to" answer in how white nationalists understood women's rights, immigration, Muslims, reproductive justice and gender identity. They argued these were all mere fronts that allowed Jews to enslave whites. It is this narrative that helped birth the white nationalist movement from the ashes of de jure white supremacy.

If white supremacy is a system of disparities and bias used to control and exploit women's sexuality, people of color and immigrants, white nationalism seeks the removal of people of color all together. Anti-Semitism became the fuel for the white nationalist engine.

Instead of recognizing this threat, many anti-racists, leftists and progressives insisted Jews primarily recognize themselves as whites with privileges. Yet the truth is that Jews are not "whites" in the United States. If they were, they would not receive death threats, their houses of worship would not be targeted, their burial sites would not be desecrated. Systemic anti-Semitic violence and threats are forms of social control and they exist to ensure that Jews know their place.

It is more accurate to say Jews in this country hold a form of temporal privilege. I liken it to my experiences in philanthropy. In my seven-plus years working as a grant-giver in philanthropy, I automatically became the most humorous person in the room. I was suddenly a 100 times better looking. Nearly everyone returned my phone calls. People would also send me invitations informing me of fundraisers and asking for individual donations of $500 or more. Yes, I had time-based privileges and access but it was only one small part of my identity and a passing one at that. There were lots of assumptions being made about my identities and my background and most of it was based on a tempory position. I'm a kid who spent most of his teenage years living in a motel where rent was paid by the week. I was thin in my twenties because I was malnourished and often near starving at times. I never made a living wage until I well into my forties. When I left philanthropy, I wasn't as good looking, I wasn't as funny.

With the Jewish community, any semblance of temporal privilege is contingent on the basis that Jews suppress their primary identity as Jews, except in those ways found acceptable by larger society. And when Jews choose to self-actualize their own identities the threat is always delivered that if the Jewish community doesn't behave itself, access, safety and opportunity will be taken away. Sorry, but this doesn't happen because Jews are seen as primarily "white" but because they are seen as something other than white. White communities simply don't receive threats like this, they don't need to.

(*Top left*) Rev. Jesse Jackson, (*top right*) Audre Lorde, (*bottom*) bell hooks

TIKKUN: It seems to us at Tikkun as if your critique of the misuse of identity politics in contemporary social justice movements may have more importance and immediacy now after the election of Donald Trump.

The electoral triumph of Trump wasn't a fluke, it can't simply be summed up by election tampering or bad strategies of containment by Republican and Democratic parties. This moment is a predictable trajectory of American politics fueled by racial demographic anxiety and xenophobia and by the inability of the Left to provide a more cohesive and compelling narrative of where we are going. The moment is not just about the strength of white nationalism as a social movement but also a profound example of what happens when we allow identity politics to be distorted and undermine our movements for change.

2011 in New York City.

Luigi Novi

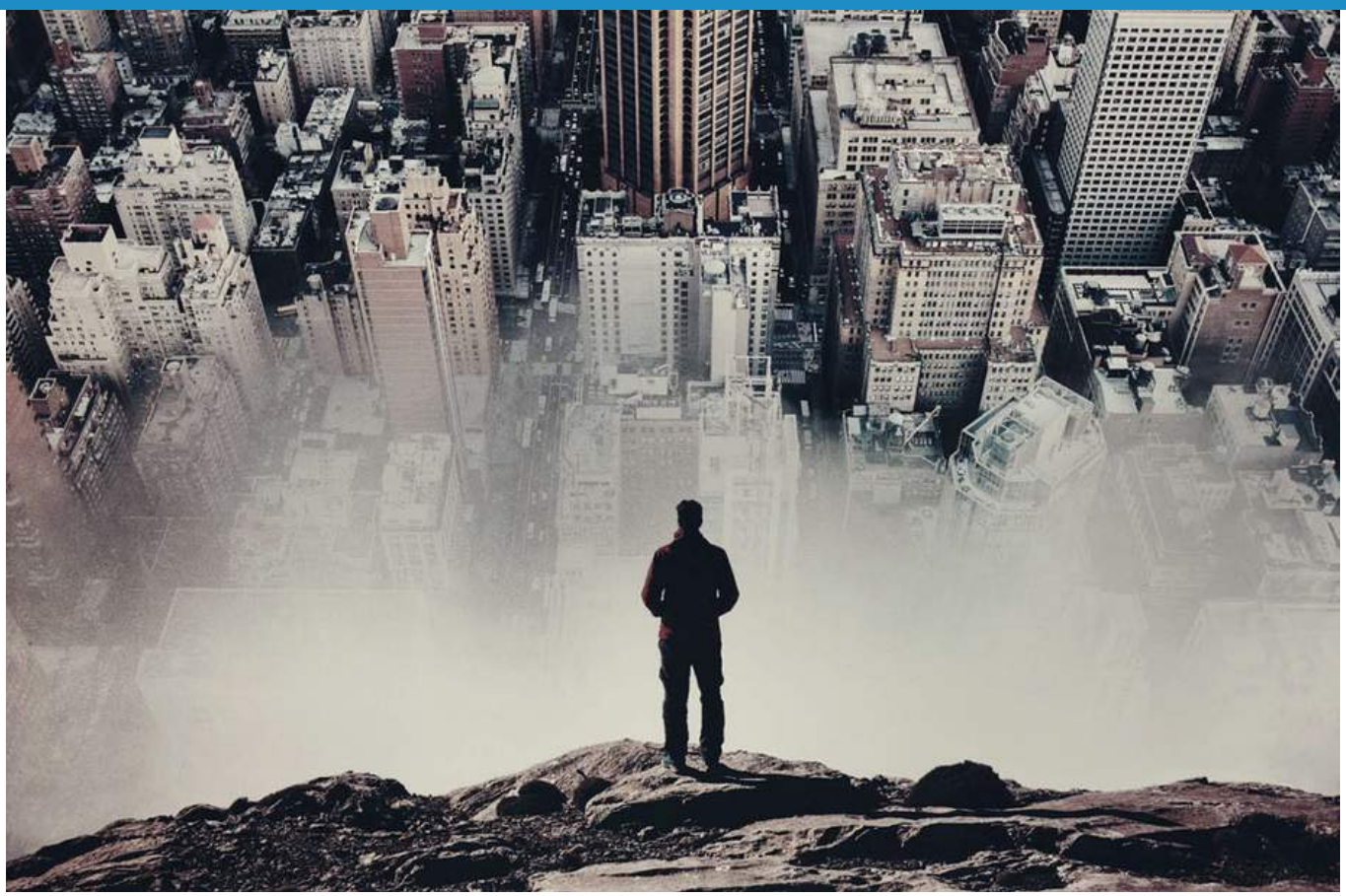
We can no longer afford to accept distorted versions of identity politics that assert that Americans who are white have no value beyond except as an ally to people of color. That attitude is not only strategically problematic, it's morally bankrupt. It's a perversion of white supremacist narratives to imply people have less worth in our movements simply because they have been designated white within this society. Our social change and justice oriented movements aren't here primarily to reorganize definitions of race, we are here to fully dismantle the remnants of a white supremacist systems that are upholding the falsity of race.

The contemporary real-world misuse of identity politics in our movements cedes ground to the white nationalists by writing off huge swaths of the very population they need to recruit to seize state power. Why would I concede a major portion of the U.S. population to a white nationalist movement committed to ethnic cleansing? In what world does that make sense? But that is what is happening.

The concept of "being an ally" assumes others have no self-interest in each other's liberation. This has often resulted in some recent movements unintentionally demobilizing most of their base and potential support. It is ridiculous to ask people to join us but demand that they set aside their self-interests. We aren't robots. We are complicated human beings with multiple identities and interests.

We have to lean in. Our job is to construct a democracy where everyone has value. This is about building a new table for all of us, not simply shifting who is sitting at the current one. Yes, the voices of the most vulnerable must be centered as solutions are crafted– they cannot be absent from those discussions. They must have the power to be able to influence those discussions; they must have the voice to be heard. But solutions must be crafted by everyone involved and must free all of us from the barriers that deny the ability for each of us to have actualized lives. Liberation must be explicitly voiced as for the liberation of all. It is simply not a true liberation movement unless it is grounded in a universalism seeking to advance all of us.

As organizers and leaders, our role is to show people there are better ways for our families to live: for our children, our



spouses and partners, our parents and our neighbors. This world doesn't have to carry this much suffering. We are creative and smart, and when we come together, we can find our way out of this madness. But we can't just say it, we must paint it vividly within our movements for all the world to see.

We don't need contemporary movement versions of identity politics or movements that are navel gazing and focused on picking the lint from our own bellybuttons. Our role is to be outwardly focused and about telling the stories of our neighbors and the stories of the society they are struggling to create.

People don't move towards a future they cannot conceptualize, particularly one where they are unable to see their own place as a respected part of it. If we are committed to constructing movements where people feel alienated, we should simply stop what we are doing. We don't need to build a movement for that. That place already exists, and it's called present-day America.

I don't know what Martin Luther King Jr. saw when he told the rest of us "I've been to the mountain top" but you can tell by the tone of his voice, it's something beautiful and breathtaking. I want to see it for myself. Don't you? But to really get to that mountain top, we can't leave anyone behind who wants to come.

That means taking on the burden of leadership in constructing an inclusive democracy, that's how we get there together. To build it means being much more interested in talking about our liberation than our oppression. It means we can't leave the slowest and most fragile behind us– which, ironically, when it comes to white supremacy in our society, means white America. Racism prevents you from embracing your own humanity, and you don't get to enter the promised land without your humanity intact.

We have to be committed to dismantling racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry because everyone has the right to embrace their humanity and that means white people too. If we leave white America behind, as we move towards that mountain top, what type of people will we be when we get there? Who are we to leave the most vulnerable behind us? Regardless of one's background or societal privileges, our movements must make people who want to be part of us feel at home and valued. Everything else is simply commentary. ■

ERIC WARD has a long and distinguished career as a social justice advocate, working over the past 20 years with local, state, and national organizations to implement strategies for change around racial justice and immigrant rights.

Creating a Spiritual Practice to Heal and Transform the World

An Invitation

THANDEKA

The election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th U.S. President prompted two immediate responses from the American electorate: the rise of a White Lives Matter Movement (this term comes from Texas-based white nationalist Preston Wiginton's 2017 article in the New York Times), and the ascent of a Resistance Movement. These two responses, if unabated, together will tank America's democracy.

Progressives can clearly see the racial threat the White Lives Matter Movement poses as Confederate flags are raised; anti-Black graffiti and Nazi swastikas were spray-painted on school walls; lynching nooses are placed on the desks, doors and walls of Black employees and black students; Jewish cemeteries are desecrated; Muslim women's hijabs are torn from their heads; transgender people are assaulted with increasing regularity; hate speech against Latins become the rallying cry of a political party; and a rising chorus of neo-Nazi and other white supremacy groups shout "Sieg Heil" and "Sieg Trump."

Progressives, however, haven't seen the political threat they themselves create when following the advice of the group of former Democratic staff members—who wrote the online guidebook "Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda"—to emulate Tea Party tactics. These staffers watched the rise of the Tea Party close up as its members organized locally to convince their own congressional members to reject President Obama's agenda. Now these staffers urge Progressives to do what the Tea Party did: resist. If a "small minority in the Tea Party could stop President Obama," the staffers argue, "then we the majority can stop a petty tyrant named Trump."

But this strategy of Progressives emulating Tea Party tactics is paradoxical because it tries to "[build] on the values of inclusion, tolerance, and fairness," using Tea Party tactics born of ideas that are "wrong, cruel, and tinged with racism." Resistance fighters thus march, protest, battle, lobby and like the Tea Party, they shut down differences rather than open them up. The result: Progressive Resistance fighters bravely disrupt conservative policymakers' programs when attempts are made to turn their religious beliefs and vested economic interests into public laws, but then the protesters move on.

The protests lack staying power because the protesters are not part of an ever-expanding network of communities millions upon millions strong. Individuals, after all, can resist injustice, as Jim Corbett, a Quaker founder of the 1980s Sanctuary movement for Central American refugees reminds us, "but only in community can we do justice." We are not yet a community of communities large enough for the task. And we have not yet presented a clear and collective articulation of our social justice work. We cannot say what we, collectively, are for and what binds us together into a united movement.

Naomi Klein, in *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*, states the problem this way: "The firmest of no's has to be accompanied by a bold and forward-looking yes—a plan for a future that is credible and captivating enough that a great many people will fight to see it realized." Klein calls upon us to create this vision for a tangible better life together, although she is not sure what this vision looks like.

I propose the organization of a spiritual vision quest for Progressives in concrete racial, political, *and* experiential

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terms. The experiential component of this work is of critical importance because keen reasoning is not enough to heal and transform broken hearts. There are broken hearts across the political spectrum, and broken hearts require healing spiritual practices. The enduring power of Resistance work, after all, is emotional stamina developed to create progressive communities that are emotionally bound together by loving kindness and as a consequence have the staying power to stand strong in victory and defeat.

I will begin by addressing the racial dimensions of broken hearted-ness because white America breaks a lot of hearts, including those of whites who feel racially downtrodden, maligned, or ignored and set aside. I will then analyze how the White Lives Matter movement uses religion politically to address these emotional issues and create an initiative with enormous staying power. This analysis sets the stage for a discussion of how progressives can envision spiritual practices that create communities with tremendous staying power as they address the brokenhearted and aggrieved feelings of whites in Trump's America. I end by introducing an experiential component of this work because keen reasoning is not enough to heal and transform broken hearts. Broken hearts require healing spiritual practices.

Trump's White America

The impetus for this entire project is something many of us know, but have not adequately explained: Trump's white America. To understand this America, we have to explain the origin of the pervasive feelings and hard-edge realities in these white lives; and we must use America's own poorly understood history of the racial creation of whites in America for this purpose.

Here's what we know about Trump's America. White voters of all sexes, ages, education levels, and income levels were the deciding factor in Trump's election.

Here's what we tend to overlook. Most whites who voted for Trump aren't self-defined racists or white supremacists. Rather, they're hurting, angry, afraid, or just downright mad people who are enraged by the way the government mistreats them, feel maligned by other racial groups, resent being demeaned or ignored by the mainstream press, and are fearful that the American Dream is now beyond their reach. Moreover, many of the lives of these voters had begun to resemble the conditions of Blacks and other stigmatized minorities in several critical ways: high unemployment, underemployment and/or low-paying job rates, rising crime rates, and endemic drug abuse rates.

These white voters live in places like Grand Junction, Colorado. The town suffered an 11% loss of the workforce (between 2009—2014) because of the collapse of the local energy industry and social collapse soon followed suit: there has been a 65% increase in felony filings; Grand Junction has the highest homicide rate in the state; there's an epidemic of drug addiction, and its suicide rate is nearly two and a half times that of the nation. Grand Junction exemplifies white America's worst racial nightmare—whites attacked, exploited and abandoned by other whites.

As one of the residents told *New Yorker* reporter Peter Hessler, who tracked these stats in his July 24, 2017 *Letter from Colorado*, "I think America is lost to us." Another Trump voter put it this way, "what [liberals and elites] hate about him is what they hate about us."

They voted for a man who, as president, will make things worse for them materially as he continues to make them feel

better emotionally. This twofold strategy of financial diminution and emotional elevation is the heart and soul of white racial attacks against white Americans. Trump is a master player of this terrible race game.

A Brief Summary of the Requisite Historical Knowledge:

Three Forms of White Racist Attacks Against Whites

The hidden history of white racial identity-formation in America is the race card we need to end Trump's game against white America. We can use this history to create a new multicultural and multi-racial identity-politics strategy to end the economic and racial duress of most whites in America. The inclusion of white race stories in diversity studies and workshops will not make America great *again*. Rather, the inclusion of narratives about how whites get trashed in white America will make it possible for whites to work together with other racially discriminated groups to make American democracy great *for the first time*. We must learn the original rules of this game in order to change them.

The set-up piece for our game-changing strategy is a story recounted by Lillian Smith in *Killers of the Dream*, her autobiographical account of Southern life. Her firsthand experience of the utter bankruptcy of white power and privilege as moral values is found in her reflections on her childhood—*before* her white racist accounting system begins. We get to watch how the white race book gets cooked.

Born in 1897 into an upper class European American family in Georgia, Lillian Smith recounts the story of a little girl named Jamie whom her family adopted and then abandoned when they discovered that Jamie, who appeared as a fair-skinned white child, was actually black.

Lillian recalls her initial thoughts and feelings about what her parents had done:

> I knew my father and mother whom I passionately admired had betrayed something which they held dear. And they could not help doing it. And I was shamed by their failure and frightened, for I felt they were no longer as powerful as I had thought. There was something Out There that was stronger than they and I could not bear to believe it. I could not confess that my father, who always solved the family dilemmas easily and with laughter, could not solve this. I knew that my mother who was so good to children did not believe in her heart that she was being good to this child. There was not a word in my mind that said it but my body knew and my glands, and I was filled with anxiety.

This kind of anxiety recounted by Lillian Smith is similar to the tensions that fill the race workshops I conduct around the country. The revelation stories unfolded by white participants unnerve them because the shattered feelings of their childhood are uncovered and on full display. They see how the broken pieces of a broken self were pieced together to carry on a tradition of shattering. Lillian Smith describes how she became part of this tradition:

> I felt compelled to believe they were right. It was the only way my world would be held together. And, slowly, it began to seep through me: I was white. She was colored. We must not be together. It was bad to be together. Though you ate with your nurse when you were little, it was bad to eat with any colored person after that. It was bad just as other things were bad that your mother had told you. It was bad that she was to sleep in the room with me that night. It was bad. . . .

This shift in feeling from condemnation of her parents' behavior to self-condemnation of her own feelings for differing from theirs is easily understood when we remember that children are hard-wired to adapt themselves affectively to their parents' values and needs in order to survive and flourish.

The interpersonal circumstances between parent and child—not racist sentiment per se—forced Smith to numb, dismember, and finally disown parts of her own feelings that didn't fit into the honor code of her family's brigade and were condemned by her parents. She had to buckle up by tamping down her own original feelings.

There's lots of psychological literature about this hurtful way of raising kids. John E. Sarno, M.D., calls this process the "origins of the divided mind." Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D., calls this process the way "the body keeps score" long after the mind has forgotten the game-changing devastating events that dismantled the child's feelings. Psychoanalytic theorist D. W. Winnicott identifies the source of this breakdown as the toxic nature of the environment in which the child is forced to live.

From these neuropsychological and medical perspectives, the human environments like the one described by Smith become environmental hazards first for the child and then for the adult.

The environments, simply put, destroy the emotional integrity of the persons they produce. The result of this breakdown, as Winnicott notes, is a pathology in which the self wages war against itself, mind against feelings, head against heart, and reason against passion, because the space between self and other got ruptured.

These affective perspectives understand Lillian Smith's emerging white racism as pathological symptoms of an emotionally compromised self. The pathology—in this case racist sentiment—was created by a toxic emotional environment and then displayed as Lillian Smith's new emotional profile toward the colored child: the racist face of her nonracial experience of loss, confusion, fear, regret, and shame accompanied

Bernard Buffet

Le Buveur (The Drinker) (1948) depicts the melancholy that can arise from deep alienation.

by feelings of being at risk within her own white caregiving community because of something "out there" that's too big to sanely cognize. From this perspective, the origin of Lillian Smith's white racist sentiments against colored people wasn't racism, it was fear, distress and upset wrought in her by the behavior of her parents.

But what was the cause of her parents' behavior? Were they similarly traumatized as children by their parents? Clearly, the origin of Lillian's racism was her parent's behavior, but what was "out there", as Lillian put it, that made them so afraid?

I hadn't a clue. But in race workshops I conducted around the country I witnessed, firsthand, strikingly similar responses in my participants to those of Lillian Smith. The original motivation for a racist act was *not* racial hatred, but fear of abandonment by one's own kith and kin.

These kinds of exposed feelings led me to look for their origin because I had discovered that an act can be racist (e.g. Lillian Smith's decision to no longer treat colored people as equals), without the original emotional impetus for the act being racist (e.g., Lillian Smith wanting to stay in right relationship with her parents). On display was the emotional pain that preceded the formation of racist sentiments and gave rise to racist actions. I learned of racist acts committed in the service of emotional self-protection from fear of abandonment.

What was "out there," I continued to wonder, that created this endemic condition I discovered within so many white Americans? Were there initial events that caused trauma-readiness profiles that could be passed down from one generation to the next epigenetically? If so, each new generation would be primed by social circumstances to be easily triggered and flooded with fear and loathing, shame and guilt, acute anxiety, the feeling of being at risk of abandoned, and the feeling that there is something so dreadful out there that your home is filled with fear and trembling by something without a name. If this is indeed the case, racism simply becomes a symptom of a far more primal threat to the self, namely, its self-coherence as a rational and an emotional soul.

White racism, from this perspective, became the symptom of a primordial injury that shattered the emotional integrity of a human soul. What could be such a primal threat in white America? The answer astonished me as I uncovered of white privilege as a racial ruse against most whites.

I discovered three distinct kinds of historical events that might have given birth to this pervasive ruse of white privilege in white America: legal entitlement, disenfranchisement, and ethnocide. The symptom is the formation of white racism, but the sources of this symptom unfolded as narratives of a ruse against whites that frame the abuse itself as a privilege. A note: I expand here upon work found in my articles for Tikkun and other journals, as well as in my book *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America*.

Legislating White Privilege

We often hear how certain policies created legal benefits for whites that made them feel emotionally superior to Blacks. These legal and psychological white narratives are rightfully tracked as devastating and unjust white racist treatment of black people. They portray white folks as the recipient of something unquestionably beneficial for most whites, and rightfully track the devastating and unjust white supremacist treatment of black people. When we look closer we see that whites and blacks were both badly maltreated legally by the wealthy law-making class. The difference is best measured not by one of kind, but rather by one of degree. Consider the following laws:

In 1670, the Virginia Assembly made it illegal for "Negroes and Indians" to own Christian (i.e. white) servants. In 1680, the Assembly next made it legal for white Christians to give "any negroe or other slave who shall presume to lift his hand in opposition to *any* Christian thirty lashes on the bare back;'" and in 1705, masters were forbidden to "whip a Christian white servant naked." They could still be whipped but now without the added humiliation of being exposed.

In 1705, the Assembly required masters to provide white servants at the end of their indentureship with corn, money, a gun, clothing, and—at the insistence of the English governor—50 acres of land. The poll tax was also reduced. As a result of such legal changes in the status of the white "small man's economic position," poor whites gained legal, political, emotional, social, and financial status that was directly related to the concomitant degradation of "Indians" and "Negroes."

By means of such race laws, Virginia's ruling class systematically gave their blessing to lower-class whites, whom they nevertheless considered the "scuff and scum of England" and who now, free in the colonies after indentured servitude, where thought of as the "rabble" of Virginia. The new racial system continued to trash this class. The result was an American system of white privilege that was, as Nancy Isenberg repeatedly demonstrates in *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, set up and maintained "as an unbanishable part of the American experience" for trashing poorer whites. White privilege for poorer whites, simply put, was a ruse.

Social historian Edmund S. Morgan chronicles the rationale and results of such laws in his path breaking book, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. Until this period, Morgan tells us, class prejudice was difficult to distinguish from race prejudice because the indentured servants of all colors were treated as members of the same race: the poor. Thus when bedraggled, penniless Englishmen and women were first shipped to Virginia, they initially found common cause with the indentured servants of African descent.

New Orleans' "Monument to the Immigrant."

Mulberry St in New York's Little Italy c.1900

Virginia's new racial classification system was designed to breed contempt between these African and European laborers. As Morgan notes,

> The assembly's efforts to distinguish [white servants] from slaves went well beyond exempting them from being whipped naked. In an act that created perhaps the most invidious distinction between them, the assembly specifically protected the property of servants while confiscating what belonged to slaves. . . . Thus even the small property previously allowed to slaves who had the excess energy and industry to work for it was to be handed over to poor whites—a highly effective device for dissociating the two.

The property taken from Blacks and given to the newly created whites did not raise them to the level of their masters; it did, however, raise them above the status of the Blacks. Now, poor, struggling, wage-earning whites and white indentured servants had legal permission to act like members of the master race, the wealthy, towards the lowest of the low, the Blacks. This elevation made them feel good as their ongoing relegation to second-class citizenship made drove them mad. Social critic W. J. Cash put it this way in his 1941 classic *The Mind of the South*: Southerners who defined themselves as white suffered "a fundamental split in their psyche [resulting] from a sort of social schizophrenia." The grand delusion of being white "foreshortened, dwarfed, and all but obliterated" the awareness of their economic and social degradation as people who had been trashed.

Why did the Virginian plantation masters elevate the racial status of their white servants, workers and other "rabble"? Slavery. By 1660, it had become more profitable for the "labor barons" to buy slaves rather than the service of indentured servants. Accordingly, in 1660, Dutch ships now exempted from local tax duties, began to bring more Negroes to the colony. By the end of the century, slaves made up half of Virginia's labor force.

This new setup, however, required a new strategy for social control, for the natural class affinities between indentured servants and slaves presented a danger for the masters. As Edmund Morgan acidly notes, Virginia's early legislators did not have to enact slave laws to begin slavery; they simply began to purchase slaves instead of indentured English servants. As the slave population began to increase significantly, these same colonial tobacco planters, landed gentry, and English-appointed governors, however, did have to generate race laws to create animosity toward the African slaves among the white servile and working classes. To this end, the Assembly legislated white race privileges for a class of persons the wealthy despised and feared: exbondsmen.

