# Tikkun

POLITICS + CULTURE + TRANSFORMATION

A Jewish and Interfaith Prophetic Voice to Heal and Transform the World

FALL 2018

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# Tikkun

FALL 2018


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# Don't Let the Light Go Out

## The State of the Spirit, 2018

This has been a difficult period for all of us spiritual progressives (whether secular, militant atheists, or religious progressives) who seek a world of love and justice. The dismantling of environmental protections for the earth, the dramatic reduction in support for the poor while simultaneously reducing taxes on the super-rich, the escalation of the assault on refugees (already dramatically increased in the Obama years, but now including separation of children from their parents in a cruel and irresponsible way), the militaristic rhetoric and attempt to legitimize nuclear weapons as a tool for the U.S. getting its way in the world, the rise of quasi-fascist forces in Europe—these are just the tip of the iceberg of what makes things difficult.

To understand how this could be happening in our wonderful country, we need to contextualize all within the framework which we teach through *Tikkun*:

That there are two worldviews that have been in conflict with each other ever since class-based societies and patriarchy emerged thousands of years ago, yet still shape our lives today.

The first I call the worldview of fear and domination or "power over others." It asserts that we are all thrown into a world by ourselves and that as we come to consciousness we recognize that the world is filled with people who will seek to manipulate, dominate, and control you and others in order to advance their own self-interest. Given that such is the reality of our world, according to this worldview, the only rational way to live is learn the skills of manipulation, domination, and control in order to enable you to dominate others before they can dominate you. This contributes to each of us feeling alone, scared, and needing to get the tools that might protect us, for example: guns, police, armies, etc. And on a global level, this worldview encourages many in the richest societies on the planet to invest in forms of domination. Republicans and Democrats disagree about what is the most viable mechanism to achieve this domination, the former cheering on direct military interventions, the latter convinced that economic and cultural penetration plus diplomacy may be a more effective way for one's nation to get its way over others.

To the extent that people are influenced by the paradigm of domination, we begin to believe that we need some way of



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exercising control over others, both domestically and internationally, to achieve "homeland security." Similarly, it is this way of thinking that produces the widespread belief among millions of Americans that they need to have guns and other weapons to protect themselves against those who might seek to harm them or take from them whatever goods they have accumulated in their lives, and/or the money and other forms of wealth that they inherited as winners of "the birth lottery" (being born into a family with great wealth and/or political power).

The alternative worldview tells us that we were not born alone, but rather that we were born through a mother and that our mother (or mothering-other, perhaps a father, relative or supportive caretaker) made it possible for us to survive. Without that initial caring in the first few years of life, children often die or have dramatic deficits in their physical, psychological, and/or intellectual capacities that they carry with them all their lives. It is from this caring through the first years of life that we get the psychological foundation for what I'll call the worldview of love, generosity, and caring as the best path to homeland security. When we act in a generous and caring way, we often elicit that loving part of "others" that also had such experiences when they were infants or children. It is on this foundation that most religions that have survived for more than a thousand years were originally based.

The preaching of commands from the Bible's book of Leviticus to "love the stranger/the Other" and to love our neighbors, to share with the poor, and to defend the powerless was an articulation of this love-oriented generosity of spirit. It was summed up most powerfully 2,500 years ago when the Biblical prophet Isaiah stood in front of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem as people were entering on the day of fasting for our sins called Yom Kippur, personally challenging them. These same words have been read for the past 2,000 years in synagogues on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), but apparently with little impact on Jared Kushner or many other orthodox Jews (with important exceptions) who support the Trump presidency, despite its systematic violation of Isaiah's message.

Isaiah 58:1-10
Declare to My people their transgression,
To the House of Jacob their sin.
To be sure, they seek Me daily, Eager to learn My ways.
Like a nation that does what is right, That has not abandoned the laws of its God,
They ask Me for the right way, They are eager for the nearness of God:
"Why, when we fasted, did You not see?"
Because on your fast day You see to your business And oppress all your laborers!
Because you fast in strife and contention, And you strike with a wicked fist! Your fasting today is not such As to make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast I desire A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrus And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast A day when the LORD is favorable?
No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock the fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke.
It is to share your bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.
Then shall your light burst through like the dawn And your healing spring up quickly; Your Vindicator shall march before you, The Presence of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then, when you call, the LORD will answer; When you cry, He will say: Here I am. If you banish the yoke from your midst, The menacing hand, and evil speech.
And you offer your compassion to the hungry And satisfy the famished creature; Then shall your light shine in darkness, And your gloom shall be like noonday.

Affirm the possibility of a different kind of world in which oppression is overcome.

The teachings of Isaiah and the Jewish prophets of ancient Israel, of our brother Jesus (before his teachings were appropriated and transformed by those who did not know him and by the ruling elites of Rome), and more than a thousand years later, the teachings of St. Francis and later still Rumi, the Muslim teacher and poet, are at the core of almost every religion since. Yet patriarchal ruling elites have done their best to control the religious communities in order to neutralize and marginalize this kind of consciousness, though never having the power to totally erase these teachings from the holy scriptures of their traditions. So it may come to many who have rejected religion as fundamentally reactionary to

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realize that these liberatory messages were part of Judaism and Christianity until the voices of fear managed to overwhelm the voices of love and generosity. It's time to change that now, in every aspect of our lives.

Here is the fundamental truth: most people on the planet have heard both the message of the domination strategy and the message of the love/caring/generosity strategy. Both are in almost everyone's head. In every interaction, one or the other of these messages comes to mind. We meet someone new, or someone we've known for years, and we might approach them with openness, but they say something that suddenly makes us cautious and we revert to the worldview of fear and domination, no longer trusting or being open to the other. Or the reverse: we approach a person with fear and distrust, and then they say something that makes us start to thaw that distrust and open to the possibility of deeper connection. These alternations can happen frequently in the same conversation, and not only with strangers but with one's lover, spouse, parents, or children, most often unconsciously.

We are all impacted by those two worldviews, though in patriarchal and class-dominated capitalist society, the worldview of fear has the upper hand because the daily experiences we have in the world of work, the competitive economic marketplace, and the messages we absorb from the mass media reinforce the worldview of fear and domination more often than the worldview of love and generosity. This worldview also appears in many religious communities and distorts their stated commitment to love and generosity. It is communicated nonverbally in the secular schools and workplaces of the society where we are constantly being pushed to compete with others for scarce rewards.

In assessing the state of the Spirit, what we really have to assess on a personal, community, national, and international level is how much of our actions, the actions of our political leaders, and the messages given to us by friends, coworkers, media, and others reflect more of the worldview of fear and domination and power over, or more of the worldview of love and generosity and caring for each other.

The first paragraph of this editorial gave a brief recounting of some of the recent realities that strengthen our fears. To the extent that there is not a mass nonviolent uprising against the Trump presidency, there is a tendency on the part of many to despair that the worldview of fear and domination is so powerful and popular that any significant change is unlikely or impossible. That, in turn, leads many people to not bother to vote, or to avoid reading the newspapers or listening to the news on radio or TV, and to shun involvement of any sort. It leads many leaders of the Democratic Party to seek to nominate for Congress or other elective offices more conservative candidates (in some cases people who were recently Republicans) in the desire to win control of the Congress (totally forgetting that when the Democrats under the leadership of Rahm Emanuel used this same strategy to win back control of the Congress in 2006, they produced a Congress which was unwilling to support even the scantily progressive programs Barack Obama proposed in 2009-10. The resulting disappointment at the badly compromised programs the Democrats produced led many who had voted for him in 2008 to not bother to vote in 2010, which then contributed to the ability of Republicans to win back the Congress in the midterm election and then redistrict the Congressional and state legislative districts to make likely many Republican electoral victories through 2020). Why did they do this? Because they don't trust the American people to support progressive ideas (ignoring the immense popularity of Bernie Sanders in his campaign for the presidential nomination). This is just one example of how, when the social energy is moving toward fear, that same energy is passed on from person to person creating an experience that deepens the fear and validates that worldview.

**Don't let the Trumpites undermine your hope for a caring society. There is a deep yearning in everyone on the planet for a world of love and justice. We need to get the liberal and progressive forces to make this yearning the center of their public discourse!**

So here is the good news: there is a deep yearning in every human being on the planet to live in a world of caring and love, even though the society does a huge amount to educate and condition us away from that yearning, to deny its reality, and to label that yearning as unrealistic, a utopian fantasy, a dangerous illusion that will ultimately lead us to totalitarianism or some other evil. And then there is the set of internal voices yelling at us to "be realistic" and to abandon any hopes of fundamental change—I call these "the reality police" and urge you to not listen to them.

Yet, no matter how hard they try, despite all the forces inside us and around us, with all their powerful ways of convincing us to "be realistic," there is in everyone this yearning for a different kind of world. It popped up when people rushed to the airports to block Trump's first anti-Muslim travel ban. It manifests in the Black Lives Matter movement, in the large environmental and women's rights movements, in the #MeToo unveiling of sexual abuse, in the Poor People's Campaign led by Rev. William Barber and Rev. Dr.



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Liz Theoharis, in the outrage that greeted information about the way the quasi-fascistic ICE rips children away from their parents, and the way tens of thousands of junior high and high school students demonstrated for rational gun controls after the repeated killings of students in some schools have finally broken through people's consciousness (at least momentarily). It might even manifest in the 2018 midterm elections and even more clearly in 2020.

This yearning for a world of love and justice will never be fully extinguished, and because the champions of the worldview of fear really understand that, they resort to repression of all sorts to forestall the surging of hope once again.

Don't be fooled if the Democrats win Congress and then in 2020 the presidency. Unless they move beyond their narrow economistic consciousness, the changes won in the next four years will be weakened or reversed again. Nothing will fundamentally change until we have a political movement that can explicitly speak to this deeper yearning and is willing to create a Tea Party of the Left that works both inside the Democratic Party to push it toward a love-and-justice perspective, and outside of the Democratic Party when needed.

It will take people with tremendous courage to insist that it is the path of love and generosity that is the best path to homeland security (see our proposed Global Marshall Plan, www.tikkun.org/gmp) and to insist that corporate power must be subject to democratic restraints (see our proposed ESRA—Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution at www.tikkun.org/esra). It will take people who understand the craziness of allowing corporations to rape the earth in order to sustain endless growth. It will take great strength to stand up to the cynical and to insist that a politics of love and generosity is the best foundation for creating environmental sanity and human survival. I lay out in detail how this could be accomplished in my forthcoming book *Revolutionary Love*—please read it when it comes out in 2019. It goes way beyond anything we've been able to present in *Tikkun*, though based on the teachings that many of us have been offering on these pages.

In order to be a Jewish state, Israel must embody Jewish values.

So what is the State of the Spirit? The Spirit hungry for love and generosity cannot be permanently repressed, but it is facing very serious challenges that may worsen in the coming years. It has on its side the core idea of Judaism: that there is something in the universe, we call it YHVH or Yud Hey Vav Hey, or "God," that makes possible the transformation of "that which is" to "that which can and ought to be." You don't have to be Jewish or believe in a supernatural being to share this faith in the eternal possibility of possibility in human affairs. This is the belief that *Tikkun* magazine came into the world to proclaim and support. And we will continue to do so with your help as you'll see when you read the third editorial.

## Israel Is NOT (yet) a Jewish State

Medinat Yisra'el, the State of Israel, has a very large Jewish majority population. It is a state with lots of Jews. But that doesn't make it a Jewish state.

To be a Jewish state, it has to reflect Jewish values.

If you had a way of describing to Jews living any time between 100 BCE and 1800 CE the behavior of the State of Israel toward Palestinians or toward each other, most would have insisted that we couldn't possibly be talking about a Jewish state because the behavior is in such striking contrast to the Judaism that prevailed in Jewish societies through much of Jewish history.

To take one example, Jewish men have, for most of the past 2,000 years, have put an emphasis on Torah learning as the best way to spend one's life. The highest honors in Jewish life—until Jews started to assimilate into capitalist societies in the past 150 years—went to the scholars who spent their days studying, explicating, and teaching the wisdom and ethical guidance embedded in Jewish religious texts. Of course, this was a luxury not available to the majority of Jews, who were dirt poor, but it was also a great honor for a wealthy family to marry its young daughters to emerging scholars no matter how poor rather than to another rich man. Of course, we do not have definitive data to prove that this was always the practice, but we do know that the folk wisdom of the Jewish people claimed that it was the practice, thereby giving evidence that such behavior was honored and esteemed in the Jewish world.

Another such value was the sharing of one's wealth with the poor. Jews traditionally were, and today in much of the world remain, one of the most charity-oriented peoples. Giving money, food, or other means of support to the impoverished was such a high value that in the ghettos of Europe, a wealthy person not giving enough to the poor could be put on trial and sent to a Jewish prison in the ghetto. Jewish

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Kibbutzim danced with the devilish capitalist banks, abandoned their socialist heritage, and lost!

law, when strictly enforced, forbade charging interest when loaning money to a fellow Jew. "Hebrew Free Loans" are still available in many communities around the world, including in many cities of North America.

And then there is the Torah command: "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue (or run after)." The Talmudic rabbis close to 2,000 years ago said that the double use of the word "justice" was to teach that one must pursue justice in a just way, or in other words, that the desirable end of justice requires that the means to achieve it are as holy as the ends achieved.

Well, you can quickly see that Torah-tradition ethics run counter to the values of the capitalist marketplace, which encourages each individual to seek his or her own well-being without regard to others. Already enshrined in Anglo Saxon law, this approach shows no requirement to care for anyone else, not even to save a person drowning, when you have the strength and skills to do so. Counter to that, the Jewish tradition prescribes an ethos of caring for the other, and even caring for the animals (in other words: property) of those whom you deem to be your enemies. An ethos of caring for others and providing assistance when you can is central to Jewish ethics.

Now these are the low-hanging fruit of Jewish ethics. And if Israel were in fact a Jewish state, these would actually be guiding principles of Jewish life. But Israel chose instead to be a modern capitalist state, with rules of behavior and institutional arrangements which, particularly under the Likud governments of the past several decades, developed a consciousness among its citizens which copied that of the most individualistic of societies.

Though the early founders of the Israeli State professed social leanings and created kibbutzim (collective farms democratically governed), a strong union organization (the Histadrut), and a health care system which remains far superior to health care in the U.S. in its inclusion of all, Israeli citizens, its socialism was narrowly focused. Members of the kibbutz movement, for example, developed an ethos of hard work and sharing material benefits with fellow kibbutz members, but rarely focused on changing the values of the larger society, much less involving themselves in challenging the class divisions that were deepening in Israel, and the expansion of capitalist ideas and imperialist economic realities in the decades after Israel had secured its existence. Little attention was paid to the way capitalist values were undermining solidarity in the larger society, the way racism was allowing Jews from Arab countries to be treated at times as second-class citizens, and solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles in the global South and East was barely mentioned.

While some kibbutzim remain functioning even today, many collapsed. Their young people were not introduced to a Jewish value system embodying the Jewish values of love, caring, justice, and solidarity. On the contrary, they saw that

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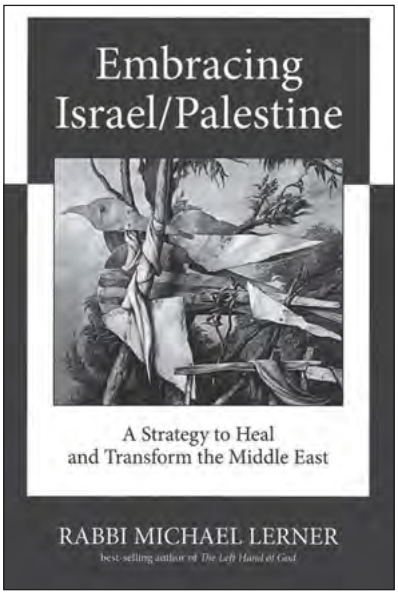
the kibbutzniks were most interested in getting more consumer items to make their lives as comfortable as they imagined the lives of those middle-class Israelis living in Tel Aviv had become. But if those are the values you learn from families and friends and from the radio or the television, then why not go whole hog (whoops, sorry) and actually move to Tel Aviv, Haifa, or one of the other growing, wealthy Israeli towns? And that is precisely what many of them did, making those who remained feel that they too ought to be doing something more, though not sure they had the skills to "make it" in the cities.

It was these consumer aspirations, unfettered by a socialist ideology that was no longer taught on most kibbutzim by the mid-1980s, that made it easy for the Likud to stoke anger among poorer Jews from North African and Arab societies of the Middle East, called "mizrachim," who saw the kibbutzim accumulating goods aided by a Labor government. The mizrachim saw those kibbutzim as never showing any interest in addressing the poverty that these newer immigrants faced. So for all their talk of being socialist kibbutzim, very few of them sought to help their Mizrachi neighbors or to seriously address the growing poverty among those neighbors. Those mizrachim have provided the margin of victory to right-wing governments ever since. They resented these supposedly socialist neighbors.

In the 1970s, many of the kibbutzim borrowed money from Israeli banks to ensure that they could grow their businesses of selling goods to the cities and increasing the amount of consumer goods for their members. But in the 1980s, a set of recessions in the advanced industrial world also impacted Israel, and the kibbutzim no longer had the money to pay back the interest on their loans, much less the principal that they had borrowed. Under previous Labor governments, they could count on the state stepping in to relieve their debts. But in the Israel that was emerging in the 1980s, the Likud government had no desire to help the kibbutzim, and soon many of them had to turn themselves into quasi-capitalist enterprises or simply give up. So much for "socialism in one kibbutz" without paying attention to the larger needs of people in the society. Many of their children joined the larger capitalist society in the big cities, some even embracing the fantasy of "liberation in one mind" that had become the watchword of middle-class aspirers to personal growth while ignoring the growing gap between rich and poor and the resultant suffering.

The main point here is that Israel could not become a socialist society in the midst of a world run by other principles unless it had an ideology that explicitly fought against the values of patriarchal capitalist societies. Yet even the older generation of socialists, having resisted earlier generations of communist Jews in the Zionist movement, had popularized an anti-ideology ideology, and that anti-ideology included a rejection of Judaism (which by this point was so




fully identified with the coercive laws imposed by the official religious establishment as the condition for their supporting whatever government coalition was being put together, that most Israelis, not just kibbutzniks, detested).

Some of the early Zionists stated that their goal was to end Jewish exceptionalism, which they (in my view, mistakenly) saw as a reason why Jews were hated in much of the European continent. So they talked of the goal of a Jewish state as making the Jewish nation *am ke'khol ha'amim*, a nation like all other nations. They explicitly relished the idea of a state with Jewish police and Jewish prostitutes—they wanted to be like all the other nations. And they succeeded in doing so, but only by rejecting the Jewish values that I mentioned above. The loans to kibbutzim would be to profit the capitalists, explicitly rejecting the Torah ban on loaning money to a fellow Jew for interest. The notion of caring for the poor was replaced with a neoliberal economics that increased the gap between poor and rich, the education system became subordinated to teaching the skills that would give each Israeli a good chance to be successful in the emerging global competitive marketplace while scoffing at the notion of education and learning as an end in itself. Honors started going to the richest Jewish capitalists rather than the most intellectually or spiritually creative amongst us.

And I haven't even mentioned the way that Israel became the antithesis of the Torah's most frequently repeated command, variants of "thou shalt love the stranger (the other)" and "you shall not oppress the stranger; remember that YOU were strangers (the other) in the land of Egypt." Every day one need only read *Ha'aretz*, Israel's equivalent of the *New York Times*, to count the many ways this command is violated both by the government and by the Jewish majority in its choice of political parties and in its racism toward



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Palestinians, Bedouins, African refugees, and to a lesser but real extent, toward its Christian and Muslim Israeli citizens. We have been chronicling this on our website and carrying in English the messages of the Israeli human rights organization B'tselem (which means "in the image," a reference to another central Jewish teaching, that ALL people of every race, color, creed, gender, sexual preference, etc. are created in God's image and hence deserving of equal respect). The article in this issue by Stephen Zunes and the articles in our Summer 2017 issue on Israel's 50th anniversary of the Occupation have enough critique of what Israel has been doing toward the Palestinian people to relieve me of trying to remind you of its latest sins against Jewish and universal values and human rights, though I went through a new round of mourning for Judaism when I heard and read American Jewish organizations embracing the false and misleading statements of the Israeli leadership as Israeli soldiers were firing into crowds of unarmed civilians, killing over 100 and wounding over 2,000 on the Gaza border in May 2018.

Let me be clear that this behavior on the part of Israelis is not some special perversion of Israel's—it is typical of most countries in the world. For example: China in Tibet, Buddhist Myanmar ethnically cleansing the Rohingya, Saudi Arabia in Yemen, and the totalitarians in India, Philippines, and the list goes on. Israel is as screwed up as most of them, not more so and not less so in most respects. Its claim to be a democratic society is ridiculous when at least a third of those whom it rules over, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, have no representation in the Knesset. For that matter, in many respects the U.S. is not really a democratic society, nor could it be, given the extreme gaps between rich and poor and how they play out in the political realm. So I don't want to hold Israel to a higher standard to the extent that I'm within the dominant discourse of global patriarchal capitalism. But of course the question I've been pursuing here is whether Israel is a Jewish state, and for that question we don't accept the standard of capitalist societies, but of Judaism.

Sadly, Israel does not reflect Jewish values—no matter that they observe their weekend day on Saturday, they speak Hebrew, and some even learn something about the Bible in school, though mostly it is about the geography of the land that (and here many Israeli secularists suddenly become religious) "God promised to us Jews the Land of Israel, so therefore we had the right to take it back regardless of the consequences to the people who lived here before the Zionist movement sought to turn it into a Jewish homeland." For an Israeli population that is mostly secular, this selective use of "god language" is made compatible with the "power over" themes in Judaism, rather than in the love and justice themes of our prophets!

In my book *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, I have shown that much of the conflict continues for so long because we have

PREMIERE ISSUE

TIKKUN

A QUARTERLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE & SOCIETY

SYMPOSIUM: "What Kind of Tikkun Does the World Need?"

Christopher Lasch — *What's Wrong With the Right?*

Anne Roiphe — *Politics and Anger*

Robert Alter — *Sodom As Nexus*

Harry Boyte and Sara Evans — *The Sources of Democratic Change*

Arthur Waskow — *A New Anti-Nuclear Strategy*

Arthur Green — The Secularization of the University

Hal Jacobs — Vietnam Revisited

Yehuda Amichai — Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela

Jacob Neusner — Emotions in the Talmud

REVIEWS — John Felstiner, Stephen Mitchell, Alan Wolfe and Eli Zaretsky

WHY TIKKUN?

The notion that the world could and should be very different has deep roots within Judaism and the Jewish tradition. But in the late 1980's it is an idea that seems strangely out of fashion...

Cover of *Tikkun*'s first issue, May 1986

two traumatized peoples acting out their traumas on the other side. Despite growing left-wing antagonism to Israel, and despite *Tikkun*'s frequently articulated outrage at Israel's treatment of Palestinians, we see both parties acting out of their trauma in ways that re-traumatize the other, although we also recognize that Israel's far greater power gives Israel the greater responsibility for taking actions to end the Occupation and repent for its part in the creation of the Palestinian refugees by providing reparations to the Palestinian people wherever they live now in this world.

Sadly, trauma often brings out the worst in people, not their highest selves. It pulls them to the worldview of domination and to distrust the worldview of love and generosity. So Israelis and Palestinians both deserve empathy, compassion, and yet firm direction to find paths to reconcile with each other (some of which I've outlined in my book on this subject, which you can order from online bookstores or directly from *Tikkun* at www.tikkun.org/eip). Still, the bottom line here is that this state is in fact a state like all other states, and does not yet qualify to be a Jewish state, much less "THE" Jewish state representing Jews around the world (though we Diaspora Jews never voted to give them that responsibility or right).

I was deeply saddened in the summer of 2018 during the many weeks I spent in Israel, when Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's government passed a new "Nationality Law" which proclaimed Israel to be the state of the Jewish people and not the state of all its (Christian, Muslim, and other non-Jewish) inhabitants. It went on to give permission to local communities to form all-Jewish settlements, villages, towns or cities, banning non-Jews, and to lower the status of Arabic which had till then been recognized by Israel as of equal status to Hebrew. Ha'aretz headlined this the next day as Israel



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moving toward becoming an apartheid state, and when in August thousands of Israelis demonstrated against this further march of Israel away from being a democratic state, much less a Jewish state. It was as if Israel had become the Torah-hating state if you recall the places in Torah which say explicitly "one law shall there be for you and for the stranger who lives in your midst. Yet this was the inevitable next move in a state that rejects Jewish values while embracing a crude version of nationalism that dishonors the Jewish people and tramples on our universalist aspirations through. Israel is a state with lots of Jews, but it demeans Judaism when it proclaims itself "the Jewish state.

Why do I then say it is not "yet" a Jewish state? My reason: just as I believe that all people have a yearning for a world of love, generosity, and caring, I believe that yearning exists among Jews and Palestinians, no matter how traumatized. So I believe that there will come a time in the next several decades when a new generation will arise in Israel that is far enough away from the sources of Jewish trauma to begin to act to create a society that does in fact manifest Jewish values. And in so doing, it may even play a role in helping at least some other states to join in alliance against the values of the capitalist marketplace and the legacy of the oppressed that in many cases leads people to embrace the worldview of fear, domination, and control, which I described in my above editorial on "The State of the Spirit, 2018."

I know I will not live to see the triumph of the love and generosity worldview in Israel. Those values may have to become prevalent in the U.S. and other Western countries first. Meanwhile, people of conscience will have to be challenging Israel and its primary empowerer, the U.S. Yet I believe that this kind of transformation can happen even in the U.S. and other deeply screwed up societies that are, at the moment, largely marching to the tunes of the fear and domination worldviews. But as a firm believer in the possibility of possibility and hence in the possibility that love, generosity, justice, and environmental sensitivity will triumph before the life-support system of the planet has been totally destroyed by capitalist selfishness and materialism I also believe that Jews can at some time return to Jewish values, recognize them as universal values for all people and hence value all people and not just Jews, and someday Israel will turn the State of Israel into a Jewish state living in alliance with a nearby Palestinian state and with other Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and secular states all around the world who have placed love, rather than domination, at the center of their society and of daily life.

Keeping that dream alive is one of the central tasks of *Tikkun*, which is why I invite you to help us become one of the most widely read websites and help provide us with the financial backing to make it possible for us to continue promoting these ideas.

## Don't Let the Light Go Out

Wow, what an amazing trip it has been. We started producing the magazine in my home 32-plus years ago, when I was only 43 years old. We've had authors such as U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone, Rachel Adler, Harvey Cox, Annie Dillard, Christopher Lasch, Arthur Waskow, Daniel Matt, Judith Plaskow, Cherie Brown, Daniel Berrigan, Allen Ginsberg, Vandana Shiva, Jonathan Schell, Fritjof Capra, Arthur Green, Omid Safi, David Loy, Kabir Helminski, David Biale, Martin Jay, Cornel West, Marshall Berman, Anton Shammas, Yehuda Amichai, Francine Prose, Jessica Benjamin, Michael Eric Dyson, Ayelet Waldman, Zalman Schachter Shalomi, and literally a thousand other amazing and creative people. All those writers, usually writing for free, were the heart of *Tikkun*, and their creative ideas gave *Tikkun* the distinction of being widely acknowledged, even by people who disagreed with our ideas, as an intellectually sophisticated voice that had to be reckoned with. We were one of the first English-language magazines, and certainly the first widely read Jewish magazine, to print Beni Morris and other "New Israeli Historians" who challenged Israel's official account of the 1948 Israel/Palestine war, helping Americans understand why Palestinians still today talk of "The Nakba" as a great human rights disaster.

We also challenge the idea that you have to choose between being progressive and being religious or spiritual. We coined the terms *spiritual progressives* and *spiritual activism for social change*. We launched the idea of a "politics of meaning" that recognized people's yearning for a life that was not just about accumulating money or power or fame but about having some higher ethical or spiritual meaning, and have been working to bring that message to liberal and progressive forces ever since so that they could transcend the narrow economistic discourse that has limited their appeal.

In the Jewish world, we published new cutting-edge visions for a spiritual reawakening in Judaism. We wrote a supplement to the Passover Haggadah and to the Selichot/forgiveness prayers for High Holidays and printed dozens of controversial articles supporting Jewish feminism way before it became popular in the the Jewish world, defending LGBTQ communities and insisting that Judaism open space for them, printing new directions in Jewish and Christian and feminist theology, rejecting the use of Holocaust memories to justify Israeli policies toward Palestinians, insisting that Jews re-embrace Jesus not as a god or messiah but as a great Jewish teacher and prophet, who had limitations like all other teachers and prophets, insisting that critiques of Israeli policy did not equate to anti-Semitism, but also publishing *The Socialism of Fools: Anti-Semitism on the Left* (revealing the long history and current reality of some anti-Semitism in the liberal and progressive world), reaching out to Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim allies



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and inviting them and secular humanists to use our pages to discuss the issues they face, and challenging the American Jewish community to embody Jewish values. And in every issue we published poetry from some of the most creative and respected poets!

*Tikkun* evolved into being the prophetic voice of liberal and progressive Jews, and also an interfaith voice for progressive Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and secular humanists of every possible background. We provide support for those who see the need for an ethical and spiritual transformation globally as the prerequisite for saving the earth from the capitalist imperative to grow endlessly without regard to the survival of the life-support system of Earth. We seek a nonviolent revolution and uprising (yes, drawing on the accumulated wisdom of the human race) to replace global capitalism with an economic system based on love, justice, and generosity. And we created conferences and then the Network of Spiritual Progressives to help get our call for "a New Bottom Line" into public discourse and to provide a way for people to move from ideas into action.

When I'm invited to speak around the U.S. and Canada on college campuses and in synagogues, churches, and community centers, I always meet people who generously tell me that reading *Tikkun* changed their lives in meaningful ways. For many Jews, the kind of Judaism we've presented gave them a way to embrace a Judaism that had previously seemed to them materialistic, politically conservative, and drenched in a narrow form of Jewish nationalism. People of other faith traditions told me that *Tikkun* influenced how they approached their own religious traditions and gave them tools to grapple with and challenge racist, sexist, and homophobic elements that were still there. Others found in our pages an approach to American politics that affirmed the humanity of people with whom we strongly disagree, a critique of the neoliberal economics that were championed not only by Republicans but by the presidencies of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, and an insistence that a progressive politics must address not only economic deprivation but also the deprivation of respect, love, and generosity. Still others told me how much it meant to them when I argued on national TV, public radio, and consistently in the pages of *Tikkun* that we must not be "realistic"—since in American politics being realistic has meant compromising with militarism, class oppression, and capitulation to an unethical status quo. As we've often said in *Tikkun*, thank God that African Americans fighting segregation and apartheid, women fighting sexism, LGBTQ people fighting various of forms of homophobia and gender oppression all refused to be realistic and hence were able to make amazing changes in our world that the realists told them would be impossible (though afterward those same realists told them that their victories were inevitable and would have happened anyway—anything to discourage people from struggling for fundamental change).

I'm gratified that many of the ideas we pioneered have now entered public discourse. Some of those ideas appeared in my national bestseller *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation* in 1994, or in my second national bestseller, *The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right* in 2006, in part because our readers spread the word about the importance of these books to friends and through social media, pushed their local bookstores to carry them, and invited me into their churches, synagogues, mosques, community centers, and college campuses to talk about them. I'm hoping that you'll help too when my next book, *Revolutionary Love*, comes out in 2019: an attempt to present to the English-speaking public the *Tikkun* analysis of what ails our world and how social change movements could be much more effective.

Being editor of *Tikkun* has been a wonderful gift to my life, both because of all the wonderful people I keep meeting through *Tikkun* and because it gives me a way of serving God, humanity, and the Jewish people with love and joy. I thank the God/dess of the universe for creating such a beautiful planet earth and putting on it so many wonderful people. So despite the bummer of having to live through the Trump presidency, I stand in awe of the goodness and beauty of creation and all the earth's creatures. And I especially feel love and appreciation for all of you who have been and continue to be my allies in the attempt to make a contribution to the healing and transformations (tikkun olam) our global society so badly needs.

And yet, disappointingly, we simply do not have enough financial backing to keep *Tikkun* on paper. So you are reading our last print issue. But that doesn't mean *Tikkun* is not going to continue. It will, in a different format. I'm excited to tell you about what we are going to do—with your help.

We have developed a stunning and integrated new website that will make it easier and less intimidating to get our ideas and information at www.tikkun.org. Almost every day we will have new perspectives to share (not all of which we will agree with; we aim to be a location for multiple liberal and progressive voices to be heard). In addition, *Tikkun* magazine will continue to be published on this website, in a space that will only be open to subscribers, donors of $50 or more per year, and/or members of the Network of Spiritual Progressives who have joined at the $50/year level or more). We can keep that website going for decades more, long after I'm dead, if you will donate generously each year to *Tikkun*. In going in this direction, we believe we will make *Tikkun* more accessible to younger generations of potential readers who get most of their information online.

