Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

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

Remembering Peter Gabel

Special Issue Celebrating the Legacy of *Tikkun* and Rabbi Michael Lerner

FEATURING: Cornel West, Riane Eisler, Peter Beinart, Martha Sonnenberg, Peter Gabel, Marianne Williamson, Jeff Halper, Walter Bruggeman and poetry by Frances Payne Adler and Josh Weiner

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER holds a Ph.D. in philosophy (1972) and a second Ph.D. in psychology (1977), is editor of *Tikkun* www.tikkun.org, executive director of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, founding rabbi of *Beyt Tikkun Synagogue-Without-Walls* in Berkeley, chair of the international Network of Spiritual Progressives, and author of 12 books, most recently *Revolutionary Love* published by the University of California Press. Lerner was recently described by Professor Cornel West of Harvard U. as "one of the most significant prophetic public intellectuals and spiritual leaders of our generation" and Keith Ellison, Attorney General of the State of Minnesota, says: "The caring society is the only realistic path for humanity to survive, and in *Revolutionary Love* Rabbi Lerner lays out a powerful and compassionate plan for building that caring society." Talking about his book *Revolutionary Love*, Gloria Steinem, a founding editor of Ms. Magazine, says "Michael Lerner takes the universal qualities wrongly diminished as 'feminine'—caring, kindness, empathy, love—and dares to make them guides to a new kind of politics that can challenge the cruelty, competition, and dominance wrongly elevated as 'masculine.' *Revolutionary Love* opens our minds and hearts to a fully human way of living and governing."

Tikkun Mission Statement

Tikkun uplifts Jewish, interfaith, and secular prophetic voices of hope that contribute to universal liberation. A catalyst for long-term social change we empower people and communities to heal the world by embracing revolutionary love, compassion, and empathy. We promote a caring society that protects the life support system of the planet and celebrates the Earth and the universe with awe and radical amazement.

Foreward

We created this special issue of *Tikkun* to honor the legacy and work of Rabbi Michael Lerner and *Tikkun*. Over its almost 40 history, *Tikkun* has been a leader in integrating spirituality, politics, and activism. Of course, none of this work would have been possible or sustained for all these years without the work of all the staff and volunteers, the writers, and of course, all of you - our readers and donors. Thank you.

This special issue includes authors who have written for *Tikkun* over the years and others who are more recent contributors. It is intended to critically engage with the ideas articulated in the magazine over the past 40 years and to see what can be birthed going forward in our efforts to heal, repair, and transform our world.

Rabbi Lerner created *Tikkun* out of a desire to uplift the prophetic voice in Judaism, a moral courage and clarity shared in all faith traditions. He shone a light on the need for *tikkun olam* (healing and repairing the world) drawing on the voices of the prophets, and his mentor Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. He was able to mobilize cutting edge authors and thinkers to write for *Tikkun* and build a national following, sparking efforts to challenge selfishness and materialism and uplift the spiritual yearning that lives within all of us to live lives of meaning and purpose. He challenged new age idealism that often focuses on *tikkun ha-nefesh* (healing and repairing ourselves/souls) to the exclusion of *tikkun olam* (healing and repairing the world), reminding us that our very identities and souls are deeply informed and shaped by the society in which we are raised and live. As such, we cannot fully heal ourselves as long as we live in a society and world that is deeply distorted, materialistic, emphasizes looking out for ourselves, and is based on a bottom line of greed, money, and power.

Tikkun writers have emphasized the important work of healing and repairing ourselves so that our own traumas do not drive our behavior and responses in our personal lives, and in the ways that we engage in the world at large. Working in community and movement building, along with developing intimate relationships with loved ones and friends, are important spaces in which to engage in personal healing and growth. For that to happen, we need to provide space for such work, striving to hold each other with compassion and empathy, and engaging in a committed way in deep self reflection, personal growth, and *teshuva* (repair and reparations). *Tikkun* explored these questions and challenges, and offered a space for creative writing, poetic expressions, and deep intellectual analysis.

The Network of Spiritual Progressives (https://spiritualprogressives.org), the outreach and activist arm of *Tikkun*, brought these teachings alive through its activist work and trainings in Prophetic Empathy and Revolutionary Love. Although *Tikkun* is closing, the Network of Spiritual Progressives will continue as a project within *Beyt Tikkun: A Synagogue without Walls (http://www.beyttikkun.org)*. We will offer trainings, educational opportunities, spiritual gatherings for people from any and all traditions or spiritual inclinations, and opportunities to participate in meaningful political actions and engagement. We will also showcase interviews with and writings from leading thinkers on the pressing issues of our times. Our podcast, *Imagine with Us*, will also become a part of this project.

You can support our work by donating in honor of *Tikkun* or Rabbi Lerner here (https://spiritualprogressives.org/index.php/get-involved/donate/). As a member of the NSP, you will receive discounts to our events, trainings, and more. And, you will know that you are part of a community of like-minded spiritual progressives who seek to co-create the world for which we all so desperately yearn. We hope you will stay connected and join us!

Thank you for your support over all these years. May we co-create a loving and just world, a world so beautifully explored and articulated for over 40 years in *Tikkun* and manifested through the actions and work of the Network of Spiritual Progressives.