To understand the fear, we must note that until 1660, the majority of workers on the Virginia tobacco plantations were indentured servants, who were kept in separate servant quarters, supervised by overseers, and whipped as a means of "correction." Like the eighteenth-century slave counterparts, they were often underfed and underclothed. As indentured servants, they ran away rather than rebel as a class.

As freedmen (i.e. persons without house or land) they did rebel. The rebels were rankled by unfair taxes, legislators' greed, and land use regulations that relegated the majority of the freedmen to the status of workers for hire rather than landowners. Nathanial Bacon, a well-born Englishman serving as a government official, led the rebellion despite the ironic fact that he held wealthy Virginians in contempt because of their "vile [lower class]" beginnings. The freedmen first slaughtered Indians and then turned their guns on the ruling elite. "Bacon's Rebellion" of 1676 did not end before Jamestown was burned to the ground. Bacon died. The English intervened militarily. Last to surrender was a group of eighty Negroes and twenty English servants.

Bacon's rebellion signaled the potential allegiance between workers of all races, and the threat it posed to ruling elites. Elites were dead set on breaking down this allegiance by giving poor whites illusory benefits that psychologically devastated them, while upholding an oppressive economic system that economically trashed most whites.

Consider once again the 1680 law regarding lashing. Their

relief from the fear of being treated as blacks, led them to celebrate their identity as whites.

Thus the ruse of white privilege. Masters and servants, as American history David Williams notes in *Rich Man's War: Class, Caste, and Confederate Defeat in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley*, who could claim that all their ancestors came from Europe became members of the white race. In truth, of course, the "poor whites" continued to be viewed as an alien race by the elite. As one Georgia planter wrote a friend, "Not one in ten [poor whites] is. . . . a white superior to a negro." Privately called "white trash" by the elite, the poor whites were publicly embraced as racial kin by the planters (that 3.7 percent of the population who owned 58 percent of the region's slaves and were dead set on keeping their exploited workers divided by racial contempt).

Accordingly, any challenge to racial solidarity among whites threatened to reveal the hidden class system of abuse against most whites, which was cloaked in an anti-black disguise. The antebellum South's pervasive class exploitation depended on the ongoing generation of an emotionally-fabricated white racial pride.

Thus it's not surprising that writer Hinton Rowan Helper's 1857 book *The Impending Crisis of the South*, which exposed the race-class link, was feared and rejected: it was publicly burned; a Methodist minister spent a year in jail for simply owning it and three Southerners were hanged for reading it. It was seditious to even think about such things because it could stoke "bad" feelings that would prompt seditions acts. Here is some of what Helper said: "The lords of the lash are not only absolute masters of the blacks. . . . but they are also the oracles and arbiters of all nonslaveholding whites, whose freedom is merely nominal, and whose unparalleled illiteracy and degradation is purposely and fiendishly perpetuated."

Thus the result: "white" feelings had to be fabricated in whites because the original and primary enemy of most whites wasn't the Blacks, but the rich.

Disenfranchisement of Non-Slaveholding Whites

The U.S. Constitution race-gamed its own political system. More precisely, the Framers diminished the voting power of non-slaveholding whites, but made it look solely like an attack against blacks.

Here's how part of this strategy worked. The Northern delegates to the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 wanted to count only the free inhabitants of the states as the basis for determining tax rates and the apportionment of members of the United States House of Representatives. The Southern delegates wanted to tally each of their slaves and would ratify the U.S. Constitution only if the new republic would count each slave held in the states of this new government. The compromise reached by the two groups was that slaves would be tallied as three-fifths of a person (Article 1, Section 2, Paragraph 3).

Thanks to this compromise, every five slaves counted as three white men and thus increased proportionately the number of representatives who could be elected to represent the state in the Congress. These extra votes—called the "Negro votes" and the "Negro Count"—swept the first (George Washington) and third (Thomas Jefferson) presidents into office.

New Hampshire Senator William Plumer summarized Jefferson's election mandate this way: "the Negro votes made Mr. Jefferson president. Negro electors exceed those of four states, and their representatives are equal to those of six states."

Slave owners became, in effect, the masters of free non-slave holding white men. Senator Plumer put it this way:

> Every five of the Negro slaves are accounted equal to three of you . . . Those slaves have no voice in the elections; they are mere property; yet a planter possession a hundred of them may be considered as having sixty votes, while one of you who has equal or greater property is confined to a single vote.

Plumer's study of Jefferson's election and its daunting implications is groundbreaking because, as he notes, he is one of only a handful of American historians who "mention the fact that Jefferson won it by the slave count." Yet, as Wills also notes, this election "is one of the most thoroughly studied events in our history."

Why the silence by other historians? Was there something "out there" that was too big to take in? Perhaps it was this fact: the U.S. Constitution not only sanctioned the economic exploitation of blacks, but it also sanctioned the political subjugation of non-slaving holding white voters. One man one vote was not the law of the new land. Wills summarizes the results: "The slave states always had one-third more seats in Congress than their free population warranted—forty-seven seats instead of thirty-three in 1793, seventy-six instead of fifty-nine in 1812, and ninety-eight instead of seventy- three in 1833."

For over half a century, Wills notes, "the management of government was disproportionately controlled by the South." Wills tells us what this control looked like:

> Slaveholders controlled the presidency for fifty years, the Speaker's chair for forty-one years, and the chairmanship of the House Ways and Means [the most important committee] for forty-two years. The only men to be re-elected president—Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson—were slaveholders. Eighteen out of thirty-one Supreme Court justices were slaveholders."

In 1843, John Quincy Adams looked at what the Negro vote had wrought and told the House of Representatives, "Your country is no longer a democracy, it is not even a republic—

it is a government of two or three thousand holders of slaves, to the utter exclusion of the remaining part." This kind of information was treated by most historians as if it were too painful to affirm and too big to know.

In short: most of white America's political feelings about their "democracy" were fabricated because the primary enemy of poorer whites wasn't the blacks, but the slaveholding rich who created a country that was neither a democracy nor a Republic for most white voters. The driving strategy of this new system of government, as Michael J. Klarman demonstrates in his book *The Framer's Coup: The Making of the United States Constitution*, entailed a conservative counter-revolution against "excessive democracy."

Ethnocide: The Black Face of Memory

The experience of immigrant laborers was deeply traumatizing. The pressure to assimilate caused many to undergo psychic and cultural deaths in order to keep their physical lives. The painful result of this process can be witnessed in Black Face. Often rightfully seen for its impact on Black people, it is also useful to see it for its cause—the psychological woundedness of white people.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, at least three-quarters of the country's industrial workers were immigrants or the children of immigrants and not—as many labor historians have assumed—white Americans whose families have lived on this continent for several generations. (Labor historians Herbert G. Gutman and Ira Berlin laid out their discovery of this history in their essay "Class Composition and the Development of the American Working Class, 1840-1890").

These immigrant workers suffered relentless attacks on their ethnic cultures and character that had the exact feeling of racism. The extreme pressure to assimilate wrought psychic injuries and cultural deaths in order for the immigrants to stay physically alive. Social historian Herbert G. Gutman in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America,* offers a few examples of the kind of extermination at these workers faced:

- In 1895, the New Jersey *American Standard* called Irishmen who caused disorder as the sought wages due them from the Erie Railroad "animals" and "a mongrel mass of ignorance and crime and superstition, as utterly unfit for its dues, as they are for the common courtesies and decencies of civilized life."
- In 1869, *Scientific America* told the "ruder" laborers of Europe who were welcomed to American shores that if they did not "assimilate" quickly, they would face a "quiet but sure extermination." They must change their ways or "share the fate of the native Indian."
- In the mid-1870s, the Chicago Post-Mail characterized its city's Bohemian population as "depraved beasts, harpies, decayed physically and spiritually, mentally and morally, thievish and licentious." The Chicago *Tribune* called striking immigrant brickmakers men but "not reasoning creatures."
- During this same period, the Chicago *Times* complained that the country had become "the cess-pool of Europe under the pretense that it is the asylum of the poor." The *New York Times* would echo similar sentiments fifteen years later.

The message to the immigrants was clear. Their wages, work conditions, and the use of armed force to put down their labor protests gave a hint of what lay in store for them if they refused the demand that they assimilate by abandoning their ethnic identities and becoming whites. More precisely, they must become part of the race that despised them, which meant accepting the indignities wrought against them until their ethnicity was whited out. The white racial category, after all, is without content as an ethnic identity or as anything other than not-African, not-Native American, not-Asian, etc. These negative designations do not define what whiteness is, but simply designate what whiteness does: attack racial others to affirm by negation what it means to be white. This negative procedure renders white consciousness a self-defensive mode of attack against knowledge disclosing the absence of an actual positive content of a white racial identity. White identity, from this perspective, is hollow at the core. It is the absence of an ethnic identity. And it marks in negative terms the loss of a social history with geographic roots that establish the life of a people in cultural, religious, political and economic terms.

If these "ethnic" Americans needed more incentive to become a content-less white racial entity, a floating signifier of

Advertisement for a minstrel show

Library of Congress

whiteness without positive ethnic or emotional content, then they had only to look so far as the genocidal treatment of Native Americans and the ongoing lynchings, degradation, ridicule, and violence to which African Americans were subjected because they were deemed by whites to be mentally and morally unfit, thievish, and licentious.

The newspaper stories certainly bore the taint of racial hatred with their talk of animality and uncivilized ways and their calls for mass extermination of immigrants who did not become white. The immigrants got the message: assimilate or die. Yet for many, assimilation itself was a social death. One immigrant quoted in W.I. Thomas's 1921 book *Old World Traits Transplanted* says, "I have been successful. I have property. My children have superior advantages. But I have lost my life."

Thomas goes on to explain that the immigrant's loss involved the "memories of his home conditions, of leisure and festivities, of joys and sorrows shared by an intimate group." For the first-generation immigrant, Thomas concludes, success can never be complete because he knows what he has lost cannot be recouped: his place in a world of pre-immigration values as an esteemed member of his own community.

These people were colored olive, sallow, peaches and cream. And though assimilation would color them white, the memories they lost weren't racial but ethnic, not white but Irish, Italian, Slavic, German, Catholic, Jewish, and Russian. Their religious and cultural values affirmed a world of relationships that could not be reduced to commercial interests or relegated by financial gain.

Not surprisingly, in the process of forgetting their pre-whited selves they began to lose the old-world values that transcended the industrial workplace and its requirements for things like sobriety, punctuality, and docility. Their resistance to the racialized procedure of turning them into industrial workers is well recorded if not well known. For example. among Philadelphia ironworkers at the rural Hopewell Village forge, absenteeism was rampant: "hunting, harvesting, wedding parties, frequent 'frolicking' that sometimes lasted for days, and uproarious Election and Independence Day celebrations plagued the mill operators." In one more instance, factory workers in Medford, Massachusetts quit *en masse* when they were refused grog privileges.

Such behavior was typical of first-generation factory workers, native or foreign-born. Work that was routinized and performed without regard to the worker's mood, and kept discrete from personal interests, family life, and values was alien to pre-industrial peasants. They thus had to learn to separate work from pleasure, means from ends, life and values from the pay envelope.

To conform, they had to participate in their own cultural demise. This was the ruse of white American privilege: give up everything worthwhile and grab hold of what demeans you.

For relief, these newly whited workers gave birth to America's first national cultural institution: the blackface minstrel show. We should not be surprised by this connection. If European peasants were going to be transformed into white American industrial workers, the pre-modern self with its pre-industrial desires for things like freedom, enjoyment, control over one's life, and meaningful work had to be suppressed and thus had to be thought loathsome.

In the blackface minstrel shows, the forbidden feelings and desires of pre-modern European immigrant workers thus met the image of the African American, who was permanently locked out of modern America as a thing to be despised. The European workers used the Black image to recover feelings that were now "inappropriate" for them as whites but for them as pre-whites had been the hallmarks of their humanity: sensuality, sexuality, free play, whimsy, and more.

The minstrels blackened up and pretended to be who the workers actually were before their whitening procedure began: ethnics rather than whites. The workers simultaneously experience and deprecate their own ethnic feelings.

Dressed as Zip Coon or any other minstrel figure, they could sing their Old World songs to their heart's delight and display how they really felt. They gazed at their feelings of being lost, alone, afraid, and they stared at their regrets, and their profoundly disquieting feeling of being at risk in the country they must now call home. They blackened these feelings—these seditious emotions—in order to express them as Blacks while at the same time disowning them as whites.

Today, the descendants of these immigrants are still pretending to be white and, not surprisingly, often feel like pretenders.

Consider Norman Podhoretz's story. This neoconservative pundit and editor-at-large for *Commentary* magazine from 1960 to 1995 explains in his autobiographical book *Making It* the requirement for his success: faking it. Becoming, in his words, a "facsimile WASP." This kind of assimilation was demanded by the American reality he faced as a lower-class

Jewish student from Brooklyn who wanted the class privileges of gentile American high culture. But learning to be a facsimile WASP also for him meant learning to be ashamed of his parents'—and his own—Eastern European Jewish manners, mannerisms, speech patterns, and lifestyle.

Norman Podhoretz is hardly alone here. Race-passing for European Americans almost always entails the destruction of their ethnic identities. For most European Americans, becoming white designates both a class (upper-middle) and an ethnic group (Anglo-Saxon). And "dropping down" from this ideal means reverting to a non-Anglo, low-class type—the kind vilified in the 19th century popular press as the non-acculturated, lower-class European immigrant "animal."

The progeny of the ethnic whites bleach their hair, straighten their noses, and class-passed by buying and wearing things that hide the truth: they are faking it. They are facsimile WASPs.

I now wonder if most European Americans are "forced" to pass as a class or ethnic type they're not? Is this ethnic shame fueled by a history of racial derision aimed at their European immigrants forbears who wouldn't or couldn't or didn't strive to conform to the racist rules of whiteness? Was this ethnic shaming process transmitted epigenetically as part and parcel of what it means to be white in America today?

Clearly, white feelings of most whites in industrial America had to be fabricated because their original and primary enemy wasn't the Blacks, but the industrial barons: the rich. But what else was going on?

Had I discovered an historical narrative that discloses how racial identity-politics took hold of "white" Americans' ethnic European souls? Did this historical process plunder the emotional integrity of European immigrants and turn the racial identity of blacks into an ongoing horror story of slaughter? African-American culture, so it now seemed to me, was forced to flourish in this context without rendering itself to an ethnic social stigma system that morphed into white racialized abuse against Blacks.

Racism: A Symptom of Intractable Abuse

White rage and white racism, from this threefold historical perspective, are not the *source* of the race problems in America, but rather they are the *symptoms* produced in persons who like Norman Podhoretz are (1) abused by a country they are taught to love, persons who like Lillian Smith; (2) undone by their own self-deprecating white attempts to fit in; (3) demeaned by well-off whites; and (4) trashed by their workplace environments that not only plunder and despoil human souls but also destroy earth's life-giving and sustaining eco-systems. Hurt people hurt things. Injured people injure things.

Desperate people do desperate things.

White privilege in America is a hurting regime. It's a rigged system against whites and most of the rest of us.

Trump did not create this toxic racial identity-politics of white voter anger, fear, rage, desperation and frustration against this regime that brought him to the forefront of American electoral politics in 2016. Nor did he create the anger, fear, rage, desperation and frustration that took to the streets with calls for Black lives to matter in America. These energies were created by the centuries-long process of wealthy whites

exploiting and abusing other whites economically, politically and psychologically, and thus rendering the core identities of whites as selves defined by what they are not: black, brown, etc. White racism, from this perspective, is the desperate attempt to affirm what whites are by demeaning what they aren't. White identities, in sum, are content-less in their own terms except as a system of abuse toward self and others. This is a story about white brokenheartedness in white America.

The Tea Party Religion

Progressives tend to misunderstand the brokenhearted nature of most whites in America. They conflate white supremacist and neo-Nazi displays with the heart and soul of the White Lives Matter movement that swept Trump into power: the brokenhearted and aggrieved feelings of whites abused and exploited by white America.

Conservative Christian worship and values tend to address these underlying feelings.

This attention is the source of the Tea Party's enormous power and success. It pays political attention to broken, angry, enraged, and despairing white hearts as a religious practice because most of its members are Christian conservatives. A fundamental function of their religion, after all, is to attend to and heal broken hearts.

This is why Rick Warren was wrong in 2009, when he declared the Christian right dead. As Frances Fitzgerald demonstrates in her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*: Warren "is correct when noting that the Christian right is no longer a movement, or even an independent entity with sway over evangelicals, as it had been for thirty years," but the Christian right didn't actually die. Fitzgerald concludes that it metastasized inside the body of the Tea Party: "The Pew Research Center analysis showed that Tea Party supporters were disproportionately white evangelical Protestants and that most people who agreed with the Tea Party agreed with the, 'Christian conservative movement,' though the two movements were not coextensive. . . . According to another study, fully three quarters of those who identified with the Tea Party described themselves as 'Christian conservatives.'"

Call these folks "Teavangelicals," says David Brody, the chief political correspondent for CBN news. They are "Bible-believing Christians [who want] a strict interpretation of the Constitution [and] focus on a crucial additional layer: all of these founding documents are rooted in a belief in Almighty God."

Religion, race, and God are thus tightly bound together in Tea Party political tactics. Stephen K. Bannon, Trump's former chief strategist, summarizes what this bond entails: Christian worship, action in the world guided by "Judeo-Christian capitalist values" that create wealth, and a creedal Christian affirmation of the U.S Constitution as a document sanctioned by God (he presented this view in his 2014 speech at the Vatican). Worship is of critical importance here because traditional Christian services are designed to produce emotional uplift in their flock. Music, singing, scriptural readings, and other ritual acts attend to how persons understand and transform the way they feel.

This emotion-based binding principle of traditional Christianity seems to be central to contemporary practice. The title of a 2008 New York Times described the dynamic as "An Evangelical Article of Faith: Bad Times Draw Big Crowds." Traditional church services grab hold of emotions and change them. Two commentators make the point. Monsignor Thomas McSweeney, a columnist for Catholic publications and a religion consultant on MSNBC, offers advice to ministers about handling the distraught emotions of their folk: "Today a pastor must set aside the prescribed liturgical calendar and directly address the anxiety in the air [saying] `I know a lot of you are feeling pain today. . . . And we're going to do something about that.'" Seventh Day Adventist televangelist Don MacKintosh explains why evangelists can do this kind of emotional transformative work so well: "every Christian revival in this country's history has come off a period of rampant greed and fear. That's what we're in today—the time of greed and fear."

So when Bannon calls for a "global Tea Party movement," he is calling for church-based worship service experiences that give rise to what Tea Party members *do* as white Christian crusaders: they act like God's chosen Christian people. Bannon believes the racist elements attracted to this global Christian movement—from without and within—"will all burn away over time and you'll see more of a mainstream center-right populist movement." He can dismisses "racism" as a label that can't "stick" because his ramming rod is Christianity, as he understands it. All the rest, for Bannon, is commentary. Religion, and not race, is the core value here.

Tea Party members, from Bannon's perspective, are thus dead set on destroying non-Christian resistance to the Christian West's master narratives of corporate empire, military might, authoritarian state power, and the status of America and Christians as the people God chose to police the rest of the world.

This white Christian stance was echoed in Trump's characterization of global events when he spoke in Poland, affirming the claims of Law and Justice leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who believes it is the duty of the Polish government and Parliament to protect his country's traditional values: social justice and Christianity. These two values, as he puts it, function as "a cradle of our civilization" (*The New York Times, July 22, 2017*). When Trump uses the word "our" substitute the word "Christians'" to understand his meaning:

> Our own fight for the West does not begin on the battlefield — it begins with our minds, our wills, and our souls. Today, the ties that unite our civilization are no less vital, and demand no

> less defense, than that bare shred of land on which the hope of Poland once totally rested. Our freedom, our civilization, and our survival depend on these bonds of history, culture, and memory.

Bannon and Trump's God is not a white racist deity. Rather, their God is an avenging crusader who has set out to save Western Christian civilization, which happens to be white. This God does not back people because they are white; rather, this God backs Christianity and Western civilization, which just happen to be European and white. Bannon and Trump explain their politics in terms of American Christian values and practices, not in terms of racism.

This use of Christianity is a master narrative with a religious practice that binds human feelings and ideas together as a formative organizing force in America. The Tea Party, from this perspective, is a religious entity, namely, a network of communities that for the most part are bound together by Christian conservative emotional practices such as Christian worship. This network of communities is successful because the communities attend to the aggrieved feelings of whites (which are racial and/or political in origin, for example) religiously. They do not have competition from liberal and progressive mainline churches because these congregations tend to focus on ideas, as if ideas are enough to alter the way persons feel and behave.

White Christians have broken hearts and they go to the places that attend to them.

Learning Lessons

Progressives must learn to view Tea Party tactics as *religious* strategies with *political* goals. Otherwise, Progressives will imitate the resistance tactics of the Tea Party, while ignoring what prompts the Tea Party members to act: religious feelings and religious community. Religious feelings prompt and sustain the tactics and give Tea Party members the vision to know what they are fighting for. Our strategies, however, will not be religious strategies. Rather, they will be spiritual strategies that function similarly to the Tea Party's religious tactics, by attending to aggrieved feelings rather than overlooking them.

The use of Christianity, after all, is a master narrative with a religious practice that binds human feelings and ideas together as a formative political organizing force in white America.

The need for such a master narrative linked to spiritual practices that attend to human feelings is something the left tends to ignore though the Network of Spiritual Progressive and Tikkun have been advocating for such a narrative and have presented its own candidate for such a narrative at www.tikkun.org/covenant.

The Left's racial and political work, however, has not been bound together spiritually or emotionally through collective practices that sustain and rejuvenate our hearts and strengthen our affective community ties as Progressives. We stand strong in the face of pervasive racist protocols against African Americans and other at-risk racial and minority groups, but the system-wide changes across America we strive to create will not happen without a unifying vision and actual spiritual experiences of what we are fighting for. The American Republic now tilts rightward *not* because Christian conservatives make up the majority of the American populace, but because American democracy does not have a religious or spiritual counterbalance. Christian political and social conservatives, in sum, keep winning the American racial and political game because they've got a religious trump card, namely, the strength and staying power of interlinked conservative churches that politically and experientially harness the minds, hearts, and behavior of their white Christian flock in the name of God and Christ.

We need a spiritual vision and spiritual practices that not only tap into our deepest sense of self, but also give us the spiritual grounding for personal and collective emotional stamina to build communities that rebuild America and the world. This spiritual work, however, will not be tied to any particular religion, but instead begins with the kinds of human transformative experiences that different religious traditions and spiritual communities refer to (e.g., a change of heart, a sense of renewal, a sense of awakened compassion) and then explain in their own unique ways. We call upon people not to create creeds, but to create inspiring experiences that open minds and hearts to deeds of lovingkindness, which build communities that rebuild the world. In our communities, we can create these uplifting experiences. What these kinds of experiences are called, however, will depend upon whether the person is an atheist, theist, Buddhist, Christian, observant Jew, Muslim, secular humanist, etc. Our unity will flow not from what we say, but from the ways we have felt held and cherished within our community.

Thus our seemingly impossible challenge: Progressives

need a racial and political strategy bound together by spiritual practices that can be affirmed by religious and nonreligious persons, by theists and atheists, by secular humanists and born again evangelical Christians, and by persons who are members of diverse faith traditions. The good news here is that we don't have to build a new racial identity-politics protocol from scratch. There's precedent.

The Radical Protocol of Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr., in his April 4,1967 speech at Riverside Church in Upper Manhattan, urged Americans to move beyond a singular Civil Rights focus on racism.

The new perspective, he argued, must be trifocal: "When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

This speech was King's eulogy for white racism as a standalone problem. To this end, King promised to "never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government."

The context for King's new trifocal agenda against racism, extreme materialism, and militarism was America's Vietnam War. In his speech, King compared America's actions in the war with those of the Nazis in World War II. What do Vietnam peasants think of us, King demanded, "as we test our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicines and new tortures in the concentration campus of Europe?" King's words angered many.

Countless white and Black leaders, pundits, and journalists backed away from his new trifocal framework for Civil Right work, as David J. Garrow made so very clear in his April 4, 2017 *New York Times'* Op-Ed essay on King's speech:

> The Riverside crowd gave Dr. King a standing ovation, but editorial denunciations were swift and harsh. The Washington Post criticized his "sheer inventions of unsupported fantasy" and lamented how "many who have listened to him with respect will never again accord him the same confidence."
>
> The New York Times called Dr. King's remarks both "facile" and "slander." It said the moral issues in Vietnam "are less clear-cut than he suggests" and warned that "to divert the energies of the civil rights movement to the Vietnam issue is both wasteful and self-defeating," given how the movement needed to confront what the paper called "the intractability of slum mores and habits."
>
> Even some of the black press lined up against him: The Pittsburgh Courier warned that Dr. King was "tragically misleading" African-Americans on issues that were "too complex for simple debate."

King's agenda is still a "new" call for us today because it was not implemented in paradigm-shifting ways. This new agenda is now up to us.

Historical knowledge of white-on-white assaults plus King's Riverside agenda can shape our narratives of "white privilege" today only if we acknowledge that telling all whites that they are privileged continues the racial assaults against blacks and whites intended to destroy all of us. Rather than end the racial abuse against us, we perpetuate it.

The notion that white people are privileged because they don't get assaulted by racist police is a very distorted notion of privilege. It's akin to telling persons in the hospital after a car wreck that they are privileged because they weren't killed in the wreck. Or it's like telling all right-handed people that they have privilege as they watch the amputation of all left-handed people. Freedom from torture, abuse, and degradation is not a privilege. It's a human right.