I'd be lying if I didn't acknowledge some sadness on my part that this will be our last print issue. We've made this decision because financially, it is more sustainable, and because through this transformation we will reach younger generations. With your ongoing generous support through



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subscriptions to the magazine, membership in the Network of Spiritual Progressives, and generous annual, tax-deductible donations, we will be able to finance the web magazine and future generations will continue to benefit from our unique voice and analyses for years to come.

During our 32-plus years, we won numerous accolades, honors, and awards, including "The Best Magazine Coverage of Religion of the Year" in 2014 and 2015 from the Religion Newswriters Association. Mainstream media has quoted our positions numerous times over the years. Nevertheless, major foundations and individual funders have not come through for us, explaining either that we are too critical of Israel or too supportive of it, too willing to give credence to spiritual and religious writing or not religious or spiritual enough, too Jewish or too interfaith, and too critical of capitalism or not critical enough. We have approached many foundations and wealthy individuals over the years, rarely with much success.

For some we are too extreme in one way or another. The truth: we are extreme only in our commitment to a world based on love, justice, generosity, environmental sanity, nonviolence, and kindness, our insistence that the path to get such a world must itself embody these values, and our firm belief that such a world is still possible! Such a belief makes many wealthy people uncomfortable. Yet in our view, such a world would give everyone much more fulfillment and sense of being part of a life that had ultimate meaning than even the most wealthy people can attain today.

We are deeply grateful for all the support we received over the years that has sustained us to this point. In particular, we are grateful to those who included *Tikkun* in their wills, and to those who contributed beyond what they would have ever done for a nonprofit. We are deeply indebted to our founding publisher (Nan Fink, now Gefen); our second publishers, Danny & Victor Goldberg; and our third publishers, my sister Trish Vradenburg z'l and her husband, George, who supported us for ten years. When Trish and George turned their charitable giving toward creating a very wonderful project, called USAgainstAlzheimers (may that project succeed quickly in generating cures and government support for research and funding of caregivers), we were sustained by a bequest to us in a *Tikkun* supporter's will (hey, please put us in yours, just in case). But the basic finances we needed were running out. And last, but certainly not least, we are grateful to Duke University Press for being our publisher for the past seven years. *Tikkun* would not have possible without all of these people and organizations.

And of course, the magazine thrived because of the incredible dedication of our tiny staff, talented volunteers, unpaid interns, and awesome writers and artists who have contributed their writing and art to the magazine. Their voices and artistry have helped make *Tikkun* the incredible magazine it is and will continue to be.

And to you—our subscribers, NSP members, and donors, who have been the backbone throughout our existence—thank you! Receiving your emails and letters of gratitude and appreciation that our voice is alive means so much to us. It is impossible to know the influence of one's work in the world, so in addition to your gratitude and appreciation in the form of financial support, your personal notes, letters, and cards nourish us daily. Thank you. We could not and cannot continue without your support.

Where do we go from here? In addition to the new website, we are starting a program called the Tikkun Institute to help sponsor research on healing and transforming the world, and we are taking applications from *Tikkun* writers, readers, and social change activists who share our worldview and want to volunteer as "Tikkun Institute Editorial Fellows" to take over some of *Tikkun*'s major editorial tasks—recruiting articles and editing them. While it would be great if you wanted to do this and lived in the Bay Area, we will also work with Tikkun Fellows online from around the world. I'm hoping to gradually reduce my role and make the editing a more collaborative enterprise in the coming years, in part so that I can have more time to read, think, and write. Want to learn more? Please contact Chris at chris.tikkun@gmail.com.

Our next edition of *Tikkun* magazine will appear online, edited by Cat Zavis and Martha Sonnenberg, and will have a special focus called "Beyond Patriarchy and How to Get There." Please be sure to visit our website frequently and share articles from it on social media and with your networks. We believe we will be able to reach a wider audience, and to do so we need your involvement and support. And we will continue our tradition of making *Tikkun* beautiful as well as intellectually and culturally provocative, exciting, rigorous, and cutting edge. It's up to you.

**DON'T LET THE LIGHT GO OUT**. As we approach the time of year when many of our readers celebrate Chanukah or Christmas, both holidays celebrating light in the time of darkness, affirming the possibility of a different kind of world in which oppression is overcome, *Tikkun*'s message is too important to let it disappear. Please generously support us to continue. We still need your tax-deductible financial support and annual donations. Most online magazines make appeals to their readers for financial support and so will we. Our small staff can continue to do the basics needed to create an online magazine, but only if you and others generously contribute (all tax-deductible). If you never did before, please do so now at www.tikkun.org/donate or by sending a check to Tikkun, 2342 Shattuck Ave #1200, Berkeley, CA, 94704, or by calling Chris at 510-644-1200.

Till we meet again on our new website, many blessings to you!—Rabbi Michael Lerner ■

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER is editor of *Tikkun*, co-chair of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, and rabbi of Beyt Tikkun Synagogue-Without-Walls in San Francisco and Berkeley. He is the author of eleven books, including two bestsellers. You can contact him at rabbilerner.tikkun@gmail.com.



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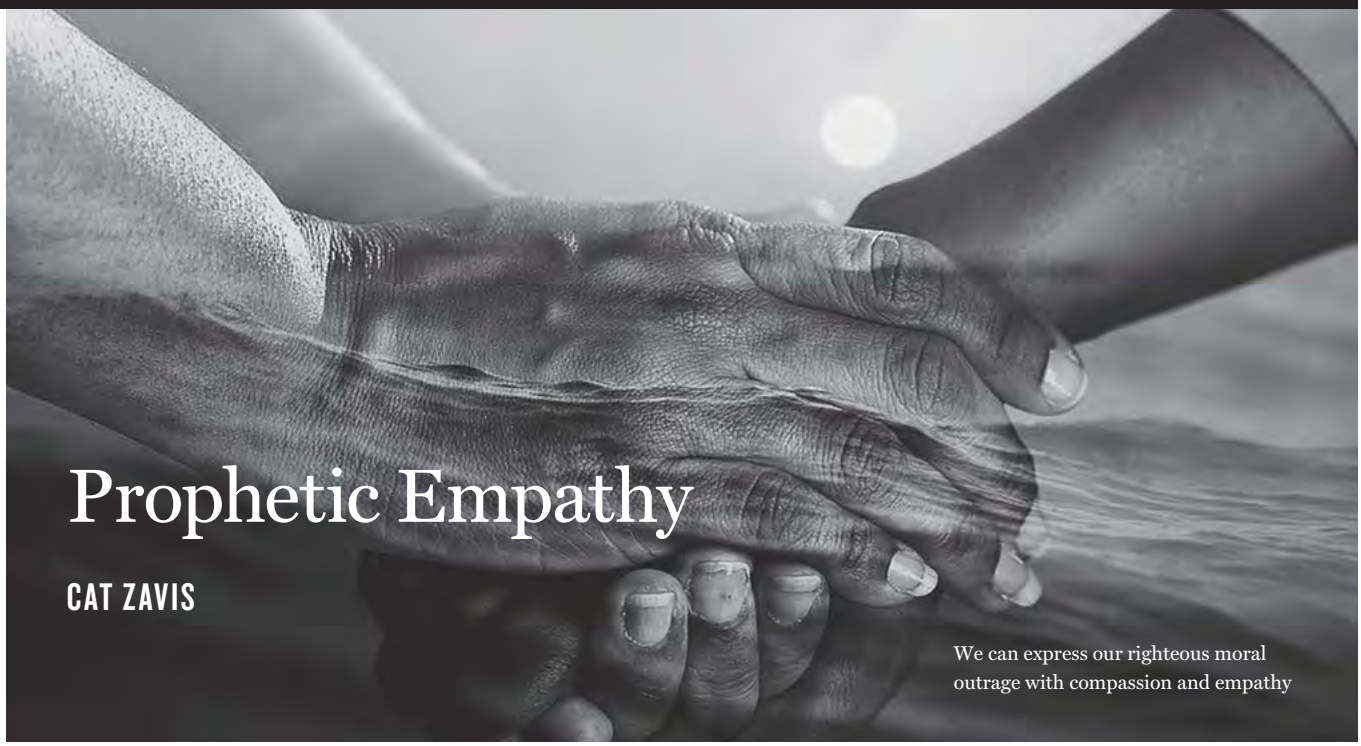

# Prophetic Empathy

CAT ZAVIS

We can express our righteous moral outrage with compassion and empathy

Several months ago, after a dramatic mobilization of outrage by people across normal political boundaries, the Trump administration claimed to have stopped having children being ripped from from the arms of their refuge-seeking parents. Parents do not carry their children across vast, treacherous lands, not knowing what lies ahead, leaving behind their lives, other family members, and community unless they have no other choice. And yet this basic truth seems to be lost on this administration and unfortunately many others in our country. In response to emails I sent out encouraging people to join local actions opposing this inhumane policy, I received responses from a few people expressing sentiments such as this: "*I am an immigrant, entered lawfully, clear criminal record, law-abiding citizen and I reject illegals coming to this great country as if anybody owes them FREE medical care, FREE education, FREE housing, RIGHT to vote—what a joke. Instead of putting hard earned money on illegals why don't you take that money to invest in lawful citizens who greatly need financial support. Shame on you!*"

Why do some people respond this way, and how do we reply to them in the face of factual misunderstandings and a worldview that seems to prioritize punishment over love and care? For the past two years, I have been training people how to be spiritual activists. In this training we teach people how to see the humanity of those whose political views differ from ours and how to challenge views we disagree with in a respectful and yet powerful way. Something is hurting so deeply within them that they are hurting others; we need to understand their pain. People are often confused as to how it is that we are living in such a morally bankrupt society where the well-being of a corporation is more important than the well-being of the people and the planet, and where we seem to have lost our capacity to hold the "other" with compassion and care. Ironically, many of these people identify liberals and progressives as the source of this ethical bankruptcy, while many on the Left hear this mistaken perception of them to blame as proof that the people who raise these issues must themselves be the problem. Drawing on some of the profound insights that Rabbi Lerner and his team uncovered in their research through the Institute of Labor and Mental Health, I explain how it is that all three branches of the federal government and most statehouses and governorships are run by politicians who do not seem to care or advocate for the needs of their constituents, and why even though the economic and social policies of the Left benefit more people in society, we are not succeeding.

If we want to create a sea of change, we need to take a long, hard look at how we got here and what we can do to create long-term, lasting change. What is it that draws people to groups that demean and harm others? People need to have a sense of belonging, community, and purpose. If joining a white supremacist group or religious community that demeans others improves their sense of self and provides a place of belonging, meaning, and purpose, that is a price some are willing to pay. One of the most critical aspects of our approach is that as we challenge politicians, policies, and behaviors that are abhorrent and resist efforts to undermine the gains we've achieved thus far, we do so with love and compassion in our hearts—emphasizing our shared humanity.

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Emphasizing our shared humanity requires that we treat people with dignity and respect even as we challenge their abhorrent policies and positions. We insist on seeing their humanity. This can be extremely hard to do, particularly when some people on the Right refuse to see the humanity of those they demean and when their behavior and the decisions of those they elect threaten and harm people's lives and the lives of their loved ones. We certainly have plenty of examples of people demeaning and putting down one another—just following discussions on social media is enough to make your head spin. Yet engaging in these slurs and attacks does not seem to be helping us build a mass movement or move those who are not yet with us (for example, those who voted for Obama and then Trump) to join us. One way we are missing the mark is that, in our understandable outrage and upset, we tend to attack those who are not with us rather than try to understand them.

I believe there is a way to both express our righteous moral outrage about what is happening in our society and, at the same time, to do so with compassion and empathy. I call this approach Prophetic Empathy. Let me start by drawing a distinction between empathic listening and prophetic empathy. The former is an intention to be present with someone for the sake of providing an empathic ear. You are there to listen, reflect, support. We often do this with friends. Through empathic listening and engagement, people have a deeper understanding of their own needs, including clarity about the distinction between their feelings, needs, and strategies. When they have a sense of truly being heard and thus feel respected, then they are more open to hear your truth and to listen with an open heart. These kinds of conversations end up opening all of our hearts and build connections and possibilities that were not there previously. This is an important and necessary component of prophetic empathy but on its own it is not sufficient.

This is because empathy often focuses on the individual person and their individual needs, even though these needs are universal. When in conflict, empathy may extend to include the needs of all in the conflict, thus helping people see their shared needs. Yet, empathic engagement fails to draw a connection between their personal or even shared needs and collective or universal needs. While empathy is an extremely powerful tool to build connection, and trust, and to open hearts, on its own it is not sufficient to change minds or to help people see and understand the larger systems and structures in which we reside and how those impact, inform, and limit us.

Prophetic empathy is a process by which one engages in a conversation from an empathic place, but is not solely focused on empathic listening. It includes sharing one's own truth and brings into the conversation a movement from individual needs to shared needs, and ultimately to the collective needs of the society as a whole. Prophetic empathy thus incorporates both listening and speaking, but speaking with particular intentions and purposes in mind. One,

Prophetic empathy calls people to their highest selves and reminds them that a loving and just world is possible.



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to help people reconnect with their most loving, kind, caring parts of themselves that seek a more loving world. Two, to deepen people's understanding of the social reality in which we live, and the way that social reality impacts and limits us. And three, to show why that social reality needs to be transformed and steps to do so. In these conversations (of which I have plenty), I am both listening with empathy and genuinely trying to connect with and understand, and sharing my truth and my heart. And my heart is full of pain and sorrow about the world; I share that because that is my deepest truth and sharing our deepest truths and being vulnerable moves people and builds connection and trust. I hate that we live in a society where whether one can obtain health care depends solely on their financial ability to pay. I hate that we live in a society where Black people get harassed, beaten, arrested, and shot simply for being Black. I hate that we live in a society in which women are not safe in their homes or on the streets. And I hate that children were being ripped from their parents arms (I immediately flashback to watching the television series *Roots* where Kunta Kinte was ripped from his mother's arms as a young child to be sold to a new master, and I was curled on the floor in a ball screaming and crying–my young 12-year-old self, unable to process the horror I was seeing on the screen). The list goes on and on. It is critically important to me to bring these truths into my conversations with people.

In political and social organizing, we are not there merely to listen, we are trying to be heard and share our perspective. In fact, we are trying to put forth a position and an argument. **Prophetic empathy does not preclude trying to convince someone!** In fact, I would say that prophetic empathy is explicitly trying to help someone see a different perspective and even trying to move them toward that perspective. We might listen for quite a while before sharing our truths, but ultimately, prophetic empathy includes trying to bring our perspective into the conversation and share our ideas for how to create a world that would actually meet their needs in more effective ways. Even more so, we are there to speak moral truths—having a society where people do not have enough food to eat, cannot access health care, do not have clean drinking water, do not have a safe and secure place to live, do not have access to good education, and so much more is quite simply not OK. In prophetic empathy, we are naming this; calling people to their highest selves and reminding them that a loving and just world is possible. I believe that we can do that in a loving, compassionate, nonjudgmental way without attachment to outcome (namely that they will adopt our strategies). Yet it does include a shaping of the conversation so that I am heard as well. Engaging in this way does not preclude me from having a so-called agenda or commitment to share what I believe can help us all meet more of our needs in a more loving and just way that is for the betterment of all and the planet.

Prophetic empathy is a call to bring your views, desires, visions, deepest yearnings, and ideas into the conversation. Prophetic empathy empowers you to advocate for what you think will help transform our world to more fully meet everyone's needs and to do so from a loving, compassionate place.

Prophetic empathy helps us support people so they can get in touch with their sense of what is right and what needs to be done about it. People who have taken my training, heard Rabbi Lerner or me talk, and/or read our work have said that for the first time in their lives, someone is putting into words what they have always felt but did not believe was possible. And that is what is so inspiring. When we speak to the deepest place within people—the place that so desperately yearns for a different world—and they see they are not alone, they are moved and inspired. Part of our task when talking with people is to help them connect not just with their own needs (or even with your needs) but with the universal needs of all people and the planet and to help them connect with what is actually morally right and needed. We are calling people to connect with the deepest ethical and spiritual truth that they know—that human suffering, and the destruction of the planet is wrong and can be alleviated. In other words, that there are in fact some moral truths and that there are some ways our society is structured that are just wrong and they need to be transformed. This is inspiring because it moves beyond fear and resistance and provides hope that a different world is possible.

Even the most resistant people open their hearts when met with compassion because it directly counters the messages they have received that this is just the way the world is and you need to protect yourself. Showing care and kindness also shatters the myth that the "other" is some awful person. Prophetic empathy is an invitation for you to step into your strongest, most powerful self. Yes, this means you will not always be "liked" or be seen as "nice," but you will know in your heart that you are taking a stand for certain truths, certain morals, and certain values—don't you wish politicians did this more? This is why folks were and are attracted to Trump—not because he's honest, but because he says things he believes to be true and that is refreshing. He is not being a "politician"; he is not being "nice"; he is not being "politically correct"; he is being real. Of course, he is also not being prophetic! He is not calling people to their highest selves; he is speaking to people's fears, to their lowest selves, and through that deepening divides. But **we** can be a prophetic voice that speaks truths that are universal and that truly are about building a loving, kind, generous, caring, and just world.

Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrated his care for everyone by speaking about his dream and the world he wanted and that included the well-being of all persons. To be a spiritual activist requires us to know both how to engage empathically and also how and when to speak from a deeper truth (even if that truth is uncomfortable or painful for others to hear).



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Speaking these truths with love in our hearts inspires, motivates, and moves the hearts and minds of others.

So let me return for a moment to the email I referenced at the beginning. Responding with prophetic empathy via email or online is tricky because misunderstandings occur so frequently and because of the invisibility that occurs in online spaces that makes it way easier to demonize and dehumanize others. And, thus it becomes even more important to be compassionate and mindful. I responded to the email above as follows:

> *No person is illegal—we are all human beings deserving of dignity and respect. Unless one is Native American, we are all immigrants to this country. It is extremely distressing that people do not have the resources they need. If you are experiencing that challenge in your life right now, like so many others, that is really difficult and sad. And just so you know, we actually do a lot of work to transform our society so everyone around the world has the security (physical and economic) they need. We believe in a basic income for everyone and a living wage for everyone, among other things. Everyone should have a safe and secure place to live, food to eat, healthcare, and education.*

This email is not the end of a conversation but a beginning, nor is it perfect. But what I try to do in my response is to clearly state a moral principle that shows universal care and concern for everyone, the person who sent the email and the people they demeaned in the email. In this instance, I also demonstrate that we care about him/her both through the personal concern I express and by telling the person that we actually advocate for the things about which he/she expressed upset.

**In summation, being a spiritual activist means:**

1. Being empathic and compassionate and seeing the humanity of those with whom we disagree and responding as such;
2. Sharing and understanding the psycho-spiritual crisis in our society and the ways, both individually and collectively, we are influenced, shaped, and harmed by the values of the competitive marketplace;
3. Articulating clearly and unabashedly what is wrong and unethical about the world;
4. Sharing a vision of the world we want, and putting forth proposals and policies that are deemed to be "unrealistic";
5. Challenging and critiquing approaches that have failed and explaining why they've failed;
6. Highlighting the importance of being connected to the spiritual energy and awe of the universe, and celebrating the miracle of life;
7. Drawing connections between the social order in which we live and the impact that has on our personal lives.

Speaking these truths with love in our hearts inspires, motivates, and moves the hearts and minds of others. This call to be a prophetic voice can be scarier than asking you to simply be an empathic voice because it calls you to step into your power and that can be frightening or at least push you outside of your comfort zone. And it might be more unsettling than standing in righteous indignation, attacking people, and expressing anger. And yet, it is what is desperately needed.

We want to build a community of people who can be a prophetic empathic voice in this world. If you are interested in being part of that effort, please reach out and let us know—the world needs *you*!

To learn more about my training and to learn these skills, please go to: www.spiritualprogressives.org/training. Even if you already have skills in empathic listening, unless you have already learned skills in how to actually bring into the discourse a prophetic voice in the context of social justice, you will need practice and skills in that area, which the training provides. And to read more, Rabbi Lerner has a new book that will be released in 2019 called *Revolutionary Love*. ■

CAT ZAVIS is the Executive Director of the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP), working to bridge spirituality and politics to build a loving and just world. She leads trainings in Spiritual Activism—Prophetic Empathy and Radical Love. To learn more, go to www.spiritualprogressives.org.



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# Desire for Mutual Recognition

PETER GABEL

*We publish here the first chapter of* Tikkun *editor-at-large Peter Gabel's brilliant new book,* The Desire for Mutual Recognition: Social Movements and the Dissolution of the False Self *(Routledge Press 2018). Peter's book proposes a visionary new social theory that places the conflict between the desire for a loving world and the legacy of fear of the other that has conditioned us at the heart of social and historical dynamics. The excerpt here should be read as an introduction to a work that ultimately addresses the foundations of law, the economy, politics, and the nature of social movements, including the tendency of social movements to undermine themselves. The social-spiritual activism that Peter ultimately argues for is one expression of* Tikkun*'s thirty-year effort to integrate the spiritual and political dimensions of our common existence.*

Robert Bergman. All Rights Reserved.

THE FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL DESIRE of all human beings is the desire for mutual recognition. This desire is an unmediated movement of being outward toward the other, emanating directly from my very center, that seeks to make contact with the being of the other. Thus coming-into-contact is a singular movement that has two experiential poles: my desire to recognize, and my desire for a reciprocating recognition. But you can't have one without the other. What is aspired to and what occurs when it occurs is an indissoluble co-presence. And this co-presence made manifest through mutual recognition is realization of our social being that pre-exists our realization of it—if we are out of contact, we are actually in flight from that contact rather than truly "disconnected." The inherent mutuality of our social being is always pulling us back toward each other—in every moment, the desire for the immediacy and co-presence of mutual recognition pulses through us, moves us out toward each other, and seeks to realize, reciprocally and through the draw of a mutual magnetic pull, our inherent social nature.

Consider the color portrait of a woman by photographer Robert Bergman, presented right.

In looking at this portrait in its full color presence, at first you might only see the face of a woman. Most likely, you will



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start looking at her "from a distance," as one often looks at a portrait or really at any object in the world, and she might at first appear to you as sad, or troubled, or thoughtful, and perhaps also resilient in carrying life's burdens. Her freckles might stand out, or you might notice particularly the redness of her dress and hair against the red light behind her. But if you allow yourself to stay with her for a full thirty seconds and don't pull away or allow her image to simply glance off your gaze, you may suddenly encounter her directly as a fully present human being. At first you may have this disturbing, disorienting encounter through her right eye as her gaze penetrates the shield of your normal distance as a withdrawn observer. But if you stay with her and don't avert your own gaze, you will see that you are experiencing her presence as a totality and not only through the eye, as a radiant energy manifesting her living being as a whole social person. And at the same moment, as you are pulled into relation with her, you will feel your own presence that you did not feel an instant before. You were "lost in thought," floating inside the withdrawn mental space of your head. And now you are for a moment, or for longer if you can tolerate it, fully present in relation to another human being.

I have described this as disorienting and disturbing, and this is so because the photograph has the uncanny power to dissolve the withdrawnness and accompanying distance that we ourselves have learned to construct to protect us from a vulnerability to the other that, due to our conditioning, frightens us. We have all learned to fear this vulnerability to the other, just as in Freudian terms the ego fears and defends itself against the impulses of the id. And what we fear is the loss of the mediating "moat" that we have learned to lay down in the interspace between ourselves and others, a moat that co-exists with and is monitored by our moment-to-moment mental activity, the anxious monkey-mind of thought. But while it is therefore disorienting and disturbing to have that moat suddenly erased as we encounter the woman in red, we also experience relief. She graciously and beautifully brings us back into contact with the other, with others, with the entire social world, with ourselves as social beings. She reminds us of the potential that exists in the next moment; she gives us hope; she makes us want to change the world so that what we experience in encountering her can become real for our social lives and for social life as a whole. Right this moment, if you have been or are regarding the portrait and if you have allowed yourself to encounter her, you will feel your heart beating faster.

What makes Robert Bergman a great artist is not something unique or special that he has "added" to the portrait of this woman, but rather that he has revealed her as the true presence-in-the-world that she actually is as she lives her existence from within her own experience. His portrait brings forth the person behind the outer appearance, the being who actually inhabits the eyes that we otherwise experience as ocular globes. Through his way of capturing her in a single moment, he is reminding us all of the presence that we actually are, and he is calling upon us to emerge from our isolation, to gain the confidence that we are really all here together, to release ourselves from the imprisonment of our separation, and discover the beauty of our co-present collective humanity, not as a collection of individuals, but as an interconnected unity of differentiated social being.

We have the same experience of discovery when we encounter newborn children, at least once they are old enough to make eye contact with us. Like the woman in red, the newborn child suddenly pulls us out of our distanced mental selves, surrounded by the moat, into the fullness of his or her presence. Not having learned to be wary of the other, or to develop "stranger anxiety" to use the term through which psychology currently naturalizes as an inevitable stage the laying down of our alienation, the child makes us burst into a smile when we encounter him or her. Like the woman in red, the newborn child instantly relieves the suffering of our normal spiritual imprisonment and helps us to return, momentarily, to who we really are. This is why every newborn child brings us the possibility of salvation from the suffering of separation, from the paralytic self-reproducing distance that blocks our capacity to fully recognize each other.

**"His portrait brings forth the person behind the outer appearance, the being who actually inhabits the eyes that we otherwise experience as ocular globes."**

But like Martin Buber, who sought to capture the aspiration to unmediated relational encounter in his famous book *I and Thou*, I have thus far presented the desire for mutual recognition in a way that might suggest I am mainly speaking about a psycho-spiritual relation between two people. This then could give the impression that the world can be understood through the lens normally used by psychology, as an infinite series of private encounters. But while I do mean to say that authentic mutual recognition can occur between two people—a couple falling in love, for example, or in an encounter between any two people who are able, by intention or accident, to break on through to the other side of the learned experiential boundary that has divided them—while I do mean to affirm that possibility, the fact is that the desire for mutual recognition and the fear of the other that opposes it undergirds the entire nexus of intersubjectivity that we



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call the social world. Thus when transformative social movements "emerge" and "break out," what actually takes place is a ricochet of recognition in which millions of people can sometimes become suddenly present to each other in a new way and in which the sedimented layers of separation that had divided people into discrete, alienated social pockets are emulsified very quickly by the movement's rising force.

In the late 1960s, for example, the fusion of the civil rights, women's, LGBTQ, and antiwar movements, along with the generative creativity of the worldwide '60s counterculture, led to a ricochet of recognition that leaped like a flame from one city in the world to another very quickly, from Berkeley, to Mexico City, to Prague, and to countless other locations. The "rising force" that generated this experience of movement was actually the desire for authentic mutual recognition gaining the social confidence to erupt across vast social spaces, creating a new social ground for millions of people to stand on, an unmediated, radiant ground of joyful co-presence. No matter what the roles and customs and identities that these masses of people had felt allegiance to and had been conditioned to be bound by prior to the movement's emergence, "something in the air" allowed people to leap forward toward each other and become present to each other on a new ground of being that transcended the particularities of their previous conditioning (at least temporarily—much more than the hot moment of a movement's emergence is required to solidify a new ontological ground like this). And we will return to this later in this book.

But the point to be emphasized here in this first chapter is that the desire for mutual recognition is a social force that radiates throughout and across the social fabric of the world, as a vector emerging (as a force and a longing) out from the center of each person as a pole of social being toward each other person. Insofar as the world precedes our birth and acculturates us to a conditioning—by gender, race, nationality, economic status, and many, many other forms of conditioned particularity—that conditioning provides a vast differentiated envelope of identity that we must conform ourselves to because it is the vehicle of the recognition by which we become social at all. To take myself as an example, when I became "conditioned" in my childhood, I became all at once male, white, upper middle-class, half-Jewish (actually three-quarters), a child of actors, American, somewhat tall, and was conditioned in countless other ways. All of these elements of my conditioning were transmitted to me through the way I was recognized by others. All of these elements were impossible to resist had I even wanted to because they provided in significant part the channel to my actually being able to exist at all as a social person, and had something kept me from properly identifying with the way I was recognized, I would have become schizophrenic or died from failure to thrive. And at the same time, all of these elements of my conditioning linked me to the wider social world by virtue of who shared my identifications and who did not share them, by the cascade of interlocking, intersubjective recognition that actually constitutes the social world and brings it into being.

The desire for mutual recognition both supports our social conditioning (since we must seek the recognition of our parents and other adults who are here to receive us if we are to realize our social nature) and transcends our social conditioning insofar as our conditioning is alienated, insofar as it does not actually make possible the realization of the fully present interhuman encounter. In our being, we seek the direct, unmediated co-presence to which Bergman's portrait aspires—this is the life-force that moves the social world forward and also makes true Martin Luther King's statement that "the moral arc of the universe . . . bends toward justice." But in our conditioning, we are bound by the conditions of how we are actually recognized from birth, with all its limitations, with the fear of the other that it transmits and contains. Yet because the longing for authentic mutual recognition always exerts a transcendental pressure on the limitations of our conditioning, we are only bound by our conditioning so long as the web of recognition that produced it remains stable, remains more or less the same from an ontological point of view. The possibility of going beyond those limitations, and the constant unconscious search to go beyond them, exists at all times, and is our source of hope.

> **"The desire for mutual recognition is a social force that radiates throughout and across the social fabric of the world."**

Now in order to more fully link this description with socio-historical interpretation and place these still seemingly psychological insights in relation to how we normally think about large-scale social processes, let me call to mind the feudal lord of the Middle Ages. When Marxists or other socio-economic interpreters think of the feudal lord, they think of him in relation to his interests, as if he were a kind of cog in an external system of socio-economic relations. In this way of seeing, he might have had a psychological life, but it would have been understood as "on the side" in the way that everyone has a psychological or spiritual life—shaped, for example, by his family and by life circumstances. But his "real" existence in a social and historical setting would be understood in terms of his interests within the functioning of the whole system, as a member of the ruling class, overseeing



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his landed estate, appropriating the labor of the serfs and increasingly of wage workers (assuming we are again viewing him in the late feudal period of the 15th century), protecting those workers as an incident of fealty, and supporting and benefiting from the legitimacy of the monarchy and the church and the ideology that these prevailing political and religious institutions generated.

What I am proposing is that we revise this entire way of seeing the feudal lord and recover his lived existence through apprehending him as a living being desiring to fully recognize and be recognized by others—to be recognized by, for example, the person next to him—but with that desire also contradicted by the envelope of alienation and fear of the other that he, by birth and social reproduction, was thrown into. Thus, his "lordship" as a totality of mannerisms, style, pretense, beliefs, condescension and deference, dehumanization of his vassals (both as factors of production of agricultural goods and as imaginary "others" occupying a lesser place in the feudal hierarchy)—all of these and countless other ways of being a lord are shaped and transcended by the conflict between desire and fear that actually incarnates him in relation to all others as a real, existential, living social being. Within this way of seeing the feudal lord, what drives the historical process forward is not his formal relationship to an external system (for Marxism, a division of classes pursuing their respective interests that are in contradiction under conditions of material scarcity), but the transcendent longing for mutual recognition organizing itself through not entirely predictable socio-historical "emergences," which sometimes have a class character (as in the overall struggle of the rising merchant and capitalist class to break asunder the restraining feudal relations), sometimes have an ideological character (the eventual coalescing of Protestant revolts against the Catholic Church), and sometimes through cultural upsurges like the forms of dress, popular song and poetry, and liberatory sexuality that give voice to each rising "movement," which we can now understand as a movement of social being seeking its own realization through transcendent and authentic community.

This is not to say the material factors shaping the feudal lord's life are unimportant but rather that they refer to those aspects of the lord's social existence that pertain to the survival of his body, and, under conditions of scarcity, provide an important channel for the longing of the desire for mutual recognition to express itself. When the peasants revolt, they are in fact starving, and they want to overthrow those who are depriving them of food, but if they lived in a beloved community, human beings would not turn on each other driven by material need. Thus there is a co-existing mutual influence of material and social-spiritual factors that must always be understood by linking the survival and health of the body with the full social realization of our relational collective being. We must fill out our description of the encounter of the desire for mutual recognition with the social envelope into which it is born and contained. How exactly does social desire that exists in everyone come to alienate itself in actual human relations? ■

PETER GABEL is editor-at-large of *Tikkun* and the author most recently of *The Desire for Mutual Recognition*, published by Routledge Press.