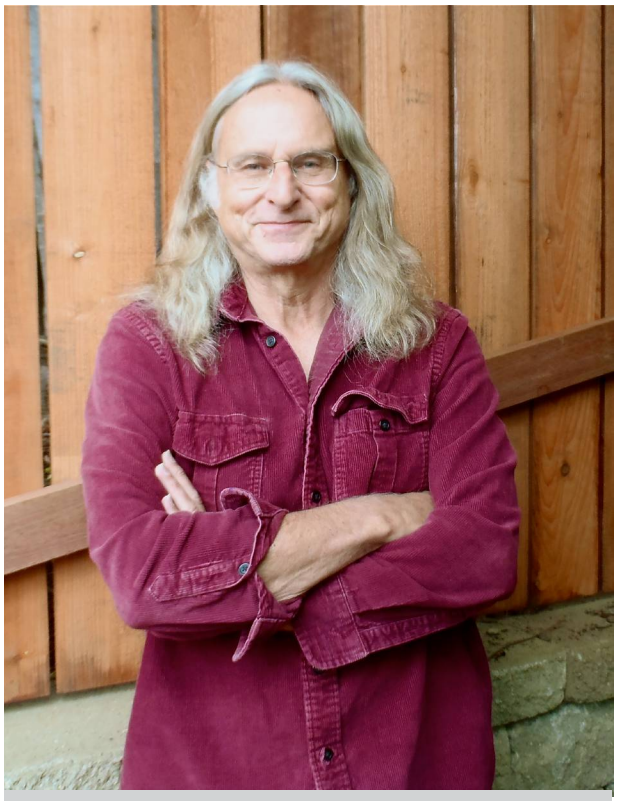
Our profound gratitude goes out to Rabbi Lerner, Peter Gabel (the editor-at-large since *Tikkun*'s inception), and all the staff over the decades who brought us hope and helped provide a vision of a different world, particularly during some of the most challenging times in our society and in the world.

May we be blessed to see a world based on a New Bottom Line of love, care, kindness, and generosity—caring for each other and caring for the world—in our lifetimes. May it be so soon.

Rabbi Cat Zavis

Beyt Tikkun
A Synagogue Without Walls
Embracing Spirituality & Social Transformation

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



Peter Gabel

Rabbi Cat Zavis

2015 Tikkun Staff

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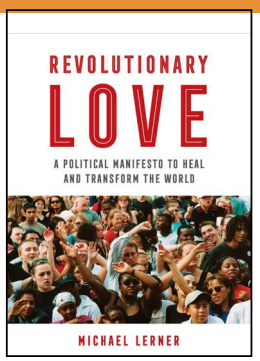
Michael Lerner

PETER GABEL (z"l)



Editor's Note: Peter Gabel (z"l) was Michael's dearest friend, most important thought partner, and a core member of the social, political and life project behind *Tikkun* since the founding of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health in 1976 (the organizational incubator for the magazine) and a member of the inner editorial board and editor-at-large from its first issue onward. Sadly he died in October, 2022 as he was curating this special issue. What follows is the text of a talk he gave in honor of Michael when Michael was awarded a lifetime achievement award by the International Associate of Sufism in Berkeley, CA.

Michael Lerner and I met in psychology graduate school at the Wright Institute in Berkeley in the fall of 1975 almost 45 years ago. Michael was a grizzled 32 and I was only 28 at the time, and we were both getting our second graduate degrees, and both seeking a new path to understanding how the psychological distortions which we felt were so ever present in American culture and which had helped to create the lunacy of the killing of 58,000 Americans and 3 million Asians in Vietnam, could be understood and integrated into the critique we already had of the injustices and inequalities of capitalism as a social and economic system. We wanted to know more fully how the psychological and the socio-economic aspects of life were connected to one another and how we could shift our life's work to focus on healing and repairing this broken world.

This perspective almost immediately made us two of the school's main critics of what we were being taught, in particular the idea that psychological distortions and suffering could be explained by problems in the isolated nuclear family. As joint veterans of the social movements of the 1960s – Michael as a leading political activist and me at that time as a counterculture rebel – we felt we knew that the problems in the family were but expressions of distortions in the wider world within which families were incubated and shaped. Michael and I became fast friends as the two people in every class who would never accept the supposedly self-evident things we were being taught about normal development and the normal explanations of psychological difficulty. We came to love each other through our common role as outcasts and trouble-makers, and we have stayed together as a couple for almost 45 years.

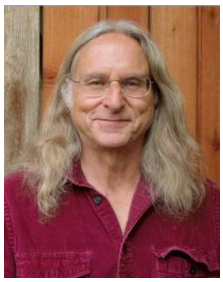
Since that time, Michael has made an incredible contribution to the effort to heal and repair the world—writing over 15 brilliant books including his most recent manifesto entitled *Revolutionary Love*, which I urge all of you to read; starting and leading and being the main writer and orator of *Tikkun* magazine, which has made such an important contribution to deepening public discourse about the psychospiritual dimension of politics, culture and society; speaking all over the country and really the world about how to integrate deep psychological and spiritual insight into the building of a transformative and healing politics; giving voice to a complex

and empathic understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and articulating a path forward that could, if followed, allow both peoples to heal their traumatic histories and live together in peace and mutual recognition of each other's humanity.