The history of white privilege in America, in sum, is a history of human rights abuse against blacks and whites. Most whites and blacks in America feel unseen, unheard, and disrespected for good reason. The racial system in America was designed for this purpose: divide and conquer.

The implementation of King's protocol thus calls for the union of the Black Lives Matter Movement with the White Lives Matter Movement for whites who do not define and celebrate themselves as white supremacists and white racists—and who voted for Trump.

A focal point here has to be attention to emotional integrity, which has been devastated by the ongoing racial assaults on America's emotional character. Spiritual practices, after all, are intended not just to open minds, but also to heal and transform broken hearts. White racism in America is a toxic emotional system that compromises the hearts and befuddles the minds of persons who have little or nothing except their "white privilege," which is a deadly ruse. So yesterday, so, too, today.

How do we heal our racially-demeaned souls and save our economically devastated lives?

One place is http://revthandeka.org/love-beyond-belief-thandeka.html where you will find an invitationto create a new community practice that advances our spiritual Progressive movement to build communities that rebuild America and the world. ■

THANDEKA IS the author of 'Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God', will be the Visiting Professor of Affective Theological Studies at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton, Massachusetts, this spring.

From Junkyard to Garden

No Mud, No Lotus — Thich Nhat Hanh

PHOENIX SOLEIL

In 2006, I was working as an IT consultant in New York City. One spring day, I was stressed out, as usual, running up the subway steps and rushing to Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. When I arrived, my client greeted me warmly and asked me if we could meet in her garden.

The lush, sunshine-filled garden was an unexpected enclave of peace and beauty among the tall brick buildings. I could still hear street traffic, but the cars felt far away. My body relaxed as we sat at a table in the center of the garden. Bright orange climbers ascended the side of the oasis. Deep purple-veined petals spotted the far wall with a few bright green bushes grouped to the right.

I told her that she was so lucky to have this sanctuary.

"Yes, but it wasn't like this when I arrived," the young woman replied. "It was a dump. It smelled; it was horrible. You have no idea!"

She proudly went on to describe how she had inherited a lot filled with fragments of furniture, bicycle parts, trash, and glass. Nearly every weekend for a year, her friends helped her remove the junk. Then they brought in soil, worked the ground, tilled the land, fertilized it, and finally planted seeds.

Although I never saw the Chelsea gardener again, I have recalled her plot many times. The evidence of transformation touched me, how she changed something terrible into something beautiful.

Her lush garden caused me to ponder: What do I want to create from the landfill my family and society piled into my ground? I remembered growing up in a home where my mom hurled insults at me every day, where shame, fear, and loneliness jabbed at me constantly. I did not want to be present. To escape, I lost myself in television, daydreams, and books. As I got older, I took long walks along the quietest most tree-lined streets in East Flatbush, Brooklyn — roaming down Clarendon, Courtelyou Road, or Avenue D to the local library, the West Indian ice cream shop, or Mostly Books shop. Even though my mind was sometimes flooded with cascades of internalized "I hate you's" and other negative self-judgments, I also found peace gazing at sun-filled branches with the feel of my foot against the sidewalk or the occasional leaf in my hand amid the silence of a quiet beautiful street. I had begun to build my internal garden through solitude, relating to the "now;" a foreshadowing of what I woud later develop more in my meditation practices.

Meditation has become one of my tools for clearing and cultivating my internal "garden" and, thus, my piece of mind. It is so hard to explain why I love meditation because sometimes it feels like torture. When a knotted memory brought to the surface painful emotions, thoughts and sensations, I became certain that I would die if they didn't go away. But instead of running, I'd practice sitting or walking meditation, learning how to detangle myself. Joseph Goldstein, one of my teachers, has a saying: "The thought of your mother is not your mother. The thought of your mother is just a thought."

At times, I felt so captive to my inner critic, my mom's doppelganger, that it pervaded my being. I craved an exorcism. I was caved in around the painful moments from my memory as if I had a magnifying glass that only saw the pain between my mom and me. Meditation helped me develop equanimity with my story and its constituent thoughts. My teacher Andrea Fella explained to me during a three month retreat that difficult emotions and sensations often have many layers like an onion; as we explore the rings with sensitivity, we can come to understand how our reactivity manifests as fear, aversion, and hate; and then let go. I wanted to overcome the pain as expeditiously as I could but she warned that forcing myself to the center of the pain is violence to myself. Instead, she suggested that we open ourselves with kindness to each layer that we are experiencing in the moment. Armed with this and other guidance, I was able to navigate the whirlwinds of intensity, in which I could lose myself and through

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my ignorance, worsen. I was learning how to care for and compost my inheritance.

During one three-month meditation retreat, I came to feel in my bones, rather than just intellectually, how my family's cruelty toward me was impersonal. It had developed as a defense that was passed down through generations, fashioned in brutal slave plantations that later found its home in the East Flatbush, Brooklyn apartment of my childhood. My mom's abuse and her gifts were a legacy from the suffering and strength of both French and West African ancestors, as were the genes that determined her skin color.

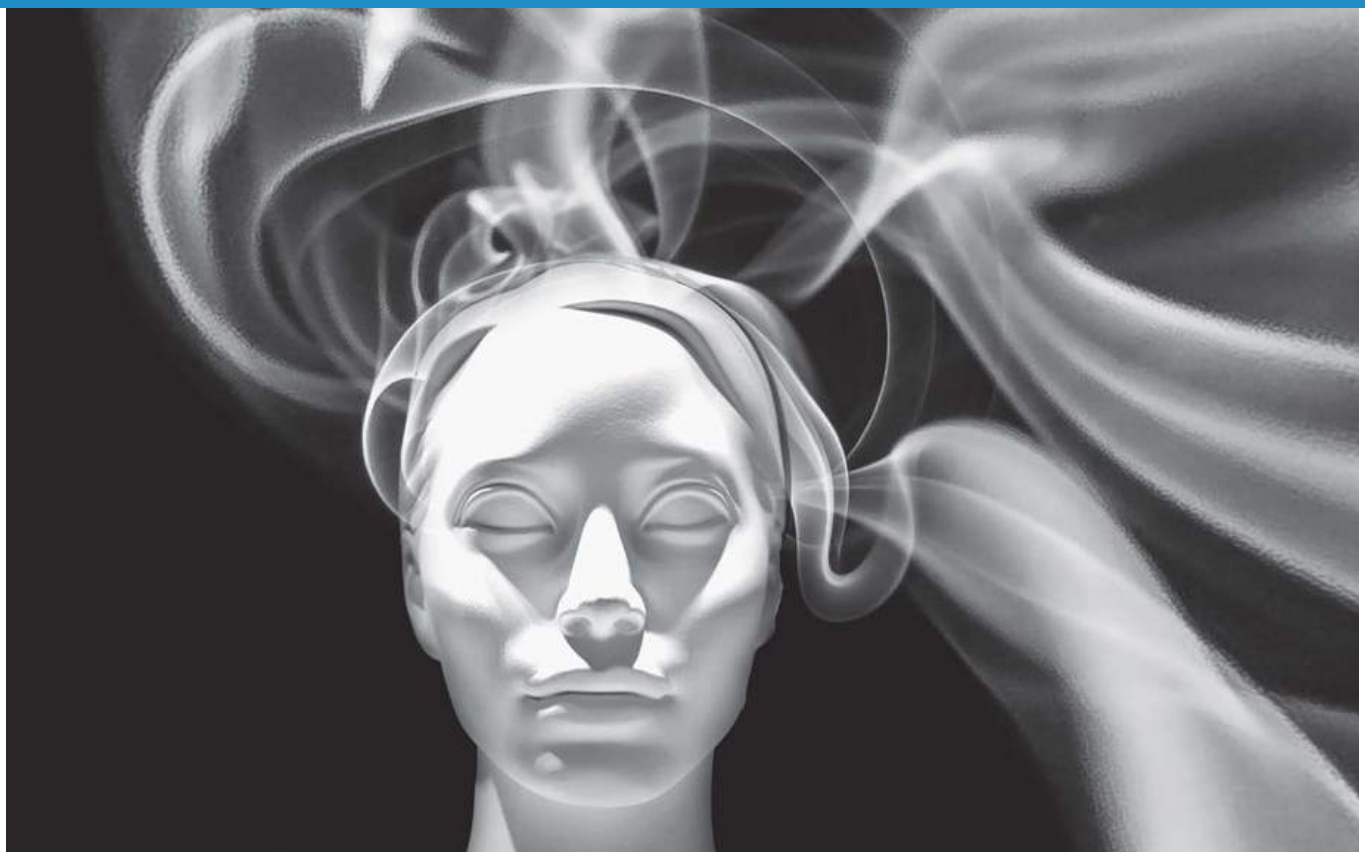
From the vantage point of equanimity I can see how the causes and conditions of the past shape the present. Looking back to the Chelsea dumping ground, I can imagine the human hands involved with every discarded item that had been there. Who were the beings with their unique joys and sorrows who had touched and abandoned the dirty, torn up objects there? How are the histories of that soiled mattress, torn up table, and rusty bicycle entwined with forces of industry, economy, colonization, politics, wars, labor, and technology? They were affected by the deeds of people, some of whom never saw that dumping ground or the garden it became. Within the garden of my life, I cannot know all the wars, loves, sacrifices, mercies, gifts, humiliations, duties, hates, or hopes nor the West Africans, Taino Indians and Europeans people who impacted my hereditary line. Yet their existence and stories add up to me through some strange equation known only to the universe.

In Buddhist communities it often felt that my stories of struggle, identity, intergenerational trauma were considered irrelevant. The concept of non-self is one of the fundamental truths in Buddhism and it helped me heal because it gave me tools to help me disidentify myself from my "junk." One way to understand it is that we're not permanent, fixed entities but are more like rivers with many different flowing parts that include all of the senses, including thoughts and emotions but none of which makes up a fixed and solid self. However, it can be used as a rationale for devaluing history, background and dismissing concepts of cultural identity, yet there other ways of understanding non-self. Rather than describing not-self as what you aren't, Thich Nhat Hanh explains you are everything — the rain, the sunshine, the earth, your ancestors, place etc. the combination of these components changing constantly. In his essay, "Working for Peace," Thich Nhat Hanh said of himself that had he grown up with a different set of conditions he would have been a pirate, rapist etc. In this way, he is seeing himself as a result of all of his past.

I am the sunshine, the rain, the earth and the fire, I am my retreats, I am my 5th grade mentor, the elementary school bullies, my queerness, my Haitian background, the daily sneer of my mother, the kindness of my aunt, the consistent meals, the life changing college experience, and I am the years of being with my pain, and learning new ways to hold it. One can use the understanding of not-self to hold all experience with equanimity and appreciation of the paradoxes rather than getting rid of or dismissing aspects of it. If you don't know about my junkyard then you won't appreciate the depth of the flowers that now grow there. When you look at a person, you are not just seeing a person but a process.

When my teacher Andrea Fella advised me not to go to the heart of the pain, she was offering me an important perspective shift that went along with the healthier alternative. The healing often requires a patient, spacious, attentive, compassionate presence that is so at odds with the fast-paced world where we default to destruction or throwing things out. Our world is full of landfills literally and figuratively. Humans are poisoning and destroying this planet. We lock people up and throw away the key. We use war and violence to kill our enemies. Even in spiritual communities, we try to get rid of what is uncomfortable. If POC (people of color) members are "creating pain" by their expressions of differences or needs, like for example asking for POC only spaces to practice, then the solution is often to get rid of people, or use a more nuanced strategy of "let's get rid of the differences" as if it can be carved out of a being or repressed out of existence. Getting rid of what is painful seems an obvious solution but it is shortsighted. We lose out on the gifts of the experience, the flowers that inhabit all people and the lessons and intimacy that can come from healing from conflict. It's easy to say this but, when you are the one in pain, it's difficult to embody these values. It's even harder when the harm was intentional and violent. What happened to a dharma friend of mine illustrates this point graphically.

It's before the start of a retreat and I'm sitting in a dining hall at a meditation center. I'm surprised to see my dharma friend wander in with a broken arm and a limp. She explains that she had been robbed and wounded by a teen. Knowing I



teach at a juvenile hall, she looks at me with a pained expression and says, "I guess there are a lot of people with a lot pain in the world." And then plaintively, "It's hard to imagine what would lead someone to act this way."

Faces and stories of the teens who sat across from me arose in my mind. Could it have been one of them? Some of them stole to feed families or to pay for medical care for loved ones; some were homeless or in foster care. These are the easiest to feel compassion for. Then there are the ones who laughed about some crime they committed and said they didn't care.

After working so hard to heal myself, it was natural that when I found some peace, I wanted to share it with others. My intention is to support them building their garden. When their brown, black, and blue eyes are bright, teary, or fearful, it's easier to imagine the rich soil of a garden lays underneath. When their face forms a glare, stone faced, or vacant look it obscures my vision. I find myself being judgmental. It seems their decision-making is so dysfunctional. Then I can look inside myself. I myself was never able to articulate to my teachers the mess of confusion and shame inside. I was so lost. Take a simple homework assignment from school for example. I could have completed the work had I begun; but I myself didn't understand why sometimes I couldn't just make myself do it. But now that I have an understanding of trauma and human psychology, I understand that with the abuse I had experienced, there were days where even focusing on the words required a herculean effort. The amygdala part of the brain that takes over when we sense that we are endangered, was activated and it was difficult to think because all this pain was streaming through my mind. In my environment, I was walking on eggshells, never knowing when the next attack would come. Without TV and daydreaming, there was a void and suffering that was so scary to face.

I remember how life was so empty; where every day was so full of meaningless abuse that I didn't care, and when I did care I tried to find a way to stop caring because it hurt so much. I understand the mind-numbing emotional pain and the void that drives you to do crazy things just to relieve the emptiness inside. I was unknowingly picking the suffering that creates more suffering. And, even though I am frustrated with how difficult it is to engage with some of these young people, I remember when a conversation was the most dangerous thing there was for me because that was how people in my childhood found ways to hurt me even more. I'd say to myself, "Don't trust anyone," and it seemed like life punished me every time I broke that rule. When you're young, adults tell you to focus on your future, work hard so that you can make something of yourself. However, there was so little pleasure in my life that the idea of happy adulthood seemed unrealistic. When I talk with some of the young people I work with, the only time they say they feel happy is when they're on drugs. How realistic is it to tell them to get rid of the only source of pleasure or soothing?

In the room where I teach mindfulness at the juvenile hall, there is a wall papered with inspirational pictures of people who have overcome great adversity and gone on to make important contributions to society. I remember how adults would share those stories. I received the lesson that somehow

I shouldn't be affected by my environment . I should be able to overcome it like Mandela, like Lincoln, or like Martin Luther King. I decided I had only myself to blame, which sunk me into more shame. Somehow, most days I tore myself away from TV and daydreaming (little moments of peace in a warzone) and got it together do the homework assignment.

Many people, with the intention of relieving my suffering, told me things like, "Ignore what your mom said," "She didn't mean it, or, "You're a wonderful person." They thought that if I could I just believe them, my suffering would transform into something more self-loving. But that kind of thinking comes from the intellect, to which we sometimes give way too much credit. It wasn't one exchange that had led me to carry an inner landscape full of negative influences but rather an extensive progression of repetition. The gradual, decades-long process of soaking in my mom's words, the hatred of bullies at school, society's racism, sexism, and homophobia led to unconscious osmosis and the build up of defenses.

From a neuroscience perspective, my capacity for inner peace and my ability to see my mom and those memories in context was because I had healed enough to be able to access more of my prefrontal cortex: the part of brain associated with reason, logic, empathy goals and inhibiting impulses. When one is deeply traumatized, access to will power and the bigger picture may be impossible. It is possible to get unstuck from the amygdala cycle of fight-flight-freeze but it requires skill, wisdom and time.

The causes and conditions that made healing possible included long stretches of time to myself. Proportionally so few people on this earth have this opportunity. Retreats were ideal because I had minimal responsibilities to others and could give my full attention to tending my inner garden. Through my many healing modalities I was able to connect to a lineage of people who had explored their inner terrain and could offer wisdom and tools that work, rather than judgmental, punitive, and desolate environment such as my homelife or a prison. Despite the difficulties of my upbringing, I had received enough nurturing from my family and community that I was developmentally able to take in support later.

I feel uncomfortable urging these young people, or anyone affected by a lot of trauma to somehow "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." I am so aware that my will was holding onto a thin edge of a cliff - with an abyss below me. Most of the teens in juvenile hall have lives that are so much harder than mine, and I barely survived what I went through. It feels good that instead of rebuking the young people with "rise above the rhetoric," I'm actually giving them the skills to help them access their prefrontal lobe and strengths. These are practices that may soothe their pain inside so that it becomes possible for them to focus for a while to finish their homework or write a resume. However, they need many more tools and resources to outweigh the challenges and negative influences on their lives.

I wish I could go back in time to tell my child and teen self that my life was meaningful even in those moments of intense suffering—that those experiences would help me develop embodied compassion, depth and faith. Those insights came about because all people have an aspect of themselves that is bigger than their memories, sensations, or thoughts that rise and fall. Through accessing that aspect, I had a bird's eye view that exposed the causes and conditions like currents in the ocean of history—currents that carried the

impersonal hate to our living room, currents that long ago transported ships holding enslaved Africans. "It's not personal," is a popular adage that I found useless when I was snarled up in my past. However, the deep comfort of that saying arose organically as compassion and wisdom composted my pain. And now, my personal unique experience of my composted pain is what I offer the world. My memories are still there, it's my relationship to them that turns them from trash to flowers.

Every day my goal is to take my flowers out into the world of brown, black, and blue eyes that sometimes are shining at me, and sometimes glaring at me. Words like this about cycles of violence, paradox and transformation, rose in my heart to share with my dharma friend, but I didn't speak them. When I felt into her brown eyes I saw that she needed to be with her broken arm, limp and heart. We can't be with someone else's pain until we have healed our own pain. How do we connect to someone's humanity when we are receiving the full force of their hatred and urge to harm? That glare has shown itself in childhood bullies, juvenile youth, activists talking about the enemy, politicians, everyday road rage and the pictures of the Charlotteville supremacists. And I saw that expression on my mom's face almost every day of my childhood. Trying to reconcile that experience with a bigger knowing has been the struggle of my lifetime. I have felt that rageful force in myself when I've tried to gather all my energy against someone I experienced as trying destroying me. I think the work of healing is to heal enough that we can do the spiritual work of embodying our values into our daily lives. Saying that I want to live from love sounds trite, yet the daily experience is courageous. When I see that day to day struggle as a mythic hero's journey, rather than a distraction from a spirituality defined only as blissful moments of universal connection my path is easier.

So this kid that grew up wanting to become hard, tough and not caring is now struggling to value her softness everyday and to find the places where love can be received and support the cultivation of other gardens.

A few weeks ago, at a juvenile hall, where I teach mindfulness to youth, we were sitting in a circle, taking turns offering our "personal weather report"—using the weather as a metaphor for how we feel inside. There were five of us in a classroom, with the only window looking out into a bigger room with a guard always looking in. We sat in a circle made of desks welded to chairs. What came to me as a metaphor was the picture of a cyclone and its super fast forceful winds tearing up everything in sight. Growing up, I felt brutally and carelessly torn apart by powerful forces, and inconsequential as a paper bag. There are times when I continue to experience life that way, but what drew me to the metaphor was the description of the eye of the storm. At the center, it's very quiet and still. I recognize stillness inside of me experiencing, witnessing, centered and free. It was always there, even when I was walking on Clarendon, Courtelyou Road, or Avenue D. ■

PHOENIX SOLEIL is a collaborative trainer with Bay Area Nonviolent Communication (NVC), and has a passion for developing people, teams, and organizations.

Decolonizing Jewishness

On Jewish Liberation in the 21st Century

BENJAMIN STEINHARDT CASE

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.
But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."
—Aboriginal activist saying, attributed to Lilla Watson

Seven decades on, Israel is geopolitically embattled and the Jewish community is increasingly polarized around the issue of occupation. The Occupation—i.e. Israeli military control over the Palestinian West Bank and the borders of Gaza Strip—is five decades old. Entire generations of people have grown up without political or civil rights under the military jurisdiction of a "democratic" state, and some trace the problem to the very existence of the State of Israel. How did the Jewish struggle to free ourselves from antisemitism lead to this point?

Following the trauma of centuries of persecution culminating in the *Shoah* (Holocaust), many Jews looked to the Political Zionist goal of founding a Jewish State of Israel, in what was then British Palestine, as a guiding star in a time of profound darkness. Defending their new state against Arab Palestinians and neighboring countries in the 1948 "War of Independence," refered to as the *Nakba* (Catastrophe) by Palestinians, gave the new Israelis a powerful founding myth after millennia of diasporic marginalization. To many Zionists, the State of Israel represented a historic milestone in the effort to combat antisemitism, having carved out territory to defend the Jewish people from a world that had rejected and nearly annihilated them. For many Palestinians and others, Zionism itself represents a new front in the historic expansion of European colonialism, with the 1967 occupation, or the State of Israel itself, representing a crime against humanity. Israel, the Jewish Question, and the occupation continue to play a central role in global political

Daniel Kelin and Ren Finkel

discussions to a degree that is vastly disproportionate to the amount of people directly affected by them, placing these issues, as Hannah Arendt once put it, at the "storm center" of national and geopolitical contention.

Meanwhile, amid the impending rise of fascism with the election of Donald Trump in the US and popular surges of far right parties in Europe and elsewhere, antisemitism has reemerged as a legitimate, if uncomfortable, issue for social movements. This subject has led to renewed discussions and arguments on the Left over the scope, nature, and reality of antisemitism, as well as the role Jews play in the dominant identity politics framework of movement communities.

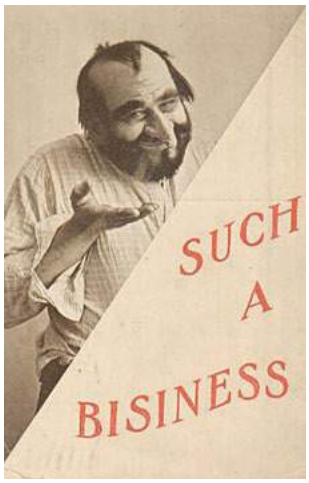
According to anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon, there are two main characters in the process of global imperialism: colonizer and colonized. Many around the world have resonated with Fanon's analysis of colonial power dynamics and have drawn from his framework to pursue *decolonization*: the process of destroying colonial power structures and remaking oneself in a liberated image. Considering the Occupation as it stands, it is not difficult to view the current state of the region through an anti-colonial lens with Israeli Jews playing the part of the (settler) colonizers and Palestinians playing the part of the colonized (e.g., Pappé 2015, Said 1979). In this framework, Jewish activists who oppose the Occupation play the part of "ally," or conscientiously subordinate supporter, to Palestinian activists (and others) who are fighting for their liberation.

However, the Zionist project itself can also be understood as an attempt at Jewish decolonization. Viewing Zionism and its subjects through this lens can potentially clarify a great deal about contemporary Jewish identities, and perhaps open a new path forward in one of the defining conflicts of our time. Ultimately, this approach helps us to understand, as I argue, that the Zionist project creates a social condition in which the liberation of the Jewish people has become fundamentally intertwined with the liberation of the Palestinian people.

The Complex Jewish Position

To Fanon, there is the colonizer and there is the colonized; there is white and Black. While he explores some complexity in the psychology and social positions of the two, to Fanon the colonizer (white) and the colonized (Black) remain the primary categories of analysis. The forms of racism that are attached to this colonialism place the target group at the bottom of a racial hierarchy for the purposes of the social, political, economic, and interpersonal power of those at the top. Considering the influence of Fanon on Black Liberation and other antiracist thinkers in the US, it is no coincidence that the contemporary framework for understanding race and privilege in this country follows the same logic. In the "identity politics" paradigm of today's social movements, the characters in the dichotomous picture are white people and "people of color" (POC). This picture can leave out a great deal of nuance, but nevertheless it captures a wide view of the politicized racial hierarchy. Importantly, it focuses on the foundational antagonisms of the racially constructed system by identifying whiteness as applying to the category of people who broadly benefit from the existence of the system itself.

Fanon's work is foundational for anti-colonial thought, so it is a sensible place to begin an analysis of decolonization for any group. At the same time, Fanon's position on antisemitism is not without controversy. Notably, afro-pessimist theorist Frank Wilderson claims that Fanon characterizes the Holocaust as merely one of many "little family quarrels" between groups of white Europeans, using this phrase to explain the incomparability between white-white antisemitism and the white-Black legacy of slavery. However, Wilderson mischaracterizes Fanon's view, possibly due to an early English edition's translation. In fact, Fanon writes: "*Bien entendu, les Juifs sont brimés, que dis-je, ils sont pourchassés, exterminés, enfournés, mais ce sont là petites histoires familiales*," which translates literally as: "Of course, Jews are bullied, nay, they are hunted, exterminated, put in the oven, but these are small family stories," or in another translation, "minor episodes in the family history." This difference in wording is subtle but not at all trivial, and it gets at a crucial point for understanding Jewish subjectivity from the perspective of decolonization. The "family stories" Fanon refers to are the Jewish family's stories of oppression, not intra-white family quarrels between white non-Jews and white Jews. In other words, Fanon is saying that the Jews have suffered greatly under the antisemitic



New York Public Library

system, but the violences done to them have been episodic and do not subsume their entire history. The Jewish family has stories of oppression, of death, but they also have stories of thriving, of living. Fanon is contrasting this with the African experience of European colonization and slavery, which he understood as subsuming the category of Black within a totalizing history of oppression.