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# *No Other Gods*

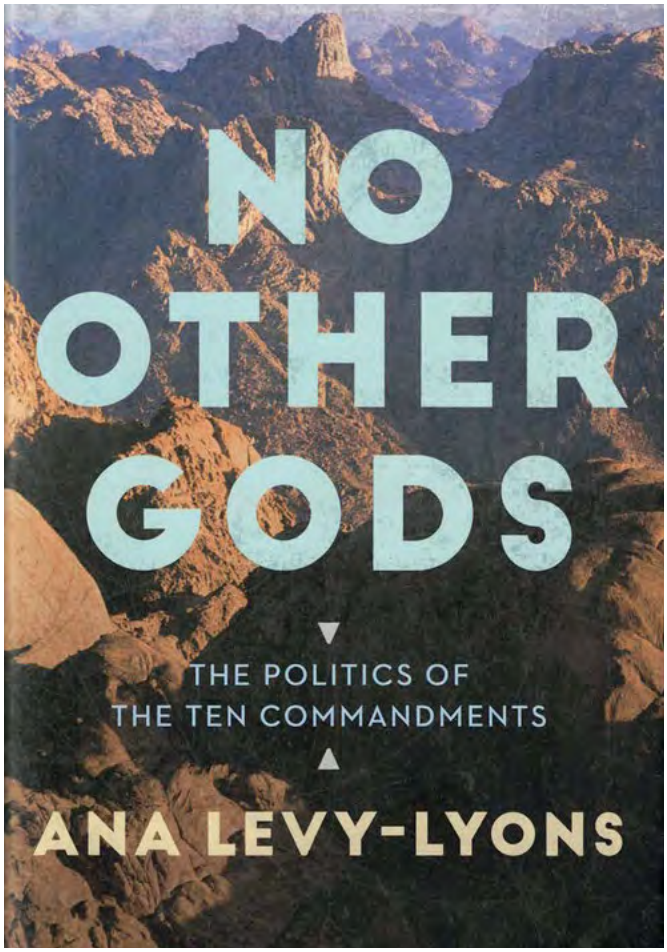
ANA LEVY-LYONS

From its inception in 1986, *Tikkun* has worked to articulate a "big idea"—a vision grounded in religious traditions and spiritual sensibilities; one that evokes a transformed world based in joy, generosity, and compassion; one that gives meaning to our lives and a common purpose to our work. Such a vision has been the missing ingredient in the movements of the political Left, which have largely seen themselves as secular in their foundation and tactical in their approach.

A broader, long-term vision with the power to galvanize diverse movements must be both universal and particular. It must embrace a sweeping hope for a world based in love and, at the same time, it must say something specific about what such a world will look like and what it will take to get there.

In my book, *No Other Gods: The Politics of the Ten Commandments*, I offer the ancient text—and context—of the Ten Commandments as a powerful example of such a universal-particular vision. Rooted in a description of God (YHVH, or *Being* itself) as the force that liberates the oppressed and the poor, the commandments form the armature of a new society. In the biblical story, the commandments are conceived/received by a people newly freed from slavery as a set of specific practices to ensure that they will not recreate the world of their oppressors. Never again will they be enslaved and neither will they enslave others. Instead, they will strive, through these practices, to build a world of love and mutual accountability.

We can read the Ten Commandments as a practical vision for our world today. They are written in the second-person singular, addressed to each individual and to the community as a whole. To keep the commandments means not only to follow them as a matter of personal ethics but also to build a society that keeps them collectively and structurally. It means to create a culture that does not kill or steal, that builds in weekly time for contemplation and awe, and that honors our Source in all its forms, human and ecological. The excerpt below is taken from the chapter on the Third Commandment—the prohibition on misusing the name of God/YHVH. Through the wisdom of this commandment, we are taught how much is at stake politically and spiritually in how we speak about God and how we represent "reality." To find out more and order *No Other Gods*, visit www.analevylyons.com.




Ana Levy-Lyons's new book on the politics of the Ten Commandments adds another dimension to the creative thinking about God and politics that has appeared in her writings in *Tikkun* and in the writing of other creative theologians we have published in our pages.

## The Countercultural Vision of the Third Commandment

Taking or using the name of YHVH in vain—*lashav*—happens not only in our own minds, but in the ways that we represent reality in public. The Third Commandment is ultimately about speech-acts. It acknowledges the power of



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The Third Commandment acknowledges the power of speech to wound or to heal and transform the world.

speech, spoken and written, to transform the world. In this way, it links again to the creation story (Genesis 1–3). In this story, God speaks the world into existence. Each new cosmic and earthly creation is formed through speech alone. "God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light." There is no separate creative act that mediates between the speech and the creation—the speech itself brings something new into existence. Speech is generative.

We have seen how speech that violates this commandment can generate hatred and fear. Such violations have been used to great effect by the religious Right to control the narrative about religion and by the political Right to control the narrative about reality. The cruel and harsh world narrative is dominant in our society and has shaped much of public policy, foreign policy, environmental policy, and our social landscapes. By promulgating the image of an angry, jealous, male God who hates gay people and wants women to be subservient, the religious Right has successfully pried progressives away from religion. Accepting this characterization of God and religion, progressives have ceded territory and yielded power, reach, and moral authority to conservative forces.

To keep the *Third Commandment* is to reclaim this territory. It is to reclaim the name of YHVH—the concept of God and the nature of reality—as a force for justice and stewardship of the earth. It is to proclaim at every opportunity that the world we have been given is a blessing and that the journey of liberation is built into the fabric of existence.

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We recognize our earth as a Garden of Eden, complete with abundant fruit trees and clear rivers running through it—enough food and water for everyone. It is up to us to lovingly protect and nurture this abundance in the name of YHVH. We recognize a world of spectacular human diversity—of genders and skin colors and shapes and physical abilities and gifts. We are blessed with people who make music and art; people who build things; people who explore the universe through science; people who explore the universe through meditation; people who grow vegetables; and people who work in factories. It is up to us to celebrate and promote this diversity in the name of YHVH.

We recognize a world of a stunning array of wildlife—at least 8.7 million species, with the majority not even yet identified, all inherently good. From elephants to earthworms to pelicans to plankton to flora to trees that breathe on behalf of all the earth, each has a unique role in the multi-layered web of ecosystems that sustain life. It is up to us to find the humility to make space for this profusion of life in the name of YHVH.

We recognize that from among all the animals, we humans have been given the gift of intellect. We have the mental capacity to solve all the problems we've created—renewable energy systems to replace fossil fuel production, the social systems of safety nets to help those most in need, sustainable and humane agriculture, the understanding of supply chains and fair trade practices that can offer workers a living wage. We even have the capacity to address many of the problems we haven't created—medicine to cure diseases, architecture to protect people from earthquakes. It's up to us to employ all of these capacities to heal the world in the name of YHVH.

## Reclaiming Our Innocence

To keep the spirit of the Third Commandment, we need to extend ourselves beyond just the negative practice of not misusing the name of God or misrepresenting reality. The Third Commandment blesses the positive practice of claiming a vision of a loving, accepting, and forgiving God and a world that was inherently good from its inception and remains so.

Keeping the Third Commandment means we encounter violence and injustice in our lives and the world around us and reply that that's not the way the world is but the way we're making it through our actions. It is keeping the Third Commandment to assert when someone shoots up a school, that it's a *distortion*, not the *expression* of human nature. Humans from infancy show preference for fairness and kindness. Humans in every culture show compassion and empathy for others. To keep the Third Commandment is to say that our destruction of the environment is not due to our inherent selfishness but our shortsightedness, that can be corrected. When we stop pinning injustice and oppression on "reality" and instead take responsibility for it ourselves, we are keeping the Third Commandment. We humans may be behind the curve right now, but "the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice."

A progressive movement grounded in a theology of wholeness and love—a positive vision of a world of blessing—would have great moral and political power. We would live in a world where God could be God and life could be life and the sanctity of these ideas—the inherent goodness and beauty of the universe—could shine among us. We would hold open the doors of possibility, taking every opportunity to proclaim that things can be different from the way they happen to be right now. By keeping the Third Commandment to protect the holiness of reality, we would spread joy, not mistrust; safety, not peril. We would care for one another in this way—giving hope where hope is often hard to find.

The sweetest fruit of this work of proclaiming the innocence of God in a suffering world is that we reclaim our own innocence as well. No one can ever convince us again that we are naïve or delusional or childish for believing that we can live together in love or nurture humans and the earth together. We will know that we have the power of YHVH within us and that ultimately the force of life and the essential promise of goodness are unimpeachable. ■

ANA LEVY-LYONS is senior minister at First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, New York, currently writing a book on the Ten Commandments as a radical spiritual and political vision. Connect with Ana: facebook.com/Ana.LevyLyons.author. Twitter: @Ana_LevyLyons. Email: analevylyons@hotmail.com.

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# Creative Souls

## The Exhibition

PAUL VON BLUM

For many decades, I have embarked on a long personal journey to bring African American visual artists out of the shadows of marginality into a level of recognition and visibility, at least at the local and regional levels in Southern California. This emerges from my personal activism in the civil rights movement in SNCC and CORE more than 50 years ago and my desire to infuse my teaching and scholarly work with this spirit of civil rights and political activism.

I have written regularly on African American art, including various books, catalogue essays, reviews, and articles, including some in *Tikkun*. Recently, I have focused on the vibrant community of Los Angeles' Black artists. Throughout my research, these women and men have transcended the status of artistic subjects; they have become my friends. I have been privileged to share their lives and to become part of their extended community. I have spent countless hours in their homes and studios and have regularly attended their exhibitions. My scholarly work about them has been openly political, in deliberate contrast to the prevailing (and absurd) tradition of academic objectivity.

Not surprisingly, these gifted artists have endured substantial marginalization and exclusion from mainstream museums, galleries, university, and college curricula, and mainstream media coverage. They have created alternative venues serving the African American community effectively, including major museums and cultural institutions like the California African American Museum, the Museum of African American Art, the Watts Towers Art Center, the William Grant Still Arts Center, and various other galleries catering to this community. But artistic racism—that is exactly what it is—remains the norm and Black artists as well as Latinx, women, LBGTQ, and other artists outside the mainstream of white male artistic hegemony still face substantial barriers and exclusion in the masculine art world of 21st century America.

The major change today is sophisticated tokenism where the white art establishment, consisting of wealthy philanthropists and conventional (but of course politically liberal) curators, critics, and museum directors, decide to "anoint" various African American artists as worthy of inclusion in mainstream discourse *and* commerce. In Los Angeles, artist Mark Bradford (and a very few others) has been the recipient of this status. A dramatic example is billionaire Eli Broad's recent purchase of Bradford's painting "Helter Skelter I" for $12 million for his Broad Museum in downtown Los Angeles.

Mark Bradford is, by any critical standard, a magnificent, award-winning artist. A substantial body of scholarship has been published on his work. I note this in my introductory chapter in *Creative Souls* and explain that this is why he is not included in this volume. Many of Bradford's works are socially conscious and he has been a major contributor to the cultural life of the Black community in Los Angeles. He fully deserves all the recognition he has received. But he is an anointed one, among several others including Kerry James Marshall, Kara Walker, Mikalene Thomas, and a few more in the U.S., all of whom, like Mark Bradford, are thoroughly first-rate visual artists with justifiable international reputations.

This tokenism is identical to that of society in general, which conceals its structural racism by allowing and highlighting a small percentage of people of color to have highly visible positions in corporations, government, nonprofits, colleges, universities, and the like. Meanwhile millions of other African Americans and Latinx endure segregation, poverty, police brutality, and other hardships while privileged white Americans ignore these realities and often congratulate themselves about their country's social and racial "progress." The art world is a mirror image of that disgraceful arrangement.

I wrote *Creative Souls* and co-curated its eponymous exhibition at the Watts Towers Arts Center because some of the 21 artists in the book and exhibition are of comparable quality and stature to Mark Bradford and other highly praised Black artistic luminaries throughout the nation. They deserve equivalent recognition because of their exemplary work over the decades. And *all* of them deserve as much exposure as possible. Their works reflect powerful creativity and imagination and their efforts address a wide variety of themes, especially issues of racism in many of its multifaceted manifestations in contemporary America.

The exhibition is intended, above all, to honor a large group of African American visual artists who have been active for many years. All have exhibited widely both locally and nationally over the years. The Watts Towers Arts Center venue for the "Creative Souls" exhibition is especially appropriate because of its location in one of the major centers of Black Los Angeles and because of its outstanding record of artistic, musical, and educational activities for the surrounding community. Moreover, the Arts Center has been the site of numerous exhibitions of some of the most iconic representatives of African American artists in Southern California. Some of the most renowned figures from this community

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Fig. 1 Phoebe Beasley, *Mother to Son*

Phoebe Beasley

have been associated with the Center, which enjoys an exemplary reputation through Black Los Angeles and beyond.

The artists in "Creative Souls" have produced scores of works for this exhibition; some are selections I chose for the book, others are from their large body of works from the past, and some art is entirely new for the present exhibition. I decided to start the show with a silkscreen print by Phoebe Beasley, *Mother to Son* (Figure 1), which stands at the entrance to the main gallery. Beasley is an accomplished, longtime artist who is one of the most acclaimed figures in the creative community.

Her artwork highlights an African American woman holding a picket sign reading "DON'T BUY WHERE YOU CAN'T WORK." Well-dressed and carrying her handbag, she shows her fierce determination to demand full equality for her people during the height of the modern civil rights movement. Beasley captures the spirit of ordinary people, including hundreds of thousands of Black women, who collectively changed the racial landscape of America. They were responsible for the progress we made during a momentous time in our national history.

For me, however, this opening artwork was especially personal, revealing the deeper sources of my involvement with this African American artistic community. In the early 1960s, I demonstrated on Canal Street in New Orleans against large department stores that refused to employ African Americans in responsible positions; this reflected the blatant Jim Crow racism of the era. I carried a picket sign with an identical message to that in Phoebe Beasley's silkscreen. But during one of my picketing episodes, two young white thugs approached and proceeded to knock me to the ground, calling me various racial epithets. Pledged to nonviolence, I protected myself but did not respond. When I found myself on the pavement, I saw two New Orleans police officers watching and grinning. When I stood up and brushed myself off, the cops approached the thugs and asked if they were hurt and wanted to press charges.

This Kafkaesque event was not unusual during the movement. I had several subsequent violent encounters with the police, with some pain and injuries, as well as unpleasant experiences with jails, courts, and probation officers. All of that underscored my will to write the book, organize the exhibition, and start with this artwork. Above all, that enduring political history has informed me in this engaging and soul-enriching work.

Beasley, therefore, sets a political tone for this exhibition. Many of the other artists also reflect this broad spirit in multifaceted ways. The present exhibition also features artworks from a former director of the Watts Towers Arts Center, Mark Steven Greenfield, who managed to combine magnificent service as an arts administrator before retiring from that role while producing a truly spectacular body of art over the decades. His thematic scope and stylistic diversity are nothing short of amazing; his range reflects an extraordinary dedication to artistic excellence as he traverses the dazzling variety of his efforts, some of which are represented in both the book and the exhibition.

One of his most provocative themes has been the controversial topic of Black stereotypes, which have despoiled American popular culture since the inception of the nation. He has (re)appropriated late 19th and early 20th century racist images of Black people. In his *Blackatcha* series, he used photographs of minstrel show performances that denigrated African Americans and their culture and transformed them into dramatic visual works of artistic resistance. Greenfield's visual redirections catalyze instant reactions, encouraging viewers to reflect on the origin and persistence of racist attitudes that may well remain buried even among those who claim to be free of bias and prejudice.

Each one in this series is strikingly powerful. An untitled work from that series (Figure 2) makes the point unambiguously. In front of the man in a minstrel costume are letters, which, when audiences spell them out, read "SOME INDIGNITIES PERSIST." Greenfield skillfully makes a second appropriation here by structuring the front of the composition as a modern eye chart, familiar to almost everyone. This



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Fig. 2 Mark Greenfield, *Untitled*.

signifies that Americans need to focus closely to discover the deep-seated racism permeating their history and culture. Many of today's racial indignities are subtle, properly characterized as micro-aggressions. It takes careful *vision* to discern these daily slights, but African Americans and other minorities are acutely cognizant of them as they occur. Greenfield uses his art to encourage a confrontation that many white Americans would prefer to avoid, especially even when they themselves are so often the unwitting perpetrators of the racist micro-aggressions.

"Creative Souls" also highlights the works of Afro-Caribbean artists Bernard Hoyes, Yrneh Brown, and Lili Bernard. These three artists draw strongly on their Caribbean roots to add distinction to the burgeoning community of Black artists in the Los Angeles area. Each has exhibited widely and received strongly positive critical reviews for their work and each has brought the tradition of Afro-Caribbean culture into the public artistic arena in the Los Angeles area and elsewhere.

Lili Bernard has contributed a powerful installation to the present exhibition that is inspired by Frantz Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks* and that reflects her status as a Cuban-born woman with a deep knowledge of Black history and thought that infuses much of her stellar artistic work in general. This three-dimensional installation with its accompanying video, *Ain't Funny Crucifix* (Figure 3), combines purple sugar cane, conga drum, watermelon seeds, nails, rope, acrylic paint, video art, and performance. The artist's objective is to examine Black Consciousness and self-image through her eldest son's developing Black manhood in a racist society.

The most conspicuous feature of the installation is the cross and the watermelon with nails. The cross is actually constructed of sugar cane, a staple crop in Bernard's native Cuba. The key theme is the fusion of Catholicism and the Afro-Cuban religion known as "Palo," which resulted from European colonialism. Enslaved Africans brought to Cuba were required to pick sugar cane, an arduous, backbreaking, and debilitating task. But this same sugar cane was also a source of sustenance, like the abundant watermelons that enslaved Black people regularly ate in Cuba.

*Ain't Funny Crucifix* critiques not only colonialism but also the racist use of watermelon imagery in American popular culture. After Emancipation, free Black people grew, sold, and ate watermelons, just as their Cuban counterparts used them for nourishment. Racist whites, however, made the fruit a symbol of African American dirtiness, laziness, and childishness. Black caricatures with watermelons were ubiquitous in film, postcards, household goods, and other expressive forms.

The nails on the watermelon signify the Black determination to destroy this repulsive watermelon stereotype. The accompanying video reflects that resistance message powerfully. Bernard sets the tone dramatically at the start of the video. She dedicates it to two women, Mary Turner and Laura Nelson, who were victims of early 20th-century Southern lynch mobs. Images of these horrific lynchings

Left: Mark Greenfield | Below: Lili Bernard

Fig. 3 Lili Bernard, *Ain't Funny Crucifix*.



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were widely distributed as souvenir postcards, reminding viewers of both the tragic legacy of American racial history and the continuing need for artworks like this.

The artist's son Rafael is the video's subject and is shown asserting his Black masculinity, as he combats society's racism and stereotypes through his strength, diligence, frustration, anger, compassion, vulnerability, and joy, all the emotions that Black men experience regularly in American society. His whitened African warrior's face reinforces the African roots of Black resistance, a major theme in African American and Afro-Caribbean art generally. The video also shows him stabbing the watermelon, a defiant rejection of American racist stereotypes.

In recent years, African American artists have joined millions of other Americans and people throughout the world in condemning the murders of unarmed Black men, usually at the hands of police. The catalyst for the movement known as Black Lives Matter occurred on February 12, 2012, when George Zimmerman fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. That killing led to Zimmerman's arrest and trial. His acquittal in 2013, in turn, led to nationwide protests against the killings of unarmed Black people and the all too easy way that perpetrators escaped legal liability for their actions.

I joined one of those protest demonstrations in Times Square in Manhattan the night of the infamous verdict. That was the personal reason for me to select various artworks that address the current plague of police killings and other forms of misconduct against African Americans. One of the younger artists in "Creative Souls," Derrick Maddox, exemplifies and underscores that theme by using a stylistically innovative visual approach. He has added to his exemplary record of socially conscious artworks through his imaginative portraits on bread; these works are unique in contemporary art, and the present work, *Got It Bad Because I'm Brown* (Figure 4), is a chilling commentary about police violence in America. For several years, Maddox has appropriated images and presented them on white bread, an entirely appropriate medium to initiate the much-needed conversation about race in this country.

Here, he places the faces of 59 African American men whose lives have been cut short. They did not, for the most part, receive the national and international notoriety of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Walter Scott, and a few others. These men had little or no visibility outside their family and friends. Most, but certainly not all, were young; each one had hopes and dreams that remained unfulfilled. Viewers look at these "bread works" and can (and should) contemplate the abysmal waste of human life. Above all, they can see that the protests about police violence and murder are not mere abstractions. They are about real people. Maddox, like many other African American artists, combines both an incisive institutional critique

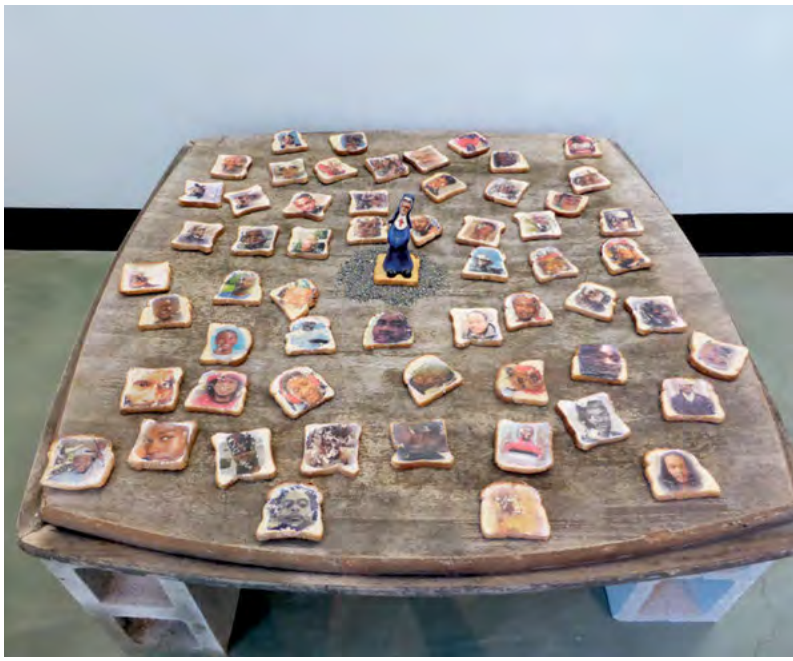

Fig 4 Derrick Maddox, *Got it Bad Because I'm Brown*.

Derrick Maddox

and a compelling human vision. The nun in the center with her cross adds a satirical note of piety, suggesting that these police killings are a matter of sacred honor in America. *Got It Bad Because I'm Brown* is an extraordinarily trenchant, poignant, and effective artwork.

Like many of their counterparts throughout the country, some of the African American artists in this exhibition use their talents to offer perceptive commentary on themes and topics that transcend conventional American race issues. Dale Davis is another highly venerated African American artist in Southern California whose thematic range and visual excellence are legendary in this community and beyond. His stellar reputation as a gallery owner with his brother Alonzo Davis from 1967 to 1989 at the famed Brockman Gallery and his long record as a teacher complement his prolific efforts as a practicing artist in several genres.

For many years, I have had the privilege of viewing and writing about Davis's assemblages, especially those in which he uses actual musical instruments to pay tribute to the richness and vibrancy of the Black musical heritage in America. These are truly remarkable artworks and the "Creative Souls" exhibition features *Horn Section*, one of the most striking in this feature of Davis's Jazz Series. Those works enable him to join some of the iconic figures of African American art for whom Black music is a key source for their enduring contributions to American art history.

Another of Dale Davis's remarkable series of artworks is his *Soul and Coal Cars*, which focuses on some of the serious environmental issues that plague our planet. That series draws upon a long tradition of African American artistic



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Fig. 5 Dale Davis, *Coal Car*.

production where railroads have played a huge role. Many Black artists have used trains as a signifier of freedom, drawing on the metaphor of the Underground Railroad in the heroic attempts to assist slaves fleeing bondage in the South. In the early to mid-20th century, trains were the actual physical vehicles of transportation for African Americans during the "Great Migration," when millions fled the oppression of the Jim Crow South to the major urban centers of the North and to the West.

Davis is well aware of the historical power of trains to African Americans and their significance as artistic symbols when used for social and political commentary and criticism. In his assemblage *Coal Car* (Figure 5), he uses the train more ironically as a symbol of oppression by addressing the problem of aggressive mining of rare minerals and metals occurring in South Africa and in other newly liberated African nations. Davis fills the train with mesquite charcoal and adds a few pieces of zircon in the corner.

Many of the leaders of these countries, like American corporations, are seduced by the lure of quick development and economic return, without consideration for the human consequences for their often-struggling populations. The glittering zircon invites viewers to reflect on what the leaders are really seeking—riches for themselves or for their populations? Dale Davis issues a troubling artistic warning that too few Americans understand, but that they should seriously confront in an era of major global interconnectedness.

Joe Sims is another longtime assemblage artist who stands in the proud tradition of using discarded materials to create powerful works that address trenchant issues of racial and social injustice. Like such distinguished predecessors and contemporaries as Noah Purifoy, Betye Saar, John Riddle, John Outterbridge, David Hammons, Charles Dickson, and Dominique Moody, Sims has an imaginative ability to transform debris and trash into powerful and enduring works of art.

Many of his pieces, understandably, address issues specifically relevant to his fellow African Americans. Like Davis and others, he also reveals a broader commitment to social class and gender justice. *Secretary's Day* (Figure 6) is an assemblage based on his wife's unpleasant experiences with the daily aggravations of clerical work with an insensitive supervisor, Sims constructed a critical artwork that captures the despair of millions of secretaries and other "pink collar" workers whose daily lives are (unnecessarily) made insufferable because their bosses view them as little more than replaceable extensions of their computers and other business technologies. Throughout the United States and much of the world, these oppressed, poorly paid workers often serve as objects of hostility when their supervisors are frustrated at events far beyond the control of their subordinates. Indeed, it is far from uncommon for some bosses to blame their secretaries for the personal failings, deficiencies, and insecurities for which they should really acknowledge personal responsibility.

Dale Davis



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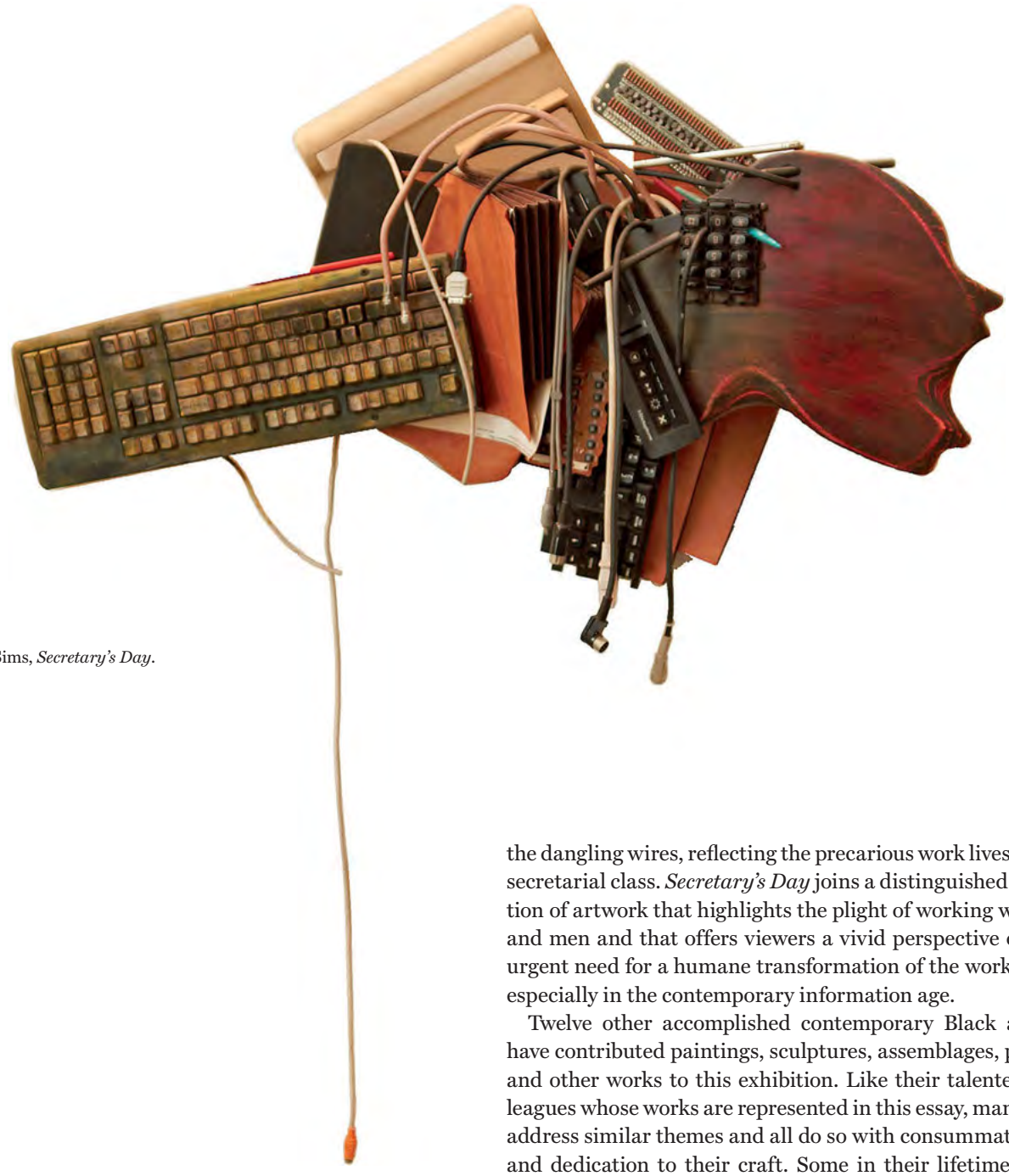

Fig. 6 Joe Sims, *Secretary's Day*.

Joe Sims captures their alienation most dramatically with the anguished expression of the silhouette figure. Her scream reflects the feelings of those clerical workers who are unable to express their legitimate rage at their unfair treatment and the lack of recognition of their basic humanity—conditions that are all too ubiquitous in the modern workplace. The discarded computer keyboards and other office equipment signify the deeper phenomenon of discarded human dignity, another expression of Sims's lifetime identification with marginalized populations. Key details of the work include the dangling wires, reflecting the precarious work lives of the secretarial class. *Secretary's Day* joins a distinguished tradition of artwork that highlights the plight of working women and men and that offers viewers a vivid perspective on the urgent need for a humane transformation of the workplace, especially in the contemporary information age.

Twelve other accomplished contemporary Black artists have contributed paintings, sculptures, assemblages, prints, and other works to this exhibition. Like their talented colleagues whose works are represented in this essay, many also address similar themes and all do so with consummate skill and dedication to their craft. Some in their lifetimes may achieve the kinds of recognition and rewards of their white counterparts of comparable talent. But that is not why they do what they do. They are artists who are also Black. They know well the profound personal fulfillment of creative accomplishments that add immeasurably to the cultural life of their vibrant community. ■

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Joseph Sims



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The campaign in support of the BDS call has grown dramatically worldwide, yet it has shown little in the way of tangible benefits for the Palestinians

# Reflections on BDS

STEPHEN ZUNES

In 2005, Palestinian civil society—suffering under an increasingly repressive occupation, expanding colonization by Israeli settlers, a corrupt and inept Palestinian Authority, a growing challenge by Hamas and other hardline Islamists, and a doomed "peace process" facilitated by the principal diplomatic, financial, and military backer of their occupiers—coalesced to call for an international campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel.

By this point, most Palestinians recognized that in addition to being flagrantly illegal and morally reprehensible, terrorism was politically counterproductive. There was also an awareness that armed struggle against Israeli Occupation forces, while more legitimate, would be utterly futile and lead to additional suffering on a massive scale.

Furthermore, any realistic hope for a diplomatic solution was being undermined by the United States' refusal to apply any tangible pressure on a succession of Right-wing Israeli governments to make the necessary compromises for peace and preventing the United Nations from enforcing its resolutions demanding Israel withdraw from its illegal settlements, rescind its annexation of greater East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, end the Occupation and ongoing violations of international humanitarian law, and allow for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

Mobilizing global civil society, therefore, appeared to be the best reasonable means to end their suffering and make peace and justice possible. As a result, 170 Palestinian trade unions, political parties, women's organizations, professional associations, popular resistance committees, refugee networks, and others called for an international campaign of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel.

The campaign in support of the BDS call has grown dramatically worldwide, including here in the United States, yet it has shown little in the way of tangible benefits for the Palestinians. Furthermore, it has in many respects increased the already high levels of political polarization regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, in many cases, allowed for the debate over BDS to overshadow the debate over the Occupation itself.

* * *

Boycotts, divestments, and sanctions are not an organization or even a movement. It is a tactic, one which has historically been utilized under different names in support of a variety of human rights struggles over the years. One of the concerns for which the tactic of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions that has been utilized historically has been as part of campaigns to put pressure on multinational corporations to stop illegally profiting from foreign occupations, particularly in cases where the United States or other powers have blocked the United Nations from enforcing, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, its resolutions calling for withdrawal of Occupation forces. In previous decades, boycott and divestment campaigns targeted companies supporting South Africa's occupation of Namibia and Indonesia's occupation of East Timor. A campaign is currently underway, particularly strong in Europe, in support of BDS against the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. In addition, the United States and other countries have imposed sanctions on Russia for its occupation of Crimea.