For Fanon, Jews are undoubtedly among the ranks of the oppressed, and in his 1952 work *Black Skin, White Masks*, he makes great use of the Jewish experience to develop his understanding of the colonized Black condition.[1] Black people and Jews pose different existential threats to whiteness, but their connection is that both are perceived as having the potential to overwhelm and appropriate white society. At the same time, the two are not equivalent. Fanon also describes Jews as white, or at least as white-passing in today's terms, and articulates important differences between anti-Jewish and anti-Black racisms. Crucially, to Fanon, the Black experience of oppression is *overdetermined* by corporeality, by skin color. Jews, on the other hand, become oppressed when they are discovered to be Jews, and since there is no definite way of identifying Jews in the racial sense, their oppression is contingent on their detection as Jews.

Prodigious attempts have been made on the part of antisemites to develop a system for physically identifying Jews at first sight, but apart from "some debatable features," Fanon is correct that Jews often pass as not-Jews. It was this physical ambiguity that led to the infamous yellow patches the Nazi government mandated for Jews' clothing. This element of Jewish racial covertness, which is the case for Jews of all colors, is critical to understanding antisemitism and how it has shaped Jewish identity. We might say that, from the perspective of the antisemite, Jews are *underdetermined* by corporeality because, in a sense, Jews only become Jews when they are discovered to be so. That which makes us objectionable resides within and is not always immediately visible from without. In other words, if the essence of Black oppression is embedded in visibility, the essence of Jewish oppression revolves around invisibility.

Finally, while Fanon explores the real historical and experiential differences between constructed social categories of Jew and Black (and Arab), he also notes that the separation and hierarchicalization of these categories is itself a tool of the oppressor. If each group of people views the others as the primary or most immediate threat, then the oppressor class, being insulated from attack and scrutiny, is able to maintain not only material but also hegemonic power.

To sum up, from Fanon we learn that: (1) Jews are an oppressed people; (2) they are oppressed by the same colonial forces that dominate other oppressed peoples; (3) Jews as a group are in many ways closer to the colonizer than other oppressed peoples are; (4) that proximity is itself used by the oppressor to maintain the colonial situation. Fanon gives us a great deal to work with, but despite his extensive discussion of Jews as a comparison group, his final analysis leaves us out. Ultimately, Fanon constructs a dichotomous world — colonizer and colonized — in which it is unclear where the complexities he discusses around the Jewish position fit in. If Jews are sometimes in one category and sometimes in the other, or if Jews simultaneously experience elements of both, then how can Jews pursue decolonization?

Antisemitic riots portrayed in response to the Dreyfus affair portrayed in *Le Petit Parisien*.

Le Petit Parisien

Systemic Antisemitism

Like anti-Black racism, antisemitism can be treated as a *systemic racism*. According to race theorist Joe Feagin, systemic racism can be understood as: "an organized societal whole with many interconnected elements" involving "long term relationships of racialized groups with substantially different material and political-economic interests," based in "the material reality and social history" of colonial societies. To say that antisemitism is a systemic racism is not to discount the ethnic and racial differences between Jews, nor is it to ignore the system's religious origins. It allows us to analyze anti-Jewish oppression beyond individual prejudice and understand it in terms of historical legacies of differential treatment that are imbedded in institutions and in our experiences of the world.

As a system, antisemitism has developed differently from other racisms. It should not be surprising therefore that attempts to equate antisemitism to anti-Black racism feel uncomfortable and forced. The efforts of liberal Jewish pluralists at analogizing the Black experience in the US with the Jewish experience in Europe are at best misguided and ahistorical. Discussing antisemitism in the terms of other racisms is awkward precisely because it does not fit well within the dichotomous construction those forms of racism are based upon.

The roots of antisemitism date to antiquity, but its contemporary terms first emerged with the racialization of Jews in

An early 20th century depiction of the Russian Jewry's circumstances.

Library of Congress

15th century Spain and were popularized in reference to the 19th century European "Aryan myth," a form of racism in which humans are divided into a biologically and culturally determined racial hierarchy. Antisemitism, or anti-Jewish oppression, existed in other regions as well, and although there were at times similarities to European antisemitism, the Jewish experiences in these regions cannot be rolled into a single, universal account. However, the racialization of Jews and the creation of the modern discourse of antisemitism occurred in the context of the production of whiteness in Europe. Without ignoring the historical and contemporary experiences of Jews of varying identities, the European system of racialized antisemitism is the dominant model, having been exported to the world via European colonialism. Though it might seem paradoxical from the perspective of decolonization, it is therefore necessary to begin by unpacking European antisemitism and its impact on Jewish identities.

In order to understand the points inherited from Fanon, there are two significant particularities to antisemitism as a system that we must confront. First, the target group is not placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy but in the middle. Second, outbreaks of widespread violent oppression are episodic and cyclical as opposed to constant.

The first particularity of antisemitism has to do with social position. Antisemitic depictions of Jews have often projected their image in the vilest forms, but systemically it has also afforded many Jews considerable social and economic privilege. While most forms of racism place the target group at the bottom of the hierarchy, antisemitism locates its target in the middle. Jews have often played the social role of merchants, traders, and moneylenders, and at times (such as today's US) Jews have been admitted into the higher ranks of professional classes and social *milieus*. Interpreted through the lens of other forms of racism, this privilege appears to be connected to a linear reduction of anti-Jewish oppression and integration of Jews into whiteness. Put simply, the popular notion is that Jews were once oppressed, but now they are not. In the common identity politics of the Left today, this privilege is evidence of Jews' complicity with whiteness and with systemic racism, prompting the role of white allyship with other oppressed racial and ethnic groups. However, historically this privilege has been a double-edged sword, and in fact has been a fundamental aspect of the antisemitic system. As Fanon reminds us, the Jewish threat is a stealthy, intellectual one, so the presence of Jews in prestigious fields, while economically and socially advantageous for a time, also plays directly into the narrative that Jews are covertly dangerous.

The middle position alienates Jews as a group from other groups above and below them in the social hierarchy. From above, they are viewed with suspicion, while from below they often appear as the most visible oppressor — for example as landlords, store owners, and bosses in low-income communities. Georg Simmel famously described the status of Jews as that of the perpetual Stranger. Kafka articulated the

condition as being told: "You are not from the castle, you are not from the village, you are nothing." The presence of this neither-nor population helped to build and maintain modern state structures, and in Europe, white supremacy, essentially by acting as a cushion in between elites and the most acutely oppressed. As Aurora Levins-Morales puts it:

> The whole point of anti-Semitism has been to create a vulnerable buffer group that can be bribed with some privileges into managing the exploitation of others, and then, when social pressure builds, be blamed and scapegoated, distracting those at the bottom from the crimes of those at the top. Peasants who go on pogrom against their Jewish neighbors won't make it to the nobleman's palace to burn him out and seize the fields.

As an identifiable group, Jews accrue limited but real privileges from above, resentment from below, and mistrust from both, until a moment of crisis in which an outburst of violence opens a pressure relief valve for popular discontent over economic or political conditions, directed at the Stranger.

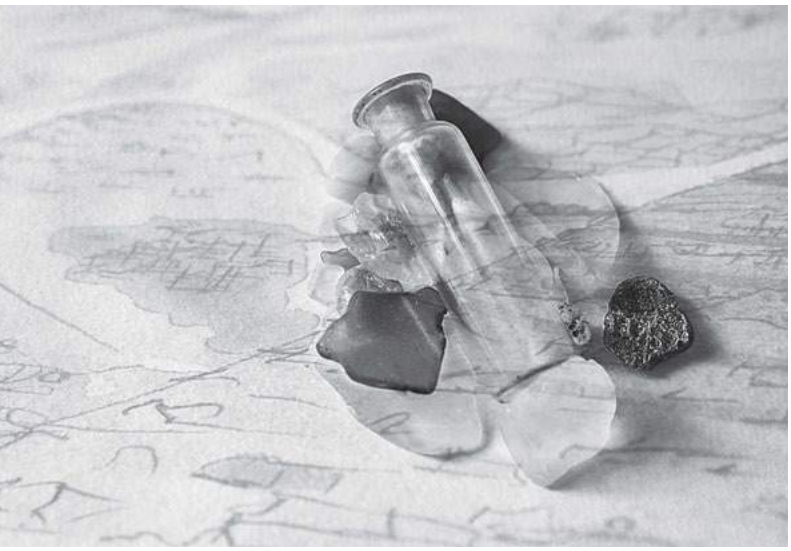
The second particularity of antisemitism has to do with its cyclical, episodic nature. In between moments of acute violence, such as pogroms, or most iconically, the Holocaust, there are lengthy periods of calm. The late 1800s were a time of integratedness and relative prosperity for Jews in Western and Central Europe, with many feeling as though antisemitism was a thing of the past. Nineteenth century anarchist Bernard Lazare's personal transformation on the matter of antisemitism is instructive. Lazare was the first Jew to pen a comprehensive sociological volume on antisemitism, published in 1894. He had been convinced that the persistence of antisemitism was at least in part the fault of Jews themselves, and that it would inevitably disappear as both Jews and non-Jews moved away from the prejudices of the past into a revolutionary future. This position is startlingly similar to that of many Jewish activists on the left today. The Dreyfus Affair of 1894—the scandal in France surrounding the arrest and (false) conviction of a Jewish military officer who had been accused of collaborating with the Germans—drastically changed Lazare's mind. After witnessing the widespread surge of public and state-sanctioned mistrust and hatred of Jews that followed Dreyfus' arrest, Lazare committed himself to the fight against antisemitism. Lazare's earlier position was partially attributable to the era in which he wrote. Jews in Western Europe appeared to be assimilating into white Christian and even bourgeois society. Anti-Jewish prejudices persisted, but the violence that had been attached to it in previous eras had all but disappeared, making these sentiments appear as a vestige of a bygone age that would surely fade into nonexistence. In Arendt's words:

> After thirty years of a mild, purely social form of anti-Jewish discrimination, it had become a little difficult to remember that the cry, 'Death to the Jews' had echoed through the length and breadth of a modern state once before, when its domestic policy was crystalized in the issue of antisemitism.

The crystallization of domestic policy around antisemitism that Arendt refers to is not random; it has been central to the development and enactment of systems of oppression by diverting the anger of a portion of the aggrieved population away from the source of their economic and political grievances. Though we have been in a lull of pogromic antisemitic violence since the Holocaust, this cycle may be becoming ominously visible again with the prospect of rising fascism, first in Europe and now in the U.S. Karen Brodkin's reversal on Jews having become "white folks" following Donald Trump's election is a poignant contemporary demonstration of what Lazare may have gone through. Brodkin's influential 1998 work *How Jews Became White Folks* articulated the now popular position that Jews had moved from an oppressed people to a white people, albeit with some differences, through a process of assimilation in the US. But the evident widespread resonance of violent antisemitic tropes in the Trump campaign along with attacks on Jewish sites and persons prompted the question: can Jews become nonwhite again? According to Brodkin, in 2016, this question itself was the answer—whiteness is by definition non-revocable. Part of its constructed social power is protection from such insecurity. In other words, if Jews' whiteness can be abruptly revoked, then they were never really white in the first place. Of course, even when speaking of Ashkenazi Jews, the question should never have been "are Jews *actually* white?" because whiteness is an invented and socially constructed category. The question should have been: in what ways do some Jews experience and enact whiteness in a context where these Jews have racial privilege and also where the Jewish appearance as white appears to be part of the antisemitic system?

In times of relative peace, the community feels the ever-increasing need to recover from the previous violent episode

George W. Bush with Milton Friedman, a Right-wing Jewish economist whose theories served the interests of the powerful.



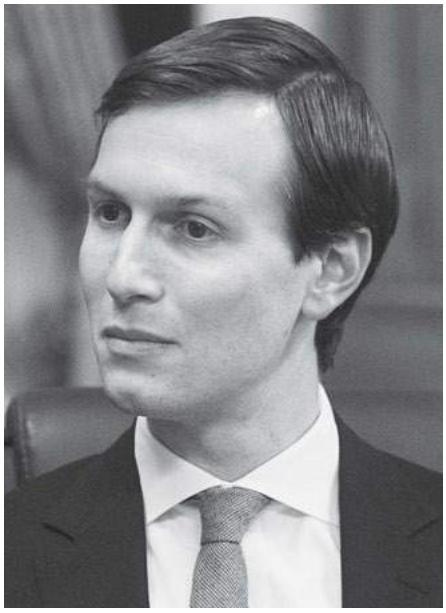
and protect itself. During periods of calm, many educated and upwardly mobile Jews have doubled down on their relative privilege and engaged in a form of "respectability politics." Of course, most Jews did not have the ability to pursue elite social status, but those who did often felt as though doing so protected the community at large (or at least they could justify their pursuit of wealth and prestige through that logic). But the anti-Jewish sentiment never entirely dissipated and Jews as a group have become distinctively sensitive to society's antisemitic murmurs, consciously or subconsciously gauging the political climate for signs of the next pogrom.

Meanwhile, for generations raised in the times between periods of open anti-Jewish violence, such as today's U.S., the absence of the more visible type of brutality that is constantly visited upon other groups sows resentment between Jews and other oppressed peoples. In these eras, many Jews are clearly more privileged than members of other marginalized populations. The visibility of Jew's privilege and the invisibility of their oppression lead to increasing doubt about the persistence or even the reality of antisemitism, and correspondingly, increased antipathy toward Jews by other groups that are collectively worse off in the socio-economic system. The combination of conservative Jews' claims of whiteness (and even superiority) and liberal Jews' insistence on analogizing their historical position to other groups' histories of oppression only serves to exacerbate this bitterness, summed up powerfully in James Baldwin's 1967 essay, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White." The resentment builds until the next moment of crisis in which a version of the dynamic described by Levins-Morales repeats itself. The social-political middle position and the cyclical, episodic nature of antisemitism are what give this racial system its specific, time-tested character.

In order to talk about decolonization for Jews, therefore, we cannot directly import the categories of colonizer and colonized from an analysis that focuses on a different type of racism. If we are to understand Jewish decolonization we must do so in the context of the particular historical development of the Jewish subject in relationship to the antisemitic system.

The Colonized Jewish Subject

The long history of antisemitism has had a significant impact on Jewish subjectivity. In Fanon's psychological analysis, being colonized is not simply a matter of material relationship to power, it is also a personality. The experience of life under a colonial system generates specific inferiority complexes among subjects, which create a colonized people when they become internalized. It has been well argued that Jews have inherited a culture characterized by precarity and trauma associated with the extreme violence experienced by previous generations, with Jewish psychological and cultural responses to this violence dating back well before the Holocaust. Here Fanon's observation of "minor episodes in the family history" is both accurate and insufficient. It is not only the moments of violence but the constant threat of them, the precarity, the perpetual lack of belonging laced with fears of betrayal, that have impacted Jewish identity at the deepest level. That Jews were neither of the castle nor of the village had the material effect of making them a vulnerable population, acutely aware that they are exposed to exploitation as scapegoats in moments of crisis. In short, the culture of antisemitism has created barriers to the establishing of



Jared Kushner is an example of a Jew that pursues status and safety through the existing power structures.

Top: Daniel Kelin and Ren Finkel Bottom: Department of Defense

solidaristic networks between Jews and non-Jews. Deeper than the objective condition of the stranger is the subjectivity of the stranger, which develops in the absence of trusted community bonds with other groups.

Despite their most ardent attempts, and despite the accumulation of vast wealth by some individuals, upper class Jews were never able to truly break through the "glass ceiling" of whiteness in the fullest sense, with whiteness being understood in the dominant European context as the enduringly superior social-economic caste. Many Jews have sought such inclusion, and arguably some have achieved it, but only to the extent that they as individuals function as white. Individual Jews achieving whiteness in a time and place has not meant that Jews as a group became fully white, even in that same time and place. The unavoidable fact that some achieved elite status — most stereotypically the "House of Rothschild," for example — has not only not shielded Jews from antisemitic violence, but the existence of such elite Jews is integral to the propagation of antisemitism. It was this dynamic that allowed "white" Jews in Western Europe to seemingly overcome antisemitism in the 19th century only to see it come roaring back as the ideological and material foundation of one of the more acutely violent episodes in human history.

Jewish agency has been an integral factor in this process. Arendt follows Lazare in calling the Jew who is ever striving at all cost to succeed in the dominant Gentile world, the *parvenu*. She contrasts the *parvenu* with the *conscious pariah*, the Jew who understands their positionality and seeks to think outside the bounds of the antisemitic system. The parvenu is essentially a phony, attempting to assimilate by "aping" dominant, elite, white behavior and culture. This imitation is an awkward and exaggerated version of the original, distorted by distance from the source and the desire to fit in. The parvenu is contemptible to Arendt not simply because of their spinelessness, but because their agency is a factor in the continuation of the antisemitic system. Elite treatment of Jews from "the castle" involves negating collective Jewish claims to self-determination in favor of dealing with individual Jews. As French aristocrat Clermont-Tonnerre articulated it, arguing in favor of civil rights for Jews during the French Revolution: "The Jews should be denied everything as a nation but granted everything as individuals." Historically, the parvenu accepts and in fact embraces this dynamic, either discarding connections to their Jewish community or tailoring them so as to make them least obnoxious to elite society. Jews' material proximity to whiteness and upward mobility in the West, most notably in the US, has enabled the parvenu to reinforce liberal capitalism and white supremacy by positioning Jews as success stories of pluralism, with the "right to embrace difference and yet enjoy access to power."

The parvenu that Arendt wrote of is the Jew imitating and striving for whiteness, yet unwittingly playing into the antisemitic system, but in fact there are two parvenu versions. Today, the other version is that of the Left Jewish activist who denies the reality of antisemitism and strives to be the "good ally" to the oppressed, a group to which this parvenu denies membership (as a Jew, though not necessarily on other bases) in a bid to gain acceptance.

Marx famously contributed to debates over the "Jewish Question," in which Jews struggle between their identity as a distinct people and the identities of the nation-states in which they live as others. In the 19th century, alongside nationalism (from which Zionism grew), and liberalism (from which assimilationism in the US grew), socialism offered an alternative solution to the Jewish question: for the working class of one nation to ally with the working class of other nations on the basis of their shared economic class. To many Jews, the workaround required a prerequisite — to negate the legitimacy of membership in one's own oppressed community. Indeed, many Jews were active in building 19th century communist and anarchist movements in part as a solution to the Jewish Question, where Jews might gain acceptance not through legitimizing their group but by delegitimizing all national groups. Accordingly, Jews have often sought validation in their participation in social movements of the oppressed as individuals or on the basis of membership in some other legitimized group of claimants (e.g. workers, women, etc.) and not as Jews per se.

This Left-wing Jewish self-denial has survived the transition from class-based to identity-based politics. In the identity politics framework, Jews are nowhere to be found on the racial spectrum. Jews as a group are not exactly white, but Jews as a group are also not acknowledged as POC. Individual Jews can be viewed as white or as POC on other bases (e.g. skin color, national background), but they are not recognized in the white-POC framework *as a group*. Jewish participants in Left-wing movements are assumed to identify as white unless they have another legitimate claim to POC status (i.e. Jews of color), and there is little room for affiliation in the struggle for liberation outside of POC status or allyship. Jews are thus disaffirmed as a legitimate people, which is to say *as Jews*, in terms of the oppressed as well as in terms of the oppressor.

The role of allyship, especially when oriented around criticizing the State of Israel, fits snugly into internalized discomfort and self-loathing that comes with Jewishness in an era when antisemitism is at its least overtly violent. The pursuit of liberation for others alone is a perfect example of this alternative version of Arendt's parvenu, essentially aping white guilt. Like the elite version, this might appear to be the only path for participation in social-political life alongside other groups, but nevertheless it has grave consequences. Antisemitism has been and continues to be a linchpin of far Right ideology, a political force that is a grave resurgent threat to society. By shirking the responsibility to pursue Jewish liberation alongside and in solidarity with other groups' liberation

struggles, this parvenu, like the other, not only facilitates the perpetuation of antisemitism, but hinders the prospects for collective human liberation as well.

Acknowledging the antisemitic system in which Jewish identities have evolved is a critical preliminary step to pursuing liberation and decolonization. This is in part because it exposes a particular vantage point that the Jewish position creates. Albert Memmi prefaces his 1957 work *The Colonizer and the Colonized* with an acknowledgement of his social position as a Tunisian Jew. The middle social position of Jews, being among the colonized but with unique proximity to the colonizer (a Jewish status Memmi identifies in both North Africa and in Europe) is, according to Memmi, what allows him to write a book analyzing the personalities of both sides of the colonial relationship: "I was a sort of half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged to no one." Memmi is able to see through the eyes of the colonizer and the colonized, he says, because his experience and identity simultaneously contain aspects of, and alienate him from, both. From this standpoint Memmi effectively describes both the colonizer and the colonized in ways that align closely with the descriptions in Fanon's clinical work. Importantly, Memmi's perspective was colored not only by his social-ethnic positionality, but also by his anticolonial ideology.

The reality of antisemitism and its centrality in the ideology of historical and contemporary fascist movements necessitates a Jewish liberation movement. But anti-Jewish oppression and Jewish positionality are unlike that of many other oppressive systems and oppressed ethnicities and nationalities. It should be no surprise then that any Jewish national liberation project that fails to account for the particular dynamics of this positionality will be doomed to failure.

Zionism as (Failed) National Liberation

To Fanon, an oppressed people start with those demands that are most basic and most promising: "Bread and land: how do we go about getting bread and land?" In achieving this, the colonized are forced but also naturally prepared to exact violence upon their oppressors, and indeed must be "determined from the start to smash every obstacle encountered." That the Jews were an oppressed people leading up to the 20th century just about wherever they lived is clear. In the Zionist story, the Jews did cry out for bread and land, and ultimately smashed all obstacles in their path to win and defend it. Nevertheless, while the legitimacy of other national liberation movements of the 20th century is not questioned today (at least by the Left) Israel is not considered among them; in fact, it is considered an archetypal colonizer. In addition to Palestinian uprisings, Israel now faces a growing boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign, a fracturing diaspora community, internal dissent, and if it were not for the U.S. veto in the United Nations Security Council, international criminal charges. What went wrong?

The simple answer from the Jewish left has been: colonialism. The simple answer from the Jewish right has been: antisemitism. While neither answer might be quite as wrong as the other side would like to believe, the story is much more complex than both.

In line with Fanon's call for "bread and land," to many Zionists the answer to the Jewish Question was *autoemancipation*, or the Jewish political movement to create a Jewish State. Seminal Zionist thinker Leon Pinsker explained:

> Today, when our kinsmen in a small part of the earth are allowed to breathe freely and can feel more deeply for the sufferings of their brothers; today, when a number of other subject and oppressed nationalities have been allowed to regain their independence, we, too, must not sit a moment longer with folded hands; we must not consent to play forever the hopeless role of the "Wandering Jew." It is a truly hopeless one, leading to despair.

For the Political Zionist movement, Jews were perpetual strangers precisely because they possessed no sovereign homeland. Pinsker's reference to his era, when other groups were fighting for national sovereignty, cannot be ignored. This Zionist vision emerged in the context of 19th century European nationalism, which, like socialism, provided a cognitive framework with which to interpret the problems of the world.

As a social group in this nationalist framework, the Jews' problems were seen to arise not from their alienation from other people but from land. According to Pinsker, Jews could not even dignify themselves to ask for hospitality as foreigners because they had no place from which to collectively offer to repay it. A state would provide physical security, but more importantly it would provide the existential foundation for recognition of the Jewish people. For Herzl too, recognition in the modern world was bound to statehood and sovereignty—Jews would only be able to achieve the recognition required for liberation from antisemitism if they controlled a state. Whereas Judaism had required Jews to look to G-d for protection and guidance in the diaspora, Zionists, who emerged from the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment), now encouraged Jews to look to the State.

Among many dilemmas for this agenda, one stands out. The Jews were a diasporic community; many felt native to nowhere but Palestine, but relatively few of them actually lived there. In the 19th century, Zionists (mainly from Europe) began urging Jews to move to Ottoman Palestine and establish land rights. Whether or not its adherents knew it, the Zionist project was at a crossroads: How would their communities relate to non-Jewish Palestinians?

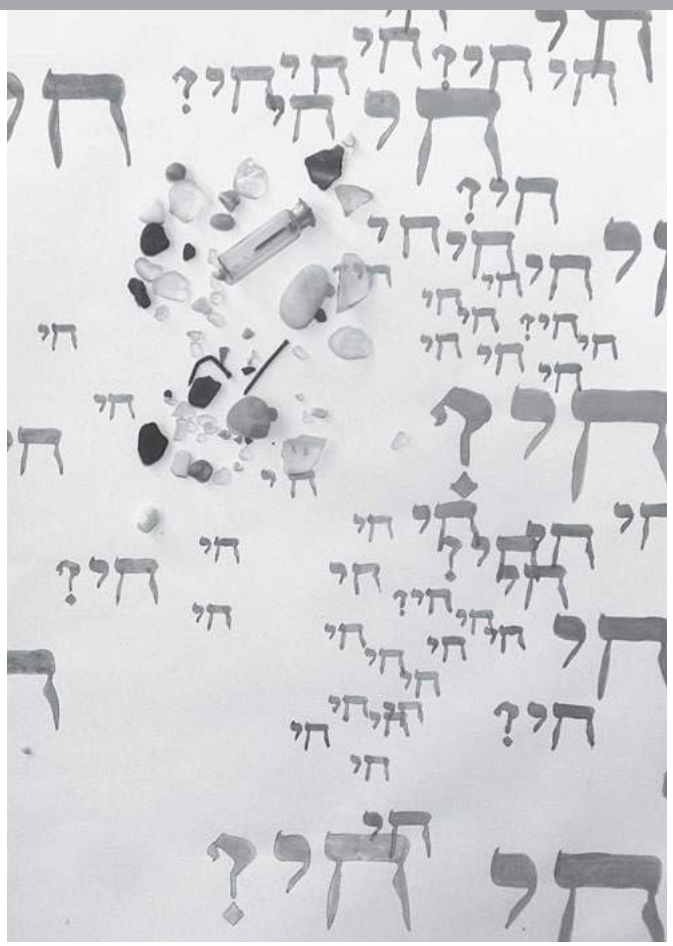
While their desire and initiative to liberate their people from oppression is admirable, the Zionist movement emerged from a European nationalist *zeitgeist* in which few were

considering the rights of non-European peoples, and the leaders of the dominant model of Zionism did not break from that mindset. Beyond this context, Herzl and other Political Zionists misjudged several crucial elements. Herzl's nationalism, combined with his belief that all Gentile nations were inherently antisemitic, led to a *realpolitik* obsessed with achieving statehood above all else. Herzl correctly identified the antisemitic trap Jews had been caught in, where all Jews were conflated with upper class Jews, who were pushed into professional and financial roles then blamed for systemic failures. However, the assumption that all non-Jewish nations were inherently antisemitic foreclosed the possibility of solidarity with other oppressed groups, namely Arab Palestinians, who also sought liberation from foreign rule, only leaving space for cynical bargaining over self-interest.

Despite internal debates (for example, some argued for an Arab-majority state with minority ethnic rights for Jews and some pushed for alliance with the Soviet sphere of influence), this avenue ultimately brought Zionist leaders to the negotiating table of global imperial powers that were able to produce the results they sought — a sovereign state carved from the waning British Empire. The British in particular were adept at defining the terms of their colonies' identities and territories, imposing both borders and colonial subjectivities that would survive local national liberation movements. As Arendt explains, "[t]he real anti-Semites [. . .] wanted to preserve the availability of the Jews as a scapegoat in case of domestic difficulties," and the creation of an Israeli state did just that on an international scale. Arendt was part of a dissenting wing of the Zionist movement that sought a "national homeland without a national state," and following their political defeat, she presciently articulated the implications of allying with European powers, saying that the autoemancipation project was ending not only in national but in "chauvinist claims — not against the foes of the Jewish people, but against its possible friends and present neighbors." In short, Herzl's Zionism led the Jewish people through a backdoor into the very same position they sought deliverance from, only on a global scale.

Since the Political Zionists' success, statehood has provided a measure of protection for individual Jews who live in Israel, but it has also created a lightning rod for material attacks by neighbors and political attacks by anti-imperialist forces. The Israeli government's preoccupation with validation of its right to exist and the panic surrounding the recent "nuclear deal" between the U.S. and Iran are but two examples demonstrating just how ineffective statehood has been in alleviating Jewish insecurity on any level.

This pathological insecurity (which Fanon notes in all colonized peoples) combined with the material benefits of being a colonizer, has led Israelis to perpetually alienate themselves from and abuse their neighbors, as Israel maintains a military occupation of the West Bank and blockade of



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Gaza, neither granting Palestinians citizenship nor allowing them to secede. To say nothing of the abhorrent violence of the Occupation, a militarily controlled territory under which people live with different sets of rights and laws depending on geography, ethnicity, and religion should be viscerally repugnant to any sense of justice, and is a status quo that is patently unacceptable in the norms of the 21st century world.

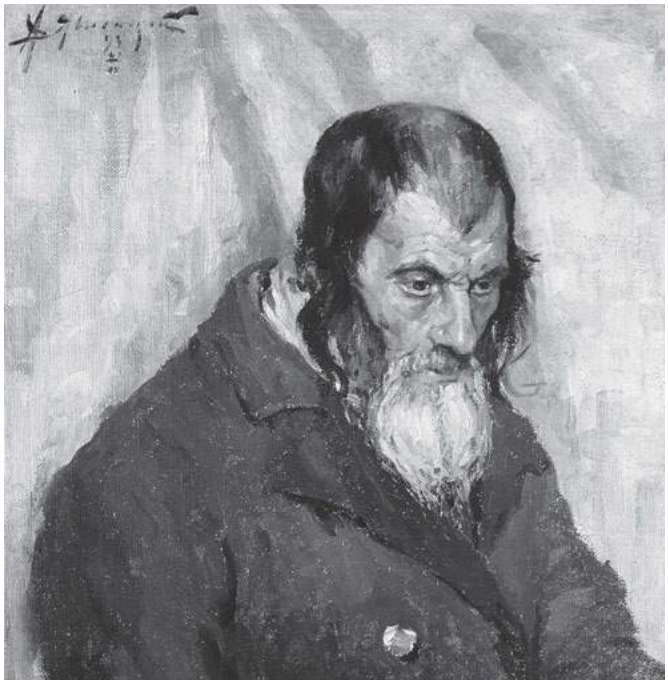
The Zionist project as Herzl articulated it set the Jewish State on this trajectory. Before, during, and following its founding, Zionist and Israeli leaders allied with colonial forces, playing the middle position in between the imperial "center" of the U.S. and British Empires and the "periphery" of the Arab and Persian Middle East and North Africa. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that early Hebrew tribes were often used by pharaohs as mercenary forces, positioned on borderlands to buffer the Egyptian Empire with the Assyrians and the Nubians, where they took both casualties and national blame during warfare. In a sense, Herzl's movement led Jews out of their modern middle position as stranger-merchants back to their ancient middle position as stranger-mercenaries.

Though the Zionist movement's goal was liberation from antisemitism, the identity of the Jewish people as scapegoats in service of rulers has survived the founding of the State of Israel unchecked. Worse still, the material advantages of colonial exploitation combined with the parvenu impulse to "ape the gentiles" resulted in the Israeli government molding

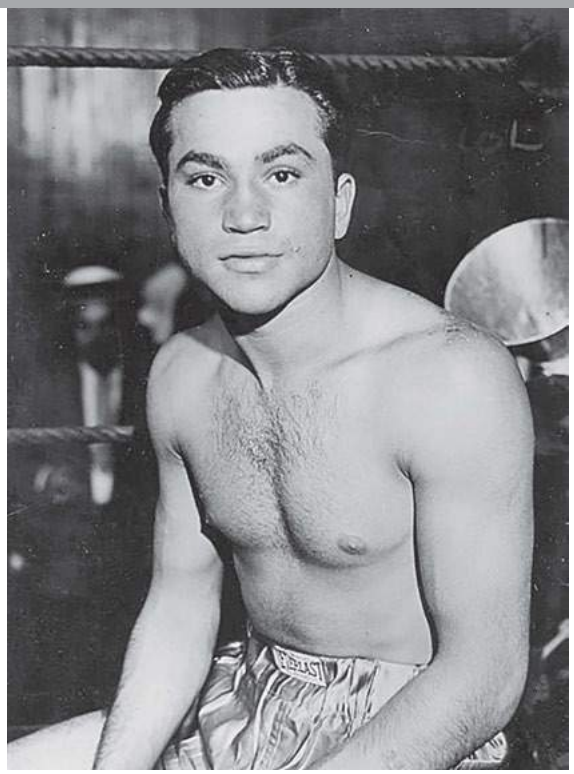
itself in the image of the Western imperial power, including all of the barbarity that comes with it, and pitching Jews to the world as racially white. The founding of the State of Israel in this way — that is, in lock step with systemic antisemitism — perpetuated a paradox from which Jews as a people have yet been unable to escape. The State of Israel as it currently exists traps the Jewish people in liberation limbo, keeping it at odds with its neighbors and reliant upon ultimate salvation by neo-imperial powers.

Re-Colonizing Jewishness

Decolonization, as Fanon put it, "sets out to change the order of the world." This process involves momentous historical events, but the project begins and ends with human subjects. In the attempt to liberate Jews via state power in Israel, Zionist philosophy created an image of a "decolonized subject," a Jewish *New Man*. This Zionist version of the *Haskalachic* "New Jew" was dubbed the *Sabra*, after the Hebrew name of the prickly pear cactus that grew in Palestine: hard and thorny on the outside but soft and sweet on the inside. The Sabra Jew was born in Palestine, spoke Hebrew as a first language, and fiercely defended the "homeland." The Sabra was the photo negative of the *shtetl* Jew; whereas antisemitic propaganda had made the diaspora Jew out to be weak, sickly, pale, ugly, cowardly, and greedy, the Sabra was strong, healthy, handsome, hardworking, daring, brave, and self-sacrificing. This was the idealized anti-diaspora Jew; the sort of "Man" Jewish people would become in a country of their own.



This 1893 depiction by Russian painter Alexj von Jawelensky typifies a common conception of Jews.



American boxer Barney Ross embodied types of masculinity associated with both whiteness and the new image of Jewishness

In seeking to overcome European antisemitic stereotypes, the new Israelis in fact adopted many of the standards of their (former) oppressors, including Orientalist views of Arabs. The Sabra Jews walked an awkward line, attempting to become natives who, as Ella Shohat puts it, "live in the 'East' without being of it." Though they struggled against the colonizers in one way, they embodied them in another. This unintentional but nevertheless close association between the New Jew and the old antisemite went beyond image — it actually required marginalizing and silencing the voices and identities of Holocaust survivors, upon whose experience their movement was being justified, in favor of an invented narrative of purity and strength.

To Fanon, decolonization involved violence against the colonizer as a mode of production of the new man. The violence helped the colonized to defeat and transcend their inferiority complex, as opposed to violence against themselves and their oppressed neighbor, which would perpetuate it. The Sabra Jews in their most iconic form, the soldiers of the *palmach* (Jewish militias in the War of Independence), epitomize the tragic embodiment of this failure, bitterly fighting their "cousins" for the sake of a system that ultimately exploits them. Today, agents of a state that claims to exist for the representation and protection of a historically oppressed people inflict traumatic violence upon their Palestinian neighbors, and, ironically, deny them access to a state with which to represent and protect themselves.

Herzl prided himself on his deep understanding of the antisemite. To Arendt, Herzl's understanding of antisemites ran so deep that he not only trusted them in allyship

with the Zionist mission, but maybe began to think like them too. From this perspective it should not be surprising that the entire Zionist project has transformed in the image of the oppressor, not only externally but internally too. Envisioned as a place of safety for all Jews worldwide, Israel has in fact codified, racialized, and hierarchicalized previously fluid categories of Jew and Arab as well as "white" *Ashkenazi* Jews and *Sephardi*, *Mizrahi, Beta Israel,* and other Jews of color. But neither a state, nor cooperation with European powers, nor the adoption of oppressive systems in the European image were able to liberate the Jewish people from the antisemitic system. As Arendt anticipated: "The antisemitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of the foreign big powers in that region but actually plotted it and hence are guilty of the consequences." We can see this phenomenon playing out in the discourse on the left today, where the U.S. and Israel are held up as the prime agents of imperialism — and not necessarily in that order.

With the State of Israel claiming to be the true home of all Jews, Jewish communities worldwide have foundered in the effort to think and act outside the parvenu paradigm. Until today, we have been unable to build a movement for Jewish liberation in solidarity with the liberation of all oppressed peoples, and all humanity. With the formal end of the exile in 1948, this is now the Jewish Question.

Decolonizing Jewishness

To Arendt, the emancipation of the Jews ought to have been an "admission of Jews as Jews into the ranks of humanity, rather than a permit to ape the gentiles or an opportunity to play the parvenu." As the Israeli State, marketed as a liberator, actively oppresses an entire population under its control, Arendt's critique stands today. Perhaps not ironically, the *tzabar* cactus for which the Sabra Jew was named is not native to Palestine, but was imported as a desert-friendly crop in the early 19th century. From the beginning, the new identity was not based on decolonizing, but on recolonizing. The route Zionism took re-enacted rather than healed Jewish cultural trauma, and projected it onto another people.

The struggle for Jewish recognition cannot be won from within a parvenu mentality. So long as Jews as a people consent to the middle role in the service of the oppressor, we will be perpetual strangers, whether or not we have a temple, a capital, or a state. The belonging we truly seek cannot emanate from the castle, but can only come from the village. Rabbi Steinlauf was therefore on the right track when he wrote his controversial 2015 essay advocating for Jews to renounce whiteness. He was heavily criticized, often fairly, for glossing over what it would actually mean to "renounce privilege," for ignoring Jews of color, and of course, for not mentioning the Occupation. All of these problems have a simple and powerful, though admittedly painful, solution. The decisive step out of the colonial mindset is removing the white mask in all of its forms and confronting the colonizer within.

Confronting the colonizer within is an integral part of confronting the colonizer without. Rabbi Hillel's famous set of questions — *"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"* — continues to stand as a beautiful summation of what is required of the Jewish people. All three questions can be understood in this context as rhetorical; the first implies the need to fight for ourselves as Jews, the second implies the need to fight for

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others in solidarity, and the third implies a sense of urgency. Pinsker began his seminal 1882 pamphlet on Zionism with this quote but, incredibly, *he left out the second question!* For the thinkers of Political Zionism, being "for others" was so antithetical to their project they did not want the revered Talmudic rabbi's second question to be considered at all.

Unfortunately, many Jewish activists in Palestinian or other liberation work today metaphorically omit Hillel's first question instead; they focus on being for Palestinian liberation, or for the liberation of other oppressed groups without considering the implications of not also being for ourselves as Jews. While important, countering false claims of antisemitism against pro-Palestinian organizing levied by the Jewish Right, and protesting Zionist organizations in allyship with Palestinians should not, as some suggest, be the sole purpose of Jewish voices in the struggle. The work of decolonizing Jewishness, which is a personally and culturally constructive as well as destructive process, is a prerequisite for any liberated future that involves us as a people, and is a vital element in the broader political struggle against the forces of the far right. Jewish liberation requires the Jewish fight against antisemitism for our liberation and autonomy, *and also* solidarity with the struggles of other oppressed groups — in particular the Palestinian struggle — for their liberation and autonomy.

Herzlian Zionism failed; it created a catastrophe for Palestinians while failing to liberate the Jewish people from antisemitism. There is every reason to believe we can yet create a truly decolonized Jewishness in the continuation of the liberatory movement against antisemitism, but this can only be done if it is melded with the struggle against the colonialism entrenched in our previous attempt at decolonization. Our struggle for our liberation is now inexorably bound up in the liberation of those we disenfranchised and continue to oppress in the attempt to gain liberation in Israel. Our position imposes a Jewish version of what W.E.B. Du Bois called *double consciousness*, where we are not forced to see through the eyes of the oppressor as well as the oppressed for survival, but we actually *are both simultaneously as part of the same identity.*

According to Fanon, an act of violence was required for the colonized to overcome their inferiority complex and decolonize. For Jews, who have become both colonizers and colonized, the first act of symbolic violence must be against ourselves. This violence is both symbolic and internal, but is no less painful. We must rebel against the internalized colonizer in ourselves, embedded in our very subjectivities, and we must rebel against the part of our community that pursues literal colonization of others, trapping the Jewish people in the global middle position. This generation of Jews will discover if we will play the 21st century parvenu or find our place in the grand struggle for people's liberation by waking to the contradictions within, standing in solidarity with other oppressed peoples without, and seeking to take an active role in our ongoing history.

Emma Lazarus said: "Until we are all free, we are none of us free." I am inclined to believe this is true, but it is unavoidably true that Jews today cannot be free anywhere until Palestinians are free in Palestine. In and of itself, this is not a political solution. But if we as Jews take the projects of Jewish liberation and human liberation seriously, it is a value, indeed an identity, upon which any political solution must be built. As Jacob had to wrestle with and defeat G-d for our Biblical people to transcend, so must we wrestle with and defeat our colonial selves to transcend. Like Jacob, we will be injured in the process, but the fight itself is required in order to open the door to a new covenant — one between Jews and our cousins. ■

**I am indebted to many comrades and colleagues for their discussions and inspiration. Special thanks to Lisa Brush, Mohammed Bamyeh, Daniel Lainer-Vos, Rachel Kranson, George Weddington, Eric Eingold, and Yotam Marom for their comments and edits, to Danielle Moeser for her help in translation, and to Belinda Rodriguez for her support during this process.*

Notes

1. Fanon's categories are essentialized; he does not deal with the fact that some Jews are Black and some Black people, Jewish.
2. Some Jewish scholars disagree fervently with this proposition, and argue that at least Ashkenazi Jews have indeed become fully white in the US context (see Biale, Galchinsky, and Heschel 1998 for some of these debates), while others see the claim to whiteness as itself an aspect of internalized antisemitism (see Lerner 1992).
3. Fanon used the term "new men" to refer to decolonized subjects who have remade themselves (1961:2), following both Freud's emphasis on the pathology of men and linguistically androcentric norms. Its patriarchal implication in this case should not go unnoticed.
4. For full notes and citations contact chris@tikkun.org

BEN CASE is a political, community, and labor organizer from New Jersey. He is a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, and is a member of IfNotNow.

Affirming Difference, Embracing Unity

BY CAT ZAVIS

White people, men, and cisgender heterosexual people need listen to the experiences of others—this is non-negotiable. To even begin to understand the impact of systemic racism and patriarchy in our society, we must listen to those most deeply impacted, personally and collectively, by these systems of injustice. Only the oppressed can tell their stories and speak about their fears, sorrows, anger, and truth; and there certainly has not been enough listening. As a first step in building a movement to transform our society, we need to build listening circles. Simply listening. Eventually, after marginalized people have a sense of being heard and understood, we also need to create space to listen to those deemed to have more power in society to hear their experiences and to see how systems of injustice keep us all disempowered, beholden to the powerful, and separated from one another. What we need to understand is that patriarchy, racism, and all forms of hatred and violence require that we first learn to hate and detach from ourselves. As bell hooks so powerfully has written, "The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill of the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem."

I "get" on a visceral level the righteous indignation that one feels when she is dismissed and discounted simply for (one of) her identity(ies). I have experienced the injustice of being treated in this way. When this occurs, I see men as the "other" and have been ready to castigate all men as evil-doers and oppressors. In these instances, I have been unable to see their humanity or the ways in which patriarchy also undermines their ability to be their fullest selves. When I feel this way, I am deeply steeped in my identity as a woman and as a victim. And from that place, all I care about is how patriarchal structures harm women. My experiences of pain from times when I have been silenced and oppressed, touched against my wishes, judged for my body, dismissed, and disrespected are real and need to be heard and honored. And, I am also aware that when I am in such pain, I cannot see beyond my hurt and thus my ability to see our shared humanity is compromised. My capacity to see my way out of my oppression, choose effective strategies, reach out to others, both the oppressed and the oppressors, and join with others for the liberation of all, are severely impaired.

How can we connect with our particular identity(ies) as a source of strength so we can see the suffering of others, (even those we deem to be the creators of our suffering)? How might we use identity politics as a way to move beyond identity as a place of victimhood, oppression, and separation to one of collective connection and liberation that empowers us all? This is how identity politics emerged amongst marginalized and oppressed groups in the first place. Feminist consciousness raising groups, Black power groups, and the like arose from experiences of oppression to serve as a source of strength and empowerment for identity groups and for connecting across identities. And in fact, identity politics has done just that—uplifted groups that have experienced

personal and systemic forms of oppression and disempowerment, changed laws, transformed consciousness for many, and at times built solidarity across differences. It has been a way for disempowered peoples to have a voice, to understand that our personal struggles are actually a reflection of social and systemic problems, and that our lives have value and matter. At the same time, "identity politics rely on already existing categories that originated in oppressive histories and support an unjust socio-political framework under which we currently live" and thus "restrict our imaginations" and "limit our visions of social change."[1] Identity politics can be and, sometimes are, used as a way to separate and divide rather than uplift and unite.

As Leela Fernades rightfully points out:

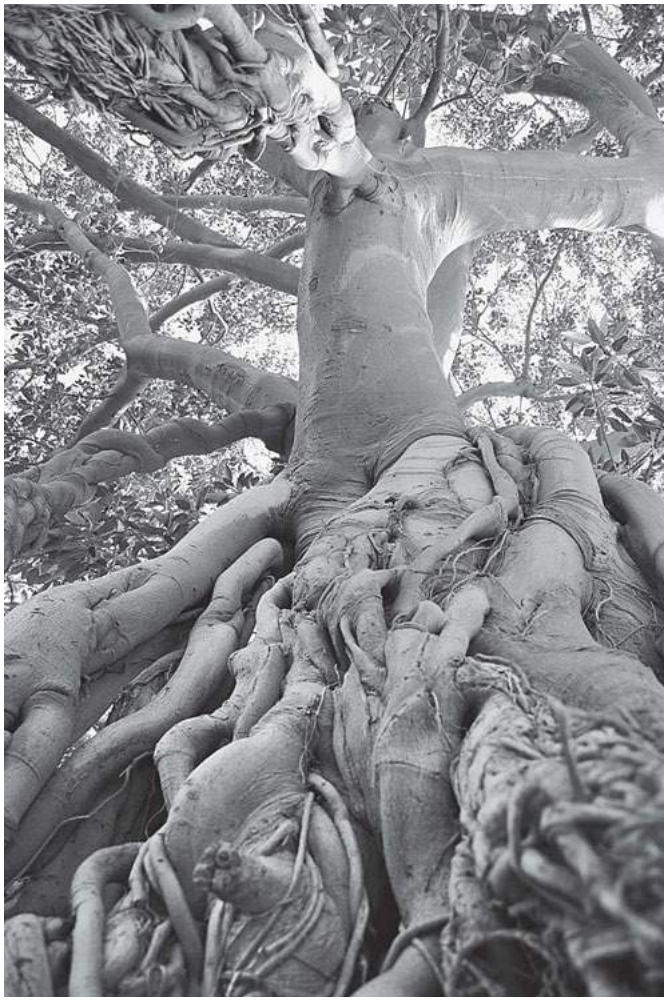
> while identity-based movements are effective in mobilizing short term political action, in the long-run, they cannot produce an alternative future that is free from the very identity-based divisions and inequalities that they oppose. While oppositional movements based on identity have been necessary to address the blindness to various forms of injustice, such movements cannot in the long run provide a viable alternative because they inevitably must rest on a form of identification that explicitly or implicitly is based on an oppositional distinction from another group.[2]

So how can we steep ourselves in our multiple identities and simultaneously experience and promote our shared humanity? What happens when movements prioritize the voices of some over others? What happens when people are told not to speak because they come from a particular group that is believed to have had historically more opportunity to be heard than others? How do we account for the multiple identities people occupy? How can we see our intersectionality and still be blind to others' suffering when they may be occupying identities that also give them greater power than us? These are questions that seem particularly germane with the rise of the "White Lives Matter" movement and alt-Right in our country in a reality where Bernie supporters end-up voting for Trump. Is there a way forward that allows us to see the pain in the demands and rage of those we deem to be our enemies that simultaneously allows us to sustain our push for addressing the historic oppressions of Black people and others?

On one particularly challenging day, as I grappled with these issues. An image appeared in my mind — one of a tree. I saw myself as a tree with roots deeply planted in the earth giving me strength and courage. Reminding me where I came from and who I am. And I felt those roots reaching out to touch and interlink with the roots of so many others who also have been dismissed, disempowered, ignored, and devalued. I felt our roots interlocking in a beautiful web strengthening each other and from those roots our trees reached up tall and proud. Each tree looking slightly unique and different — different colors, different leaves, different barks — yet we were all trees, rooted in and growing out of the same earth. Each of us (each tree), beautiful, powerful, and uplifted by and with one another. Our branches and leaves formed the most exquisite canopy, creating a safe place underneath the canopy for all of our experiences — our pains and sorrows, and our power and our strength — to flourish. And in that moment I came to realize that this is what a truly empowering identity politics could look like. What if we use our identities as a foundation for unity and love? What then might a transformative movement for the liberation of all look like and how might we create that?

In 1965 Abraham Joshua Heschel gave a lecture called "*No Religion is an Island*." In this piece, Heschel brilliantly articulated the need for Christians and Jews to work together to save the world. He emphasized their shared responsibility at that particular moment in history, stating that the very survival of Judaism and in fact all religions depend on interreligious cooperation. "*None of us can do it alone*."[3]

He continued, "Man is never as open to fellowship as he is in moments of misery and distress."[4] And yet, even in the



midst of our distress, we "have no eyes".[5] In other words, we are unable to see the fellowship that is knocking at our door, the fellowship we need, the fellowship we must embrace. He beautifully articulates the interdependence in which we all live:

> Our era marks the end of complacency, the end of evasion, the end of self-reliance. Jews and Christians share the perils and the fears; we stand on the brink of the abyss together. Interdependence of political and economic conditions all over the world is a basic fact of our situation. Disorder in a small obscure country in any part of the world evokes anxiety in people all over the world. . . Parochialism has become untenable."[6]

Heschel is speaking to the need for honoring our differences and yet emphasizing our shared realities. Our well-being is intrinsically connected to the well-being of others. According to Heschel, Jews and Christians bore responsibility for the predicament of the times. Take that in for a moment. Twenty years after the Holocaust, in which one out of every three Jews alive at the time was murdered and in which Christians participated and facilitated the demise of Jews, Heschel turned to Christians not from rage but from a love of humankind, from an awareness that "no one is in this alone;" from an acknowledgement of our interdependence. This was truly a radical call. He implored Jews and Christians to come together as a response to "internihilism."[7] He recognized the larger threat to humanity and called on Jews and Christians to work together to address this larger social ill, without prioritizing the voice of one group over another, even though one of the groups was historically marginalized, oppressed, and slaughtered by the other.