In addition, there was the large-scale BDS campaign in the 1970s and 1980s against South Africa, demanding that the country end its apartheid system and allow for majority rule. Other recent BDS campaigns have targeted Burma, Sudan, and other countries with notorious human rights violations.

Thus, BDS is not new. Yet—the current campaign targeting Israel has led to unprecedented controversy. Several states have banned government contracts with companies, and in some cases even individuals, that boycott Israel, or simply boycott products from illegal settlements in the occupied territories, or companies that support ongoing Israeli violations of international humanitarian law. University administrators have publicly denounced those student governments that have supported divesting from companies that support the Israeli Occupation as well as professors and academic



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The BDS campaign targeting Israel threatens the profits of such powerful corporations and encourages similar campaigns against supporters of other repressive governments.

organizations that boycott Israel, and have even banned pro-Palestine student groups advocating BDS.

Why is there such antipathy toward BDS when it comes to Israel?

Part of this is a result of the close strategic relationship between the U.S. and Israeli governments. Boycotts and sanctions targeting Russia for its occupation of Crimea, by contrast, are widely supported, as were the strict sanctions against Iraq during its occupation of Kuwait in 1990–91. In addition, the United States has placed sanctions on a number of autocratic governments, citing their human rights abuses, while providing security assistance to autocratic regimes with even worse human rights records. In many respects, opposing boycotts and sanctions against Israel is another example of longstanding American double standards regarding the violations of international legal norms by allied governments.

Another reason for such antipathy is the widespread anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigotry in the United States, which is purported to justify the conquest and occupation of Arab and Muslim nations, in regard to not only the Israeli occupation, but also the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. A BDS campaign in solidarity with an oppressed white, Christian population would not likely be so controversial.

There is also the growing concentration of corporate power, their ability to influence elected officials, and their means of countering such campaigns for corporate responsibility. The BDS campaign targeting Israel threatens the profits of such powerful corporations as Hewlett-Packard, Motorola, and Caterpillar and encourages similar campaigns against carbon polluters, union-busters, and supporters of other repressive governments.

* * *

Concerns regarding the BDS campaign targeting Israel, however, are not restricted to anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bigots, Right-wing supporters of U.S. and Israeli government policies, or defenders of powerful corporate interests. Many progressives who oppose the Israeli occupation and are supportive of Palestinian rights have also raised concerns regarding aspects of the BDS campaign.

One reason is that the official BDS call from Palestinian civil society organizations calls not just for the end of the Israeli Occupation but also for equality for Palestinians within Israel, including the right of return for Palestinians in the Diaspora (a right currently limited under Israeli law to Jews only). If Palestinians were allowed to return in such large numbers, it would presumably mean that Israel would no

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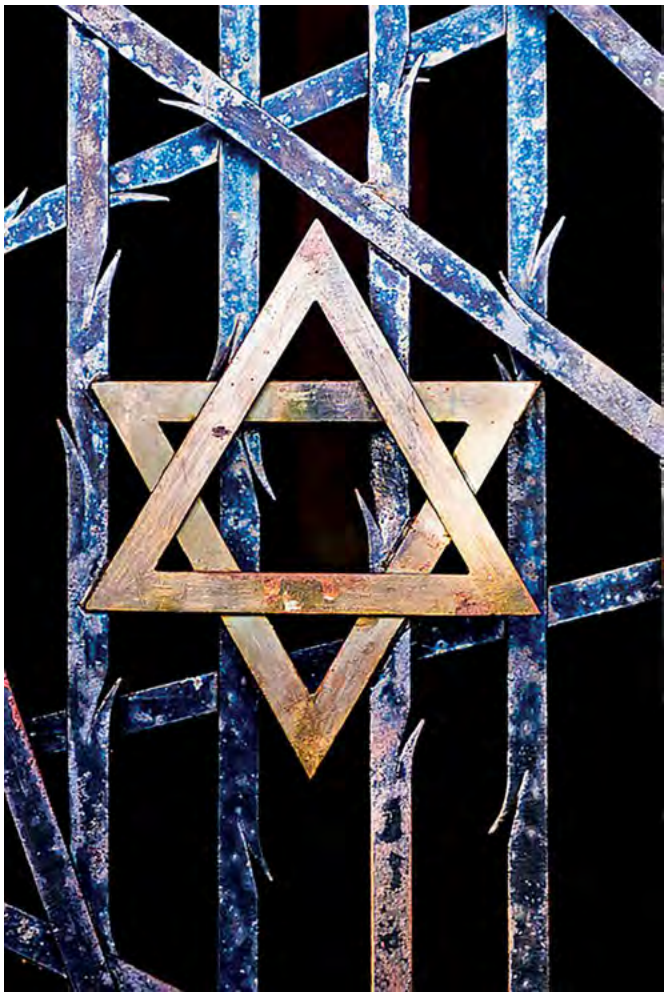
longer have a majority Jewish population. So, while this is not a call for "the destruction of Israel" in a violent sense, as many opponents of BDS imply, it would certainly mean that Israel would no longer be the "Jewish state" as we know it today. Even among the many of those who believe that Israeli colonization of the West Bank has reached a point where a viable two-state solution is no longer possible if some sort of binational state with guaranteed rights for both peoples is the goal, the failure to make this important legal distinction between Israel within its internationally recognized borders and territories under foreign belligerent occupation is a tactical mistake. Focusing on the stronger moral and legal case against Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian lands seized in the 1967 war, illegal colonization of occupied territory, siege of the Gaza Strip, and denial of the Palestinians' right to self-determination—positions which have much greater popular support—would seem to be far more effective, if not distracted by divisive arguments regarding Israel's "right to exist" or the nature of Zionism.

A BDS campaign focused on ending the Occupation would therefore have a much greater impact than one focused on the dissolution of a Jewish state of Israel. Among the few major successes of the BDS campaign has been getting some major religious denominations and pension plans to divest from companies that support the Occupation and settlements and forcing some companies, such as Soda Stream, to end their operations in illegal settlements. By contrast, no companies have withdrawn from Israel itself and a number of entities, which have divested from companies supporting the Occupation, have explicitly noted that they are not advocating a total boycott of Israel. Similarly, a number of prominent individuals who have pledged to support the academic and cultural boycott have stressed that they will do so until Israel ends its occupation and is not contingent on granting the wholesale right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, which—despite moral appeal and sound legal basis—is not as attainable or widely supported.

Supporters of the BDS call have cited the successful BDS campaign against apartheid South Africa as a precedent. There are, however, some key differences. For example, while the situation on the grounds of the occupied West Bank does, in many important respects, resemble apartheid, and there is certainly discrimination against Palestinian citizens within Israel, Israel (at least at this point) is not yet what could reasonably be considered an "apartheid state" or anything close to the uniquely horrendous system that existed in South Africa. Another key difference is that during the BDS movement's targeting of the apartheid regime, the United States maintained an arms moratorium on South Africa and at least nominally called for majority rule; U.S. military aid to Israel continues to increase and the U.S. government fails to call for an end of the Occupation and settlements, much less equal rights for Palestinians. Successive administrations and



Israel is the world's only Jewish state, thereby raising concerns as to whether Israel is being unfairly singled out

Congressional resolutions with huge bipartisan majorities have defended Israeli bombing and incursions into neighboring countries, despite widespread attacks on civilians, whereas no such resolutions were passed in favor of South African attacks on its neighbors or on Black townships within the country. There were no statements or resolutions coming out of Washington denouncing the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, or reputable international jurists and human rights organizations for criticizing South Africa's violations of international humanitarian law, as there have been repeatedly in regard to such criticism of Israeli transgressions.

During the final decades of apartheid, foreign direct investment was the single most important way that the United States and other Western countries propped up South African minority rule, so a campaign focusing on boycotts and sanctions made a lot of sense. By contrast, foreign investment plays a relatively minor role in making Israel's ongoing

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occupation, colonization, and repression in the occupied territories possible. As a result, while campaigns targeting Western corporations supporting the Occupation are certainly one way of challenging the Occupation, they are not the only way, nor are they necessarily the most effective.

For example, polls show that a sizable majority of Democrats and independents believe that the United States should utilize sanctions and stop Israel's obstruction of United Nations peace efforts in order to pressure Israel to end its settlement drive and make the necessary compromises for peace, but the Democratic Party platform and the vast majority of Democrats in Congress oppose such measures. Launching a campaign similar to those which forced Democrats to shift their similarly initial hawkish positions—regarding the Vietnam War, the nuclear freeze, U.S. intervention in Central America, U.S. support for the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, and backing the Iraq War—would seem to be a higher priority than BDS. Working to change U.S. policy, therefore, would appear to be a more direct means of influencing Israeli policy than opposing corporate investment policy or academic and cultural exchanges.

* * *

One concern which has been raised about the BDS campaign here in the United States and other nations, even by those who acknowledge ongoing Israeli violations of human rights and international law, is why the focus on Israel, the world's only Jewish state?

One reason is that there are few cases where civil society organizations have come together so explicitly to call for such a campaign, as with the case in Palestine.

However, there are a number of other important reasons. While there are a large number of other governments which also violate human rights, there is a much stronger legal case for international mobilization against human rights abuses in occupied territories. For example, under most circumstances, international law prohibits foreign companies from exploiting labor or natural resources within such non-self-governing territories. There are also clear international prohibitions against occupying powers transferring civilian settlers onto lands seized by military force and, by extension, supporting such colonization efforts economically. Similarly, there are a host of legal issues regarding the export of weapons and other military resources to countries that utilize them in suppressing the rights of those under what is recognized as a foreign belligerent occupation, particularly when the use of such weapons results in large-scale civilian casualties.

In addition, Israel gets far more U.S. aid than any other country. The United States has used its veto power in the United Nations on scores of occasions to protect Israel from international accountability; many U.S. officials rationalize human rights abuses and violations of international law committed by Israel that they would condemn if committed by many other countries. Using BDS to challenge Israeli policies is one way of attempting to redress the ways in which Israel is already being singled out by the U.S. government for support.

Despite this, supporters of Israel's right-wing government and its occupation and colonization of the West Bank are fighting back, with both Republican and Democratic leaders denouncing the BDS campaign as "anti-Semitic." Some states have passed laws forbidding state contracts with companies and other entities that boycott Israel. In a number of these cases, as well as in a major anti-BDS bill currently before Congress, "Israel" is defined in the legislation to include "territories controlled by Israel," thereby targeting even those who support boycotts and divestment, even if only in regard to the Occupation and settlements, not Israel itself. This is why such legislation has been opposed by J Street, American Friends of Peace Now, and other liberal Zionist groups which oppose BDS: they point out that these bipartisan legislative initiatives are not "pro-Israel" bills but pro-Occupation and pro-settlements bills. Just as some elements of the BDS campaign have been criticized for failing to distinguish between Israel and the occupied territories, so are the many Republican and Democratic elected officials opposed to BDS.

One result of this failure to distinguish between the state of Israel and its occupation of the conquered lands of its neighbors is that Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and other religious denominations that have voted to divest from companies supporting the Israeli Occupation and settlements—which have previously received state funding to operate homeless shelters, soup kitchens, emergency relief operations or other subsidized services—will no longer be able to do so. Some of these state laws apply to individuals as well. For example, a well-respected high school teacher in Kansas who endorses his Mennonite congregation's call for boycotting and divesting from companies supporting the Occupation and settlements was denied a contract he had initially been offered to lead a pedagogical workshop for other teachers. The University of Houston, a public institution, has refused to pay honoraria or reimburse expenses for guest speakers who boycott Israel or the settlements. A lawyer in Arizona who had been providing legal support for inmates was denied a renewal of his state contract because of his support for boycotting companies that support the Occupation. In several states, professors at state institutions can no longer get funding to attend scholarly conferences of organizations that have endorsed the academic boycott.

Many of these anti-boycott bills appear to be designed to establish a precedent in suppressing other campaigns for corporate responsibility, such as those targeting other corporations backing other repressive governments allied with the United States, major carbon emitters, arms manufacturers, sweatshop owners, union busters, and others. Had



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similar anti-boycott laws been on the books when prohibiting boycotts of non-union grapes and lettuce, bus lines with segregated seating, Woolworth's and other retailers with discriminatory practices, J.P. Stevens and other manufacturers suppressing unions, or companies investing in apartheid South Africa, it would have seriously hampered these important social justice campaigns. It is no accident that many of the anti-BDS laws are also backed by ALEC and other lobbying groups tied to corporate interests, since these laws could create an important precedent in protecting the rights of corporations to act with impunity.

Some BDS proponents see this extreme reaction as a vindication that their campaign is having an impact. However, given the support of these measures by many prominent liberal Democrats, the dangerous precedent of this legislation, and its impact on socially conscious individuals and organizations, the question arises as to whether the campaign is strong enough to resist the powerful interests arrayed against it and the damage the pushback may have on other struggles for social, economic, and environmental justice.

* * *

BDS supporters are not a monolith. Just as with previous movements in opposition to the Vietnam War, intervention in Central America, and apartheid in South Africa, BDS advocates range the gamut from religious pacifists to far Left ideologues, long-time human rights activists to those new to activism, those currently involved in numerous progressive causes to those for whom this is their number-one issue. In this respect, the range of views is not unlike earlier movements challenging U.S. policies in Vietnam, Central America, and South Africa, which—while including hardline elements—were primarily made up of Americans with decidedly moderate views. There are undeniably extremist elements who advocate for BDS in some circles—including anti-Semites—but, despite such bigots being a small minority, U.S. supporters of the Israeli government have been remarkably successful in portraying the BDS campaign as its most extreme elements. The result has been near-universal condemnation of BDS by leading liberal politicians, the Democratic Party, and others who have previously been more sympathetic to campaigns in support of human rights, international law, and corporate responsibility.

While some of this can certainly be attributed to concerted efforts by various right-wing Zionist organizations allied to the Israeli government, the failure of the BDS campaign to gather more traction may primarily be the result of the fact that, while Israeli violations of international humanitarian

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law are no more justifiable than those committed by other repressive right-wing governments, Israel is the world's only Jewish state, thereby raising concerns as to whether Israel is being unfairly singled out. History is replete with examples of Jews being scapegoated to deflect criticism from those who really held power and being unfairly blamed for misdeeds primarily committed by Gentiles. This has led even those critical of the policies of Israel's current right-wing government to become defensive in response to BDS campaigns.

For example, if there was only one Black state in the world, even if (like Israel) it had invaded and occupied its neighbors and was engaging in repression and colonization in lands it had seized by force, there would be a lot of African Americans—along with white liberals—who might be somewhat defensive about advocating boycotts, divestment, and sanctions, even where justifiable. In addition, the fact that historically, boycotts of Jewish businesses have long been part of anti-Semitic campaigns—including in Germany immediately preceding the Holocaust—calls for boycotting Israel and companies investing in Israel (and even just the occupied territories) can quite understandably bring up fears and suspicions among many Jews.

* * *

While there are certainly other governments with even worse human rights records than Israel, the vast majority of such human rights abuses take place within these countries' internationally recognized borders. Though such repression is immoral regardless of on which side of an internationally recognized boundary it takes place, the international community does have a particular legal obligation to defend the rights of those under foreign belligerent occupation, including their right to national self-determination. And multinational corporations have certain unique moral and legal responsibilities regarding investing in non-self-governing territories, including those recognized as being under foreign belligerent occupation.

Today, there are only two countries that are engaged in what the United Nations, the World Court, and virtually the entire international community recognize as a foreign belligerent occupation of entire nations: Israel and Morocco. There are some nations, such as Ukraine and Azerbaijan, which are partially occupied and other nations, such as Tibet and West Papua, which arguably have a moral right to independence, but are not recognized by the international community as under occupation. Western Sahara and Palestine are currently the world's only legally recognized captive nations.

As with the Israeli-occupied West Bank, a number of companies support Morocco's ongoing illegal occupation of the nation of Western Sahara. And, as is the case with the Israeli-occupied territories, U.S.-based arms manufacturers have provided weapons to Moroccan Occupation forces engaged in what independent human rights groups have described as gross and systematic human rights violations, including manufacturers of the teargas that has been used to break up peaceful demonstrations calling for the right of self-determination. U.S. mining companies and other extractive industries have signed contracts to exploit the natural resources of Western Sahara, thereby violating international legal prohibitions against such operations in non-self-governing territories where the indigenous population does not have a say in the process and is not able to benefit.

The credibility of the BDS campaign against the Israeli Occupation would be considerably strengthened if, instead of calling for divestment specifically from companies supporting the Israeli Occupation, the call was for divestment from companies supporting *all* recognized foreign belligerent occupations of captive nations. Given that Moroccan universities are even more closely tied to their government than Israeli universities, advocates of academic boycotts should target Morocco as well. As with Palestine, Western Saharan civil society supports such efforts. Since it would effectively mean just one additional country and only a small number of companies and academic institutions, it would not take much attention away from the Israeli Occupation and Israel's corporate backers. More importantly, it would help move the debate away from a divisive pro-Israel vs. anti-Israel dichotomy, where people often end up just talking past each other, to where the debate belongs: human rights, international law, and the right of self-determination.

Morocco is a predominantly Arab-Muslim country. By including Western Sahara along with Palestine, BDS advocates could then avoid the accusation that they are unfairly singling out Israel. Morocco, like Israel, is in violation of a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions and a landmark decision of the International Court of Justice regarding its occupation, has illegally moved tens of thousands of settlers into the occupied territory, engages in gross and systematic human rights abuses in the occupied territories, has illegally built a separation wall through the occupied territories, relies on the United States and other Western support to maintain the occupation by rendering the UN powerless to enforce international law, and is able to maintain the Occupation in part through the support of multinational corporations. And just as Palestine is recognized by scores of countries and is a full member of the Arab League, Western Sahara is recognized by scores of countries and is a full member of the African Union, thereby insuring international support.

Not only would including all recognized occupations of captive nations (Palestine and Western Sahara) in the divestment campaign help protect BDS advocates from spurious charges of "anti-Semitism" and broaden the movement's appeal, it would help bring attention to the little-known but important self-determination struggle of the Sahrawi people against the illegal and oppressive Moroccan occupation of



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their country, which was invaded by the U.S.-backed kingdom in 1975, eight years after the Israeli conquest of the West Bank and other Arab territories. Given the intense polarization, harsh polemics, and suspicions regarding Israel and Palestine, a campaign based more on universal legal and moral principles against occupation, rather than one targeting a particular country that has a strong and influential domestic constituency, would be far more effective. And, given the suffering of both the Palestinian and Sahrawi peoples and the complicity of the U.S. government and U.S. corporations in their oppression, they deserve nothing less.

This does not mean that there won't continue to be controversy. Even when divestment and boycott efforts, such as those endorsed by the student government at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and the New Orleans City Council, have been broad based and have not even mentioned Israel, they have been reversed or defeated by charges of anti-Semitism for not explicitly *excluding* Israel. Indeed, as far back as 1986, a sanctions bill in Congress targeting apartheid South Africa in Congress was considerably weakened when its passage was threatened because of language that could have negatively impacted the Israeli diamond industry. There will always be controversy when challenging Israeli policies. However, as with any effort opposing the Israeli occupation and supporting justice for the Palestinians, there are ways of advocacy which can lessen opposition and minimize triggering negative responses from Jews and sympathetic liberals without compromising the fundamental message.

* * *

Perhaps the biggest problem with the BDS campaign is one that has plagued pro-Palestinian struggles for decades: many of the more public advocates of BDS take rather extreme anti-Israel positions, sometimes even bordering on anti-Semitism. These include the tendency to portray Zionism as some kind of monolithic ideology made up of its most extreme manifestations. It is not fundamentally wrong to identify as anti-Zionist on the grounds that the emancipatory aspects of Zionism as a national liberation movement for Jews has been outweighed by its racist, militarist, and settler colonial aspects. However, the failure to recognize the broad ideological spectrum among those who consider themselves Zionists—including those who oppose the Occupation and support certain forms of BDS to pressure Israel's right-wing government to change its illegal repressive policies—is quite unfair and makes it difficult to build the broad alliances necessary for the BDS campaign to achieve the needed political impact.

A related problem has been the tendency to blame "Zionist" pressure exclusively for the backlash against BDS and for U.S. policy support for the Israeli Occupation, thereby ignoring the long-standing tendency for the U.S. government and corporate interests to fight back against calls for a more ethical U.S. foreign policy and greater corporate responsibility elsewhere in the world as well. Portraying opposition to BDS as a result of certain powerful Jewish interests rather than also recognizing the role of far more influential non-Jewish corporate, military, and foreign policy elites demonstrates a profound ignorance of the obstacles faced by earlier human rights campaigns against repressive U.S. allies and uncomfortably parallels anti-Semitic scapegoating.

It is not unusual, particularly on college campuses, for solidarity movements in support of national liberation struggles in the Global South to take rather hardline positions, including romanticizing armed struggles and providing uncritical support for resistance movements with authoritarian tendencies. However, in this case, the state engaging in the repression is not a military dictatorship but a democratically elected government of the world's only Jewish nation. While this does not mean that the policies of that government shouldn't still be challenged—including through advocating of boycotts, divestment, and sanctions—it is particularly important to do so in a manner that can build a broad-based movement rather than alienate potential liberal allies. This means categorically condemning attacks against civilians and acts of bigotry by all sides. Similarly, whether one still believes a two-state solution is possible or one supports the establishment of a single binational state, it is critical to underscore the rights of both Arabs *and* Jews in Israel/Palestine to peace and security, including the right to immigrate or return. This is not only a moral imperative but critical to challenging the widespread notion that support for BDS is somehow a threat to Jews.

The ability to successfully utilize BDS as a tactic in support for peace and justice will therefore be greatly enhanced if put forward not from an ideological agenda against Zionism and Israel, but as one component of a multifaceted campaign for peace, security, and equality for Palestinians and Israelis, based upon universal moral principles of justice for all peoples. ■

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# A Purposive Evolution?

DAVID R. LOY

DNA does a good job of explaining how genetic information is reproduced, but not how individual organisms constantly respond to their environment.

The debate between Darwinism and Creationism usually generates more heat than light because it has evolved into a war between two orthodoxies. Polls regularly find that a large majority of Americans either don't accept evolution at all or believe in "intelligent design" managed by God. On the other side, Darwinists are concerned that creationists import such immaterial (spiritual or vitalist) influences to explain the evolutionary process—factors which in their view are not only unnecessary but refuted by modern science. According to Richard Dawkins, "The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference." But are both sides able to see only what they expect to see?

While creationism is not easy to square with what science has learned about the physical world, there is also a problem with contemporary neo-Darwinism: it has become a dogma that is increasingly challenged on scientific grounds. J. Scott Turner's *Purpose and Desire: What Makes Something "Alive" and Why Modern Darwinism Has Failed to Explain It* (HarperCollins 2017) is a new contribution to this debate. Turner, a distinguished biologist and physiologist at SUNY-Syracuse, focuses on the inability of Darwinism to explain homeostasis, the relentless striving of living systems for persistence and self-sustenance. Life involves a dynamic equilibrium between adaptation and heritable memory. DNA and its mutations do a good job of explaining how genetic information is reproduced, but chromosomes alone cannot account for the fact that individual organisms are constantly responding to their environment—in other words, that life is inherently *cognitive* and *purposive*. Turner states, "Homeostasis involves coupling information about the state of the environment on one side of an adaptive boundary to the matter and energy flows across the adaptive boundary" (221). The ability to do this implies an individual that has a sense of itself as something distinct from its surroundings. But the "dogma of modern evolutionary biology" assumes that such abilities develop only much later, once a certain level of complexity develops. Turner challenges this:

> [H]omeostasis does not derive from natural selection; it is homeostasis that drives selection, and there is nothing natural about it. What drives the course of evolution is not the soulless lottery of the gene pool, but life's striving for persistence. The striving is driven not by the luck of lottery, but by a cognitive



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> sense of self, even down to the smallest bacterium, even preceding, as I have argued, the emergence of life itself. A deep intelligence is at work in life, its operations, and its history, and it cannot be denied. Yet that is precisely what modern Darwinism asks us to do. (292)

Modern Darwinism asks us to do that because accepting such a deep intelligence—in effect, acknowledging that a rudimentary consciousness is inherent to all life and its development—would be incompatible with its mechanistic foundations, which deny any intentionality or purposive behavior to the lifeless matter/energy that composes the universe. Ernst Mayr, one of the great evolutionary biologists of the 20th century, made fun of the "physics envy" implicit in such materialistic reductionism: the desire to reduce biology to chemistry, and ultimately to ground it in the basic laws of physics, the "hard science" that other sciences want to emulate.

However, our understanding of those basic physical laws also evolved quite a bit during the 20th century, and the paradoxes of quantum mechanics in particular raise questions about how well we really understand the nature of matter. In addition to the familiar "is-light-a-particle-or-a-wave" paradox, physicists have recently reconfirmed what Einstein called "spooky action at a distance:" elementary particles such as photons that have become "entangled" can travel very far apart from each other, but measuring one instantaneously affects the other. Such nonlocal interaction remains unexplained, which leaves the basic "stuff" of the universe fundamentally mysterious . . . in which case perhaps we should be more cautious about asserting our understanding of the universe's blind, pitiless indifference.

The early scientists most responsible for adumbrating the modern worldview—Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton—were nonetheless deeply religious, and understood this world in relationship to a "higher" one. They all still believed in a Creator, although an increasingly distant one. They developed a new paradigm: God rules the universe, not through a hierarchy of spiritual subordinates but with a rational system of "hidden laws." We use the same word for *laws* passed by a legislature and the *laws* of nature because these architects of the modern view believed that natural laws were also ordained by God. Whereas the medieval worldview saw the influence of God filtering through agents (e.g., angels) of varying degrees of blessedness and power, the great Geometer ruled this fallen world impersonally, from afar. As the astronomer Johannes Kepler wrote, "My aim is to show that the celestial machine is to be likened not to a divine organism but to a clockwork." And once God wound that clockwork up, God was not needed to keep it ticking.

This opened up exciting new possibilities. Those who comprehended God's hidden laws could use them to manipulate nature for their own purposes. But there was a downside: "The process of mechanizing the world picture removed the controls over environmental exploitation that were an inherent part of the organic view that nature was alive, sensitive, and responsive to human action" (Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*). The trajectory that would lead to our ecological crisis was set.

Darwinism was so threatening to religious orthodoxy because it refuted the "argument from design," the last remaining attempt to *prove* God's existence. Since evolution by natural selection doesn't need a God to direct it, an all-powerful deity was no longer necessary to create the extraordinarily complex organisms, including us, that compose the web of life. In fact, the new secular world had no need for God at all.

That final Darwinian stroke seemed to leave us stranded, for better or worse, in a mechanistic and desacralized world, ruled by impersonal physical laws that, as Dawkins reminds us, are pitilessly indifferent to us and our fate. Death is no longer the portal to another reality, just the end of this one. We may not as individuals believe that or feel personally oppressed by its implications, but this secularization continues to remold our economic, political, and educational institutions. As this modern mindset continues to spread beyond the West and globalize, it increasingly determines the social environment within which people around the globe must live and act.

Although Darwin himself was troubled by the religious implications of his work, his theory was soon used to justify a new social ethic. Herbert Spencer coined the phrase "survival of the fittest"—human life, too, is basically a struggle for survival and success—which rationalizes the most ruthless forms of economic and political competition. Furthermore, if humans are mere accidents of genetic mutation, and we have no role to play in a meaningless cosmos, what is there to do except enjoy our material possibilities as much as we can, as long as we can . . . if we can? This has led to our collective preoccupation with ever-increasing production and consumption, in fierce competition with others seeking access to the same resources and opportunities.

* * *

According to the prevalent Darwinist paradigm, biological evolution is the result of physical processes operating according to impersonal laws. It is a mechanistic model. But what if, instead of reducing biology to physics and viewing the cosmos as a machine, we turn that upside-down and try to understand the physical universe according to a biological model—that is, as *alive*? As Joseph Campbell observed, "If you want to change the world, you have to change the metaphor."

In fact, there is a fundamental problem with the mechanistic model. As the evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris has pointed out, machines presuppose a machine-*maker*: someone who designs and constructs them. A machine-like



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cosmos made sense as long as the universe was understood to have been created by God according to his plan and purposes. That was how Galileo, Kepler, Descartes, Newton, among others, understood the laws of nature. Without a Creator, however, the mechanical metaphor doesn't really make sense. *Any machine that constantly reorganizes itself, creating more complex structures as evolving parts of itself, is not a machine*. Arguably, it is better understood as an *organism*—which evokes the premodern worldview that Carolyn Merchant mentions.

The different metaphors have very different implications. Machines can be disassembled into their components, cleaned, and after reassembly they work better than ever; don't try to do that to an animal! That is because the various parts of a mechanism are lifeless in themselves, but an organism is not: it is purposive and strives to persist in its being, as Turner points out.

According to the eminent biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky, evolution is neither random nor predetermined but *creative*; Elisabet Sahtouris describes it as an intelligent, improvisational dance. In *At Home in the Universe*, Stuart Kauffman makes the same point, "The central quality of the evolutionary process is creative emergence. . . . Living systems, from the smallest microbes to the largest organisms, exhibit self-organization; all of life is basically defined by this self-generating, self-maintaining criterion."

This is more consistent with Indra's Net, a Buddhist metaphor that compares the cosmos to a multidimensional web with a jewel at each knot. Each of these jewels reflects all the others, and each of those reflections also reflects all the other reflections, *ad infinitum*. According to Francis Cook in *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, Indra's Net "symbolizes a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos." Because the totality is a vast body of members each sustaining and defining all the others, "the cosmos is, in short, a self-creating, self-maintaining, and self-defining organism." To say it again, in biological language, such a cosmos is *self-organizing*.

According to neo-Darwinism, evolution occurs because of random DNA mutations, some of which enable the organism to be more reproductively successful in its specific environment. But what does "random" really mean? On the surface, the term is descriptive yet a negative value judgment is often implied: random mutations are by definition *meaningless* mutations, and a universe where they determine what happens is a meaningless universe. However, there is some experimental support for the view that genetic mutations are not completely random. Research biologists such as Lynn Margulis and Mae-Wan Ho have established that colonies of bacteria respond to changes in the environment much faster than could be explained by chance mutations. The bacteria seemed to exhibit intelligence and intentionality in the ways they were able to modify their own genetics

Perhaps we should be more cautious about asserting our understanding of the universe's blind, pitiless indifference

in order to adapt to new circumstances. More generally, it has been observed that when an organism is stressed, more mutations occur, and they are more likely to occur in areas where other DNA mutations have recently occurred, creating "hotspot clusters."

One well-known experiment was conducted by the geneticist John Cairns in the late 1980s. He isolated a strain of the bacterium *E. coli* that was unable to digest lactose. When their only food source was lactose, however, the bacteria quickly mutated and became able to metabolize it, due to what Cairns termed "purposive mutation" and others have called "adaptive mutation." Another researcher, Barry Hall, found that something similar happened when *E. coli* were placed in a solution of salicin: the colony became able to metabolize the salicin because of two otherwise rare genetic mutations that happened at a rate thousands of times faster than predicted.

When the alternative is starvation and extinction, a will to survive apparently motivates a large surge in various genetic mutations, until one of those mutations provides what is sought. Significantly, no consistent pattern has been observed in the sequences of the successful mutations. In that respect, the process can be considered random, or (as I prefer) *groping*, but as soon as the needed mutation appears, the surge in mutations stops. Such research seems to support the conclusion that organisms are capable of responding to dynamic changes in their environment by proactively altering their own genetic code—a provocative example of



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Turner's homeostasis. In short, this evidence supports a more dynamic, self-organizing understanding of the evolutionary process.

* * *

So why is this important? An organic paradigm suggests an intriguing speculation that takes us far beyond individual homeostasis. It resonates with the "new cosmology" originally proposed by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme in *The Universe Story,* which argues for a *meaning* to the evolutionary process. The components of an organism are not the lifeless parts of a machine but *organs*, collections of tissues forming a structural unit that has a specific function within the larger organism. I can't help wondering: are human beings an organ within a Great Organism, and if so, what is our function?

On the only planet we know firsthand, life originated and self-organized, evolving into species increasingly biologically complex and conscious. At least one of the earth's species has become self-conscious, and we would be unwise to assume that development is the end of the evolutionary process. Do we really know what's going on here, what the potential is?

The issue, finally, is whether we can view evolution as the creative groping of a self-organizing cosmos that is becoming more self-aware. Does it, in some sense, *want* to become more self-aware? *The Universe Story* makes this claim more poetically: "The mind that searches for contact with the Milky Way is the very mind of the Milky Way galaxy in search of its inner depths." What does this imply about Walt Whitman, for example, admiring a beautiful sunset? "Walt Whitman is a space the Milky Way fashioned to feel its own grandeur." Instead of the eye being the accidental product of a mechanistic process driven by meaningless mutations, can our eyes be understood as having been created by the cosmos, in order to be able to perceive itself? Are humans a way that the cosmos is coming to know itself? ■

DAVID R. LOY is a Zen teacher and an author whose books include *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory.* His new book is *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment, Evolution, and Ethics in the Modern World*. Many of his writings and podcasts are available on his website: www.davidloy.org.

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Since time immemorial, reports have surfaced suggesting a link between distant individuals who are beyond the reach of sensory-based communication.

# The One Mind

LARRY DOSSEY, M.D.

Silvia and Marta Landa were four-year-old identical twins who lived in the village of Murillo de Río Leza in northern Spain. One day in 1976, their father took Silvia to visit their grandparents, who lived several miles away. Marta, the other twin, insisted on staying home and helping her mother with household chores. Marta burned her hand on a hot clothes iron, causing a large red blister, a second-degree burn, to erupt. At the same time, miles away, an identical blister formed on Silvia's hand. Silvia was taken to the doctor, unaware of what had happened to her sister Marta. When the two little girls were united, their parents saw that the blisters were the same size and on the same part of the same hand. After being featured in their local newspaper, the twins became local celebrities. Word spread, and a team of nine psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians from Madrid thoroughly investigated the happening, with the consent of the twins and their parents.[1]

Research suggests that around 20 percent of identical twins respond in this way, but most such cases occur in non-twins. The prerequisite seems to be profound emotional closeness between the individuals involved—most often mothers and children, bonded spouses, lovers, and close friends.

## The Pedigree of the Idea

Since time immemorial, reports have surfaced suggesting a link between distant individuals who are beyond the reach of sensory-based communication. Such a connection might permit the sharing of not only physical phenomena, such as the above example in identical twins, but the commingling of thoughts and emotions in general. This channel might take the form of a universal One Mind that subsumes and unites all individual minds.

This possibility is threaded from antiquity through the present. As Plato wrote, "[H]uman nature was originally



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One and we were a whole."[2] Hippocrates stated, "There is one common flow, one common breathing, all things are in sympathy."[3] The Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola believed that the world is governed by a "unity whereby one creature is united with the others and all parts of the world constitute one world."[4] In the 19th century, the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel called distant mental exchanges between humans "the magic tie." He believed that "the intuitive spirit oversteps the confines of time and space; it beholds things remote; things long past, and things to come."[5] Arthur Schopenhauer, also in 19th-century Germany, suggested that a single event could figure in two or more different chains of circumstance, linking the fates of different individuals in profound ways. He believed in a form of communication that took place between humans during dreams.[6] Walt Whitman, America's 19th-century bard, proclaimed, "All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and link'd together . . . Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more."[7] His contemporary, philosopher-essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote, "There is one mind common to all individual men . . . [a] universal mind" Emerson called this universal mind the "0ver-soul," which, he said, is "that unity . . . within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other. . . . [W]ithin man is the soul of the whole . . . the eternal ONE."[8] Among the poets in Emerson's camp was William Butler Yeats: "[T]he borders of our minds are ever shifting, and . . . many minds can flow into one another . . . and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy. . . . [T]he borders of our memories are . . . shifting, and . . . our memories are part of one great memory."[9] Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and the collective conscious paralleled the views of Emerson and Yeats. These various observers seem to be saying that everything is connected, including minds.

## What Physicists Have Said

It is not widely known that some of the greatest physicists of the 20th century were also aligned with the concept of a single, collective form of consciousness. Astrophysicist Sir James Jeans observed, "When we view ourselves in space and time, our consciousnesses are obviously the separate individuals of a particle-picture, but when we pass beyond space and time, they may perhaps form ingredients of a single continuous stream of life. As it is with light and electricity, so it may be with life; the phenomena may be individuals carrying on separate existences in space and time, while in the deeper reality beyond space and time we may be all members of one body."[10]

Erwin Schrödinger, whose wave equations lie at the heart of quantum physics and who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1933, wrote, "To divide or multiply consciousness is something meaningless. In all the world, there is no kind of framework within which we can find consciousness in the plural; this is simply something we construct because of the spatio-temporal plurality of individuals, but it is a false construction. . . . The category of *number,* of *whole* and of *parts* are then simply not applicable to it.[11] . . . The overall number of minds is just one. . . . In truth there is only one mind."[12] Schrödinger went on to observe, "[I]nconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you—and all other conscious beings as such—are all in all. Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the *whole*; only this whole is not so constituted that it can be surveyed in one single glance."[13]

The eminent physicist David Bohm agreed, observing, "If we don't establish these absolute boundaries between minds, then it's possible they could . . . unite as one mind. . . . Deep down, the consciousness of mankind is one. This is a virtual certainty . . . and if we don't see this it's because we are blinding ourselves to it."[14] Bohm and his colleague Basil Hiley further stated, "The notion of a separate organism is clearly an abstraction, as is also its boundary. Underlying all this is unbroken wholeness even though our civilization has developed in such a way as to strongly emphasize the separation into parts."[15]

## Experiments and Experiences

Why take seriously the possibility of the One Mind? There are two main reasons. First, people have *experiences* in which minds interact and share information at great distances and outside the present. They could not do this if minds were isolated. If these experiences are valid, minds must in some way be connected for them to occur. Second, there are hundreds of actual *experiments* that confirm these interactions. So: *experience* and *experiments* show that our minds are connected in ways that transcend separateness.

In recent decades, experimentalists have subjected to rigorous testing the idea that minds might communicate as if they are united. Consciousness researcher Stephan A. Schwartz describes six areas of research whose findings have been replicated in labs around the world, each area of research giving odds against chance of around a billion to one, or combined odds against chance of 10 to one, a truly astronomical number.[15] These bodies of research, too complex to describe in detail here, include remote viewing (the synchrony of distant individual minds); mental influence on the output of random number generators; the Global Consciousness Project, which tracks the behavior of globally distributed random-number generators in response to specific events; presentiment (unconscious physiological responses to future stimuli); precognition (the knowledge of future happenings); and Ganzfeld (a type of information sharing between two individuals, one of whom is sensory deprived). Why aren't these replicated findings uniformly embraced in contemporary science? Schwartz says, "The objection is fundamentally cultural, not scientific. . . . [T]he data will not be denied forever, and a new paradigm is emerging."[16]



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## "Beats the Heck Out of Me"

The materialistic concept of consciousness that is currently widely accepted prohibits One Mind phenomena. Materialism asserts that consciousness is somehow produced by the brain and is confined to the brain, the body, and the present. This view of consciousness has become so hegemonic that it is almost heretical in some circles to question it. However, this view of consciousness suffers from two severe defects: the sheer poverty of evidence that brains produce consciousness, and the enormous human costs of a world that is sanitized of a spiritual outlook, which the materialist dogma forbids.

No human has ever seen a brain or anything else produce consciousness, and there is no accepted theory as to how this *could* happen. The link between a brain and consciousness is as mysterious today as it was when Thomas Henry Huxley wrote in 1886, "How it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as a result of irritating nervous tissue, is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the djinn when Aladdin rubbed his lamp in the story."[17] The weakness of the brain-makes-consciousness dogma has become obvious to an increasing number of top-tier scientists, as the following comments demonstrate. In a genuine test of your patience, I now include several examples from scholars. I wish to emphasize that these are not rare, isolated opinions, and that the materialist view of consciousness is empirically bankrupt.

Steven A. Pinker, an experimental psychologist at Harvard University, on how consciousness might arise from something physical, such as the brain, stated, "Beats the heck out of me. I have some prejudices, but no idea of how to begin to look for a defensible answer. And neither does anyone else."[18] Donald D. Hoffman, a cognitive scientist at the University of California, Irvine, says: "The scientific study of consciousness is in the embarrassing position of having no scientific theory of consciousness."[19] Roger W. Sperry, a Nobel Prize–winning neurophysiologist said, "Those centermost processes of the brain with which consciousness is presumably associated are simply not understood. They are so far beyond our comprehension at present that no one I know of has been able even to imagine their nature."[20] Eugene P. Wigner, a Nobel Prize winner in physics says, "We have at present not even the vaguest idea how to connect the physiochemical processes with the state of mind."[21] Theoretical

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This channel between distant bodies might take the form of a universal One Mind that subsumes and unites all individual minds.



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physicist and mathematician Freeman J. Dyson: "The origin of life is a total mystery, and so is the existence of human consciousness. We have no clear idea how the electrical discharges occurring in nerve cells in our brains are connected with our feelings and desires and actions."[22] Philosopher John R. Searle, of the University of California, Berkeley: "At the present state of the investigation of consciousness we *don't know* how it works and we need to try all kinds of different ideas."[23] Theoretical and mathematical physicist Sir Roger Penrose: "My position [on consciousness] demands a major revolution in physics . . . I've come to believe that there is something very fundamental missing from current science. . . . Our understanding at this time is not adequate and we're going to have to move to new regions of science."[24] Nobel laureate Niels Bohr, one of the patriarchs of quantum physics said: "We can admittedly find nothing in physics or chemistry that has even a remote bearing on consciousness. . . . [Q]uite apart from the laws of physics and chemistry, as laid down in quantum theory, we must also consider laws of quite a different kind."[25] Werner Heisenberg, a Nobel laureate in physics and Bohr's contemporary, similarly observed: "There can be no doubt that 'consciousness' does not occur in physics and chemistry, and I cannot see how it could possibly result from quantum mechanics."[26] Sir John C. Eccles, the Nobel Prize–winning neurophysiologist states: "I maintain that the human mystery is incredibly demeaned by scientific reductionism, with its claim to account for all of the spiritual world in terms of patterns of neuronal activity. This belief must be classed as a superstition. We have to recognize that we are spiritual beings with souls existing in a spiritual world as well as material beings with bodies and brains existing in a material world."[27] Neurophysiologist William H. Calvin, of the University of Washington says: "Consciousness, in any of its varied connotations, certainly isn't located down in the basement of chemistry or the subbasement of physics. . . . [These] consciousness physicists use mathematical concepts to dazzle rather than enlighten. . . . Such theorists usually avoid the word 'spirit' and say something about quantum fields. . . . All that the consciousness physicists have accomplished is the replacement of one mystery with another."[28] Sir John Maddox, the editor for 22 years of the prestigious journal *Nature* notes: "What consciousness consists of . . . is . . . a puzzle. Despite the marvelous successes of neuroscience in the past century . . . we seem as far from understanding cognitive process as we were a century ago."[29]

## Why the Connections?

If you made it through the previous section, congratulations! Now let's ask: why would humans have developed a unitary, collective form of consciousness that permits the sharing of experiences and information as if the barriers of space and time do not exist? What is the evolutionary benefit of having no fundamental boundaries or limits to consciousness? Are we better off if individual minds can merge with all other minds to form a One Mind? If thoughts, emotions, feelings, and cognition can be shared? If we are literally of One Mind?

An obvious advantage is that the sharing of information frequently warns another of impending danger. This ability imparts a decided survival advantage to the individuals possessing it. I explored this aspect of consciousness at length in my book *The Power of Premonitions*.[30]

> **What is the evolutionary benefit of having no fundamental boundaries or limits to consciousness? Are we better off if individuals can merge with all other minds to form one mind?**

Another approach to these questions is to ask: what is the experience of the One Mind like? The overwhelming answer from those who learn to traverse this domain is that the experience of the One Mind involves a direct apprehension of the universe and all in it as being One, with no fundamental dividing lines or divisions in it. Everything seems connected with everything else. Partition and separation are illusions. This experience carries with it the sense that one has apprehended truth, the way things really are, and is accompanied by a feeling of joy, compassion, and love.

A sense of being connected with all others and with all sentient life has been recognized throughout human history as a source of immense joy and fulfillment. Solitary mystics notwithstanding, unity and connectedness with others has generally been a highly prized goal of the great wisdom traditions. Abundant contemporary evidence shows that rich social networks and interaction are good for our health and that protracted, continual isolation is terrible for health, happiness, and longevity. We are not designed to be alone. Perhaps that is why people who tune in to the One Mind are more likely to be happier, healthier, wiser, and more creative. These patterns are evidenced in the research of social epidemiologist Jeff Levin, who pioneered the field called the epidemiology of religion, and his colleagues.[31, 32]

## Immortality

Yet, there is an even greater advantage associated with the One Mind. As a physician, I believe that the terror of annihilation with physical death has caused more suffering in



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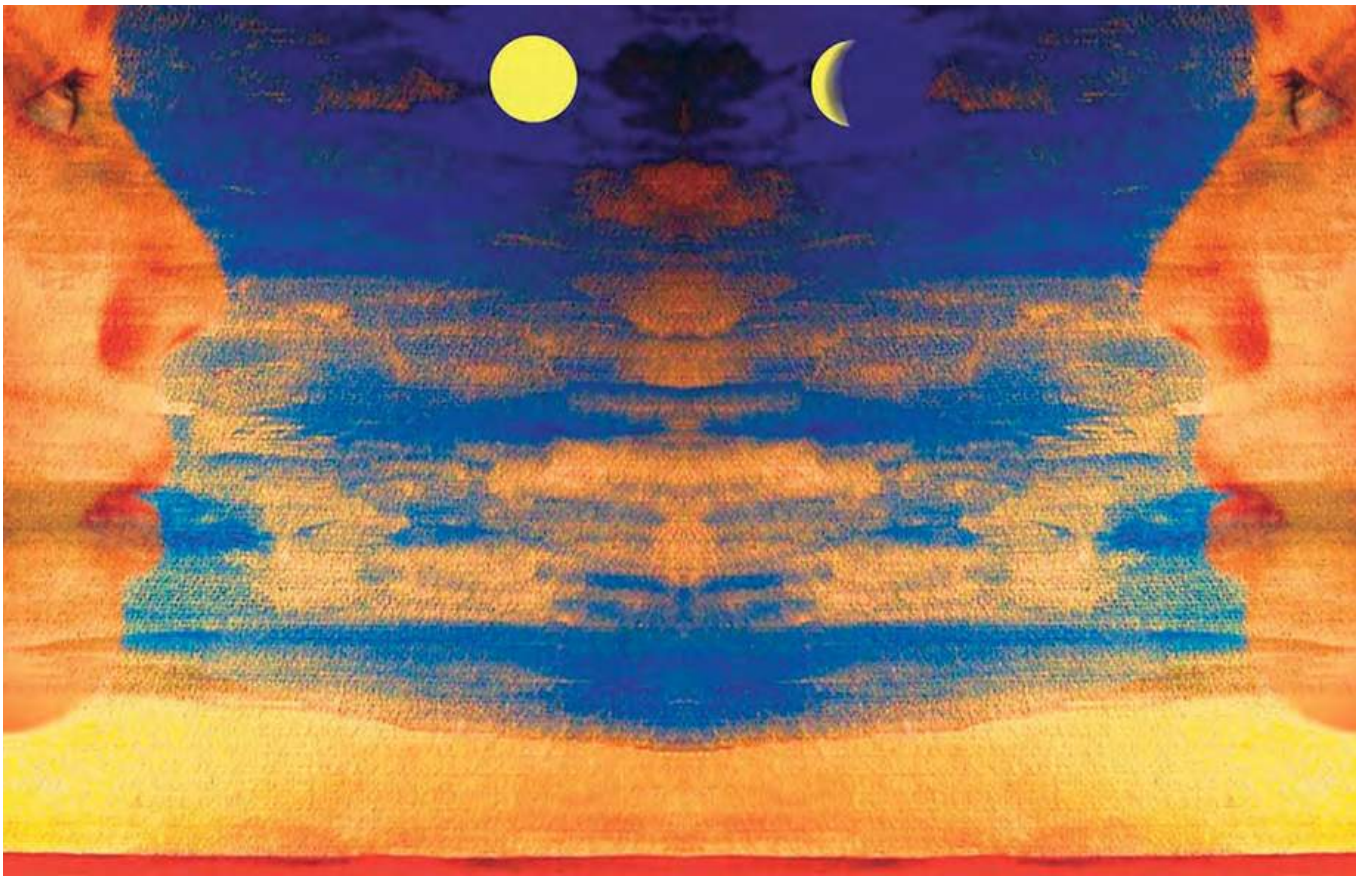

We are not designed to be alone. The gravity of the universe may reflect a natural attraction of each part of being to each other part.

human history than all the physical diseases combined. The One Mind involves a form of unitary consciousness that is nonlocal—that is, a consciousness that is boundless in space, therefore omnipresent, and infinite in time, therefore immortal and eternal. The nonlocal One Mind, then, is a potential cure for the greatest of all diseases, the dread of total annihilation with physical death.

Total destruction of personhood with physical death is an inescapable part of the materialism package. Therefore the doctrine of materialism, which insists that consciousness is produced by the brain and dies with it, comes with enormous human costs that are vastly underestimated by the cheerleaders of materialism. Jung viewed this as a calamitous situation, saying, "The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of his life."[33] If consciousness is produced by the brain and vanishes with physical death, as materialists insist, then any meaningful relationship to "something infinite" is a chimera. Novelist George Orwell also decried this morbid outlook, saying, "The major problem of our time is the decay of belief in personal immortality."[34] Jung felt so strongly about this issue that he made it a principle in therapy with his patients. "As a doctor," he said, "I make every effort to strengthen the belief in immortality."[35]

Immortality of the mind was a key feature of Schrödinger's vision. He wrote, "I venture to call it [the mind] indestructible since it has a peculiar time-table, namely mind is always *now*. There is really no before and after for the mind. There is only now that includes memories and expectations."[36] He goes on to state: "We may, or so I believe, assert that physical theory in its present stage strongly suggests the indestructibility of Mind by Time."[37]

Some spiritual teachers insist that the belief in survival beyond physical death is linked to planetary survival. Buddhist scholar Sogyal Rinpoche, author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* states: "Believing fundamentally that this life is the only one, modern people have developed no long-term vision. . . . So there is nothing to restrain them from plundering the planet for their own immediate ends and from living in a selfish way that could prove fatal for the future."[38] Simply put, materialism, mindless consumerism, and environmental debauchery are exacerbated by a denial of immortality, a key feature of a temporally nonlocal One Mind.

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## Spirituality

The concept of the One Mind helps restore to life a sense of spirituality, the sense that we are connected with something higher than the individual self and ego, however named. Sir John Eccles expressed this importance:

> [S]cience has gone too far in breaking down man's belief in his spiritual greatness . . . and has given him the belief that he is merely an insignificant animal that has arisen by chance and necessity in an insignificant planet lost in the great cosmic immensity. . . . The principal trouble with mankind today is that the intellectual leaders are too arrogant in their self-sufficiency. We must realize the great unknowns in the material makeup and operation of our brains, in the relationship of brain to mind, in our creative imagination, and in the uniqueness of the psyche. When we think of these unknowns as well as the unknown of how we come to be in the first place, we should be much more humble.[39]

## Creativity

The One Mind can be a source of great wisdom and creativity, because it implies an infinite pool of information that we can learn to access. Many famous artists and scientists have apparently done this throughout history. Physicalistic, brain-bound models of the mind fail to explain, for example, the mind-boggling feats of savants, who are often severely mentally impaired and unable to read or acquire information in conventional ways. But if all individual minds are connected with one another and to a domain of consciousness that transcends personal limits, an individual might have access to all conceivable knowledge, past, present, and future. As Emerson expressed this possibility:

> There is one mind common to all individual men. . . . What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done.[40]

The 20th-century quantum physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker echoed Emerson, "[In any great discovery] we find the often disturbing and happy experience: 'It is not I; I have not done this.' Still, in a certain way it is I—yet not the ego . . . but . . . a more comprehensive self."[41]

This access to deep knowing is particularly dramatic when it occurs in children. Developmental psychologist Joseph Chilton Pearce reports a striking example of creativity in his five-year-old son, which suggests that childhood wisdom may come from the "outside." When he was in his early thirties, teaching humanities in a college, he was engrossed in theology and the psychology of Carl Jung. Pearce describes himself as "obsessed" by the nature of the God-human relationship, and his reading on the subject was extensive. One morning as he was preparing for an early class, his five-year-old son came into his room, sat down on the edge of the bed, and launched into a 20-minute discourse on the nature of God and man. Pearce was astonished. He states, "He spoke in perfect, publishable sentences, without pause or haste, and in a flat monotone. He used complex theological terminology and told me, it seemed, everything there was to know. As I listened, astonished, the hair rose on my neck; I felt goose bumps, and, finally, tears streamed down my face. I was in the midst of the uncanny, the inexplicable. My son's ride to kindergarten arrived, horn blowing, and he got up and left. I was unnerved and arrived late to my class. What I had heard was awesome, but too vast and far beyond any concept I had had to that point. The gap was so great I could remember almost no details and little of the broad panorama he had presented. . . . He wasn't picking up his materials from me. I hadn't acquired anything like what he described and would, in fact, be in my mid-fifties and involved in meditation before I did. . . . My son had no recollection of the event."[42]

> **"The concept of the One Mind helps restore to life a sense of spirituality. The sense that we are connected with something higher than the individual self and ego."**

We get additional glimpses of this process from famous exemplars who claim to have intentionally employed it. An example is Thomas Edison, America's great inventor, who stated, "People say I have created things. I have never created anything. I get impressions from the Universe at large and work them out, but I am only a plate on a record or a receiving apparatus—what you will. Thoughts are really impressions that we get from outside."[43]

## Swallowed Up?

A common objection to the One Mind is the fear of being swallowed up and homogenized in a vast, featureless sea of consciousness in which a sense of individuality and personhood is obliterated. This objection fails on close examination. Those who learn to navigate the One Mind experience typically describe the opposite reaction: individualism is not destroyed, but it is enhanced, amplified, augmented, intensified, and paradoxically *balanced* with a complementary experience of belongingness. Instead of losing one's sense of self, there is the joy of belonging to a greater whole, and a



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sense of rightness in being connected with everything that exists.

A related form of resistance to unitary, One Mind consciousness comes from materialistic science itself. Classical science, in its insistence on objectivity, requires individuality and the ability to stand apart from what's being observed. Without intrinsic separateness, scientific objectivity would not be possible. The Harvard social scientist Philip Slater described some of the problems that flow from this stance in his seminal book *The Wayward Gate,* which I quote at length:

> All these [unitary] phenomena violate our Tinkertoy notions of reality because what happens is independent of the particles themselves. They suggest a larger unity that seems slightly spooky to us because we lack the ability to see ourselves as a *part* of that unity. Since we like to think of ourselves as separate beings the unification of all *other* life seems rather overwhelming—a huge conspiracy. Because we leave ourselves *out* of that conspiracy, we imagine that it must be directed against us.
>
> Paranoia is nothing more than that: *an incomplete perception of the unity of life*—a half-baked vision in which we become aware of everything outside ourselves, moving together, but are blinded by our narcissism from the realization that we're in on the secret. This is completely voluntary: the ego clings to its sense of isolation, willing to scare itself to pieces rather than acknowledge that it's part of a whole. It blinds itself to that awareness in order to indulge its dreams of glorious detachment. Hence whenever awareness of unity of life breaks through, the ego panics and sees the event as weird, horrifying, "occult."
>
> The eeriness and uncanniness . . . disappear when we accept the unity of life.[44]

## The Dark Side

Synchronized thinking and shared emotions can be practical and valuable, as with members of an orchestra, a sports team, or a surgical group. Yet there are other situations in which unified thought processes can be disastrous. In 1841, Scottish journalist Charles Mackay's remarkable book, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, still in print, provided a warning of this ominous process. Nazi Germany raised this phenomenon to horrid heights, infecting an entire nation with homicidal madness. Japan's warmongers whipped their nation into a military frenzy in the run-up to World War II with their unspeakably cruel invasion of China prior to Pearl Harbor.

Does the One Mind make these events more likely? I would argue the opposite. The "madness of crowds," when closely examined, is a repudiation of the central One Mind experience: a focus on unity, compassion, empathy, and caring toward the whole of creation; an awareness of the primacy of love for the planet and its creatures; an impulse toward wellness and health for all. The dangerous, destructive, Trumpian nightmare that currently threatens us comes about not *because* of the One Mind experience, but *in spite of it*.

The same can be said of the objection that the One Mind destroys individual initiative and free will, that it leads to helplessness, apathy, and ennui. One reason this objection finds traction in our society is that we have become besotted with the cult of the individual and the belief that we must raise ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and that anyone who objects to personal initiative is a lay-about and "moocher" or "taker." Healthy individuality and a sense of personhood are necessary and valuable aspects of the personality coin, but they are only one side of that coin. If individuality is not balanced by a sense of connectivity with others, degradation follows—of society, culture, environment, and life itself. As Harvard social scientist Philip Slater put it, "Most philosophical and political conflict results from individualistic thinking. . . . Awareness of the whole is the first necessity, for it's what we have most deeply lost."[45]

## Survival

> That long and bedrock certainty of thoughtful men that regardless of the race's disasters the natural world would go on and on is no longer a certainty.[46]
>
> —John Graves, *Goodbye to a River*

The realization of our essential unity is our best hope for our survival on Earth. Only by sensing, at the deepest emotional-psychological level, our connections with one another and the Earth itself can we summon the courage necessary to make the tough choices that are required to survive. This realization is about staying alive—saving the Earth and our own skins.

The sense of oneness that accompanies the One-Mind experience suggests that we revise the Golden Rule from the customary "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" to "Be kind to others because in some sense they *are* you."

Novelist Alice Walker said, "Anything we love can be saved"—including the Earth and its creatures, our children, and generations yet unborn. And as W. H. Auden said in the 1930s, as if peering into the present, "We must love one another or die."[47]

Love is an accompaniment of One Mind participation. Love helps us re-sacralize the world. The love-suffused One Mind experience offers us a way out of hell—the hell of this particular moment in history, where we confront threats to our existence our forebears never imagined—an Earth that is being degraded by the sheer fact of our existence, our short-sighted choices, and our materialistic mania. This is a hell from which, beyond a certain point, experts say, there may be no escape. The evidence for our global predicament is based



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in abundant science, not on some sidewalk lunatic wearing a sandwich board yelling, "The end is near!" Only through willful blindness can one *not* be aware of the challenges we face—global climate change, polluted air and water, mindless consumerism, exploding populations, habitat and species loss, water scarcity, desertification, murderous ideologies, resource depletion, grinding poverty, endless wars of choice, ethnic and religious hatreds, on and on, all abetted by the "I've got mine/every man for himself" philosophy with which our society is currently septic.

> **I believe the concept of the unitary, collective One Mind is a vision that is powerful enough to make a difference in how we approach all the challenges we face.**

There is a way of recalibrating our collective response to *all* of these problems, a move that permits a cascade of solutions to fall into place. This approach requires rebooting our ethical and moral stance toward the Earth and one another. It is about changing channels, redialing our basic concepts of who we are and how we are related to one another and to the terrestrial crucible that sustains us. I believe the concept of the unitary, collective One Mind, a level of intelligence of which the individual minds of all sentient creatures are a part, is a vision that is powerful enough to make a difference in how we approach *all* the challenges we face—not as a mere intellectual concept, but as something we feel in the deepest way possible. As Hesse said in the prologue to *Demian*, "I have been and still am a seeker, but I no longer seek in stars and books; I have begun to listen to the teachings my blood whispers to me."[48]

We cannot compel the universal One Mind to do our bidding on command. Still, we are not helpless. Although the One Mind cannot be commanded, it can be invited. We can set the stage for the revelation, the breakthrough. This seeming paradox has been emphasized repeatedly in the world's great spiritual traditions. As the historian of religions Huston Smith says from the Christian tradition, "Everything is a gift, but nothing is free."[49] Vivekananda, from the Hindu perspective, agreed: "The wind of God's grace is always blowing, but you must raise your sail."[50] The message from mystical Islam is the same. As the Sufi mystic Bastami said, "The knowledge of God cannot be attained by seeking, but only those who seek it find it."[51] And Hafiz, the 14th-century Persian poet:

Let's go deeper,
Go deeper.
For, if we do,
Our spirits will embrace
And interweave.

Our union will be so glorious
That even God
Will not be able to tell us apart[52]

In the same spirit, Uri Zvi Greenberg, the Israeli poet and journalist said, "Unity of God, unity of the universe and unity of mankind are the spirit which moves Judaism."[53]

During the 20th century, we took the mind apart. Now we must put it back together. We've been taught that our mind is fragmented, that it is divided into the conscious, the preconscious, the subconscious, the unconscious, the ego, the superego, the id, and so on. We are divided not just from within but also from without, from one another. The One Mind looks through the other end of the telescope. It reveals that our individual minds are part of a greater whole, a dimension of consciousness that encompasses all minds—past, present, and future, human and non-human. On this realization our future may depend. ■

## Notes


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3. Hippocrates. Quoted in: Watson L. *Dreams of Dragons*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books; 1992: 27.
4. della Mirandola P. Quoted in: Watson L. *Dreams of Dragons*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books; 1992: 27.
5. Please contact magazine@tikkun.org for the complete list of footnotes.



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We now have the power to destroy all human life, if not all life, on Earth. Let's try the path of *tikkun olam* instead.

# Violence, Morality, and Religion

JAMES GILLIGAN AND JAMES VRETTOS

If the theory of evolution has taught us anything, it is that most species become extinct, and that there is no guarantee that this will not be as true of the human species as it has been of the overwhelming majority of other ones—from the dinosaurs to our closest cousins in the genus *Homo*, to Neanderthals and others. That is one reason it is important to ask: what are the main sources of risk in the contemporary world to our continued survival?

We believe that the largest and most immediate risk today is the human propensity to engage in acts of violence, such as the wars and genocides by means of which we now have the power to destroy all human life, if not all life, on earth—particularly given that several of the nations currently in possession of thermonuclear and other weapons of mass destruction are led by rulers of questionable sanity, rationality, and morality. We include in this group not only the most obvious examples, the United States and North Korea (both of whose leaders have questioned the hitherto existing absolute prohibition on the first use of such weapons), but also Pakistan, India, Israel, and Russia—in all of which their leaders have made plain their willingness to commit military aggression, mass murder, violations of international law, and if necessary, war and genocide, in order to consolidate their own political power.

That is why we believe that the most important and critical task facing us today is to learn how to understand the causes and prevention of violence. But the moment we attempt to do that, we are faced with a paradox: the main institutions we have invented in our endeavor to prevent or at least minimize human violence have been morality and religion—that is, moral and religious value judgments, commandments, and belief systems—but the most deadly violence has always been committed in the name of morality and religion. That has been true from the dawn of human history, when the ancient Israelites were commanded by their God to slaughter every man, woman, and child of neighboring tribes, to the Crusades, pogroms, and religious wars of the Middle Ages and the early modern era. This extends to the contemporary world, in which the violence associated with traditional religions has been supplemented by that committed in the name

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of pseudo-secular "political religions," such as nationalism and totalitarianism (culminating not only in the most extensive genocide ever committed but also in what has been called "the collective suicide of Europe").

How can we understand this? And more importantly, what can we do about it? We are doomed to self-extinction if the only means of preventing the violence we are capable of inventing is to simply stimulate it further. And yet, that pessimistic description does seem to fit every method we have devised for rescuing us, or enabling us to liberate ourselves, from our own species-destructive inclinations.

This article will be devoted to explaining how we can escape from that trap by learning enough about the causes of violence to see how our traditional notions of morality and religion have stimulated rather than inhibited violence, and to showing how transcending those notions, to the degree and in the contexts in which we have done so, has enabled us to succeed in preventing violence.

Public intellectuals, activists, academics, and spiritual leaders can have important roles to play in this analysis and struggle. The real transformation will have to be a creative one—a response by ordinary Americans and people around the world involved through the "praxis" and experience of healing, radical love, and *tikkun olam*—repair of the world. A movement is envisioned here that, without limiting itself to any one existing religion, would express and build on an inclusive spiritual vision that has been the common wisdom of humanity for much of recorded history.

A central cause of violence might be the feeling of being disrespected, or subjected to what psychoanalysts call "narcissistic injuries."

## The Birth of Violence and Morality

The senior author has engaged in this research by using prisons as his social-psychological laboratories, so to speak, in which to learn about the causes and prevention of violence. What he discovered, in the course of directing mental health programs in Massachusetts prisons and elsewhere, was that when he would ask violent offenders why they had assaulted or even killed someone, he would almost always get the same answer: "Because he (or she) disrespected me (or my mother, wife, friend, etc.)." In fact, they used that word so often that they abbreviated it into the slang term, "He dis'ed me." It occurred to him that when people used a word so often that they abbreviated it, it told you something about how central it was in their moral and emotional vocabulary. From this (and multiple other), observations he hypothesized that a central cause of violence might be the feeling of being disrespected—or in other words, dishonored, disdained, disgraced, demeaned, shamed, insulted, humiliated, or subjected to any other of the many synonyms for what psychoanalysts call "narcissistic injuries," such as being rejected, ridiculed, defeated, or treated with contempt as someone who is inferior or inadequate.

But as soon as he thought he had discovered something original about the causes of violence, he was reminded that the Bible had gotten there long before he did. He had never understood until then what had caused the first recorded murder in the history of Western civilization. But then he realized that the first book of Genesis explains very clearly why Cain killed Abel: "God had respect unto Abel and his offering, but unto Cain and his offering, God had not respect." In other words, God "dis'ed" Cain; or rather, Cain was dis'ed because of Abel, and he took his rage out on Abel in the same way that the murderers with whom he was working had done with their victims.