If step one is listening to the experiences of those most marginalized, what is step two? I want to suggest that step two is figuring out how to build a new society—one that is loving, kind, embracing of differences, just, peaceful, and generous. No one group or individual has the answer for how to move from where we are to where we so desperately want to be—no one. We need to build communities and groups that are part of a larger movement that welcomes everyone's voice, even those who in some respects are treated better than I am by the larger society.

A movement that silences some because one's particular identity seems limited in scope and unwelcoming to many. I do not want to be part of a movement in which I feel silenced because of my perceived skin color[8] and thus my 'privilege.' That is simply recreating a silencing I have experienced over the course of my life as a woman. I welcome being in spaces where I listen to the experiences of my sisters and brothers who are marginalized and oppressed in ways I have never experienced. Their ideas about how to liberate all of us from our collective oppression are critical to hear and include. But I do not believe that their experiences of oppression give them a monopoly on strategizing how to transform our society. Liberation is a collective process. It requires everyone's input and engagement. Lila Watson put it powerfully when she said, "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us **work together** (emphasis mine)." Liberation struggles need to be empowering for everyone, including those perceived to have more power than others in the struggle.

When we shame people into silence based on a person's identity(ies), using labels like "privileged" or "mansplaining," we end up emphasizing and entrenching identity differences rather than our shared humanity and shared pain. We need to engage in open-hearted conversations, listen to and hear one another, empathize and try to follow each other's vision,

understand each other's perspectives and histories, and see the fullness of one another's humanity.

Engaging in this way honors people where they are at and invites them to grow and partner together with one another to uplift all.

I understand the resistance to what I am proposing. I have heard people say many times they are "sick and tired of taking care of the feelings and needs of whites or men (or straight people or whatever other group is momentarily being seen as privileged) because they are always heard, and our lives are on the line, not our feelings." I have grappled with this many times. Of course it is true that people are dying because of the policies, oppression, and violence that exist and that affect people of color and LGBTQ people at much higher rates than others. And that is exactly why I feel so strongly about these forms of oppression. But if we are serious about ending them and not just sharing our pain, we must recognize that we cannot make those changes without the engagement and participation of a massive segment of society and this necessarily includes white people and men. As long as most white people and most men believe that their voices don't matter to those of us who seek to transform our society and that their opinions are not valued, they will not join our efforts. When we treat people poorly and do not respect them, they will not only not return to be part of our liberation struggles, but more problematically for us all, some will turn to Trump and Right-wing groups that acknowledge their pain and suffering.

The kind of liberation we seek must be about *everyone's* freedom to live a life free from discrimination and free from barriers that impede our ability to access all of who we are. If we continue to marginalize and dismiss the voices of men, white people, straight people, or others deemed to be privileged we are not only shutting down and shutting out the majority of people we need to be part of our movement, we are also modeling precisely the opposite of the world we really want.

It is actually a sign of one's own power to directly engage without blaming or shaming. Isn't this exactly what everyone wants? Isn't this respect exactly what identity groups have been fighting for all along — to be seen and treated with dignity and respect? Why would we settle for anything less for ourselves or treat others in any other way?

The recognition of our status as oppressed and marginalized peoples, the very legitimacy of our survival, is possible only in a world in which all human beings are honored as embodiments of the sacred, as coming from the same origins as one another, in a world in which all life is revered. Racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, and homophobia are, in their very roots, a rebellion against humanity and the sanctity and dignity of human life. Yet they continue to thrive today. All of us must realize that in our age, hatred of one is hatred of all, whether it manifests as racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, or classism. These various ways of separating us based on our identities only perpetuate economic, social, and political inequality for the detriment of all.

Are we willing to work for a breakthrough in the soul of humanity, the guarding of the precarious position of being human, even a little higher than human, despite defiance and in face of despair? The misery and fear of alienation from each other, from ourselves, from life, make us all cry together. This yearning for a different world can be a foundation on which we build a society of love and caring for each other and for the earth.

"There are moments when we all stand together and see our faces in the mirror: the anguish of humanity and its helplessness; the perplexity of the individual and the need of divine guidance; being called to praise and to do what is required".[9] This is one of those moments. ■

Notes

1. Ana Louise Keating, *"I'm a Citizen of the Universe": Gloria Anzaldua's Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change,* Feminist Studies 34, nos. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2008), 64.
2. Ibid.
3. Heschel, Abraham Joshua, "*No Religion is an Island*." (*Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, Ed. by Susannah Heschel, 1966: Noonday Press, New York), 236.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid, 237.
7. Ibid.
8. Since Charlottesville I hope that people are more able to see that being Jewish leaves one as vulnerable to the fascists as being a person of color. In the end, they will kill us all.
9. Heschel, 240.

CAT ZAVIS is the Executive Director of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. She is also an attorney, mediator and trainer in conflict resolution and empathic communication.

Identity Beyond Politics

BY SIMON MONT

We exist within a system of global violence that forces us into relationships of domination with each other, creates a situation where the material safety of some is dependant on the oppression of others, life energy is extracted for profit, and human existence entails the destruction of the planet. Whether we are in the role of "oppressed" or "oppressor" we are all caught in a dehumanizing system that alienates us from our true selves while wounding us psychologically, spiritually, and physically. The pain is different depending on a person's position in the social structure, but the entire structure commits a deep violence against the human condition that transforms every person into a grist for an mill designed to extract all value from nature and people, monetize it, and consolidate it in the hands of the few so that they may satisfy the more base and fearful parts of their own selves that they have become trapped in, and even these chosen few are alienated and suffering as well.

This situation is not the only way we could be living, but as long as it's in place none of us can be full and liberated manifestations of our most sacred, intimate, truthful, and loving natures. None of us can avoid harming each other and falling short of what we know we could be. None of us.

We often exhibit two responses to this truth that create deep tension, particularly in the world of identity politics. Fortunately, there is a third choice that presents an alternative path.

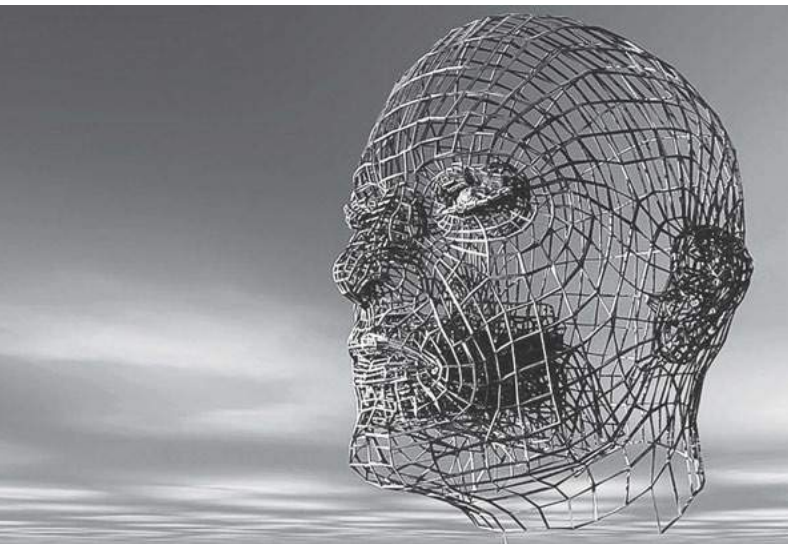
The first response is to tune into a dimension of reality that does not carry the message of the structural violence and our complicity. *Tikkun* readers are likely pretty adept at noticing avoidance patterns like consumerism, bigotry, and ignorance, but there is a more subtle channel that well-intentioned spiritual folks are more likely to get caught on: the transcendent present.

This transcendent present is real. It is a place beyond word, thought, and distinction where everything is exactly as it should be. Here, even the darkest of emotions are merely the decadent unfurling of a universe that knows nothing but love. This is the place where matter, space, and energy are the same; the place where all is one and separate objects are as much an illusion as invented categories like race, gender, and nationality. There are no barriers to love here, and all is an ecstatic cosmic union.

This dimension is referred to in most spiritual traditions and it is an essential aspect of our reality, but a fixation on the transcendent present and a belief that it holds a truth superior to other states of being can create two destructive consequences: escapism and denial. Both consequences do not arise from the the experience of the transcendent present itself, but rather the belief that the state is more true or real than other states.

Escapism arises from the addiction to constantly occupying this state. Like other addictions, people seek a particular experience that allows them to avoid more painful or unfamiliar parts of existence; and, like other addictions, people are willing to commit and rationalize harmful acts in pursuit of their goal. Years ago, England used colonization to get access to coffee and tea; today people are leveraging racist capitalism to get access to exclusive yoga retreats. In both cases there are sets of reasons that make this palatable for the addict, most commonly "this is the just the way the world works." Instead of feeling the discomfort and propulsion to action that would come with noticing that their healing is dependant upon someone else's suffering, the escapist "rises above" this through "acceptance" and continues to reside in the transcendent present. This creates a fracture that allows the person to plaintively accept the presence of violence. The resultant placid calmness in the face of oppression is not enlightenment, it is dissociation that reinforces structures of violence and prevents people from connecting deeply to the world or themselves.

Denial inflicts harm by suppressing tools for self awareness and liberation. From the transcendent present, we see categories like race, gender, ability, sexuality, and nationality



as contingent occurrences rather than the true unified nature of humanity and existence; and we are right. We would also be right to observe that a rock is not a seperate object but really part of a unified energy field vibrating in mostly empty space. So be it, but if someone throws the rock at us, it will hurt. Same with identity. Of course it's socially constructed, but it has become a real facet of existence that shapes social, physical, and psychological space. Language is a social construct but it writes laws that shuttle people into prisons. Money is a social construct, but that awareness is of little help to a poor person. Identity is a construct but that knowledge doesn't really help someone who is oppressed because of theirs. The suggestion of unrealness of identity is tantamount to a denial of the lived experience of people acutely aware of theirs, and is only a plausible stance to those who have mistakenly believe that a life of freedom from acute identity-based oppression is accessible to everyone. We need to understand the reality of identity in order to see what it will take to liberate ourselves.

The notion of the unrealness of identity also denies vital self-expression. We know that a being expressing itself as a member of a particular group can transform the world into a more liberated place (e.g. gay folks coming out to homophobic family members who subsequently re-evaluate their beliefs); we understand how various cultures and traditions carry tremendous contributions to humanity that have been ignored and their proponents degraded because of their identities; we have experienced how tremendously healing it can be to love an aspect of ourselves we were taught to hate. Yet when people practice assertive identity-based self love and elevation of their contributions to humanity, folks who are addicted to the transcendent present see it as merely attachment to illusory characteristics that detract from an awareness of our unity.

Not so. These are the particularities through which the universal expresses itself. It is analogous to language. The English language is shaping, limiting, enabling, and restricting the way this writing you are reading is expressing ideas that transcend language. If I wrote this piece in another language it would be exactly the same and completely different, there would be some new things I would be able to say and others I could not. Same with identity. The contingencies are determinative of and inseparable from the expression, and they are very much not the thing being expressed. We cannot simply reside in a transcendent present where we only witness the essences because we won't be able to notice the decadent intricacies of particular expressions or truly love the individuals from which they arise. More than that, we will ignore that we exist in a world that is killing some people and providing wealth to other on the basis of those contingencies, particularities, and expressions. As long as the world is like this, denial of identity is a dangerous delusion even if it is a cosmic truth.

The second common reaction to our collective condition is run away into an intellectualized future. Sitting in the pain and stuckness of the present, we imagine a world that is a perfect embodiment of our hearts' desire. This imagination produces visions, plans, stories, theories, and frameworks. It gives us hope and relief; and it creates an essential creative tension between the present and the future by enabling us to identify and change aspects of our world that do not yet meet our ideal.

Unfortunately, holding a vision of any ideal can result in a chronic case of not-enoughness. We are familiar with it in many realms of our lives as we scold our selves or each other for not being enough; not educated enough, not smart enough, not pretty enough, not whatever enough. Sometimes it motivates change, but it is often incredibly toxic, self hating, and paralyzing. We see this trope playing out constantly in the realm of identity politics.

Visionaries and activists hold an ideal image of the world where we are not experiencing identity-based violence, and they can spot every occurence of where we fall short. The violence occurs so constantly that it is easy to get caught in this wavelength and see nothing but the fact that we are not anti-oppressive enough, reflective enough, committed enough, wise enough, or just enough to cocreate the world we crave.

This assessment of our collective not-enoughness is accurate from the perspective of the idealized future, but it often results in self-destructive behavior in the present. We reject aspects of ourselves that are out of line with our ideals, we reject others when they exhibit those behaviors, and we hate the things that caused them. We fixate on all the ways that we are falling short of our ideals, and if we can't stomach accepting our own role and shortcomings we just project and lash out on others.

A doctor does not cure a patient by constantly telling them they are not healthy enough, a therapist does not just tell a client they are not loving enough, and an activist can not just tell everyone they are not just or anti-oppressive enough. That's just not how things change, and we know it. We also know that the reason we are scolding each other for being not enough is that we are scared, wounded, and having a really hard time accepting loving ourselves and each other because we are also stuck in this labyrinth of structural violence. It's the same reason we scold each other for not being smart, successful, or pretty enough: internalized self hatred and projection.

> **We can accept the world as it is, and reject it, and accept the rejection while rejecting the accepting.**

Residing in the imagined future attunes us to the unacceptable violence and the inadequacy of many responses, but it fails to witness the truths visible from the standpoint of the transcendent present. It cannot see that everyone already is enough and that love permeates all actions and things. Identity politics is a tremendous critical and analytic approach, but it is not the most generative or nurturing, particularly as it is expressed through wounded souls such as myself who have wielded it as a tool for projection, blame, constructing ourselves as "better than," acquiring a position of dominance, and competing to be the "wokest" person in the room.

The ultimate shortcoming of identity politics and intersectionality is that it does not bring us into direct relationship with the energy that transforms the present. The irony is that this force *is* our true identity. It is the self that pre-exists and will outlast all social systems. It is the identity that will serve as the foundation for a truly nonviolent and liberating politics.

That brings us to our third option for how to cope with reality. We can witness that the transcendent present, imagined future, wounded past, need to change, and immediate perfection all exist at the same time and that this is not contradictory. We can accept the world as it is, and reject it, and accept the rejection while rejecting the accepting.

There is a self within us, lets call it a soul, that preexists all concepts and yearns to express itself in, and connect with, the material world. It can only do so through the means at its disposal: its body, its language, is time, its place, its social structure, its position within that social structure, and all of the other uncountable factors that construct its reality. The soul is being birthed constantly in each one of us, breaking its way forth into the world, like a seed looking for the light.

It is not my whiteness, my maleness, my Jewishness, or what have you. It is the thing that expresses itself through and despite these limitations. And it is the exact same self that you have, though yours is expressing itself through an entirely different set of contingencies. Just like we can have the same house and have different experiences of the house, and we can have the same belief and different experiences and expressions of the belief; we have the same self while having different experiences of that self. This is not another self that is just like my self, it is the same self. It is the force that can overcome the constraints, karma, and patterns of the past to recreate reality and our experience of it in order to more fully reflect the grandeur of the universe.

This is our real identity. Identity politics helps us understand how this self inhabits and is influenced by certain socially constructed identities, but it does not help us tune into our true selves. In fact, it often essentializes the constructed categories and convinces us that we really are nothing more than the sum total of our socio-political coordinates, our contingent experiences. This alienates us from the transformative self that resides within and repeats the deepest oppressive alienation perpetuated by the current oppressive system: the severing of humanity from Truth, Love, Liberation, Connection, and Peace.

We can be this self here amidst the contradiction. Not searching for escapism or purity in the transcendent present or the imagined future, but rather understanding that we are the force of transformation constantly expressing itself in a world that is made perfect by its need to be transformed. Only by recognizing we are not the contingencies and that the contingencies are real and determinative of our lives can we begin to transform them. We must realize that we are not all these identities, we are our soul, and our soul is a constant revolution; that's why the system of domination keeps trying to convince us it doesn't exist. ■

SIMON MONT is Managing Editor at Tikkun and an organizational development consultant.

Progressive Islam

Reawakening Authenticity

DR. ADIS DUDERIJA

As a male person of Muslim background (Bosnian Muslim by birth) and as someone who came of age around the time of 9/11, I have sought ways to understand my faith that is affirmative of Goodness and Love as well as open to potential goodness and love in every human being. This search set me off on a journey that eventually had me embark upon a career in academia and come to dedicate much of it to the theorising of progressive Islam. The fruits of this labour of love include two books, the second of which, the *Imperatives of Progressive Islam* was published in early 2017. In no small measure was my journey inspired and influenced by the wonderful work done by Tikkun and the Network of Spiritual Progressives that I became acquainted with some ten years ago while researching on progressive Islam.

In this article, I will draw upon my previous scholarship to provide an overview of the worldview underpinning progressive Islam, its approach to conceptualising and interpreting the Islamic tradition, its theology and its normative imperatives. In doing so, I wish to present a less well known but no less authentic understanding of Islam that will hopefully challenge what many non-Muslims and Muslims think about what Islam was, is or can ever be.

Introduction and Overview:

Progressive Islam is an umbrella term covering approaches to the Islamic tradition and (late) modernity, which employ the words "progressive" or at times "critical" (e.g., the magazine *Critical Muslim* published in the United Kingdom) when labelling themselves or which fall into Progressive Islam as defined herein. The main theoreticians behind this contemporary Muslim thought are academics and public intellectuals from both Muslim majority and Muslim minority contexts and include scholars like Hassan Hanafi from Egypt; Enes Karic from Bosnia, Ali Ashghar Engineer from India; Nurkolich Majid from Indonesia, Sadiyya Shaikh, Ebrahim Moosa and Farid Esack from South Africa; Ziba Mir Hosseini and Mohsen Kadivar from Iran; Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri from Morocco; Jasmine Zine from Canada; Hashim Kamali from Afghanistan/Malaysia; Kecia Ali from the United States; Abdulaziz Sachedina from Tanzania/USA; Abdullahi An'Naim for Sudan; Khalid Masud from Pakistan; and Khaled Abou El Fadl from Egypt /USA to name but prominent few. Importantly, progressive Muslim academics and intellectuals include a significant number of females. Progressive Muslim thought also has a global grassroots activist presence associated with Muslims for Progressive Values, Musawah, and like-minded movements.

In terms of its overall worldview, Progressive Islam is best characterized by its commitment and fidelity to certain ideals, values, practices, and objectives that are expressed in many ways and take form in a number of different themes. These themes primarily concern issues pertaining to progressive Muslims' *critical* positioning in relation to (1) the hegemonic economic, political, social, and cultural forces from the Global North, (2) hegemonic patriarchal, exclusivist, and ethically ossified interpretations of their own inherited Islamic tradition, and (3) the values underpinning both Enlightenment modernity as well as radical forms of postmodern thought. This critique, therefore, simultaneously challenges both (neo-)traditional and puritan Islamic hegemonic discourses on many issues (including the debates on modernity, human rights, gender equality and justice, democracy, and the place and role of religion in society and politics) and their Western-centric conceptualizations and interpretations, embedded as they are in the values, worldview, and assumptions underpinning the Enlightenment.

One of the main concepts permeating progressive Muslim thought is the centrality of spirituality and the nurturing of interpersonal relationships based on Sufi-like ethico-moral philosophy. By this I mean an intellectualised form of Sufism that exists without the accompanying misogynist and highly hierarchical elements present in much of the pre-modern Sufi tradition. Moreover, progressive Muslims emphasise God's universal nature and the universality of the faith itself through demonstrating God's concern for humanity in general which as, I will outline below, leads to them to embracing religious pluralism.

Cultivating and strengthening the multifaceted and dynamic aspects of the inherited Islamic tradition and resisting

Peter Knight

its reductionism and exclusivist interpretation founded on patriarchy, misogyny, and religious bigotry is an important additional trait underpinning the worldview of Progressive Islam.

Progressive Muslims are also very critical of the hegemony of the modern free market–based economics, political and social structures, institutions, and powers that support, maintain, or are not critical of the (unjust) status quo. This constellation of forces is often called "The Empire," and progressive Muslims consider it to have brought about the transformation and the reduction of a human, a carrier of God's spirit, into a primarily economic consumer that has contributed to the great economic disparities between the majority world of the poor South and the minority world of the rich North.

Progressive Muslims also wish to shift the current discourses on jihad from being primarily embedded in overly geopolitical and security and terrorist related analytical and conceptual matrixes to that of inner intellectual and ethical and principally non-violent struggle and resistance to forces that conflict with their overall worldview.

Progressive Muslims consider the nature of the concept of the Islamic intellectual tradition (*turath*) to be a dynamic, humanly constructed product of many past and present communities of interpretation. The concept of cultural cum religious authenticity (*asala*) in progressive Muslim thought is not based upon a literal clinging to the Islamic tradition but on a creative, critical engagement with it. In this sense progressive Islam can be conceptualised as a form of critical Islamic traditionalism. Progressive Islamic consciousness is firmly rooted in Islamic tradition itself and is uncompromisingly cosmopolitan in its outlook. Importantly, the theory and practice of progressive Islam has the ability to redefine the very meaning of Islam in light of late modernity without abandoning the parameters of faith.

Progressive Muslims' approach to, and engagement with, modernity is also characterized by an attempt to problematize the history of debate between Islam and modernity or between Islam and the West which conceptualizes the two as being mutually exclusive. Moreover, progressive Muslims' understanding of the historical processes leading to modernity in the West considers them a result of trans-cultural and inter-civilisational processes, thereby challenging the often made claim that modernity is a purely Western civilisational product. Therefore, progressive Islam is in this sense not 'Western.'

Why 'Progressive' in Progressive Islam

The concept of "progress" in progressive Muslim thought is conceptualised as the possibility and not inevitability of change. In other words progressive Muslim thought does not subscribe to the idea of Eurocentric, Age of Enlightenment approach to 'progress' as a deterministic process, but rather to the idea that progress, including moral progress, is possible in a variety of different forms and from different sources. Therefore, progressive Muslim thought breaks away from unilinear conceptualisations of progress either in their western scientific, political (e.g. Fukoyama) or philosophical (e.g. Hegel) dimensions. Again, in this sense progressive Islam is not 'secular.'

The idea of progress also stems from progressive Muslim scholars' conviction that the primary sources of Islamic teachings, the Quran and Sunna, were progressive in approaching ethical and legal issues of their times by embodying and calling for a more ethical vision beyond what was prevalent and customary. Progressive Islam wants to stay true to this vision.

The concept of progress in progressive Islam also signifies that ethical values like justice and fairness do not remain frozen in time. As collective human experience testifies, they are in principle, subject to change as God's creative powers bear down directly on our own collective reason and our collective ethico-moral compass. Progressive Muslim thought considers that it is the role of every individual to ever more faithfully approximate the Divine as the source of absolute Beauty, Justice and Mercy and that is only possible if our ethical systems do not remain frozen (as in case of traditionalist/pre-modern based approaches). As such, progressive Islam theorizes Islamic theology, ethics and law in such a manner to allow space for ethico-moral progress/improvement in the never ending quest for ethical perfection.

Another reason why progressive Muslim thought employs the term 'progressive' is to highlight the strong affinities in the kind of theologies/philosophies, interpretational approaches and socio-political and ethical values that exist among progressive religious/spiritual movements worldwide such as the Network of Spiritual Progressives.

Normative Imperatives of Progressive Islam:

In terms of its conceptualizing and interpreting the Islamic tradition, progressive Islam can be further characterised by subscribing to a number of 'imperatives.' By the concept of imperative in progressive Muslim thought I refer to certain theological, moral, and ethical principles that the community agrees ought to guide principled actions of those who believe in the Islamic message and which are considered to be in accordance with the foundational Islamic textual sources. Importantly, these normative imperatives are considered to be applicable to all humanity, since they are premised on the belief in pre-theoretical and pre-conventional concepts of truth and justice that do not presuppose faith. In the context of Islam as a religious tradition, this translates itself in the

idea of Islam being an ethico-religious worldview whose anchoring value is the idea of what could be termed the ethics of responsibility in which humans as stewards of God's creation have the responsibility to act justly and fight for justice even if it is against their own self-interests.

Epistemological Openness and Methodological Fluidity

By this it is meant that proponents of progressive Islam do not subscribe to commonly employed dichotomies such as tradition versus modernity and secularism versus religion, or to simplistic generalization such as modernity equals Western or Judeo-Christian intellectual/civilizational tradition. As such, the proponents of progressive Islam are engaged in permanent dialogue with the progressive agendas of other cultures, drawing inspiration not only from faith-based liberatory movements such as liberation theology (see below), but also from movements that are premised outside a faith-based framework, such as secular humanism. I refer to this aspect of progressive Muslim thought as epistemological progressivism.

This is in contrast to non-progressive based approaches to the Islamic tradition whose worldview and the very concept of the Islamic tradition itself is premised on what could be called epistemological arrest and methodological closure. According to these approaches authenticity is locked in the past and the past is constantly imposing itself onto the present leaving little or no room for meaningful, consequential, creative, and innovative thought.