Then he discovered that the same insight was later recorded by many of the greatest thinkers in our tradition, from Aristotle to Aquinas to Hegel—that assaults are motivated or caused by the feeling of being "slighted" by others and treated as insignificant or unimportant. Furthermore, evidence supporting this hypothesis has been published in our own day by researchers in every single branch of the human sciences—social, clinical, and experimental psychology, clinical psychoanalysis, forensic psychiatry, criminology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and even the research arms of law-enforcement agencies such as the FBI.

Before the senior author, a psychiatrist, first entered a prison, he had been taught that the violent criminals he would encounter there had behaved as they had because they were simply amoral nihilists—that they had never developed a moral value system or a concept of moral rules and

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obligations. What he discovered instead, from the time he first began interrogating violent men, was that he had never met people who were so preoccupied with moral issues. They could hardly talk about anything else. They made it clear that they would willingly go to their own deaths in order to stand up for their version of what was right and wrong. And those were not just idle words, threats or boasts. They would actually behave accordingly, and provoke the guards or their fellow inmates to beat or kill them because of their fight to achieve what they perceived as justice. The only difference between their moral rhetoric and that of most non-criminals was that they perceived themselves to be the victims of injustice, rather than as the perpetrators of it.

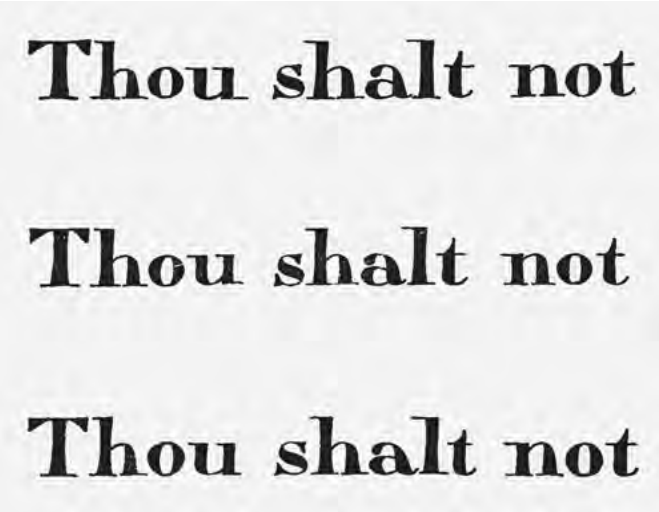
The ideas through which people perceive and think about their world involve an interpretation of their own situations—the causes and legitimacy that help explain and justify their actions. Their ways of thinking and judging are part of a social and cultural context that shapes behavior, and explains why people sometimes defy what others regard as legitimate authority. The "culture of violence" within prisons provides them with multiple justifications for violent action, and becomes the social resource through which they may express and act on the multitude of ideas and emotions that they are experiencing, including in this case ideas of social justice and the violent behaviors that flow from these concepts.

That brings us to the moral emotion that these men almost always lacked the capacity for: guilt. That is, they were hypersensitive to being shamed by others, but pathologically incapable of feelings of guilt and remorse for having hurt someone else. This contrast is so sharp that it can be summarized in the formula: people feel shame when they perceive themselves as being victims of injustice which in turn stimulates hate toward others and self-indulging, self-aggrandizing egotism and egocentrism; but, they are likely to feel guilt when they perceive themselves as the perpetrators of injustice, which stimulates self-hate, and self-punishment, as well as self-sacrificing altruism. Freud said once that no one feels guiltier than the saints—and he was right. That is why they are saints: because they feel too guilty to harm others or fail to help those who are in need. But the senior author concluded that the opposite was true of a population that Freud never studied: no one feels more innocent than the criminals. That is why they are criminals: because they lack the capacity for the feelings of guilt and remorse that would stop the rest of us from committing serious violence toward someone else, no matter how deeply we felt he or she had shamed or insulted us.

These considerations led the senior author to conclude (as many moral philosophers also have) that there is not just one morality, or one set of definitions as to what constitutes good or evil, justice or injustice. There are two different sets of moral value judgments and commandments, and they are diametrical opposites, for they are caused or motivated by two diametrically opposite, or antagonistic, moral emotions: shame and guilt. For shame-motivated ethical value systems and commandments, the worst evil is shame, and the highest good is pride, the opposite of shame. For guilt-motivated ethics, the worst evil is guilt or sin, the worst sin is pride (it is called the deadliest of the Seven Deadly Sins in the guilt-ethic of Christianity), and the highest good is the opposite of guilt, namely innocence. But that is a state that is achieved and maintained not by means of self-aggrandizement, but by the opposite: humility, self-effacement, unselfishness, all of which are perceived by the holders of a shame-ethic as self-humiliation.

Nietzsche called shame-ethics "Master Morality" and guilt-ethics "Slave Morality." Master Morality is the moral value system that justifies, and indeed commands, its followers to be the masters of slaves (or other "inferiors"—women, children, ethnic or religious groups, the weak, the poor, etc.). Slave Morality is the ethic that orders one to accept being a slave—"resist not evil," "turn the other cheek," "love and forgive those who harm you," etc. Thus a central commandment of a guilt-ethic is "Thou Shalt Not Kill." But an equally central commandment of a shame-ethic is "Thou Shalt Kill"—for by doing so you prove how tough, dominant, powerful, and courageous you are.

That is why behavioral violence is most common and destructive among those who perceive themselves as being treated as (or worse yet, as actually being) inferior, weak, failures, rejected, ridiculed, etc. That is why the kinds of violence that are defined as criminal in our society, such as murder, are committed most commonly by those who are shamed by being assigned to an inferior status in our




There are two sets of moral commandments, and they are diametrical opposites, for they are caused by two antagonistic, moral emotions: shame and guilt.

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hierarchical social class and race groupings—namely, those who are poor, unemployed, uneducated, or members of minority groups that are subjected to systematic shaming and being treated as inferior.

There is another form of violence that is the main cause of behavioral violence, however, that up to now has actually killed far more people than all the different forms of behavioral violence put together. That is what the Scandinavian social scientist Johan Galtung and the "liberation theologians" of Latin America have called "structural violence," meaning the increased death rates among the poor in societies whose social and economic structures divide the population into rich and poor. The politicians and their supporters who maintain these structures are, of course, not considered criminals and are not subjected to cruel punishments, as the poor are when they commit their far less deadly forms of violence.

**"The enormous differences between societies around the world in their rates of both individual and collective violence prove that violence can be prevented."**

The senior author was able to demonstrate empirically that the application of these social and psychological principles can enable us to prevent violence. For example, one of the most direct and effective means for overcoming shame and elevating self-esteem is through education, the acquisition of knowledge and skills that one can respect in oneself and that elicit respect from others. Thus it was no surprise when he asked what program in the prison mental health service that he directed had been most effective in preventing recidivism, or reoffending, after prisoners were discharged back into the community. He found that only one program had been successful in preventing a return to any prison in the country over a 25-year period: namely, the acquisition of a college degree while in prison. Over that entire length of time, more than 200 murderers and rapists had attained at least a B.A., and not one had been returned to prison. (The nationwide average for recidivism is 65% within three years of release from prison.)

When he was able to engage in a more rigorously designed violence-prevention experiment with violent men in the jails of San Francisco, he and his colleagues found that an intensive, multi-dimensional group of well-designed educational and therapeutic programs was able to reduce the rate of violence within the jails from war-zone levels to zero for up to a year at a time; and to reduce the rate of violent re-offending by 83%, compared with an otherwise identical "control group" in an ordinary jail. In fact, this program was so successful that it received a major national prize for "innovations in American governance" from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in a competition among 800 nominees from around the country. It has been adapted for use in several other cities, states, and nations.

One thing that is important to recognize here is that while the development of the capacity for feelings of guilt and remorse and the guilt-ethics that they motivate can reduce the rate of killing or harming others, this alone does not solve the problem of human violence. While guilt-feelings inhibit violence and the infliction of pain or punishment toward others, they stimulate violence and punishment toward the self, as in moral masochism, fears of success, and at the extreme, suicide. For example, while African-Americans in our racially discriminatory society are several times more likely than whites to commit homicides, whites are several times more likely to commit suicide than Black people are. And yet, this is the one form of violence that kills people just as effectively as the other one does. In fact, in America and all other developed nations, many more people kill themselves than kill others.

The question of why people commit violence in different ways goes to the heart of the need for more attention to be directed at the possible forms that violent behavior and social change might take. The enormous differences between societies around the world in their rates of both individual and collective violence constitute repeated empirical demonstrations that violence can be prevented, and societies structured differently and more peacefully.

The desire to wipe out or ward off shame can also motivate suicide, but when it does so, its meaning and purpose is not to punish oneself (which is what people do to reduce their guilt feelings). Rather, it is a last resort that is turned to when it is perceived as the only means by which to stop others from shaming oneself—as when a criminal or soldier has been disarmed and therefore cannot continue to ward off shame by killing others. Many prison suicides are of this nature, as were the ritual suicides of defeated Samurai aristocrats in feudal Japan who could avoid the shame of being killed in a shame-inducing way, like common soldiers, only by proving their courage by killing themselves. Antony and Cleopatra, likewise, killed themselves in order to avoid the shame of being paraded through the streets of Rome in Augustus's victory celebration; as did Hitler, to avoid the shame of being prosecuted in an open court by the Allies who had defeated him (as he said, it was better to be a dead Achilles than a living dog).



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## Collective Political and Military Violence

These examples raise the question: is collective military or political violence, from war to terrorism, caused by the same motive that causes individual/interpersonal violence, such as murder? We believe it is, but with this difference: interpersonal violence is caused by feeling that one has been shamed (e.g., disrespected) as an individual by another individual. Collective violence is caused by the feeling that the group with which one identifies oneself has been shamed, as a group, by another group, whether or not one has been shamed individually. For example, Hitler was elected to power on the campaign promise to "undo the shame of Versailles," i.e., the shame and dishonor to which he felt the entire German nation had been subjected by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I. That Hitler also felt shamed as an individual, by his poverty and academic failure as a youth, is true (as he himself illustrates repeatedly in his autobiography), but it was his obsession with what he called Germany's shame that connected him with the millions of his countrymen who apparently felt the same way.

Osama bin Laden, in fact, did not even suffer from poverty. As one of the richest men in the Middle East, he possessed a powerful bulwark against individual shame. His motive for organizing the suicidal/homicidal airplane crashes of 9/11 was, as he put it in his first public statement on the subject, payback for the "80 years of humiliation and contempt" to which he felt "the entire Islamic nation" had been subjected by the nations of the West (presumably referring to the humiliating defeat and dismemberment of the last of the great Islamic empires, the Ottoman). And indeed, there is a virtually unanimous consensus among students of terrorism that the desire to undo or prevent the collective shaming and humiliating of the group with which one identifies is the main emotional motive of that form of violence—whether the terrorist group is Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, a Japanese cult, or whatever.

## The Death of God and Morality, and the Rise of the Political Religions

On the other hand, while individual violence or murder has been with us, relatively unchanged, since Cain and Abel, there is something unique and unprecedented about the suicide-bombings of today, which is one reason they are so shocking, incomprehensible, and terrifying. They appear to violate all previous principles of political and military violence in their apparent irrationality and self-destructiveness. Because suicide is an inextricable component of this form of violence, it cannot be deterred, as all previous violence had been assumed to be, by credible threats of retaliatory violence and punishment.

Since violence, like all behavior, is ultimately a product of the mind, this uniquely modern form of violence must be a product of the modern mind. If all violence has the same affective cause—the wish to eliminate feelings of shame and humiliation—how is the cognitive cause of violence different now from what it was in the past? In other words, how is the modern mind different from the mind of the premodern world?

That brings us to what we consider the main problem created by "modernity," by which we mean the transition from the medieval worldview that was the dominant cognitive structure in Western civilization (or "Christendom") from the end of the Roman Empire, to the modern scientific mentality that was created by the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century. The medieval worldview was summarized in St. Augustine's formula "Credo ut intelligam" (I believe in order to understand). That meant that if you wanted to understand why, how, and by whom we and the world were created, and how we should live, you had to begin by believing in the Revelation contained in the Bible, which contained explanations of all those matters. Indeed, as Lucien Febvre and other historians of *mentalites* have demonstrated, it was essentially impossible for virtually anyone in premodern Europe (up to the 16th century) not to believe in God and the Bible. However, with the Scientific Revolution, all those assumptions were challenged, and in effect reversed. As the first modern philosopher (or the first philosopher of modernity), Descartes, put it, "De omnibus dubitandum est" (Everything is doubtable; or, doubt everything). In other words, knowledge does not begin in faith, it begins in doubt. The very motto of science as we would summarize it is "take nothing on faith: believe only those hypotheses that have been confirmed by empirical evidence and data, or in other words, by experience. And believe in them even then only tentatively, provisionally, and temporarily, until they are refuted by discrepant data or a hypothesis with greater explanatory and predictive power."

This destruction of faith and its replacement by doubt led ineluctably to what Nietzsche famously called the "Death of God" (which entailed the death of the Devil as well). What is often overlooked in this scenario is an inextricably linked event that has been just as unsettling and disorienting as the Death of God (and the Devil), namely, the Death of Good and Evil, the abstractions of which God and the Devil are the personifications—in short, the Death of Morality. As Nietzsche said, he was describing not just the death of God, but also the advent of moral nihilism—the complete absence of any moral standards or beliefs.

But people cannot live in a state of complete moral nihilism, that is, a complete vacuum in the sphere of our thinking that philosophers call "practical reason"—the sphere that asks and answers questions concerning how to live and what to do. As Kenneth Tynan put it, Hell is not the triumph of



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People cannot live without some form of morality.

evil, it is the absence of any moral standards at all. For we cannot avoid making decisions and choosing between different alternatives and we need some coherent, organized cognitive mechanism for deciding what is better and what is worse. Until we have been able to evolve an internal behavioral self-guidance system that is more effective in preventing violence than our hitherto existing forms of morality are, we have an absolute need for one or another of these two moralities.

This dilemma of modernity that had been created by the Scientific Revolution was illustrated with utmost clarity at the very beginning of that revolution by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who has been called the first modern personality. For in the play of that name Shakespeare shows how the coming to awareness of the subjectivity of moral value judgments, and the subsequent inability to think of them as objectively real, true, and knowable, absolutely paralyzes Hamlet and makes it impossible for him to act coherently or in an organized way. Hamlet describes the death of the belief that good and evil are objective realities that exist independently of our subjective thoughts and preferences when he says "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." His paralysis in the face of this collapse of belief in the validity and independent reality and existence of morality is simply unviable: it leads directly to his death and the deaths of those around him.

John Donne, writing at almost exactly the same time, expressed the same thought: "The new philosophy" (meaning modern science) "calls all into doubt"—including the prohibitions against both parricide and regicide. The history of ideas from that time to the present can be understood only by recognizing that every one of the greatest thinkers and writers of the past four centuries has been wrestling, mostly unsuccessfully, with what we have called here the Death of Morality. For example, even Kant, who is usually thought of as the greatest defender of morality in the past two centuries, acknowledged that we simply cannot know whether good and evil exist. In the generation immediately following his, Georg Buchner, the inventor of modern tragedy, has his antihero Woyzeck exclaim "When God goes, everything goes." By the time Dostoevsky wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*, he describes Ivan's Hamlet-like paralysis by having him protest repeatedly that without God, anything is possible, everything is permitted—which makes it virtually impossible for him to act at all. A generation or two after that, one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, Wittgenstein, wrote that it is impossible for there to be ethical propositions, and that "Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent."

We could fill several volumes with quotations of this sort but we believe our point has been made: the greatest and most destructive hitherto unsolved dilemma of the modern era has been the loss of faith in morality—that is, the awareness that belief in the validity of any given moral value system can only be based on faith, not knowledge, since it is impossible to know what is good or evil, or to know why we should be good rather than evil. And yet, we live in a post-faith world, one in which the cognitive structure of the modern mind is constructed according to the scientific model of universal doubt. Hence we not only cannot *know* what is moral or immoral, we cannot even have *faith* in the answers we try to give to moral questions. We can meaningfully ask and answer questions only concerning what is, not what ought to be (as Hume famously observed)—in other words, questions and answers that can be framed and confirmed or disconfirmed in empirical terms by means of data and evidence, as matters of fact rather than value.

Until we have learned how to do that in the sphere of practical reason, we are left with a cognitive vacuum that is unviable. Human nature hates a cognitive vacuum. And because of the absolute necessity of filling that vacuum after the death of God and religion had led to the death of morality as well, the nations who were undergoing that crisis (which initially included only those of Europe, since that is where the Scientific Revolution began) invented a whole series of pseudo-political, pseudo-secular religions disguised as politics, or in other words, political religions. The first of these ideologies, which was a product of the European Enlightenment of the 18th century, was created in its most complete form during the French Revolution, when the principals of that event expelled the Church from Notre Dame Cathedral and replaced it with virtually identical rituals and liturgies celebrating, worshipping, and even sacrificing themselves to, not God and religion, but the nation and the people.



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As Simon Schama explained, "Talleyrand was well aware of the need to provide some kind of inspirational revolutionary religion that could draw on the same emotive and even mystical passions on which the Catholic Church relied, to bind the faithful to the Revolution."[1] As Hans Kohn puts it, to many intellectuals and writers, "nationality appeared as 'sacred,' as the source of morality"[2]—effectively putting the nation into the position previously occupied by God. Hegel was even more explicit and sweeping in his assertions that "The state is the march of God in the world . . . the State is the Divine idea as it exists on Earth. . . . Man must therefore venerate the state as the divine on earth." He referred to the state as "this actual God."[3] Of course, this political religion called nationalism not only resurrected the God who had died in one's own nation-state, it also resurrected the Devil in the form of other people's states, particularly if they became rivals in the competition for hegemony and expansion, i.e., imperialism.

**Of course, this political religion called nationalism not only resurrected the God who had died in one's own nation-sate, it also resurrected the peril in the form of other states.**

As for totalitarianism (a term coined by Mussolini to describe his own regime in 1922), the Russian theologian and philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev[4] identified Bolshevism as a political religion, a term that the British historian Michael Burleigh[5] also applied to Nazism. Both ideologies, of course, the Bolshevist and the fascist, also re-created the absolute certainty that comes with simple and clear dogmas and beliefs, with the Party and the Leader substituted for the Church and God as the authorities who were the source of absolute truths and moral commandments that could not be questioned, on pain of death.

The nationalism that originated in the 18th century, and the imperialism of the 19th century, led directly to the First World War, which destroyed four of the greatest empires of that time and left an ideological vacuum that was immediately filled by a third political religion or ideology, totalitarianism (fascism, Nazism, and Bolshevism). The collapse of those *religions disguised as politics* with the defeat of fascism/Nazism in 1945 and the implosion of Bolshevism in 1989-91 left another ideological vacuum, which was soon filled by apocalyptic fundamentalism, which might best be described as a form of *politics disguised as religion*. That ideology too, like the others that had preceded it, was motivated on a cognitive level by the absolute necessity of filling the vacuum in practical reason created by the loss of faith in God and morality. Incidentally, each new ideology that has arisen since the birth of nationalism has not just replaced the preceding ideology, it has also incorporated it while adding something new. In other words, fundamentalism is also nationalistic, imperialistic, and totalitarian.

Here too, as with his explanation of the emotional sources of 9/11, Osama bin Laden can serve as our guide to its cognitive causes. As he explained, "these events" (the mass murders and suicides of 9/11) "have divided the world into two camps—the camp of belief, and the camp of unbelief." In the category of unbelief, we can assume he included the lack of belief in the God and Scriptures of Islam. But we believe that the fundamentalist movement of which he was one of the leaders was also, and crucially, motivated by something else that is an intrinsic and inextricable part of those religious beliefs—namely, the belief in the validity and binding of the moral value system that is contained in them—as opposed to the moral nihilism of the secular Western science-based civilization that he saw as the greatest threat to the continued viability of his people and his culture—the Islamic nation. For the identification of modernity (meaning science, which in turn means modern Western civilization), with moral nihilism and the recognition of the incompatibility of nihilism with viable human life runs like a thread throughout the literature of fundamentalism.

For example, one of the most influential thinkers of the Muslim fundamentalism that underlies the current Iranian theocracy, Daryush Shayegan, maintained that "nihilism constituted the very foundation of modernity," and that "nihilism gradually substituted man's reason for Divine

Belief in any value system can only be based on faith, since it is impossible to know what is good or evil, or why we should be good and not evil.

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Revelation, and in [its] later stages replaced reason with instincts and "appetites." He concluded, not surprisingly, that "traditional societies such as Iran should avoid the nihilism that was modernity."[6]

Another influential Iranian Islamist thinker, Al-e Ahmad, wrote a book whose Farsi title has been translated into English as "Westoxication," in which he described what he saw as the baneful effects of the influence of the nihilism of the West on people who allowed themselves to adopt its assumptions and way of life. As he put it, "Westoxicated people had neither beliefs nor commitments. . . . The Westoxicated person does not have a personality. He is an inauthentic thing . . . his words smack of nothing. . . . He belongs to nowhere."[7]

## Transcending the Dilemmas of Modernity

It took the West four centuries to learn to live with the cognitive, moral, and political chaos produced by modernity, during which it nearly destroyed itself. The U.S. still has not done so, as indicated by the resistance in many of our states to teach Darwin in our schools and by the takeover of the White House and the Republican Party by our own homegrown fundamentalists. Our experience would seem to suggest that we cannot learn how to facilitate the Islamists' ability to outgrow their fundamentalism and the violence it engenders until we have outgrown our own.

But how can we do that? Only by learning how to respond progressively rather than regressively to the loss of credibility of our traditional religious and moral belief systems and to the legal and political assumptions that flow from them. We might begin by noting that *while cognitive growth consists of finding better and better answers to the same old questions, cognitive development consists of asking new questions*, once we have realized that the old questions are unanswerable, meaningless, or based on a set of assumptions that are themselves no longer credible. For example, even if we cannot give meaningful (knowledgeable) answers to questions concerning how we *ought* to live or what we *should* do, since we cannot test the answers against empirical data, we can find answers to a different type of question, namely, "How *can* we live?" That is, "What biological, psychological, and social forces and processes tend to sustain the life of the organism and the survival of the species? And which ones tend to cause the death of the organism and the extinction of the species?" For that type of question can be answered by means of hypotheses that can be tested empirically. The arena in which this type of hypothesis can be framed and tested is the human sciences.

From the point of view developed here, the psychohistorical significance of Darwin, Marx, and Freud in the collective cognitive development of humanity lies in their finding ways to apply empirical methods to the questions asked and answered by practical reason, namely, how to live and what to do. In so doing, they created the first prototypes of the modern human sciences—human biology, sociology, and psychology, respectively. Their importance lies less in the specific factual *content* of their theories, some of which is no longer credible even to those who take their work most seriously, than in their *form* or cognitive *structure*. That is, they were the first thinkers in history to advance practical reason from the philosophic question, "How *should* we live?" (which cannot be answered, except by means of totally arbitrary assertions whose validity can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed), to the scientific question, "How *can* we live?" which can be answered empirically.

For example, the senior author has been investigating the kinds of biological, psychological, and social forces that cause behavior resulting in death and those that protect and sustain life. That is, he and his colleagues have engaged in clinical, experimental, and epidemiological research aimed at identifying and measuring the variables that increase or decrease the frequency of various forms of lethal violence—behavioral violence, such as homicide, suicide, war, and capital punishment, and structural violence, or relative poverty (socio-economic inequality). Gandhi recognized this as the deadliest form of violence, in that it kills far more people, year after year, than all the various forms of behavioral violence put together.

What all this research shows is that we actually know more than most people realize about how to achieve significant decreases in the rates of deaths and injuries from various forms of violence.[8, 9] The advantage of this approach is that it makes it possible to *replace moral value judgments and commandments* ("Thou Shalt Not Kill," which is about as successful in preventing murder as repeating Nancy Reagan's mantra, "Just Say No," was in curing drug addiction) *with psychological understanding as to what the biological, psychological, and social forces are that cause violence and death, and which ones prevent it*. It is only by attaining the ability to do that that we can avoid two equally destructive choices: a nihilism that is simply amoral, and a moralism that is simply punitive, i.e., violent and violence-provoking rather than therapeutic and violence-preventing.

As we said above, morality is based not only on a particular cognitive structure, but also on particular affective foundations, namely shame or guilt. Shame is the absence or deficiency of pride, self-love, self-esteem, self-respect, and feelings of self-worth. What it motivates is therefore the intensification of self-love (egotism, "selfishness") and of hate toward others. Guilt is self-hate, self-condemnation, self-abasement, and the need for self-punishment. What it motivates is love of others (altruism, saintliness) and the intensification of self-hate and self-punishment.

Freud has commented that neurosis (and by implication, all psychopathology) consists of an inhibition of the capacity



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It is less painful to feel angry than to feel sad.

for love (of others and/or the self). We believe that emotional health consists of the liberation of the capacity for love of both self and others, and that hate is the emotion that people resort to in order to avoid the pain of sadness, grief, and mourning over whatever losses they have suffered (including the loss of self-esteem that occurs when one is shamed and humiliated). That is, it is less painful to feel angry than it is to feel sad. Indeed, sadness can be considered the universal essence of all emotional pain (anxiety being merely the anticipation of sadness, i.e., the fear of the future loss of whatever one loves and values). Anger or hate represents an attempt to avoid the pain of sadness. It motivates revenge, which our capacity for magical thinking can lead us to think will undo our losses, whereas in fact it accomplishes no such result—it merely inflicts loss on someone else. That is why developing the capacity for mourning or grieving is one of the final common pathways of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, and is a prerequisite for the healing of psychopathology and the prevention of violence. As James Baldwin put it, "People cling to their hates so stubbornly because they sense, once the hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain."

One of the main purposes of psychotherapy, and of social and community psychiatry, is the same as one of the purposes of religion: the enhancement and disinhibition of the capacity for love of self and others, (meaning the love of all life) or what Albert Schweitzer called reverence for life, and indeed, love of existence, of the universe and of the ultimate, unknowable, mysterious reality that has brought all that into being, which corresponds to the love of what in traditional language has been called God.

## Fundamentalism and Terrorism vs. Religion and Love

What does all this have to do with fundamentalism and terrorism? The term "fundamentalism" is derived from the title of a series of tracts called "The Fundamentals," first published in the U.S. in 1909, which based their authority on the infallibility of the Bible, which the authors, Southern Protestant (Baptist) preachers, interpreted literally. From the beginning, fundamentalism saw itself as consciously engaged in a struggle against "modernism," especially the modern scientific theories that contradicted the literal truth of every word of the Bible, such as the theory of evolution.

From that perspective, *the major crisis in the world today appears not as a clash of civilizations but rather as a clash*

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*within each civilization between the fundamentalists and the modernists* (or progressives). However, there is another dimension of the crisis that could easily be misunderstood as a clash of civilizations, namely, the *clash between the fundamentalists within different civilizations* (e.g., between Palestinian and Jewish fundamentalists and between Islamist and American fundamentalists). The important thing to notice about that is that the members of the population within each of those different "civilizations" who have succeeded in adapting to the world of modernity, modern science, and Enlightenment values, are not experiencing any violent clash of civilizations. On the contrary, they are quite capable of engaging in dialogues across civilizational boundaries, even eager to do so; it is they represent the peace parties within each civilization.

If fundamentalism is a form of religion that is incompatible with life, love, and our current stage of cognitive development, is there any form of religion that is compatible with these requirements for our continued survival? We believe there is, and that we might begin to describe it by redefining the traditional concept of "faith" as meaning what Erik Erikson has called "basic trust." Trust is one of the meanings of *pistis*, the word that is usually translated from the Biblical Greek as "faith." Erikson has described the attainment of the capacity for what he called "basic trust" as a form of psychic strength that is the primary and deepest basis of mental health and healthy human development, the foundation upon which all the other components of psychosocial functioning rest, and for which it is a prerequisite. He described it as the "cornerstone of a healthy personality," while at the same time stressing that it always exists in counterpoint to an equally necessary (unavoidable, but also, within limits, adaptive) sense of mistrust. In a personal illustration of that point, Erikson told me once that after he had emigrated to the United States before Hitler's rise to power, some of his friends who remained in Europe during the 1930s asked him why he did not return. Several of them soon after perished in the Nazi death camps.

So a healthy personality can be defined as one that maintains a balance between trust and mistrust that enables one to remain in touch with reality, rather than being either excessively trusting even of untrustworthy people, i.e., credulous, and thus vulnerable to being deceived and taken advantage of, or insufficiently trusting, and therefore unable to receive and accept whatever good things one may be offered by others. What health requires is merely that this balance be sufficiently tilted toward trust in life and the world (meaning, most importantly, other people) that one will be motivated to continue to live, even when one has been betrayed or deceived by those who are sometimes untrustworthy (as everyone is, and as the natural world is, at one time or another).

The sense of basic trust means that one expects that the benefits of living will outweigh, in the long run, the pains and costs. This does not mean a starry-eyed, Pollyanna view of other people, of life, of nature, or of the universe. On the contrary, it means that even with the most realistic and unsparing recognition of the pain that life exposes one to, one is still able to maintain the expectation that the benefits of being alive will outweigh the costs. Indeed, it is quite compatible with the sentiment expressed in a poem by Donald Hall, that "*life is hell but death is worse*"—the important point of which is simply that death really is worse, and that even when life is hell, it is still preferable to the alternative. Only the person who knows life (nature and people), who sees the world and other people and him or herself realistically, without engaging in denial, and knows how much pain nature and people can cause, can be said to be capable of truly loving either life or others or him or herself; for anyone else is loving an illusion, a wishful fantasy, not life and humanity as it really is. (This is not to say that people suffering from an illness whose pain or disability are unrelievable or irreversible, and whose life in any meaningful human sense is already over, should necessarily be denied the option to end their suffering by voluntarily speeding up the timing of their biological death if they wish to. But that is a complex issue and the adequate discussion of which would require more space.)

**"Is there any form of religion that is compatible with requirements for our continued survival? We believe there is."**

What does this have to do with belief in God, or religious faith? I am suggesting that those theological concepts (belief, faith, and God) can be interpreted as metaphors for the concept of basic trust in life and the world that we have just been discussing. A young child has not had time to undergo sufficient cognitive development to understand the theological metaphors as metaphors, but interprets them literally instead. A fundamentalist is simply an adult who has regressed from a mature stage of religious experience and cognitive development to one that corresponds to the literal-mindedness of the child. Nevertheless, the fundamentalist is attempting to protect and preserve something that is in fact entirely necessary for health and life and humanity, something that a literal-minded scientific positivism, or "scientism," may be even more blind to than the fundamentalist is. Indeed, religious fundamentalism is not the only variety of fundamentalism that there is. There is also scientific fundamentalism,



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Properly understood, religion is the most mature and unsparingly realistic stage of human development.

which can be defined as the mistaken belief that science, and the "scientific method" (or methods), actually arrive at the "truth" about "reality," rather than being simply the latest and cognitively most powerful in the series of useful fictions (or "language games," as Wittgenstein called them) that we humans have been inventing, in order to orient ourselves and improve our capacity to increase the balance of life over death and pleasure over pain, since we first acquired the capacity for speech and thought.

## Union with God (*Unio Mystica*)

If we disparage and repudiate all varieties of religious experience and language simply because some of them are less mature than others, we will wind up throwing out the baby—or rather, the adult—with the bathwater. I say this because I believe that is exactly what Freud did, and I believe that it was a mistake based on his misunderstanding of religion. I am not sure what the source of Freud's attitude toward religion was, but it is clear that his attitude toward it was quite different from his attitude toward virtually every other aspect of human functioning and experience. For with the exception of religion, I cannot think of any topic in human psychology that he did not approach from a developmental perspective. In his analysis of everything else, he recognized that all of our capacities, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral, begin with infantile versions and precursors, and only over time develop through a series of identifiable stages into ever more mature and highly developed forms of ever increasing differentiation and integration. But not with religion, which he was incapable of seeing except in its most infantile version, in which God is an old man in the sky with a white beard, the ultimate patriarchal father figure, who rewards or punishes us when we are good or bad.

Why is this important? Because the fundamentalists, for all their mistakes (including their regression to precisely the immature, literal-minded stage of religious development just described), are nevertheless onto something that it is vitally important for us to recognize: important for our own sakes, and for the sake of being able to understand and communicate with them, and to provide them an example of a less destructive way of responding to the very real dilemmas, challenges, and dangers of modernity. We need to do this not only so they can deal more constructively with those challenges than they have up to now but so that we can also. If we persist

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in acting as if they are simply perverse, crazy, mistaken, or immature (however much they may be all those things, to some extent), we will never learn from their mistakes to correct our own (such as positivism, scientism, and moralism).

The fundamentalists are quite correct about two things. The first is that modernity and the modern mind has destroyed the credibility of the traditional sources of moral, legal, and political authority, including God, religion, and pure practical reason. That leaves us forced to choose between nihilism, anomie, and anarchy, all of which are incompatible with life, and fundamentalism and/or other new social and political ideologies that are based on dogmatism and blind faith in an authoritarian leader who promises absolute truth and certainty as the antidote to the doubt and uncertainty that are unavoidable consequences and characteristics of the modern scientific mentality—unless we can create a replacement for morality that is cognitively and affectively progressive rather than regressive (as the aforementioned ideologies are).

**Rather than seeing religious experience as regression from the adult psyche, we would propose that it represents transcendence beyond the body and the mind.**

The second is that religion, properly understood and conceptualized, is not only not an illusion or an immature form of wish fulfillment, it is precisely the most mature and unsparingly realistic stage of human development. As that implies, the capacity to reach this stage of development represents the most life-enhancing degree of mental and emotional health—the most fully developed capacity for love, basic trust, spiritual peace, relationship with others, and a transcendence of narcissism that is only possible when self-esteem is secure enough to make genuine intellectual humility emotionally affordable. Religion in this conception transcends both moralism and scientism (as Spinoza, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein all suggested, each in his own way). This view of religion, however, necessitates a complete revision or reversal of Freud's interpretation of religious experience.

In the opening pages of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud reduced what Romain Rolland called the "oceanic feeling," which the author described as the essence of religious experience (the sense of spiritual union with the universe, existence, reality, or "God"), to a regression to the earliest stage of infantile experience, when a baby has not yet differentiated itself from the mother. In responding to what I believe is Freud's complete misunderstanding of what Rolland and religious mystics in general are talking about when they describe such experiences, I can only begin by observing that Freud was as tone-deaf to religious experience as he was to music. For the sense of spiritual peace, of trust so deep as to render all possible events trivial by comparison, of awe in response to the extent and beauty of infinite space and time in which past, present, and future coexist in the light of eternity, of wonder at the miracle that we and the universe exist, the sense of the sacredness and holiness of all life and all existence, of gratitude and thanksgiving for the unsolicited, gratuitous gift of life, of the utter insignificance of one's own ego in the perspective of all that is, of the indissoluble union and integration of the self with all that is, the sense that one is in the presence of undreamed of energy—to reduce such a transcendent experience, such a transcendence of egoism, to regression to the subjective experience of earliest infancy (about which, despite much exciting recent research, we still know so little that we are only beginning to be able to do more than speculate about it, in any case) is a sweeping repudiation of something of which Freud himself apparently had no experience, no evidence, and hence no knowledge.

Rather than seeing religious experience as regression from the adult psyche, we would propose that it represents, instead, transcendence beyond both the *soma* and the *psyche* (the body and the mind) and the progression to the most mature stage of human development, which we would call (to use St. Paul's term) *pneuma*, or spirit. The fields of psychology and psychoanalysis have taken it for granted up to now that the human personality can be completely described as the coexistence of, and the interaction between, *soma* and *psyche* (as in "psychosomatic" medicine). But that is too limited and truncated a view of human beings. It is incapable of doing justice to the full range of human experience and human potential. It is time that we now expanded our conception of humanity to include the capacity for spiritual experience and functioning. I believe that Freud did not see the necessity for this because he was incapable of understanding religious experience, and that because his theory was too limited to be capable of conceptualizing or encompassing it.

I need hardly add that the kind of religious experience to which I am referring here has little or nothing in common with what I would call the fundamentalist perversion of religion. While the literal-mindedness that is one of the defining characteristics of fundamentalism is merely immature when it belongs to a child, it is the product of serious regression when it is practiced by adults. Regression is not always pathological, of course. Indeed, the inability to "regress" in the sense of temporarily relaxing one's "adult" persona and permitting oneself to play, whether in sports, vacation, sex, art,



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humor, or any other harmless and even constructive pleasurable activities, engaged in as ends in themselves rather than as means to some other end, are among the experiences that make life worth living and are an essential component of whatever we might mean by mental health. But regression in other contexts can lead to the most life-limiting and life-threatening forms of psychopathology, as in the psychotic illnesses of individuals, and in the shared delusions of the new social and political ideologies discussed earlier, from nationalism to fundamentalism.

One point of stressing the fact that there are also forms of religious experience and expression that are mature and healthy is to demonstrate to those who might be tempted to become fundamentalists, whether in our own society or any other, that going down that path is not the only alternative to nihilism and the other forms of modern skepticism. On the contrary, it is the most destructive alternative, as opposed to the life-preserving and life-enhancing ones we have just outlined—namely, the psychological understanding that is necessary for the protection, preservation, and enhancement of life and the capacity for the love of life and reverence for life that is an essential and central component of religious experience.

Rev. William Barber, cofounder of the Poor People's Campaign and founder of the Repairers of the Breach Movement, is a contemporary example of the mature and healthy transcendence of the more immature and limited stages of moral development we have described above. He often refers in his sermons to "standing at the gap and speaking a truth that has a moral focus—not merely a democratic version, a republican, or a liberal version, but a moral focus of what our government ought to be."

Echoing Martin Luther King Jr.'s call for a time to break the silence about the inequities of society, Barber's response is one of radical love, healing, redemption, and equal justice for all—a fusion coalition politics of caring and nurturing, representing all people in any place throughout the globalized world. It is a life-affirming *agape* love—transpersonal, universal concern with care and respect for all humans that, in reality, is the only alternative to the destructive and self-destructive cycle of a "fear-based" worldview of violence that continues to bedevil the human condition and threatens the extinction of all of us as a species. ■

## Notes

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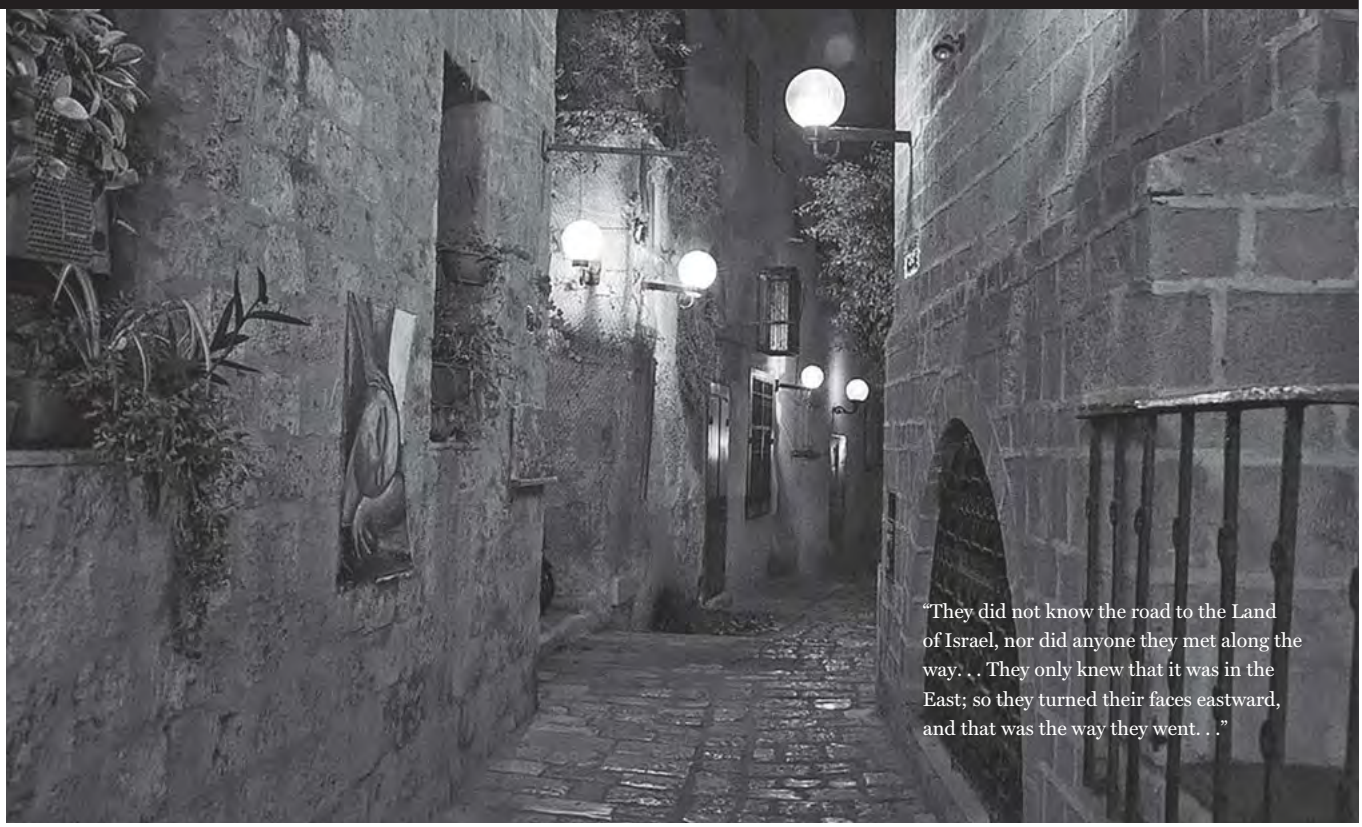


# From Building a City to Demolishing Homes

## Origins and their Outcomes

*In Memoriam: Alan Mintz*

**OMER BARTOV**

In his vast posthumous biography of Buczacz—his hometown and, as he depicted it, the symbol of East European Jewry—the Hebrew writer and Nobel Prize laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon spins a lengthy tale of the town's mythical origins: "When was our city founded, and who was its founder?" he asks. "Long have all the chroniclers labored to find this out in vain. But some few facts have been revealed to us," continues Agnon, possibly tongue-in-cheek, since he was famous for his fine sense of irony, "and I am herewith setting down a faithful record of all I know."[1]

What, then, is the story of the town's origins? Here is how Agnon relates it:

> *There was once a band of Jews who were moved by their own pure hearts to go up to the Land of Israel, together with their wives and their sons and their daughters. They sold . . . all their property that could not be transported. They obtained permission from the authorities to leave their city. They bought provisions and set forth on the road.*
>
> *They did not know the road to the Land of Israel, nor did anyone they met along the way. . . . They only knew that it was in the East; so they turned their faces eastward, and that was the way they went. . . . They set out at the beginning of the month of Iyar, when the highways are merry and the fields and vineyards full of people, but as they proceeded, people became scarce, vineyards and fields vanished, and all the roads led through forests that never seemed to end, with birds and beasts. . . . They made a halt and set up camp for the month of holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.*
>
> *They made their camp in a place of forests and rivers, with no sign of habitation. . . . In those regions, as in most of the lands of the Slavs, winter comes on early. . . . At the holiday's end, when they ought to have set forth, the snow began to fall . . . until the roads were blotted out and they could not distinguish*

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*land from water. . . . Like it or not, the pilgrims had to linger in their camp.*

*One day . . . they found themselves surrounded by strange people who seemed to them like animals, with huge and fearsome dogs at their heels and great trumpets to their lips. But these people had not come to them with evil intent but only to hunt animals. They were great and distinguished noblemen, and it is the way of noblemen to go to the forests to hunt game.*

*One of the noblemen asked them in Latin, Who are you and what are you doing here? They told him their whole story . . . in such detail that the noblemen were struck by their cleverness and eloquence. So enchanted were they that they forgot the game and gave up the hunt and began to urge them to come with them and to live with them, arguing that winter is very hard in that land, that many people fall sick from the great cold, that not everyone is built to bear it, and that these Rhinelanders would certainly never survive. . . . The Pilgrims . . . agreed to go and live with them until the end of the winter season. . . . Each nobleman took with him an individual or a family and brought them home. . . .*

*The noblemen who had taken the Jews into their homes enjoyed prosperity in whatever they did. They realized that their success was due to the Jews. . . . They began to urge them to stay, saying, The whole land is yours; make your home wherever you like. If you want to engage in commerce in the land, better yet, for no one here knows anything about commerce. . . .*

*They thought about it and began to discuss what to do. To leave where they were and to go to the Land of Israel was out of the question; for by now, they had acquired property in the land and built houses and were in favor with the nobility. As for the women, some were pregnant, some were nursing, some were worn out and weak. And the elders were even older than before, so that traveling would have been hard on them. . . . After much discussion, they agreed unanimously to establish a permanent house of prayer. . . . The building in which they had been holding their services on the festivals they designated as the synagogue. . . .*

*Little by little, the entire place came to be settled by Jews. . . . The place acquired a reputation; people began to come from far and wide on the days of their festivals, both to see and to be seen. . . . Then the local nobleman built himself a stone house; eventually, he built a castle up on the mountain facing the River Strypa. . . . That is how Buczacz began. . . .*

*There they dwelled for many generations in security and tranquility, except for years of war and revolution. Their first protector was the kingdom of Poland, and later Austria; then Poland reestablished its kingdom and engaged in conquest and destruction, until the Enemy came and eradicated them all.*

*May God return the remnants of His people from wherever they are; may He assemble our Diaspora from among the nations; may He bring them to Zion, His city, in song, and to Jerusalem, His temple, in lasting joy; may no enemy or foe enter the gates of Jerusalem from this day forth. Amen.*[2]

The story told by Agnon is more than a legend; it is, in many ways, the distilled version of what generations of Jews living in the vast territories of what was once the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—stretching from the German lands and the Carpathian Mountains to east of the Dnieper, and from the Baltic almost all the way to the Black Sea—had told themselves about where they had come from and where they were heading. Polin, as the Jews called Poland, was interpreted as the Hebrew words "poh lin," or "here we shall dwell," or "stay overnight." There is an inner logic to this tale, for it both establishes origins and indicates the goal. Just as the Jews had founded Buczacz, or rather the civilization of all of Eastern Europe, so too, after their destruction, their remnants were to be naturally gathered by God in the Land of Israel, their eternal object of pilgrimage and their final resting place.[3]

Agnon's 1939 novel, *Ore'ah Noteh Lalun*, translated as *A Guest for the Night*, describes the author's last visit to Buczacz.[4] He is now a guest in his own hometown, and while in reality this visit, which occurred in 1930—22 years after he left Buczacz at age 21—lasted only a week, in the novel it stretches for an entire year. He did not just stay overnight, but nevertheless did not return. The title, of course, refers to the entire conceptual edifice of temporality: the unresolvable conflict between home and temporary abode. How can one think of the landscape of one's youth as a site that one had merely passed through, as the child of refugees born en route from the ancestral home to the new place of refuge would imagine the sights its eyes perceived when they first opened? Can one reimagine one's place of refuge, then, as a homeland, even if its sights were foreign and exotic, its smells, sounds, people, and language strange and unfamiliar? Can one in fact leave one's homeland, one's hometown, or just one's home, and ever come home to another place and be at home there?

Agnon, who made his home for a while in Jaffa, and then, after a long sojourn in Germany, finally settled down in Jerusalem for the rest of his life, did not write about the origins of

In Hebrew, Polin was interpreted as 'here we shall dwell," or "stay overnight."

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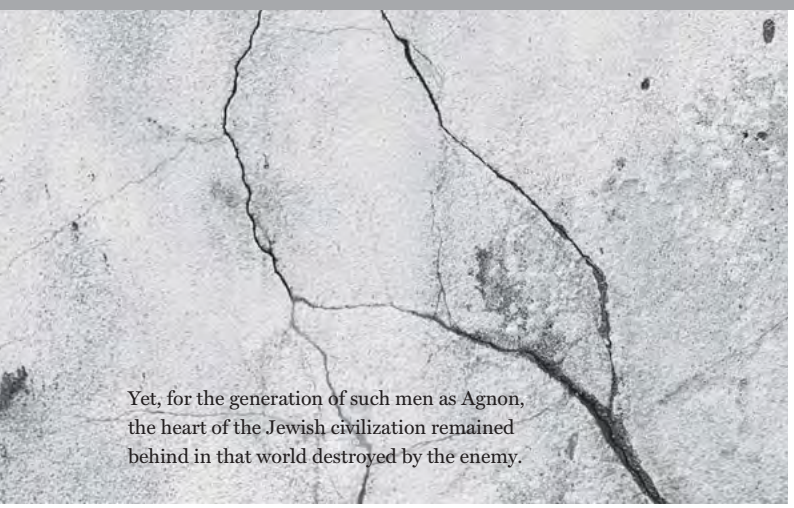

Yet, for the generation of such men as Agnon, the heart of the Jewish civilization remained behind in that world destroyed by the enemy.

Jerusalem, or the land of Israel, and definitely not of Jaffa.[5] The tale of origins was about Buczacz, the real hometown; and yet, a hometown imagined as a transitory space, a stop for the night on the way to Israel that lasted four centuries and ended up in the massacre of its entire Jewish population. He writes:

> *This is the chronicle of the city of Buczacz, which I have written in my pain and anguish so that our descendants should know that our city was full of Torah, wisdom, love, piety, life, grace, kindness and charity from the time of its founding until the arrival of the blighted abomination and their befouled and deranged accomplices who wrought destruction upon it. May God avenge the blood of His servants and visit vengeance upon His enemies and deliver Israel from its sorrows.*[6]

This is how Agnon opens his book and how, some 700 pages later, he closes it, recalling the day he heard of the destruction of his hometown. Living in Jerusalem, the holy city, his destination, and where indeed he had made his home, he is beset by endless sorrow for the universe, the town, the home he had lost, and feels completely alone and cut off from his roots. He tries to remember the words of a poem whispered to him in a vision by the apparition of Rabbi Solomon Ibn Gabirol, "each line of which began with one of the letters of the name of my town." He thinks: "Were it not for remembering the poem, I would have been like all my townsfolk, who were lost, who had died at the hands of despicable people, those who trampled my people until they were no longer a nation. It was because of the power of the poem that my soul went out of me. If my town had been wiped out of the world, it remains alive in the poem that the poet wrote as a sign of my city." Yet the words are lost:

> *To whom shall I now turn who can tell me the words of the song? To the old cantor who knew all the hymns of the holy poets? I alone remain to shed their tears. The old cantor rests in the shadow of the holy poets, who recite their hymns in the Great Synagogue of our city. . . . But here—here there is only a song of mourning, lamentation, and wailing, for the city and its dead.*[7]

Agnon filled that void of forgetting with his vast collection of stories about Buczacz. In the wake of the destruction, as the modern State of Israel was being built over the remnants of Palestinian civilization, Agnon engaged in another act of construction. Asked by the critic Baruch Kurzweil what his new literary endeavors were, Agnon replied: "I am building a city."[8]

The city he built, a literary edifice that has taken long to be recognized as a masterpiece and is still unknown to many Hebrew readers familiar with his prewar works, was not merely a monument to the Jewish civilization of Eastern Europe encapsulated in his hometown and destroyed by the Nazis, it was also an extraordinary mélange of historical fact and fiction, fantasy and imagination, deep research and erudition, and keen psychological insight. One central insight was that while Buczacz, as representative of the Jewish Diaspora in Eastern Europe, was the heart of Jewish existence, at the same time its own heart was elsewhere. It was there in Poland that it was formed, yet part of its very being was a profound sense of not-quite-being in place. The Jews—who did not in fact build the city of Buczacz—come as guests of the noblemen on their way elsewhere and are delayed merely by practical matters, which keep them there for close to half a millennium.[9]

But when they eventually get to where they were going, even though they are not welcome guests and are as foreign to that new landscape as they were to the old, they know that they have come home. Yet that home is inhabited by others, just as the home they left behind is taken over by others. The indigenous populations of the lands of the forests, the Poles and the Ukrainians, had always seen the Jews as guests, indeed increasingly less welcome guests with the rise of nationalism. The Jews never made claims on that land, although they did assert their role in developing and enriching it. Now, as they come to their home, they declare the indigenous population of that land foreign to it, and themselves, the newcomers, as its rightful owners. As a people that had spent much of its historical existence in a state of imagined transition, they can imagine the Arab population too as transitory, in the land but not of it, no matter how long it has actually lived there. Its origins, like those of the Jews, lie elsewhere, and it is to that other place that they belong.[10]

Yet, for the generation of such men as Agnon, the heart of Jewish civilization remained behind in that world destroyed by the enemy. It remained there, on the margins of his consciousness, like the words of the poem that bring the city back to life but which he cannot remember. As for the generations that come after, those born into the new land, their literal homeland, they have no memory at all of that other world and are thereby normalized as the indigenous population of the land. Having forgotten not only the words of the poem but its very existence and all that it symbolized, they are bereft of the civilization that made their own existence

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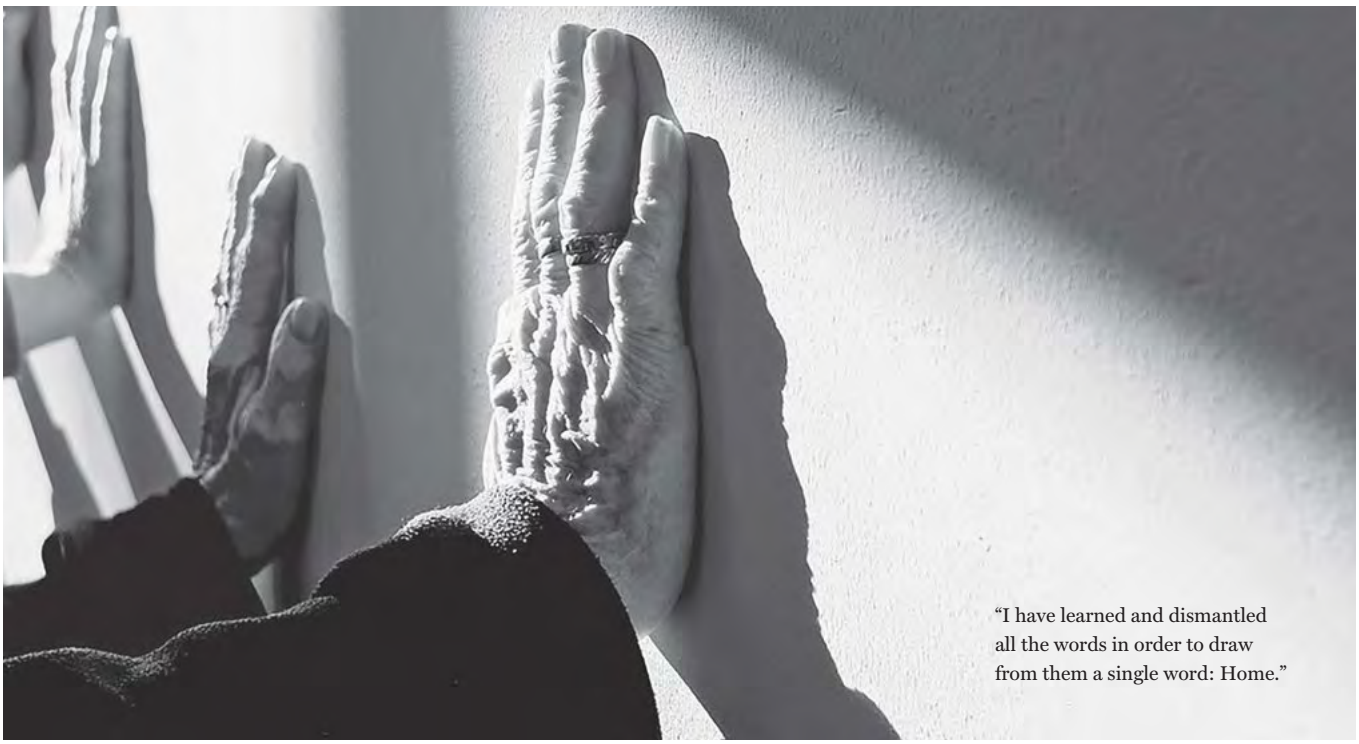
a hope and a dream. They do not know that they are the last link in a long chain and imagine themselves as newly made, as the originators of it all. They reside in their own myth of creation oblivious to the origins of their very existence. They thus claim a right to a place based on a history of faith and tradition of which they know nothing; all that is left to them is their indigeneity, which is by definition newer and more tenuous than that of those they had displaced. Hence it must be backed up with fire and sword.[11]

Agnon's own creation myth of Buczacz is, of course, largely divorced from the historical record, and he must have been as aware of that as anyone who has studied this complex interethnic world subjected to many rulers and regimes. The city, in brief, was not founded by Jews. But in another sense Buczacz, and innumerable cities like it, did become a city because of the Jews, and ceased to be one when they were murdered. The violence that made for the destruction of those cities was just as deeply embedded in assertions of origins as were the fantastic tales of pristine beginnings. The Jews were hardly alone in seeing themselves as the originators of it all. In this imaginary genealogy of origins, the local peasants, later known as Ruthenians and later still as Ukrainians, lay claim to being the indigenous population, trampled upon, oppressed, and exploited by their colonizers. The Poles, for their part, who literally owned the city, and for that reason long determined its history, imagined themselves as those who transformed a universe of savages into civilization, whose contours could not help but be Polish. As for the Jews, they confidently saw themselves as those who made it all happen, the commercial, managerial, financial engine that made medieval castles and estates into cities and constituted the bourgeoisie that put an end to the feudalism of nobles and serfs. But if the Ukrainians said the town was theirs because they were there first, and the Poles said it was theirs because they had built it, the Jews then conceded that they had not only wandered in from elsewhere but were also, in fact, on their way to another destination. Hence they did not belong in their town, even though they were the majority of its citizens.[12]

Agnon left Buczacz in 1908 and settled down in Jaffa. David Ben Gurion, the founding father of modern Israel, came to Jaffa two years earlier. He did not stay there but moved right away to Petah Tikva, which was populated by Jews. He did not like Jaffa because he thought there were too many Arabs there. Reportedly, he always thought that it should be torn down.[13] Agnon wrote some of his early stories there and describes it with much more compassion and eventual nostalgia. Unlike his fellow townsfolk, who served as grist to his literary mill for many years thereafter, he continued on that mythical journey to the East and reached their original destination. But like Ben Gurion, for Agnon the Land of Israel was a place of origins in the sense that it was naturally and indisputably his to settle in (although he ended up later living many years in Germany). He eventually built himself a house in Jerusalem and lived in that city for the rest of his life. He was never troubled by the relationship to that land. In this mythical tale of origins, which he never told, he had come home and was part and parcel of the great



"I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: Home."

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return of the Jewish people to their homeland. In his writing, however, the soul and spirit of Jewish civilization was elsewhere: in Buczacz, Podolia, Galicia, the land in which the Jews had stopped for a rest on the way to their place of origins and where they remained until they were murdered. For Agnon, the extinction of East European Jewry was the assassination of the essence of Jewish existence.

The Jaffa in which Agnon lived in his early years, and the Jerusalem in which he spent the rest of his life, were cities filled with Arabs. But for Agnon, with his European clothes and Galician mannerisms, his coming home to Palestine, to the land of the birth of the Jewish people, had nothing to do with the presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian townspeople and villagers. The claim of origins here did not need a mythical tale spun by an author—it was in the Bible and the myriad texts and prayers, poems, and lamentations that followed it. It was, essentially, ours. But as that home was built, as modern tenements went up and cities sprouted, that other population was pushed out ever more to the margins of awareness and existence. The Jews in Palestine imagined themselves as the majority even though they were a minority, just as the Jews of Buczacz were seen as a minority even though they were the majority. Long before Agnon began building his city—the Buczacz whose Jews had been murdered—other concrete cities were displacing the Arab population that surrounded him in Israel. Within the span of a few years, Jews were no longer the majority or substantial minority in Eastern Europe's cities; indeed, in most cases they were entirely gone; and almost simultaneously in historical time, the Jews of Palestine were transformed from a minority into a majority: their own population tripled thanks to mass immigration of survivors from Europe and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, and the Arab population was reduced by three quarters with the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948.[14]

Yet, traces of that other tale of origins remained, visible to anyone who wished to look, in abandoned villages, untended groves, cactus fences, and neglected cemeteries. These concrete, tactile origins of the land challenged the Jewish story of return home, the home that was said to be indisputably the origin of it all, the very beginning of everything, entirely and absolutely theirs, by covenant with God and through the sword of Joshua. These troubling reminders of another story, of other origins, had to be removed. And so they were demolished, 400 villages pulled down, planted over, and erased from maps and memory.[15] And in Buczacz, in 2001, the last remaining Jewish house, *beit hamidrash* in which Agnon used to pray as he looked out to the Fedor Hill, where in 1943 half of the Jewish community was murdered and buried in mass graves, was also demolished and replaced by a modern shopping mall. There is now a street in Buczacz called Vulitsa Agnona, where a new plaque and bust of the famous writer stand. It boasts that this little provincial town had produced a Nobel Prize laureate, but it never mentions that he was Jewish and wrote in Hebrew. In this story of origins, Agnon has become Ukrainian, just as Bruno Schulz, the great writer and artist of nearby Drohobycz, was claimed decades after his murder to be a Polish writer by the Poles, an inhabitant of Western Ukraine by Ukrainians, and a Jewish victim of the Holocaust by Yad Vashem.[16]

To each his origins and oblivion; and yet, even as the cold wind howls over the mass graves and through the skeletons of synagogues in Ukraine, and as the sun burns down upon the scars left by Israeli bulldozers and demolition crews, the scattered sabra fences and broken terraces, the tales and myths, the memories and remnants of the past refuse to go away, each claiming their right to have once existed, to be remembered and respected. For all these tales of origins appear to have always had deep within them the seeds of their own ruin and erasure:

I belong there. I have memories. I was born as everyone is born.
I have a mother, a house with many windows, brothers, friends, and a prison cell
With a chilly window! I have a wave snatched by seagulls, a panorama of my own.
I have a saturated meadow. In the deep horizon of my word, I have a moon,
A bird's sustenance, and an immortal olive tree.
I have lived on the land long before swords turned man into prey.
I belong there. When heaven mourns for her mother, I return heaven to her mother.
And I cry so that a returning cloud might carry my tears.
To break the rules, I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood.
I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a *single word:* Home.[17] ■

## Notes

1. S. Y. Agnon, *A City in Its Fullness*, ed. Alan Mintz and Jeffrey Saks, multiple translators (New Milford, CT: Toby, 2016), 31. This is an abridged translation from the Hebrew of *Ir u-Melo'ah* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1973).
2. *A City in Its Fullness*, 31-7.
3. Please contact magazine@tikkun.org for the complete list of footnotes.

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# More Glorious than God

## Culture and Identity in an Age of Ignorance

JEREMY BASS

THE FORCES ALIGNED AGAINST the individual in our current sociopolitical moment are staggering. Even as our society seems poised to embrace a more expansive concept of inclusion and diversity, the backlash of misogyny, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia has grown in response. It is difficult to look at the events of recent months and not conclude that we live in a culture defined by conflict. One of the most urgent conflicts we face today as a society is between individuals attempting to inhabit a unique sense of their own identity and a significant portion of society that denies, in increasingly violent ways, both that individual's identity and their right to claim it. This conflict—between prejudice and inclusion, the clash of cultures and the fractured totality they create—has sadly become the narrative of our country. But it is arguably also the narrative of human history. In an interview given over 50 years ago, James Baldwin said, "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read."[1] The written word offers not just an immediate response to our moment in time, it reminds us that our struggles are historical, providing a connection to "all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive."[2] All the more prescient, then, is poet Robert Pinsky's new book *At the Foundling Hospital* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux; $23), a work that grapples with our historical connection to the vibrant and violent forces that create culture, and to the foundlings who are cast off along the way.

"I'm tired of the gods, I'm pious about the ancestors," Pinksy declares in his poem "Creole." It is a fitting tagline for a book that opens with the description of Hermes inventing the lyre from "wiry rabbitflesh . . . pulled taut across the gutted / resonant hull of the turtle," and whose last poem, quoting an old saying, ends "*that's the story of my life*." It also reframes what for Pinsky is an essential human trait: reverence, in this case, not for religion, but for culture and the act of creation itself. For Pinsky, our culture is inherently Creole, bred from different histories and identities into a whole.

The ways in which we create and change culture—and the ways in which culture forms around us and changes us—have always been the central obsession of Pinsky's work. From the first poem of his first book, "Poem About People," to the wide-ranging associative poems in 2010's *Gulf Music*, Pinsky examines our myriad acts of creation in musical, muscular lines that pulse with humor and intellectual rigor. Greek gods, saxophones, song lyrics, and family stories. *At the Foundling Hospital,* Pinsky's seventh volume of poetry, finds the poet laureate mining themes he's made his own over four decades of writing, and loading every rift with ore.

Readers familiar with Pinsky's greatest hits—"History of My Heart," "What Where When How Whom," "At Pleasure Bay," and "The Shirt"—will find new favorites in *At the Foundling Hospital*, which contains trademark interweavings of stories and history spliced together through meditations on the meaning of names and language, phrases, of music, or popular sayings. "I confess," he says in "Creole," "I find that Creole work more glorious than God"; it is in these poems that Pinsky's reverence for the patchwork amalgamation of our fractured culture is most palpable and enjoyable.

In Pinsky's seventh volume of poetry, he explores the ways in which culture forms around us and changes us.