Islamic Liberation Theology

Progressive Muslim scholars consider theology of liberation to be an absolute imperative for Muslims living in the current socio-political and wider geopolitical context. This context includes the traumatic legacy of colonialism; the growing gap between rich and poor in general and between rich and poor Muslims in particular; the aggressive spread of forms of Islamic puritanism/fundamentalism and their alliance with imperialist neo-liberal capitalism whose epicentre is in the West (and more specifically in the United States of America); and the political, economic and social impotence of various secular/liberal/modernist as well as conservative mainstream forms of political Islam.

In fact, the emergence of Islamic liberation theology as conceptualized by progressive Muslim scholars examined below has been inspired in significant part through their engagement with the pioneers of liberation theology in the Christian majority world context such as G. Gutiérrez, C. Torres, and L. Boeff, to name but the most prominent few. Shabbir Akhtar, one of the main proponents and pioneers of Islamic liberation theology, goes as far as to suggest that Islamic liberation theology is in fact an Islamization of Christianity. This stands as a strong example of progressive Muslim thinking that finds inspiration in movements and schools of thought that are not necessarily part of the historical experience of Islam's concrete historical trajectory but which are considered as being in accordance with its overall ideals, values, objectives, and therefore, imperatives.

Much like their Christian liberation theology counterparts, in whose work they find sources of inspiration, progressive Muslim scholars consider faith to be an indispensable and vital stimulus for struggle against oppression and injustice at the grassroots level. These scholars have moved away from many aspects of mainstream accommodationist interpretations of Islamic theology that are irreconcilable with the ideals, values, and objectives of (Islamic) liberation theology as outlined above. As a result, the progressive Muslim scholars have used sophisticated methodologies and hermeneutics in systematic and creative efforts to reinterpret many fundamental concepts of their creed, including core theological concepts, in order to reflect their commitment to theology of liberation. For example: (1) for progressive Muslim scholars, the concept of Revelation is not a theocentric but anthropocentric concept which brings humanity rather than God into full historical limelight as subject of study; (2) the five pillars of Islam are considered as religious in their form, but political in nature as their content implies free will, freedom to act, responsibility for one's actions and hence the need to establish justice and fight injustice; and (3) the concept of tawhid (usually understood as a theological concept describing 'Divine Unity' as a central tenet of Islamic theology) is considered to be an action-oriented belief system which affirms emancipatory and liberatory practices of the entire humankind and resists oppression, tyranny and injustice.

Engaging in a quintessential progressive Muslim's 'multiple critique,' progressive Muslim scholars are also relentlessly scrutinizing all forces and structures responsible for perpetuation of oppression and injustice regardless of whether these emanate from outside or within of the Islamic tradition and irrespective of the race, ethnic or gender-based identities of their victims.

Progressive Islamic theology as Islamic liberation theology, therefore, gives priority to orthopraxis over orthodoxy. The human and the human condition are central to this type of theology. Furthermore, this theology, holds that humans are considered to experience the Divine most readily and immediately through their interactions with other human beings rather than by contemplating abstractly on the Divine, observing nature, or engaging in various spiritual exercises (i.e. ritual).

This theological orientation, favours inductive over deductive reasoning/thinking because its foundation and starting point is the world of the human condition with its incredible diversities (including religious) and complexity which makes it very difficult to think in binary terms (e.g. having salvation – v. not having salvation). In addition, it is more likely to be

open to and accommodating of the idea of religious pluralism; i.e. the premise that none of the reified religious traditions made in the crucible of history (as well as those in the present and the future) are capable of objectively and fully capturing the Divine, thus none can claim monopoly over God. This, in turn, translates into the notion that, according to this progressive theology, the idea of God is not fully graspable to the human either through their intellect, mind, reason or 'heart.'

By definition, such a theological orientation also implies that the sacred scriptures cannot offer us humans an unequivocal, clearly accessible and once and for all valid understanding of God through the simple process of reading/interpretation. Instead, it considers the human interpreter and her subjectivities and contingencies as most significantly determinative of a process of interpretation that is envisaged as a never ending dynamic process that continually evolves with reason. There is, in other words, an organic and dialectical relationship between revelation and reality. Furthermore, this theology gives precedence to reason-based ethics over law. It insists that law must be in constant service of ethics and that law ought to transform alongside evolving ideas about ethics as developed by humanity. This theology holds that in the post-revelatory period this evolution is exclusively driven by reason/intellect. Put succinctly, this theology embraces and even thrives on pluralism, diversity, and what is fundamental to all of it: uncertainty.

A Human Rights Based Approach to Islamic Tradition

The last three to four decades have witnessed an increasing internationalization of human rights discourse as a global platform for the contemporary language of progressive politics with its focus on eradication of all types of inequalities which perpetuate, or are complicit in, various social injustices around the world. The question of the compatibility of Islam and human rights at a theoretical *and* conceptual level has been a prominent theme in this regard.

Speaking in broad terms, progressive Muslim scholars, approach the issue of compatibility or the relationship between modern human rights discourse and the Islamic tradition by placing both in a historical perspective. In agreement with the proponents of non-western forms of human rights schemes, such as that of Bueventura de Santos, progressive Muslim scholars are engaged in developing a theoretical framework for a constructive encounter between the two human right schemes at the level of abstract concepts. In doing so, progressive Muslim scholars seek to weave the ethos and the culture of human rights discourse into the social and cultural fabric of Muslim-majority societies in order for those rights to be more effectively realized in the political and legal realms of these societies.

As such, progressive Muslim scholars are interested in engendering Islamic human rights schemes which are sensitive to the historical, ethical, and religious sentiments of Muslims but which are in agreement with or compatible with those of the modern human rights schemes at the conceptual level. In other words, progressive Muslim thinkers aim to theoretically affirm the *conceptual* compatibility between Islamic doctrine and the modern human rights scheme. For this to take place, progressive Muslim scholars highlight the importance of developing a fresh, rigorous and systematic methodology of interpretation of the fountainheads of the Islamic worldview, the Quran and the Sunna. This methodology is based on rational Islamic theology and ethics briefly described above, as well as on a particular conceptualization of divine ontology whose central tenets are justice and mercy. These values, in turn, are considered to be sources of universal moral values that are to be extended to and applicable equally to all of humanity. This argument rests on the basis that each and every human being is considered a unique creation of God having equal, dignity, moral worth, and moral agency. According to progressive Muslim scholars, this view is deeply embedded in the Qur'anic *worldview itself.* Hence, each individual is entitled to enjoying the same inalienable rights both at the level of individuals as well as members of different communities, including the political.

Rationalist and Contextualist Approaches to Islamic Theology and Ethics

The issue concerning the nature of socio-ethical norms and values and their relationship with Islamic law and jurisprudence is another prominent theme in progressive Muslim thought. In many ways, the proponents of progressive Muslim thought consider the issue of ethics in general to be one of the most pressing challenges to the Islamic tradition in

the contemporary age. In order to meet these challenges progressive Muslim scholars seek to (re-)discover/recover and build further on rationalist approaches to Islamic theology and ethics.

In order to do so, progressive Muslim scholars rely on two interpretational mechanisms in particular. One I term "comprehensive contextualization" and the other "teleological" or "purposive" Qur'an-Sunna hermeneutics. Comprehensive contextualisation is premised on the idea that the social and ethico-legal injunctions featured in the Qur'an and Sunna largely *reflected* the prevalent customary norms but did not initiate them. This applies to laws pertaining to gender relations (e.g. inheritance laws, divorce laws) and to laws regarding corporal punishments (known as the hudud) as well as others. As such they should not be viewed as universal aspects of the Islamic teachings. Purposive Islamic hermeneutics begins with the belief that the social and ethico-legal elements found in the primary texts of Islamic teachings, when approached holistically and contextually, point to certain moral trajectories that go beyond the immediate moral and ethical horizons within which Qur'an (and Sunna) initially operated. It is these moral trajectories, that manifest in the form of certain ethical ideals and values, that Islamic ethics and law seek to fulfill and preserve while being fully aware that these ethical values and ideals will require new articulations and conceptualisations in the light of new contexts. In this view, what was at one point *ma'ruf* may no longer be appropriate to fulfill the Islamic ethical ideals in a new context. For example, while the Qur'an and Sunna emphasise the concept of justice, this could require something different from Muslims in a world that speaks of gender, race, class, capitalism, and colonization than it did at the time of the Qur'an.

Importantly, both principles are premised on a rationalist theology and ethics that interpretationally privilege the spirit over the letter of Islamic ethics/law. In other words, Progressive Islamic hermeneutics is characterized by its emphasis on the role of context and history (i.e. the nature of previous communities of interpretation) in interpreting the foundational Islamic texts without questioning their ontologically divine nature.

These interpretational mechanisms, in turn, enable progressive Muslim thought to escape the hermeneutical confines of traditional Islamic law and ethics. Furthermore, these approaches accommodate and exist in harmony with contemporary conceptualizations of ethico-moral values such as justice and gender equality.

Social and Gender Justice

Commitment to social and gender justice, including the theorising of indigenous Islamic feminism, is another important pillar of progressive Muslim's approach to the Islamic tradition. In this respect a number of progressive Muslim scholars have developed very systematic and sophisticated non-patriarchal Qur'an-Sunna/hadith hermeneutical models which affirm gender-just interpretations of Islam and counter the prevalent patriarchal alternatives. These non-patriarchal Qur'an-Sunna hermeneutical models are characterized by the kind of interpretational principles outlined in the previous section.

Meena Keshwar, founder of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, speaking in 1982.

Although acknowledging that both feminism and Islam are highly contested evaluative concepts which elicit and hold various meanings to different actors participating in the debates on Islam and gender, progressive Muslim scholars consider that the term 'feminism' has currency in the context of Islamic tradition for a number of reasons including the following: (i) the existence of Islamic feminism transcends and destroys the inaccurate and artificial conceptual dichotomies and polarities between religion versus secularism, 'East' versus 'West,' and Modernity versus Tradition, which have been employed to deny rights to Muslim women; (ii) the premise that there can be no long-lasting and sustainable gains in women's rights unless patriarchal notions of family and gender relations are debated, challenged, and redressed within an Islamic framework; and (iii) its ability to highlight the importance of gender justice in conceptualising Islam as a normative tradition.

Affirmation of Religious Pluralism and Diversity

Progressive Muslim scholars theorise and affirm the normative validity of pluralism, including the religious, on number of levels. In addition to what I have described above, these

include the inescapable pluralism at the level of understanding religious *texts* (hermeneutics/scriptural reasoning), and at the level of religious *experiences*; some thinkers consider this pluralism as Divinely willed. In doing so, they build further on pluralistic tendencies present in the pre-modern Islamic tradition as, for example found, in the writings of sages such as Ibn al-'Arabi and Jalaluddin al-Rumi. However, progressive Muslim thought does not embrace radical forms of postmodern pluralism/relativism but rather that of pluralism based on *reasoned* plurality of truths and, generally speaking, also defend the normative validity of religious pluralism in accordance with perennial philosophy approaches.

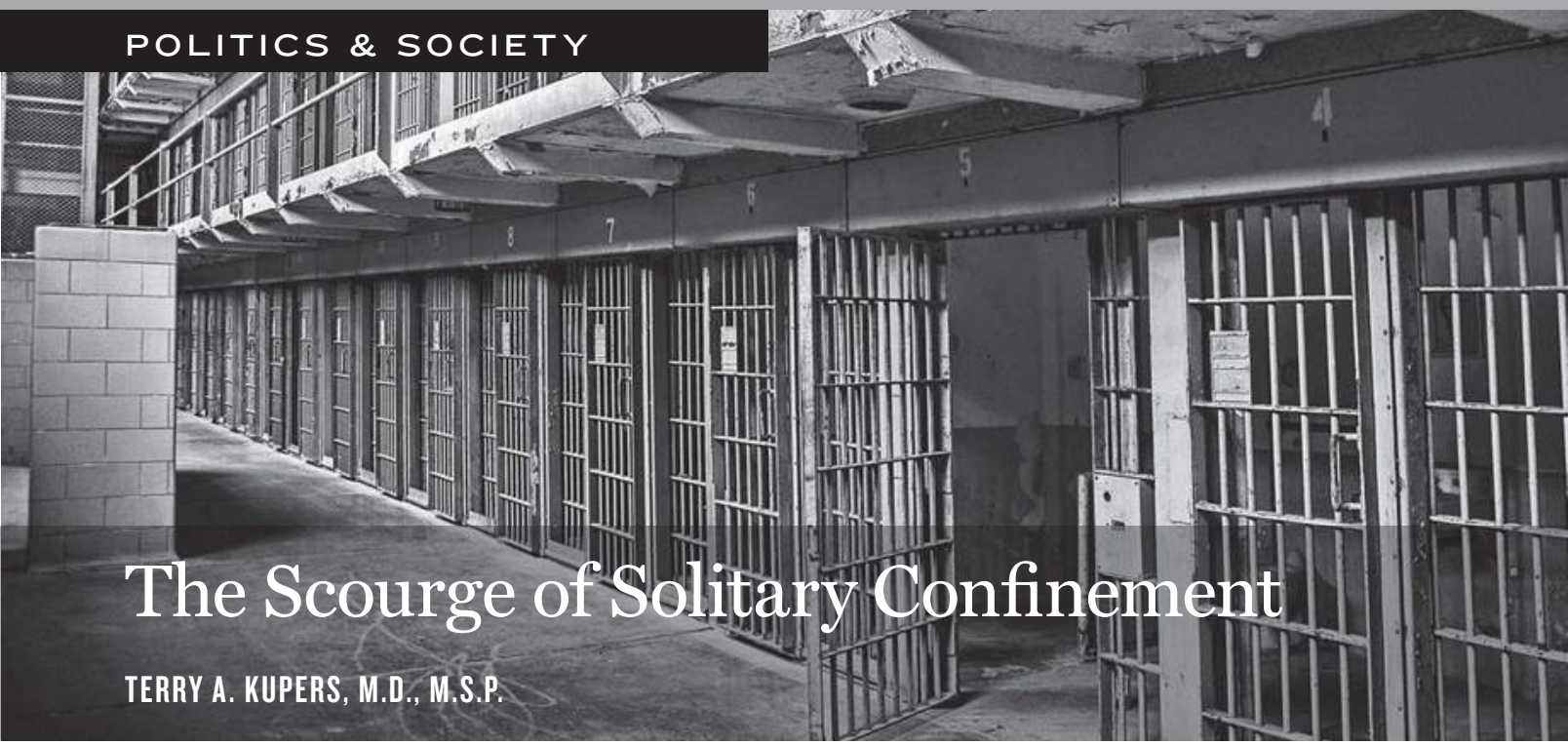
This recognition of pluralism and diversity, including in the realm of religion, in turn, plays a number of very important functions in the progressive Muslim thought. For example, the idea of irreducible diversity and pluralism forms the basis for human moral responsibility to be just and humble. Pluralism and diversity are also considered as necessary preconditions, philosophically speaking, for understanding ontologically true meaning of the human condition as such.

The above, in a nutshell, provides a brief overview of progressive Muslims' worldview.

Conclusion

I am convinced that progressive Islam offers the best answers to many of the challenges that contemporary Muslims are facing and that, along with other progressive minded spiritual, religious political, social and economic progressive forces, can contribute to the flourishing of the human spirit and indeed all of the God's creation. More specifically, I hope that the ideas inherent to the theory and practice of progressive Islam can shift the current views about the nature and place of Islam in the contemporary world among both Muslims and non-Muslims based as they are on Islam's ontological securitisation in the age of the 'War on Terror;' Islam as the religion of poor and the alien immigrant; Islam as a religion of tyrannical dictators in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim majority world to a view of an Islam as a cosmopolitan, intellectual and ethically beautiful force that can meaningfully contribute to the furthering of the common good of the entire humanity and the planet. ■

DR. ADIS DUDERIJA is a lecturer in Islam and Society, in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University. His research expertise are in contemporary Islam and western Muslims identity construction.



The Scourge of Solitary Confinement

TERRY A. KUPERS, M.D., M.S.P.

Bob Jagendorf

The imprisonment binge of recent decades has resulted in over two million people currently in jails and prisons, nearly fifty percent of whom are African American. In the same decades that the prison population was multiplying exponentially, the proportion of prisoners suffering from serious mental illness was also expanding. There are now ten times as many prisoners with serious mental illness behind bars as there are in state and federal psychiatric hospitals. I have had the privilege of appearing as a psychiatric expert witness in class action lawsuits challenging the kind of harsh conditions of confinement and inadequate correctional mental health services that violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment. The conditions challenged in class action lawsuits in the 70's and 80's included crowding and the increased violence, psychiatric breakdown, and suicides that it caused.

In the late 80's, a historic wrong turn occurred. The violent jails and prisons seemed out of control. Instead of down-sizing the population and expanding rehabilitation programs — reasonable and safe measures that would have effectively resolved the crisis — the powers that be decided to lock up "the worst of the worst" in solitary confinement, often in special facilities called supermax prisons. There, relatively stable prisoners experienced serious emotional distress while prisoners with mental illness experienced severe exacerbation of their disorder and eventually, magnified psychiatric disability.

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Ryan's story (not his real name) is dreadfully representative. Ryan entered a large maximum security prison in the Midwest at age seventeen, before he had anything but peach fuzz on his cheeks. He was tried as an adult and sentenced to five years in a maximum security prison. White, five foot six inches tall and slight, he was what's known as "a fish," "meat," or "bait" in a maximum security prison. As soon as he got off the bus, prisoners lining the path to the reception office started their catcalls: "Nice ass," "Come bunk with me and I'll show you a good time," "Hey, wanna suck my dick?" The catcalls were coming from older, much larger men, and they persisted the entire time he was walking across the yard under guard. He had heard from other youth at the county jail where he'd been awaiting trial that prisoners would fight over who got to claim him as sexual prey. And he was told by other kids that his options were, basically, "Fight or fuck!"

A slightly older cellmate at the jail, who had already done some prison time, summed up for Ryan what young prisoners like him are forced to confront:

> "You can ask for protection, they call it 'lockin' up,' but if you do that you're branded a sissy from then on, and either someone will rape you in the protection unit or eventually you'll get out of protection and they'll attack you on the yard. You can go out on the yard and take your chances, but being small with no stubble on your face you'll have to do a lot of fighting. You can hook up with a gang, and they'll take care of you, nobody will bother you because they'd be afraid of the gang's retaliation, but then you're in a gang and the cops [correction officers] will probably put you in segregation. Or—this is what I did on my last bit [prison term]—you can punch someone really hard and get into a fight. The cops will break it up and throw you in the hole for fighting. You'll be in seg [solitary confinement] for a while, and that's a rough go, but at least you'll be safe and you won't have snitched, asked for protection, gone into a gang, or gotten raped."

Ryan had been raped before, by a stepfather when he was seven. There had been a lot of violence in the home where he grew up. His mom was a methamphetamine (crank) addict, his father had deserted the family when he was a few months old and he never saw him again, and there had been a series of "stepfathers," the men in his mother's life, several of whom beat him as well as his mother. Only one raped him. He had never had any counseling for the repeated early traumas. He was always agitated and couldn't concentrate or sit still at school. He got in a lot of fights: as he explained them to me, he was small and the other boys bullied him, but he decided early to stand up for himself and make them think twice about attacking him. He thinks he started using street drugs by the ninth grade to help him calm down, maybe to suppress pain from all the violence at home. He progressed from marijuana to crank and heroin. He dropped out of school in the ninth grade. Then he got caught stealing to support his habit, and that was the crime that sent him to prison at seventeen.

At the reception center of the adult prison he was stripped naked, made to stand in a large, cold, high-ceilinged room with a lot of other incoming prisoners, and examined gruffly by a doctor in front of all the other guys. "He grabbed my balls and had me cough, it was totally humiliating." He was issued prison garb and grilled by a classification officer who asked if he was gay or in a gang. He remembers being shown to the cell where he would be sleeping, and then he was sent out onto the prison yard. He walked around feeling terrified, not knowing who was going to jump him, but he knew he had to stay away from the places where prisoners of other races were gathered, he had to stay near the white guys, and he had to act as tough as he could given his age and size. He was mulling over his options and had not yet settled upon a survival strategy when a much larger, older man grabbed him, pulled him into a storage bin, and raped him brutally. His rapist told him that if he told anyone about the rape he would kill him and that he planned to find him the next day and rape him again.

When I met with Ryan, several months later, he was in solitary confinement in the supermaximum security area of the prison. He told me that he had never had "mental problems" before coming to prison, but when I met him he was distraught, suicidal, and exhibiting clear signs of psychosis. He reported that after the rape he didn't know what to do. He nervously approached a guard and asked what he was supposed to do in his situation. The officer said Ryan had to tell him who had raped him and then the officer would "take care of" the matter. Ryan was terrified and could not think straight, but he knew that the last thing he was going to do was to "snitch." He had been told that snitching would get him killed. So he did not tell the officer what had happened, saying instead, "Forget it," and went back out on the yard. He went up to another white prisoner who was only a little larger than him and hit him as hard as he could. Their fight was vicious, he sustained cuts and bruises on the face and ribs, and when the officers broke up the fight they took him to the infirmary. The nurse asked him what happened, but he responded with generalities and did not report the rape or his fear of going back on the yard. The officer wrote him a ticket, a disciplinary infraction, and he was transferred to the segregation unit.

Almost immediately after being confined in a cell by himself with nothing to do and no contact with family, Ryan began "falling apart." He was unable to concentrate enough to think through his problems. He became increasingly anxious and paranoid. He felt despair, believing that he would not be able to survive the five years he had to spend in prison. He did not know who to talk to. He started to believe that the people on his segregation tier—the officer who brought him his food trays and the tier-tender (a prisoner whose job it was to keep the tier clean)—were secretly plotting to enter his cell and force him to have sex. He could not sleep at night. He did not want to talk to the mental health counselor who came to the front of his cell to ask after him because a cell-front conversation could be overheard by other prisoners and officers, and anyway he was terrified that if he told the counselor about the rape he would be forced to confront the perpetrator and that would lead to retaliation. So he remained in his cell, did not talk to anyone, became increasingly terrified and paranoid, and began having what he termed "strange thoughts." He told me he was seriously contemplating suicide but wanted me to swear not to tell anyone.

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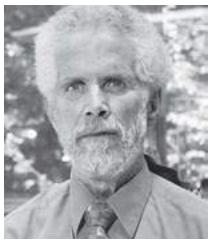
The most effective alternative to long-term solitary confinement would be massive reduction of the prison population with abolition of solitary confinement and concurrent upgrading of mental health and rehabilitation programming in the community as well as in correctional settings. We have learned that the more criminals that we lock away, the more those criminals are beaten, raped, and locked up in solitary, where they despair of ever returning to their families or finding meaningful employment. Eventually, 93% of prisoners are released, and if they were forced to endure significant time in solitary they are likely quite damaged. ■

(This article includes excerpts from a University of California Press, 2017 publication.)



TERRY A. KUPERS is a psychiatrist, Emeritus Professor at The Wright Institute, and author of *Prison Madness (1999) and Solitary: The Inside Story of Supermax Isolation and How We Can Abolish It* (2017).

"We Are Victims of Our Past . . ."—Israel's Dark History Comes to Light in New Documentaries

OLGA GERSHENSON

The 34th annual Jerusalem Film Festival opened on July 13 with a screening and greetings in Sultan Pool, a valley in between the West Jerusalem and the Old City. Sitting in the large amphitheater under the open sky, one could see the gorgeous old Jewish neighborhood of Yemin Moshe on one side, and the walls and steeples of the Old City on the other. The next day, three men, Palestinian citizens of Israel, came out of Al Aqsa Mosque and shot two Israeli Druze police officers who were guarding the compound. The police officers, themselves Arabs, died. Their assailants were killed too. This terrible incident started a new cycle of escalated violence and retaliations between Israelis and Palestinians.

But if you were at the beautiful Cinemateque, a site of the Festival, you'd never know about these political and military developments—there it was business as usual. People went to see movies, or spread out on the lawn chairs; they ordered drinks or ice-cream and had lively conversations. From where they sat, they could clearly see not only the Old City, where thousands of Palestinians were protesting the new restrictions, but also the Apartheid wall (or a Separation Barrier, its Israeli euphemism), that cuts across communities in the West Bank. But no one talked about it at the screenings or during the breaks.

This culture of denial is the Israeli reality. It is as if another wall comes in between the vibrant, flourishing, and exciting Israeli cultural production and the facts of the occupation on the ground. But once in a while, there is a breach in this wall of denial, and through the cracks one can glimpse the pain and the trauma, the terrible toll the violence takes not only on victims but also on perpetrators.

The wall of denial surrounding the past is especially thick. If 1967 is discussed occasionally and reluctantly (think about such films as *The Law in These Parts* or *Censored Voices*), the 1948 is still a non-starter. Whenever the War of 1948 (known in Israel as a War of Independence) is discussed, the violence of Israeli military-in-the-making against the Palestinians is justified as necessary for the survival of the new Israeli nation, which had to be established in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Today, both Israeli and Palestinian cultures exist in the shadow of these original traumas—the Holocaust and the Nakba (the Arab name for the War of 1948). The third generation has been raised with this complicated legacy. This new generation of Israeli artists and filmmakers dare today to deal with that trauma, and not only with the trauma as victims, but also as perpetrators.