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Pinsky's work grapples with our historical connection to the vibrant and violent forces that create culture and to the foundlings who are cast off along the way.

Take the poem "Running with Noodles," where the etymology of a derogatory name for Italian immigrants, "noodles," is traced back to the creation of pasta in Italy, itself a combination of imports from China and South America: "Columbus brought Italy the *pomo d'oro* / As Marco Polo brought the noodle from Asia." Thus: "Spaghetti with red sauce is Aztec and Chinese." "Creole" presents perhaps the most declarative depiction of this sentiment while navigating a discursive framework: political maneuvering between Jews and Italians in postwar New Jersey is retold alongside the creation of languages in the hinterlands of the Roman Empire:

> The Roman colonizing and mixing, the Imperial processes
> Of legal enslaving and freeing, involved not just the inevitable
>
> Fucking in all sense of the word, but also marriages and
> births
> As developers and barbers, scribes and thugs mingled and
> coupled
>
> With the native people and peoples. Begetting and trading,
> they
> Had to swap, blend and improvise languages . . .

In this sense, poems in this new book reach back to Pinsky's earliest work, where "prose virtues" are employed to harness the "clarity, flexibility, efficiency [and] cohesiveness" normally reserved for historical analysis or memoir (*Situation of Poetry,* 162). Pinsky uses this mode of discourse to claim, as he states in his earliest book of criticism, *The Situation of Poetry*, "the right to make an interesting remark or to speak of profundities, with all the liberty given to the newspaper editorial, a conversations, a philosopher, or any speaker" (*Situation*, 145).

Other poems, such as the aptly named "Culture," attempt less of a coherent resolution between disparate things and rejoice instead in chaos: Auto-Tune software and Rwandan history mashed up against T. S. Eliot and Charlie Chan, the clash of objects and images creating a web of cross-pollination as intricate as the culture and history it attempts to describe. "The City" juxtaposes Pinsky's memories of his youth with reflections on the "village" where he lives now, trying to locate, among memories and musings, the elusive center of the modern city:

> Sometimes I think I've never seen the City,
> That where I've been is just a shabby district
> Where I persuade myself I'm at the center.
>
> Or: atrocities, beheadings, mass executions,
> Troops ordered to rape and humiliate—the news,
> The Psalms, the epics—what if that's the City?

"The City" grapples with a question that is fundamental to Pinsky's poetry and criticism, that "the truest political component of poetry is the sense of whom the poem belongs to" (*Poetry and the World*, 122). If the City has a center, Pinsky argues, it inevitably creates a periphery, a space where foundlings languish and die.

A foundling is "an infant that has been abandoned by its parents and is discovered and cared for by others."[3] "Foundling" is not a word that is much in circulation these days (as opposed to the word "orphan"), and Pinsky's use of the Middle English derivative suggests an attention both to the roots of the English language, itself a Creole invention, and to the pervasiveness of abandonment throughout history. The word also emphasizes in particular the act of discovering

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If the city has a center, Pinsky argues, it inevitably creates a periphery, a space where foundlings languish and die.

and caring for what has been lost. Part of the mission of *At the Foundling Hospital* is to gather and reclaim, if only through language, individuals or groups of individuals who have been denied a place in the larger historical narrative. This happens on a singular level as well as a collective one, from Pinsky's classmate from grammar school, "the foolish one who died in the course of war," to "Chinese immigrants / In the dark Angel Island / Internment cells of San Francisco." Pinsky includes not only human beings in his search but also disappearing languages and abandoned cities, arts and styles lost to time. His poem, "Improvisation on Yiddish" (Yiddish, the speaker observes, is "Tongue of the dear and the dead, tongue of death"), mingles Yiddish phrases with variations on their meaning, while "Orphan Quadrille" catalogues dying elements of culture in a song that is both elegy and celebration:

> Lost arts of cochineal enamel and earthen bell foundry.
> Shelling of the Parthenon, flooding of Sioux burials.
> Let's caper in memory of our mothers and fathers.
> (*Step and turn, step to me darling*)

At the heart of this volume is "The Foundling Tokens," a poem that collects many of the book's overarching themes in a single place: the Foundling Museum, itself a creation of culture dedicated to memory. Here we find abandoned children, the need to name and create meaning through names, the etymology of words and our darkest periods of history, all linked by the fundamental urge to create, even if just through "fragment[s] of a tune or a rhyme or name / Mumbled from memory."

The power of naming is fundamental to Pinsky, both in the fact that names are often variations on a larger theme, more akin to music than language, and also because they imprint on their owners deep intention and meaning. Names are "arbitrary but also essential. . . . Not just an allusion, but also an example." There are entire poems in *At the Foundling Hospital* that read like associative catalogues where Pinsky explores the interchangeability of names and, by extension, the interchangeability of experience:

> My real name is Israel Berlin. My father
> Was a Roman slave who gained his freedom.
> I was first named Ralph Waldo Ellison but

> I changed it to the name of one of your cities
> Because I was born a Jew in Byelorussia.

The various speakers in "Mixed Chorus" claim the freedom not only to give and take experience but also to form their own identities, choosing their own names and lineage:

> My other name is Flaccus. I wrote an essay
> On the theme You Choose Your Ancestors.
> It won't be any feeble, conventional wings

> I'll rise on—not I, born of poor parents. Look:
> My ankles are changed already, new white feathers

> Are sprouting on my shoulders: these are my wings.

As the speaker's tone and the variety of names suggest, *At the Foundling Hospital* situates the drive for the creation and expression of identity in a cosmic and historical context that is much larger than any one life. In the poem "Procession," for example, "submillimeter waves from across the universe" carry inside them the web of couplings and births that leads to any one individual, "everybody by descent the outcome of

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These later poems attest to the interpretability of language and the adoptive and adaptive nature of shared experience, even as they spell out our doom.

a rape. / Everybody also the outcome of a great love." All of this is imagined inside the network and wiring of "an array of antennae / Sensitive to the colors of invisible light" on a sacred mountain in Hawaii, where each ray of light contains the whole of human history riding "astride matched tortoises on a road / nine microns wide":

> The heart of each telescope on Mauna Kea,
> Is a tube finer than a hair on Vishnu's head.
>
> On each hair of each Vishnu's head, a procession
> Of subatomic tortoises crosses the universe.
>
> In the skull of each tortoise in that procession
> A faceted jewel attuned to a spectral channel
>
> Where Kronos eats us his children, each contracting
> By each one's nature a micron suture of light.

*At the Foundling Hospital* ends with a series of short, compressed poems that are surprising given Pinsky's predilection for broad, wide-ranging meditations. Borrowed blood, the end of civilization, robots shaped like dragonflies that take to the sky "in varying unison and diapason . . . [to] dance the forgotten," these poems read like parables of the end-times of civilization, a dissolving of the very fabric other poems in the book attempt to construct. Translations from Hebrew and Baroque Spanish, meditations sprung from the Bible and the Torah, these later poems attest to the interpretability of language and the adoptive and adaptive nature of shared experience, even as they spell out our doom. It is not exactly an uplifting vision, though it bears along a cold kind of beauty. The robots who dance our extinct culture in the sky mirror the sensors on Mauna Kea: "Their exquisite sensors will comprehend our very dust, / And re-create the best and the worst of us, as though in art."

If Pinsky chooses a historical instead of personal or political lens to view the theme of identity in culture, it must be acknowledged that this is a luxury he comes to by way of his own identity. Poets of color, queer poets, poets whose native language is not English or whose expressed identity places them outside what is currently accepted in our seesaw culture of ostracization and appropriation are often denied "permission" to write from a purely historical or cosmic lens, relegated instead to a restrictive category of "identity poetry." This seems, however, less of a reason to discount Pinsky in this particular context, but rather a cause to read him as closely as, say, the stunning recent work of Claudia Rankine or Ocean Vuong, and to read these books in dialogue with one another. *At the Foundling Hospital*'s attempt to examine the struggle between individuals and culture is an extension of Pinsky's career-long dedication to the democratization of poetry and the power of the written word to transform language into a more universal experience. These poems are imbued with a sense of generosity and inclusion that is sorely missing from many who might claim a similar identity. "Not everything that is faced can be changed," Baldwin wrote, "but nothing can be changed until it is faced."[4] In the face of simplistic ignorance and enmity, in the grip of conflict that seems both senseless and unavoidable, it is a blessing that contemporary poetry continues to grapple with the complex and difficult, establishing a conversation that is more necessary to have now than it has ever been. ■

## Notes

1. James Baldwin, "There's a Bill Due that Has to Be Paid," *LIFE*, May 24, 1963, 81-83.
2. ibid.
3. *Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Oxford Dictionaries, en.oxfordictionaries.com/definition/foundling. Accessed December 12, 2016.
4. James Baldwin, "As Much Truth as One Can Bear," *New York Times Book Review*, January 14, 1962.

JEREMY BASS is a writer and musician based in Brooklyn, NY. His poems and reviews have appeared in *The Nation*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Boston Review*, *New England Review*, and *Kenyon Review Online*, among others. Read, listen, and find out more at: www.jeremybassmusic.com.

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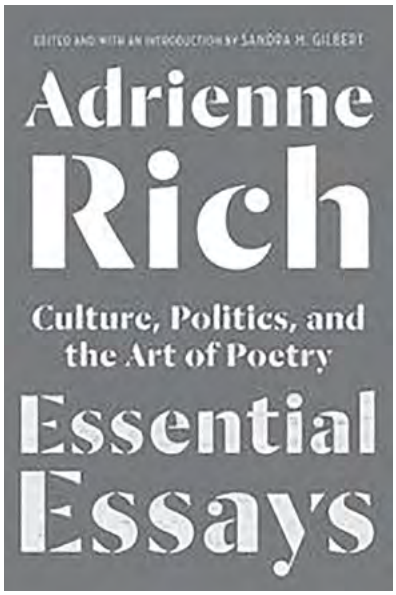
# Rich's *Essential Essays*

ALICIA OSTRIKER

A POET IN 1997 REFUSES to accept a National Medal for the Arts and writes an open letter to President Clinton to explain why. She cares, she explains, about "the relationship of art to justice;" she names a dozen of the many webs of injustice in her society by a government in which both major political parties "display a crude affinity for the interests of corporate power, while deserting the majority of the people, especially the most vulnerable"; she prefers not to accept a gift from a government that is, in fact, hostile to the arts. In 1991 in the extraordinary collage-poem "Atlas of the Difficult World," she had stated, "A patriot is one who wrestles for the soul of her country / as she wrestles for her own soul." But by that time, Adrienne Rich had been refining her moves as a wrestler in and with language for decades.

For half a century, Adrienne Rich was a major American poet and our premier radical, feminist, Jewish thinker. She was adored and hated. To me, she seems a prophet, treading a path like those of the biblical prophets, speaking truth to power. It is odd to realize that she has been gone for over half a decade. Her *Essential Essays* are as exciting to me now as they were when they first came out, or came *on,* starting in the 1960s and 70s, bearing their cargo of intellect, rage, and hope, illuminated by the poet's exactitude of feeling and language. My generation was living through the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Drug Wars, the war on poverty, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X, riots in the cities, and the rise of the religious Right. This was also the period of the Civil Rights movement, "Second Wave" Feminism, the beginning of the Gay Rights movement, the start of environmentalism, the birth of rock and roll. As Plato says, "When the music changes, the walls of the city tremble." Wealth and power were pressing down upon the poor and powerless; the poor and powerless were resisting, striking back, often through the medium of the arts. As Americans, we are still being torn apart by these ongoing struggles.

Then and now, as a feminist Jewish poet and seeker, I respond to Rich's prose with ardent assent, streaked at times with equally ardent dissent. She is still that provocative, radical "thinking woman" who recognized, with horror and anger, that everything in our society conspires to make a thinking woman sit down and shut up. I still experience the awe I felt as an insecure young wife, mother, and teacher, watching this woman barely ten years older than I, resolutely and eloquently probing the tight connection between dysfunction in society and her own divided self. In one of her most famous early poems, "Diving into the Wreck," the poet descends to "the deep element" to investigate what she calls "the wreck and not the story of the wreck, / The thing itself and not the myth . . . . to see the damage that was done / and the treasures that prevail." The metaphor here is a brilliant successor to T. S. Eliot's metaphor of society and self as "The Waste Land." Rich implies that the history of civilization, American history, the poet's family history, her personal life, her psyche—all these intricately nested phenomena—can be understood as a "wreck." A woman who could evoke the history of malaise in our society, along with the suppressions stored in our individual and collective subconscious, by using the simple metaphor of a submerged wreck, was the kind of poet I thought I might want to become.




Adrienne Rich is a woman who could evoke the history of malaise in our society, along with the suppressions stored in our individual and collective subconscious.

Rich's essays, like her poetry, were indeed essential reading for my generation of feminists, suckled on Betty Friedan's



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Adrienne Rich forces us to look inside ourselves and speak truth to our own power.

*The Feminine Mystique,* but wanting to be more than mad housewives. Each new work of hers removed blindfolds, and opened vistas. Sometimes they poured salt in wounds. Her writing was making us want to heal, not hide, our woundedness. Her early essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" was a wake-up call to the woman writer, to learn "how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative"; we needed, she said, to re-examine the writing of the patriarchal past "to break its hold over us." The essay "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" broke the hold of depictions of Dickinson as Belle of Amherst, half-cracked recluse, writing merely to compensate for a broken heart. (These painfully condescending stereotypes are still with us, incidentally; cf. the 2017 film *A Quiet Passion.*) Rich sees Dickinson as powerful, relentless, a volcano of language and emotion erupting against all odds in her Puritan-dominated culture. "It is always what is under pressure in us, especially under pressure of concealment—that explodes in poetry," Rich wrote. After her definitive commentary on the neglected poem "My Life had stood—a loaded Gun," critics could never read Emily Dickinson the same way again. Tutored by Rich, I share with every new set of poetry workshop students my mantra: "Kill the censor. Write what you're afraid to write."

The 1982 essay "Split at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity" moves into issues of race and class. It begins as an autobiography. Rich's mother was a genteel WASP, her father an "assimilated" Jewish intellectual, physician, and gentleman for whom overt Jewishness was to be avoided and East European Jews were, in a sense, trayf. The essay ends by locating anti-Semitism within a more broadly racist society, while recognizing that victims of oppression can themselves become oppressors. To be a Jew was, for Rich, to be a divided being. As a well-off white girl, she was a privileged participant in an unjust society. As a Jew, she was an outsider, but this condition led to identification with other outsiders. She had to take her stand, she wrote, among the powerless. Influenced by James Baldwin, she stated what still unfortunately needs stating, "that racism was poisonous to white as well as destructive to Black people." She wrote, "The history that really concerned me [was] the history of the dispossessed." Belatedly, she came to recognize that Jewish traditions, religious and secular, "included a hatred of oppression and an imperative to pursue justice and care for the stranger."

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And what of Israel/Palestine? Israel is not her topic in this essay, but the settlements were already expanding, and the Sabra and Shatila massacre took place in the same year as this piece of acute self-examination. In later years Rich became a notable critic of the Occupation. During the Al Aqsa Intifada, she wrote that a military occupation "is the continuation of war by any means possible: humiliations, detentions without charges, searches and seizures, demolition of homes, destruction of harvests . . . force that can destroy but cannot build."

Back in 1976, Rich's book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* spoke most forcefully to my own situation: barely coping as a scholar, teacher, poet, and mother of three young ones. Rich made it abundantly clear that patriarchal society is utterly hypocritical in its treatment of motherhood and mothers, building cages where it pretends to honor, stacking the deck against women's finances, freedoms, and physical bodies. I was struck by an anecdote encapsulating what mothers are for in a patriarchal society—to give birth to sons who will kill and be killed for their country. Rich tells of mentioning to a French woman that she had three sons. "Madame," replied the woman, "vous travailler pour l'armée," which translates to: Madam, you're working for the army. My own son had been born a few days after we invaded Cambodia and shot the students at Kent State University. My obstetrician (who had given me drugs I didn't want) had handed me the baby saying, "Listen to this one yell. He'll be a soldier."

Each of these works touched a nerve—or opened a window—for me personally. I think they will do the same for anyone who reads them. Rich, as a self-examining human being insistent on probing the truths of her and our lives, and the structures of our society as still ruled by white men and masculinist ideology, is someone you just can't turn away from. She is too serious, too smart, and too honest. Like Walt Whitman, Muriel Rukeyser, James Baldwin, and (recently) Claudia Rankine, each of whom along with poetry or fiction composes critical essays grappling with self and society, she is an American prophet.

I argued with some of her ideas, (a Jew, in my view, is someone who argues). The essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" was, for me, a bomb exploding right on my corner. Her impassioned arraignment of male law, custom and power over women's bodies was brilliant. But was I, a straight woman, merely brainwashed? Her case for lesbianism (it is not a "defense") made me feel condescended to, disrespected, as a woman in a long and largely pleasurable marriage. Her conviction that heterosexuality is not natural but culturally imposed on women seemed to ignore the whole of the animal kingdom to which we as mammals belong. Her rejection of the possibility that heterosexual love is something natural for women seemed to me dead wrong. I was a little jealous of lesbian love, and drawn to


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(*though honestly the people who do come have the most fun*).

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the intellectual and emotional energy of my lesbian students and friends, but this essay was as if "the lesbian continuum" must now itself be compulsory. I felt the shadow of political correctness creeping up. Her treatment of motherhood also seemed to me somehow unbalanced; the sheer, grueling, sometimes maddening, burden experienced by mothers, and their perpetual sense of guilt—she got that right. The failure of society to support the health and well-being of the women responsible for birthing and nurturing our nation's young—Rich was quite rightly infuriated by that. But where in her analysis was the experience of maternal joy? The pride? Were Rich's sons nothing *but* burdens to her? Was her deep love of them *only* a handicap? And her Jewishness—how is it that in this essay she seems incurious about Jewish texts and Jewish traditions, not to mention the God Jews profess to worship? The God other Jewish feminists such as Judith Plaskow find in need of repair? In my own wrestling with tradition, I didn't really want to "break the hold" of past literature; I wanted a transformed future to grow out of it.

The questions and criticisms I had back then return to me as I read now—and the experience of this is, as I said, exciting. Rich makes me read attentively. She makes me examine my own thoughts and my own emotions. I like that in a writer. Disagreement can be as stimulating as agreement is reinforcing, if the writer is good enough. If the essays excite me more now than when I first encountered them, it is that hindsight shows me how profoundly indebted to them my own work has been over the years.

> **Rich makes me read attentively. She makes me examine my own thoughts and my own emotions.**

Rich's experience of Judaism is not mine. Hers was upper-middle class Southern, entangled in social shame; mine was working-class, socialist, idealist. My parents, deep-rooted atheists ignorant of the Bible as well as of Jewish custom and ritual, had no awareness that their ideals derived ultimately (and intimately) from the Hebrew prophets. You could draw a straight line from Isaiah shouting "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked" and "love the stranger" to my mom and dad, but they didn't know it. Perhaps this was true of Rich's parents as well; she remarks that her mother never went to church, nor her father to temple. Yet her constant pursuit of justice has an unmistakably Jewish cast that is instantly recognizable—and threatening to power, threatening to every status quo. But the most precious gift of Rich's wrestling with Judaism to me is her passionate acceptance of the condition of outsider as "thinking woman." Like many writers, I feel myself to be deeply lonely. A misfit. A clumsy outsider looking at other people's lighted windows. With Rich at my elbow, I don't mind so much. I can see my loneliness as liberating. I can be like Dickinson inviting her niece into her bedroom-workspace, pretending to lock the door, saying "Matty: here's freedom." Or like Rich herself, I can struggle to deal with my own contradictions.

More than perhaps anything else in her writing, Rich's chapter on mother-daughter alienation in *Of Woman Born,* reprinted in this volume, transformed my life. My relationship with my mother had been tortured for decades. I had thought my anger at her was purely personal—anger at her narcissism, her neediness, her clinging to me, her fits of screaming that she was not loved enough. Reading Rich arguing that daughters' rejection of mothers is built into our culture—that I was *trained* to despise my mother, was a revelation. If this was true, I could try to untrain myself. I could stop laughing at the stereotype of the "Jewish mother." I could try to stop blaming my mother for making me an outsider. I could uncover the compassion beneath my anger and the love beneath that. I knew this would take decades and it did. At the same time, I was able to see that the feminism of my entire generation suffered from the absence of love for our mothers—our mothers' minds and bodies. We blamed our mothers for our insufficiencies. We were armored against their passion for us. We liked to quote Virginia Woolf, "we think back through our mothers, if we are women," but we didn't mean that literally.

Here is where my quest as a Jew comes in. My feminist wrestling with Jewish texts and traditions, in the form of midrash, poetry, and personal essay, led me inexorably to the conviction that the being we in the West call "God the Father" swallowed (repressed, denied, rejected, made to disappear, and appropriated the powers of) the goddesses of Middle Eastern prehistory. But in kabbalah, the tradition of Jewish mysticism, I discovered the Shekhinah. Originally an abstraction signifying "dwelling" and denoting God's Presence, the gender of the word morphed over centuries into a persona—a female figure signifying God's Presence among us, God's estranged other self, a Divine Female whom Jewish mystics today may name "She Who Dwells Within," as feminist rabbi Lynn Gottleib suggests. Why not recognize that we desperately need such a figure? Some congregations, especially within the Jewish Renewal movement, do invoke the Shekhinah. As the Reconstructionist scholar and therapist Barbara Breitman puts it, "God is coming through the women this time." But she is not a living presence for most Jews. Most Jews, in fact, have never heard of her. To extend my metaphor, I believe that the Divine Female is alive in the belly of the beast, like the grandmother inside the wolf in the old tale—that God the Father is metaphorically pregnant with God the Mother and that men and women can be



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midwives and help her be born into the world again. This is part of what tikkun olam means to me. I take the metaphor of the midwife from an Adrienne Rich poem, "The Mirror in Which Two Are Seen as One,"

> your mother dead and you unborn
> your two hands grasping your head
> drawing it down against the blade of life
> your nerves the nerves of a midwife
> learning her trade

In the course of writing a book of poems ultimately published as *the volcano sequence,* I found myself invoking the repressed Shekhinah as mute, amnesiac, exiled, and needing to be discovered/recovered in the form of our actual imperfect mothers. Can we stop rejecting them? Can we stop turning our backs? Can we face them and see in them the Divine Female who comes down to us through the ages, along a hidden tunnel of female flesh? Men and women can share in this recovery, which has only just begun. It turns out that Rich's chapter on mothers and daughters in *Of Woman Born* was, for me, a key unlocking a sacred space. I see in retrospect that Adrienne Rich, utterly secular though she was, became, for me, a muse leading me to a vista that was personal, political, and spiritual—even theological.

Other readers reading Rich's essays today will find themselves dealing with their own demons, their own issues. Her diagnoses of the illnesses from which our world suffers remain accurate. But throughout her essays she has stressed the need for social and personal transformation as two facets of the same struggle. *The Will to Change* was the title of her second book; she kept that will alive to the age of eighty-three. With so many threads to the web of her thought, one's response can travel in a multitude of directions. What I find myself noticing as perhaps *the* overarching fact of her writing on whatever topic is that she is fearlessly personal. However much research she has done, she is never "academic." She never pretends to be an impersonal "objective" authority. She lets us know how her thinking arises from the circumstances of her life, thereby alerting us to this undeniable fact in our own lives. In her prose as in her poetry, Rich makes the personal and the political inseparable. We therefore trust her, even where we disagree. She has been an influence on American poetry and on American thinking about gender, race, art, human psychology, and politics. I have tried to follow her example of honesty in my own writing. And the need continues. Rich's 1971 indictment of "the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society" speaks precisely to our present condition in America and the world. The essay "Arts of the Possible" in 1997 calls us "a nation in . . . extreme pain." What we do about that is up to us.■

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

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# Poetry at *Tikkun*, the Why and the Wherefore

JOSHUA WEINER

Poems are, within themselves, entire worlds, made of words.

TIKKUN: to heal, repair, and transform the world. The magazine's title, the meaning of that word, announces its mission, its obligation. The world, it's said, was created by ten utterances. How could they not have been poetry? Poetic utterance, inherently creative, is our common source of origin. Repair and transformation not only take place in poems, but they take place in ourselves when we read them, when we say them. We could put it more accurately: when poetry takes place, it creates place, something like a dwelling place, for mind and heart. Our everyday language is very poor, it barely gets the job done; poetry transforms such language, giving itself transforming powers, which are transitive.

Poetry, of course, cannot change us unless we allow it to, unless we open ourselves to it; but it can catch us off guard. The sounds of words organized into artful sequences may have something like therapeutic properties; and what those sounds mean, what they tell us about the world, ourselves, our relations, may also inspire us to pay attention, to act, to speak up, and out. But they are also, themselves, entire worlds, made of words; and their metonymies continually enact transformation and completion, even when they remain indeterminate, unresolved, and open.

Poetry has not only the capacity to help heal the psyche and transform our vision, it dramatically presents such actions; poems formally stage our comprehension, and help us see more, hear more; they help us understand others. Poems are an existential technology, of survival, progress, and growth.

*Tikkun* has always included poetry in its pages because Rabbi Michael Lerner, from the beginning, intuited the role that poetry had to play in promoting a progressive vision. Also, he knew that readers liked poems—that they opened the magazine hoping to find a poem that might open a new window, make a new sound, present a new experience, and remind us who we are, where we come from, and why that matters. Over the years, the magazine has showcased new poems by established and younger writers, including: Yehuda Amichai, Allen Ginsberg, Mahmoud Darwish, Carolyn Forché, Shirley Kaufman, Wisława Symborska, C. K. Williams, Anne Winters, Carl Phillips, Robert Pinsky, Czeslaw Milosz, Gail Mazur, Louise Glück, Leah Goldberg, Rosellen Brown, Marie Howe, Zelda, Marge Piercy, Jerome Rothenberg, Brenda Hillman, Alicia Ostriker, Tom Sleigh, Peter Dale Scott, Jane Shore, Maxine Kumin, Primo Levi, Philip Levine, Rodger Kamenetz, Ari Banias, Joy Ladin, Moshe Dor, Cid Corman, Gerald Stern, Alan Shapiro, Jacquelin Osherow, Susan Mitchell, Agi Mishol, Spencer Reese, Jennifer Michael Hecht, Andrea Cohen, David Gewanter, Yehuda Halevi, Thom Gunn, Reginald Gibbons, Eytan Eytan, Heather McHugh, Enid Dame, David Avidan, and on, and on, and on.

I joined *Tikkun*'s editorial staff in 1987, and I stuck around, even after I left Oakland in the early 1990s. I had personal reasons. Not being very observant in the religious sense, by helping to edit the magazine, I was, in another sense, able to actually *be* Jewish in a way that's been important to me over the years. It's been an education, and a kind of practice that I've made part of my practice as a poet, a teacher, a parent, a human being. "You are not obligated to complete the work," says Rabbi Tarfon, "but neither are you free to desist from it." The work of poetry, the work of *Tikkun,* and of tikkun—these labors are ongoing, and only most meaningful when you add yourself to them. I could call it an obligation, but really, it's been a privilege, and a pleasure. ■

JOSHUA WEINER is the author of three books of poetry. He is also the editor of *At the Barriers: On the Poetry of Thom Gunn*. He is the recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award, the Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a 2013 Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, among others. Josh has been on the editorial staff of *Tikkun* since 1987. He teaches at the University of Maryland and lives with his family in Washington, DC.

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## Seven Types of Ambiguity

There are seven types of ambiguity,
maybe more, it depends—
for example, what is ambiguity?
What are means and ends?

I mean, there is an end—I say,
humiliation; people say, justify.
I say, that would make me very unhappy.
But I don't want to give it away.

I don't like to give away anything.
So we'll see, I don't know.
I'm President, that's unignorable;
in the end, does it mean anything?

So, that is one ambiguity.
Then there's my so-called ideology.
Do I have one, what could it be?
Let me be clear: there's some obscurity.

So I guess that's another kind.
Are we up to seven yet?
They're sometimes hard to find
like the veil inside my threat.

Or when I refer to people
as a source of opinion or "fact"
that's a sample of an example
that just got someone sacked.

Or when I refer to studies
that no one knows if they exist,
it makes pros look like rookies
wondering what they missed.

In fact, in the end, I mean
what's the meaning of meaning?
It's an ambiguousness machine
that makes dirty what it's cleaning.

For example, I have my opinion,
and you can have yours, as well,
and that's a kind of inversion
of a truth that's hard to dispel.

Now, you can call that a lie,
but my truth is the article "a"—
an indefinite ambiguity
that backs up whatever I say.

It's important to avoid the "the"—
except before the word President;
there's no ambiguity there
like the imp that hides in impediment.

So maybe that's the point,
and whether seven or six,
don't get your nose outta joint
sniffing my semantics.

—Joshua Weiner

I'm President,
that's unignorable;
in the end, does it
mean anything?

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## Motto

Montaigne's motto, *"que sais-je?"* My credo
not a question, "the Devil generalizes,
angels are specific." He is Lord, and I
a footman in the château of opposites.
For the hell of it I say, "the Devil is specific,
angels generalize." What do I know?
The Devil takes us to bed where he does
opposite things, licks up and down, leaving
permanent blisters wherever his tongue
plays specifically. Angels generalize,
they lead us all by the hand everywhere.
My nameless angel never tells me where I am.
The angel who caught Abraham's hand
holding the knife did so in *no man's land*.
Look: the Devil and a fallen angel
are dancing—while they dance,
the Devil gossips, "Be more concerned
that men talk of you, than how they talk of you.
Montaigne's family sold herring,
enough to buy their Château, *Eyquem*.
His grandmother's a Jew.
Angels protect herrings, not châteaus."

Translations lie. "What do I know?"
Montaigne said, "if I were accused of stealing
Notre Dame, I'd leave France." He disliked rules.
In my heart I have a valve, a bridge
that crosses the Hellespont from Europe to Asia.
The Devil is an *arriviste*. The Angel of Death
an aristocrat, loathes all saints except Julian
who returned home, from the local road
on the way to Jerusalem. He forgot
his beads, murdered his mother and father—
mistaken identity—he thought a lover
was in bed with his wife. Why did they think
the dog was barking? Why did they ask
Montaigne when he was a child to drown
newborn puppies? Which he did,
saw their terrible struggle to keep the self,
the "I" Montaigne saw in every living thing.

After the dance, the Devil complained,
"You angels believe every word in the Bible is true.
Your Lord knows and wills everything, and nothing.
Why doesn't he mention India, China?
The Buddha did not think the world was flat.
Yahweh did not mention there were rattlesnakes
before Eden, chocolate and potatoes—
Confucius kept things in order.
I did not say, "confusion kept things in order."
Before the beginning, there were ages and stages,
actors, pollywogs, and frogs, years
appeared and disappeared, rattlesnakes
with calendar skins."
Faust never heard the Devil sing.

*The Devil's Song*

*I love to hear them say,*
*"The Devil take you."*
*If you believe in any god,*
*I'll take you. If you grieve*
*for the dead instead of*
*the newborn, I'll take you.*
*With one of my fingers*
*pushed into one of your holes,*
*I'll drag you off to heaven*
*where my penis is the key*
*to the pearly gates, then*
*I'll drag you down to hell.*
*Seeing heaven first makes it worse.*
*I love to take infants from the breast.*
*I play the game of shooting stags,*
*they are really papa, brother, sons.*
*I don't know if Eros is a god or angel,*
*but I exile the little enthusiast.*

The devil never takes a shower.
See how little I know?
I pin my old credo to my door.
The wind blows away my paper sign
leaving me to think life is just a door
without a roof or window.
My motto now is "what do I know?"

—Stanley Moss

STANLEY MOSS published his *Almost Complete Poems* in 2016, which won the Berru Award, and National Jewish Book Award for Poetry in 2016. He will publish a new book, *Abandoned Poems*, in the fall of 2018 with Seven Stories Press, distributed by Random House.



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The Devil gossips, “Be more concerned that men talk of you, than how they talk of you.”

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# The Fish Mistaken for a Man

I tried to explain that I was innocent, that
I had been talking about a bottom feeder,
a fish, and, under questioning, explained
that

groupers are ray-finned, and are typically
stout-bodied and large-mouthed, and that
their mouths and gills form a strong suck-
ing

system which can suck their prey in from
a considerable distance, known in politics
as a sphere of influence. As I spoke, I saw
that

the eyes of my interrogators slid sideways
as if to say You gotta be kidding, which was
not so. I had, I insisted, been talking about a
fish,

not of a hominid who might or might not be
ten fingers shy of a load, aye, a ten-fingered
fish out of water, out of his depth, not even
one

elected by a self-decreed landslide, although
it's true that a grouper can weigh up to 220
pounds, heft of a groper wearing a long, red
tie.

—Jon Swan

Their mouths and gills form a strong sucking system which can suck their prey in from a considerable distance

JON SWAN is a poet, translator, and journalist. Jon's poems have been published in *The Atlantic*, *Antaeus*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Harvard Magazine*, and *Tikkun Magazine*.

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