Born in Deir Yassin, a new documentary by a young Israeli filmmaker, Neta Shoshani, which premiered at the Festival, is a case in point. Deir Yassin was an Arab village near Jerusalem that signed a non-violence agreement with the nearby Jewish neighborhood of Giv'at Shaul. Both sides adhered to the deal, but in April 1948, the Zionist paramilitary forces—Irgun and Lehi—conquered the village. When they ran into trouble, they called on the more mainstream Haganah for help. Approximately 110 villagers were killed, others were expelled. Rumors of a massacre in Deir Yassin spread across Palestine, causing panic and leading to mass exodus of the Arab population. The events in Deir Yassin had far-reaching consequences for both Jews and Palestinians. Arguably, it is at the root of the Palestinian refugee problem, whose displacement paved the way to the establishment of Israel as a Jewish majority state. The massacre at Deir Yassin implicated Zionist forces in violence: the victims turned perpetrators.

After the war, the village stood empty. In 1951, Israel's government established Kfar Shaul, a mental health hospital at the site of the village. The traces of Palestinian presence were erased.

To this day, Deir Yassin remains a taboo in Israel. Its history is blocked from public consciousness, and to the extent to which it is discussed, it is phrased as a debate of whether the events can qualify as a massacre. Born in Deir Yassin brings this dark history into the light. It recovers—or rather attempts to recover—the memory of Deir Yassin from the point of view of the perpetrators. In other words, it's a brave film.

Born in Deir Yassin is not fueled by attacks and accusations. Instead, it tells a complex and nuanced story, weaving together a conversation with

Dror Nissan, an Israeli man who was born to a mental hospital patient in Kfar Shaul, and interviews with former Zionist underground fighters, who took part in the conquest of Deir Yassin. These veterans are in their late 80s and 90s today, and they had a chance to reflect on their roles in the events. Some of them remain proud of the part they played in what they called a battle for Deir Yassin. Ben Zion Cohen, a fiery former Irgun operative says: "I am proud that I was in the underground . . . that I kicked out the Arabs. They ran away crying 'Deir Yassin is upon us!'" Uri Yanovsky of Haganah emphasizes the importance of Deir Yassin, which "made possible the establishment of the state." Shimon Moneta of Lehi, self-identified as a "Jewish terrorist" calls the 1948 war justified. In his view, it was the war for the survival—"we had to fight so that the next generation could be here." These veterans are so convinced that they are right that Moneta is distraught by the filmmaker's probing questions; he responds "We went wrong in your education—we failed to explain to our children where did they come from . . ."

But for other veterans, the assessment of the events is less clear-cut. Sarah Ben-Or, who fought with Haganah, speaks of her own trauma. She recalls the terrible silence that settled on the village after the battle was over and piles of corpses that needed to be buried. "It still haunts me," she admits. This is the nature of a trauma: "You don't just remember it—you live it." Others recall traumatic memories of their own: a horrified Arab child, a woman with her head cut off, a stench of burnt corpses, body parts flung into the air. . . . They do not fully agree on the nature of the events, and their scattered memories do not all add up to a coherent story. Maybe that is the nature of trauma, or maybe it's an evidence of their conflicted ideological positions.

But in fact, these awful sights were documented. Shraga Peled, who was with Haganah, remembers taking pictures for official documentation. Significantly, he has never seen the photos himself: "I repressed the images," he explained.

Neta Shoshani documents herself trying to get hold of these photographs, which are still held at the IDF archives. Facing rejection after rejection, she gets all the way to the Supreme Court. The judges examine the photos, and deny her appeal. According to them, the conflict hasn't been resolved and the exposure of the photographs of such graphic nature may harm Israel's foreign relations. Paradoxically, this judgement is an implicit acknowledgment that these images are incriminating. It is also a vivid testimony of Israel's attitudes to its dark history—the attempt to recover it is halted.

The story of the Deir Yassin massacre is told on screen in parallel with a story of Kfar Shaul, the Israeli mental health hospital. The two stories are different but they overlap in some sort of painful traumatic territory with unresolved past. Hanna Nissan, a mentally ill woman was a reluctant patient in Kfar Shaul in the 1950s-60s. She got pregnant, believing that the birth of a child will heal her, and she would be released. The child—Dror Nissan—was taken away from her. The film recreates Hanna's diaries and her correspondence with Dror. "This is an evil place," she writes to him from Kfar Shaul, "Never come here." But he does.

The connection between the two narratives, that of Deir Yassin and that of Kfar Shaul, comes to the fore in the words of Dror Nissan. "When I came to visit here," he says after the emotional journey, "I was shocked. I understood that it was ruins of the village—Deir Yassin. . . . A tragic continuity remained: victims exited, other victims entered." Filmed at night, sitting behind a fence, as if behind bars, Nissan acknowledges that reconciling with his mother's story was difficult. He wished he could escape his biography, but, he adds, "We are victims of our past."

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Collective memory and Israel's accountability for the Nakba is also at the center of another documentary, *Jerusalem, We Are Here,* by Israeli-Canadian filmmaker Dorit Naaman. If *Born in Deir Yassin* focuses predominantly on the perpetrators of the Nakba, *Jerusalem* is almost entirely about Palestinians expelled in 1948 from their beloved neighborhood of Qatamon, and their descendants today. It is more than a film: defined

Still from *Born in Deir Yassin*

Rotem Faran

as an interactive documentary, the project also includes sophisticated layered maps of Qatamon in different eras, as well as careful records of families, businesses, and architecture of every identified house in the neighborhood. In fact, *Jerusalem, We Are Here* is a virtual archive, which comes alive in the video and audio vignettes, which pop up as one moves along the interactive map. (It can be viewed in its entirety at www.jerusalemwearehere.com).

Jerusalem, We Are Here had its local premieres in Jerusalem in May, and in Ramallah and Bethlehem in July. It recently became a basis for a permanent exhibition at Zochrot, a Tel Aviv-based Israeli NGO working to promote accountability for the injustices of the Nakba. The exhibition, including a large interactive installation and a visual biographic archive, launched on July 20, coinciding with the 2017 Jerusalem Film Festival. But unlike the crowded screenings at Cinemateque, the opening at Zochrot attracted a small, albeit dedicated group.

Zochrot's mission is not popular in the current political climate in Israel. *Jerusalem, We Are Here,* with its focus on Palestinian past of the quintessential Jerusalemite neighborhood makes many Israelis uncomfortable. As one of the audience members phrased it, "I don't want to feel guilty." In fact, today Naaman is looking for ways to introduce her documentary, which was originally created for international audiences, to Israelis without putting them on the defense. "How do you tell the story that people don't know and don't want to know?" she asked at the event at Zochrot. "What is our responsibility as Israelis once this story is told?" This is why the documentary is available today in two versions—English and Arabic, whereas Hebrew version is still work in progress.

Qatamon today is an affluent Jewish neighborhood, full of stylish boutiques and restaurants, where one is more likely to hear English or French than Hebrew. Israelis are simply priced out. The distinctive Arab architecture of the neighborhood's gorgeous buildings is perceived as no more than a style. The Palestinian past of this urban space is thoroughly erased. What *Jerusalem, We Are Here* accomplishes so remarkably is restoration of this past, giving us a sense of what life there was like before 1948.

Still from *Jerusalem, We Are Here*

Dorrit Naaman

Back then it was also a wealthy neighborhood, home to a diverse group of people—mainly Christian Arabs, but also Armenian and Greek Orthodox, German colonists, and others. They were educated urban classes, with a taste for city life and culture. The documentary starts with a scene in a movie theater, once known as Regent Cinema (Lev Smadar today). As a red velvet curtain opens theatrically, we hear a pleasant conversation between two people in the audience about this place. "My mother used to come here," says the woman. "My grandfather had his first date with my grandmother here," shares the man. These two are Mona Hajjar Halaby and Anwar Ben Badis, researchers and educators with family roots in pre-1948 Qatamon. Momentarily, Naaman herself joins them in the theater—the three of them then take turns leading us along the streets of Qatamon, switching between English, Arabic, and Hebrew.

The scene in the movie theater is segue to the story of Fernando Schtakleff, an amateur cinematographer who ran Regent Cinema in the 40s. He captured his family on vacation to Haifa, Jaffa, and Tel Aviv: snappily dressed adults, laughing children. Soon though, his camera starts capturing not only the middle-class leisure, but pictures of destruction and violence. This was the start of the war of 1948. Schtakleff's family was eventually expelled.

After the Regent Cinema scene, the documentary can be experienced in two ways: one can follow along the pre-designed tours or switch to the interactive map. The tours take us on virtual walks along the beautiful streets of Qatamon, with stops at the marked houses. From there, a click of a mouse would open additional screens with short videos about the place and its inhabitants or audio testimonies. The interface of the interactive map allows us to see the bird's eye view of the neighborhood in different eras—from 1918, to 1930s and 1940s, to today. A click on a building reveals its brief story, and when available, photographs and documents. One can also toggle between the map and the tour.

Some of the former inhabitants are well known: Khalil Sakakini was an educator and a public intellectual. His

lovely home housed not only his family—whose photographs appear upon a click on the map—but also a massive library (which in 1948 was "transferred" to the Jewish National Archive at the Hebrew University). The family escaped to Cairo, but two of the Sakakini daughers, Dumia and Hala, moved to Ramallah where they lived for the rest of their lives. Hala Sakakini later wrote a memoir, "Jerusalem and I," where she hand-drew the map of Qatamon from memory.

The daughter of the Karmi family, Ghada, also wrote a memoir, "In Search of Fatima." The family was driven away from their home in 1948 and settled in London, in Golders Green, ironically, a Jewish neighborhood.

None of these families received any compensation for their properties; today worth millions and millions of dollars. Many have never seen their homes again. Others can come to visit. Ellie Savvides grew up as the daughter of a successful merchant in the neighborhood. As a young girl, she took dance lessons at the Greek Club, a social center for a substantial Greek community. Naaman found a 1946 footage of a dance recital there—young women in art-nouveu-inspired dresses move in the distinctly modernist dance, with young Ellie among them. In 2014, Ellie, now an elegant older woman comes to visit her childhood home from Cyprus, where her family ended up. Naaman's camera captures a failed negotiation with an Israeli family, occupying the home now to enter and have a look. But Ellie is welcome at the Greek Club, which still serves its much diminished community, offering programs such as Greek dancing, open to everyone. In a poetic and moving moment, the camera captures one of such programs where middle-aged Israelis are dancing in circles, with Ellie joining them and the video of 1946 is projected on the wall, the ghosts and the living dance together. . .

Several testimonies bring up the most traumatic event in the war for the neighborhood, the bombing of Semiramis Hotel, attacked by Haganah on January 5, 1948. Twenty seven civilians were killed. Taken together, the testimonies and stories in *Jerusalem, We Are Here*, paint a rich picture of the life in the neighborhood, and its subsequent destruction. Significantly, this is a story of urban Nakba, making an important addition to the better known story of takeover of Palestinian villages and displacement of their population.

In that sense, Naaman's film pays tribute to the influential documentary *House* by Amos Gitai. Back in 1981 Gitai told a story of a building in Jerusalem that was first taken by Israel from Palestinian owners, then passed onto a poor Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) Jewish immigrants, and ultimately, as the gentrification started, was bought by a wealthy Ashkenazi buyer, who then employed Palestinian laborers to renovate the house. That very building is located in Qatamon, on Dor Dor Ve-Dorshav Street, allegedly the most expensive address in Jerusalem today. This trajectory of multiple displacements and injustices, is characteristic of the entire neighborhood.

Naaman's own position as an Israeli telling the story of Qatamon's Palestinian past is complicated. She is the first to acknowledge it: "I come from a settler society. I don't have a way not to benefit from that." But that doesn't mean that she can just be complicit. "I think what I am trying to do is to take responsibility for what happened and to complicate the Israeli narrative," says Naaman. "We need to know our past, in order to be able to have a future."

This is no small step. Changing the victor's narrative to include the perspective of the oppressed people and recognition of their story is an important opening for further dialogue. A recent study conducted in Israel and the Palestinian Authority revealed that when people believe that their enemy acknowledges their victimhood, they are more open to reconciliation. In other words, when Israelis believe that Palestinians acknowledge their victimhood in the Holocaust, and Palestinians believe that Israeli Jews recognize and acknowledge their victimhood in the Nakba, both sides are more likely to make concessions for the sake of peace on divisive issues, including such non-starters as the status of Jerusalem and the Right of Return.[1]

The recovery of Israel's dark past, an open conversation about the grief caused to other people, is arguably the most important step that Israel can take towards the Palestinians, towards recognition of their loss, and to eventually taking responsibility for it. In other words, a step towards peace. Whether Israelis are ready to make this step is another question. It's true that these two new brave documentaries speak in the minority voices and their reception is controversial. But the mere fact of their appearance in Israel is inspiring hope. ■

Notes

1. Boaz Hameiri and Arie Nadler, "Looking Backward to Move Forward: Effects of Acknowledgment of Victimhood on Readiness to Compromise for Peace in the Protracted Israeli–Palestinian Conflict." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 2017, 1–15.

2. For full notes contact Chris@tikkun.org

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OLGA GERSHENSON is Professor of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she is also on the Film Studies faculty. A multidisciplinary scholar, her interests lie at the intersection of culture, history, and film.

Thomas Merton

Creation-Centered Mystic, Poet, and Prophet

A Way to God: Thomas Merton's Creation Spirituality Journey
by Matthew Fox | New World Library, 2016

REVIEW BY CHARLES BURACK

MATTHEW FOX is known as the passionate prophet of Creation Spirituality. For nearly four decades, he has championed the spiritual movements and persons that affirm the sacredness of Creation and unite mysticism with prophecy. In his latest book Fox explores the life of Thomas Merton, the influential 20th-century contemplative, writer, poet, and activist who did much to put Christianity in dialogue with the world's religions and to challenge the social, economic, and political trends of his times. *A Way to God* traces Merton's journey from a conventional "Fall/Redemption" Catholic theology to a nondual Creation Spirituality that is "more ecumenical and more prophetic, more grounded and earthy."

The book can be thought of as a conversation largely involving Fox, Merton, and Meister Eckhart (the medieval Rhineland theologian and mystic who Fox describes as "the spokesperson par excellence for the wisdom-based and nature-based mystical and prophetic tradition called Creation Spirituality"). Meister Eckhart not only deeply influenced Fox's own life but also profoundly affected Merton's transformation. Indeed, Merton called Eckhart "my lifeboat," "a great medieval thinker," and "a great man who was pulled down by a lot of little men." According to Fox, Eckhart "permeates Merton's work and consciousness from 1959 onward." Fox demonstrates that Buddhist teacher and writer D. T. Suzuki, who was in dialogue with Merton from about 1958 to 1968, played a pivotal role not only in catalyzing Merton's new ecumenical orientation but in fostering his reappraisal of Eckhart (twenty eight of Eckhart's theological propositions had been condemned by Pope John XII in 1329). It was Suzuki who wrote that "Eckhart's thoughts come most closely to those of Zen and Shin. . . . Eckhart, Zen, and Shin can be grouped together as belonging to the great school of mysticism."

For readers unfamiliar with Merton, I will briefly synopsize his life: Born in Paris in 1915, the first son of two

artists—an American mother and a New Zealander father—young Tom moved with his family in 1916 to the U.S. where his maternal grandparents lived. His mother died five years later of stomach cancer, and from then on he was largely raised by his itinerant painter father, who tried to make a living by farming, music, and journalism. In 1925 father and son moved back to France, where Tom was initially enrolled in a Catholic school and later, due to his grandparents' insistence, in a secular school. In 1927, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, from which he slowly recuperated. In 1931 his father died, so his grandparents sent him to public school in London, where he majored in languages and became editor of the literary magazine. Considering a career in the British diplomatic corps, Tom won a scholarship to Cambridge University in 1933 but plunged into a wild life of alcohol and women and fathered at least one child out of wedlock. His grandparents urged him to return to the U.S., where he enrolled in Columbia University. By 1935, he was

extremely focused on the question of the existence of God while continuing to pursue literary and political studies. In addition to completing his undergraduate degree, he completed a Master's degree in English with a special interest in the mystic, poet, and artist William Blake. Influenced by philosopher Jacques Maritain and other Catholic thinkers, he became a Roman Catholic in 1938. In December 1941, after a few years as a college English teacher, he joined the Trappist Monastery in Gethsemani, Kentucky, where he took a vow of silence. His love of both silence and writing created a tension not only in his life but in that of his superiors. His autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948) became an instant success and gave him notoriety in both Catholic and non-Catholic circles because it vividly addressed many of the psychological, economic, political, and religious issues that his contemporaries were grappling with. In 1949 he was ordained a priest. While his writings in the 1950s largely focused on the solitary, contemplative life, those in the 1960s were socially engaged with issues of racism, the Vietnam war, the nuclear bomb, worldwide poverty, and the Holocaust. He also wrote about other religions, especially Buddhism.

Early in Fox's important book we learn that in 1967, shortly after joining the Dominican Order, Fox wrote to Merton requesting advice on where to go to get a doctorate in spirituality. The nearly 52-year-old Merton recommended that Fox study at the Institut Catholique in Paris, where Fox would soon meet his life-changing mentor, Pere Marie-Dominique Chenu, who "named the Creation Spirituality tradition" for him. Ever since studying with Chenu, Fox's vocation has been "to research and teach and preach and make known that much-forgotten and often-maligned tradition." Chenu was also "the grandfather of Liberation Theology and a former worker priest" who helped Fox "reconcile mystical experience with prophetic action."

A central thesis of *A Way to God* is that Merton "lives and writes a Creation Spirituality and [. . .] dances through the Four Paths back and forth on a regular basis." These four paths contrast with the traditional threefold Christian mystical experience of purgation, illumination, and union. A large portion of the book demonstrates how Merton came to walk each of the four paths of Creation Spirituality. Later chapters discuss Merton's actual or likely views of sexuality, feminism, religion, fundamentalism, empire, and the Cosmic Christ.

The first path of Creation Spirituality is the "*via positiva*," which is the "path of awe and wonder." Fox describes Merton's initial conversion to Catholic monasticism in the 1950s as dominated by the dualistic, ascetic, and anti-creation theology of St. Augustine, which, according to Merton, "'escape[s] upward', away from matter." However, by the 1960s, under the influence of Eckhart and Suzuki, Merton embraced earthly existence and reimmersed himself in "incarnation and transformation." This meant that, as a monk, Merton shifted from "contemplation alone to the vocation of the mystic as prophet." In other words, he took on the integral role of "the contemplative in action."

Much of Merton's poetry extols the sacredness of Creation. In the poem "Grace's House," Merton proclaims, "No blade of grass is not blessed / On this archetypal, cosmic hill," and elsewhere states, "Every blade of grass is an angel singing in a shower of glory." In a prose poem, Merton echoes the Romantic view of the poet as a worshipper and prophet of the spirit of nature: "My worship is a blue sky and ten thousand crickets in the deep wet hay of the field. My vow is the silence under their song." For Merton, the ultimate exultation arises from the realization, during moments of communion with reality, that "we are already one;" in such moments we "recover. . . our original unity." Fox attributes Merton's celebration of nature in part to his Celtic roots and Welsh ancestry.

The second path of Creation Spirituality is the "*via negativa*," which is the "path of letting go and letting be, of solitude and silence, but also of undergoing grief and sorrow; it's an ongoing act of radical trust in the Divine." Like Eckhart who championed the letting go of self, the silencing of the mind, and the stilling of the body so that one could "sink [. . .] eternally into the One," Merton emphasized the need for "an ever greater surrender" to God. In his poems, he continually praises silence, stillness, and solitude: "Be still / Listen to the stones of the wall / Be silent, they try / to speak your / Name." In another poem, he proclaims, "I Solitude, am your professor! / I go before you into emptiness / [. . .] / I, Nothingness, am thy All. / I, Silence, am thy Amen!" Contemplation is one of the most important ways Merton communes with silence. He described it as "essentially a listening in silence, in expectancy" and equated the transrational state of the soul with what Zen Buddhists call the silent, enlightened mind.

The third path of Creation Spirituality is the "*via creativa*," which is the "path of celebration and creativity, of cocreating with the work of the Holy Spirit." Creativity is paramount to Merton's spirituality, much as it was to Eckhart, who believed that self-emptying enabled the Godhead (*Gottheit*) to "become fruitful" within us and so make each person a divine "wife." Merton asserted that the Catholic "theology of creativity" necessarily involves "the Holy spirit re-forming us in the likeness of Christ, raising us from death to life with the very same power which raised Christ from the dead." He admired the Hindu tradition that treats all artistic work as Yoga and that "says that your everyday work can lead you to union with God." He was critical of a Western aestheticism that "fails to integrate art with life," and instead praised art that emerges from "the peculiar immediacy of the most direct vison." The prophet-poet seeks to "obey life, and the Spirit of Life that call us to be poets."

Just as Eckhart imagined a feminine divinity who "lies on a maternity bed giving birth" all day long, Merton emphasized

the feminine dimension of sacred creativity. He believed that "God is at once Father and Mother" and affirmed the "feminine principle" in the universe, which he associated with *Hagia Sophia* (Holy Wisdom). This feminine principle is "the dark, nameless *Ousia* [being, essence], of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the incomprehensible, 'primordial' darkness which is infinite light" and is "perfectly" realized in the Blessed Virgin. Echoing Proverbs, Merton saw Holy Wisdom as "the feminine child" playing before God and envisioned the creative artist as a child playing in wonder before the Mystery. More generally, he recognized the power of the creative arts and of ritual to "open up" the contemplative's inner self to "incorporate the sense and the body in the totality of the self-orientation to God that is necessary for worship and for meditation."

Merton came to believe that the contemplative life should not be divorced from the active life.

The fourth and final path of Creation Spirituality is the "*via transformativa*," which is the "path of compassion and justice. . . the way of the prophet who calls us to action." Under the influence of the social activism of the 1960s and of Eckhart's stress on the spiritual imperative of social justice, Merton came to believe that the contemplative life should not be divorced from the active life. Rather, the monk should seek "to restore the ancient, harmonious and organic balance between" contemplation and action since "both are necessary." Deeply affected by reading Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's book on *The Prophets*, Merton described "the prophetic struggle with the world" as "the struggle of the Cross against worldly power" and said that "To live prophetically, you've got to be questioning and looking at factors behind the facts."

Refusing to divide the creative life from the socially engaged life, Merton embraced the prophetic vocation of the poet and recognized the poetic dimension of prophesy. He characterized poets as "children of the Unknown" and "ministers of silence" who are "needed to cure all the victims of absurdity" and as "dervishes mad with secret therapeutic love which . . . changes everything." He defined prophecy not as the power "to predict, but to seize on reality in its moment of highest expectation and tension toward the new. This tension is discovered . . . in the light of everyday existence." Prophecy seeks to identify, nurture, and support the positive potentials of humanity and facilitate their birthing and development. In "Message of Poets," he encourages fellow poets to "Harvest many new fruits for which the world hungers—fruits of hope" that can "calm the resentments and the rage of man."

Merton was an advocate of responsible freedom and became an outspoken critic of racial injustice, the Holocaust, Vietnam war, the Cold War, fascism, militarism, materialism, consumerism, technologism, eco-destruction, and fundamentalism. In his mind, all of these problems were interconnected since they derived from a mindset divided and deformed by dualism and out of touch with the spirit in all beings. He supported the civil rights movement, praised Martin Luther King, Jr., and admired the "religious and non-violent" character of the "Negro demonstrations." Echoing William Blake, he believed that "In the conflict between law and freedom God is on the side of freedom." He considered fascism to be a "total submission to organized injustice. . . which has lost interest in holiness" and which supports "resignation under official brutalities."

As an early proponent of ecological consciousness and action, influenced in part by Rachel Carson, he considered it to be "perhaps the most crucial aspect of Christian obedience to God today" to be responsible "toward creation and God's creation and God's will for creation." This obedience requires "respect for nature and love for man." He perceived that the worship and misuse of technology were alienating us from nature and destroying the planet, and he criticized a technological, atheistic humanism that makes humans into "insects" without "a human center and a human spirit." He considered modern war to be "the right arm of technocracy" and was the first major religious leader to openly oppose the

Vietnam war. Critical of religious fundamentalism, he advocated deep interfaith exchange and was aware that his "interest in Buddhism has disturbed some of the Catholics, clergy and religious." While at a Buddhist shrine in Sri Lanka in 1968, a few days before his tragic death, he had a profound experience of enlightenment.

In his last talk, delivered at an interfaith conference in Bangkok, Merton spoke about "Karl Marx and Monasticism." He emphasized that "[t]he whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings," and agreed "somewhat" with neo-Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse who criticized managerial societies, whether in the U.S. or in the Soviet Union, that are "highly organized technological societies" and that "end up being equally totalitarian in one way or another." On his way to the conference, Marcuse stated that "the monk is essentially someone who takes up a critical attitude toward the world and its structures" and who declares that "the claims of the world are fraudulent."

Officially, Merton died an accidental death due to receiving a shock from a faulty fan after stepping out of a shower at the Bangkok conference. But Fox believes it is likely that he was assassinated by the U.S. government—probably by a CIA agent—because of his anti-war activism and support of conscientious objectors. For years, Merton had been receiving hate mail from government agencies. The FBI had a file on him, and the CIA illegally intercepted a letter he wrote to Russian author Boris Pasternak. His body was flown back to the U.S. on a CIA plane, and no autopsy was done.

Thomas Merton lives on through his profound and inspirational writings. Fox's powerful portrait will inspire readers to play and pray, love and labor, congregate and contemplate—and to create a community of beings bound by compassion, justice, and joy. ■

CHARLES BURACK is an award-winning poet, writer, and professor, as well as a spiritual counselor and creativity coach. He teaches at John F. Kennedy University. His latest book of poems is *Leaves of Light* (Apocryphile Press, 2016).