But this list of accomplishments only enumerates what Michael has done in its "outer" aspect; it fails to capture what I think is Michael's most significant contribution in what I would call its "inner" dimension—namely the moral courage that he has demonstrated throughout his life to publicly show the way toward actually being a totally committed spiritual and political being, modeling for others how to bring about a spiritual-political transformation of the world. In his Beyt Tikkun synagogue and High Holiday services, we recite the sh'ma prayer which says we must every day write the spiritual-political truth upon our doorposts and bind it upon our arm and talk about it in the public square, but in my lifetime no one has actually done this more constantly and more visibly and publicly than Michael, no matter how resistant the context is, how uncomfortable it may make listeners, and no matter how "unrealistic" it may seem to a group of a few people sitting around a table at a restaurant or coffee shop, or as has fairly often been the case, to thousands of people gathered at a conference or listening on the radio or on CNN, or even to millions of people, as was the case when Michael spoke at the televised memorial service for Muhammad Ali.

The point I'm making here is not just that Michael has shown moral courage in being willing to speak deep and important truths to people who at first think they don't want to hear it... more important than that, he has shown those of us who DO believe in what he is saying about the possibility of creating a loving and caring world that we too can insist upon this in public, that we can ourselves believe fully that the world we think can be brought about can actually be brought about, and that it is little shmo's like us who can and must say so wherever we are so that we can pass on to others the confidence that they too can dare to believe in what is in their own hearts, no matter how much they conceal their longings behind neutral facades and pleasant demeanors masking their own secret frustration and pain that the loving world they know they deserve does not yet exist in reality.

In this respect especially, Michael has been my mentor throughout my adult life, showing me how I can be, and how I ought to be, in fighting for a truly loving, caring and just world, no matter how momentarily despairing I may be feeling peering out at the vast replication of injustice in the world, no matter much I may be tempted to seek some private solution to life's challenges "bankin' off of the northeast winds, sailin' on summer breeze, skippin' over the ocean like a stone," to cite one of my favorite escapist rock and roll songs. No matter where he is or what he's doing, Michael always manifests the moral courage to stand at Armageddon and battle for the Lord, and we all thank him for it and love him for it, and rely on him for it in summoning our own power to make the world the healed and beautiful place that we know it can actually be.



PETER GABEL was the editor-at-large of *Tikkun*. His most recent book, *The Desire for Mutual Recognition: Social Movements and the Dissolution of the False Self* (Routledge Press, 2018), was nominated for the Kirkus Prize as Best Non-Fiction Book of the Year.

Honoring Michael Lerner's Contributions to Building a Better World

RIANE EISLER

Jasmin Wedding | Pexels

As a child refugee from the Holocaust who, like Rabbi Michael Lerner, is committed to building a more caring and sustainable world, I write this short piece to celebrate his 80th birthday, his leadership, and his many contributions to understanding where we came from, where we are, and the better future we must create.

Michael's Holistic Approach to Building Caring Societies

Both in earlier books, and in his Revolutionary Love, Rabbi Lerner's writings help us see that a better world is possible, and that every one of us can help bring it about. Through his devotion to *Tikkun*, he has brought his message of *tikkun olam* to many thousands. And through his insistence that love is key to our humanity, he constantly reminds us that we can, and must, put love into action.

> Michael has not hesitated to challenge what I have called our heritage from more rigid domination times: times when top-down rankings of man over man, man over woman, race over race, and man over nature were not only normalized but idealized as "divinely ordained." His has been a systems approach, in which what happens to the majority of humanity – women and children – is no longer marginalized or ignored. So in Revolutionary Love, Michael writes:
>
> "Building the psychological foundation for a partnership society requires changing the way we raise children to be more respectful, to eliminate violence entirely from the raising of children, and to eliminate hierarchical relationships between parents. When children grow up in the domination-oriented inequalities of certain family relationships, it is far easier for them to accept inequalities not only in the home but also in our economic and political lives as well."

As the above illustrates, a notable aspect of Lerner's work is his recognition of sexism as a key social issue that children internalize early on as a template for in-group versus out-group thinking, and with it, blaming "the other"–starting with blaming Eve or women. He emphasizes the earlier passage in Genesis where Elohim and not Yahweh is credited for creating both women and men, with no mention of Eve being a secondary creation, much less blaming women for all of "men's ills."

In short, Michael Lerner recognizes that the ranking of the male human form over the female human form is a template for equating difference (gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.) with superiority/inferiority, dominating/being dominated, being served/serving.

Therefore, he repeatedly decries sexism, as in this passage from Revolutionary Love:

> ". . . a Caring Society must give a high priority to dismantling patriarchal systems and all of their remnants in both the structure of our economic and family lives, and in the language, culture, and psychological proclivities that have accompanied human history for most of the past ten thousand years. We cannot have a caring society where some people receive more caring because of their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, physical appearance, beauty, or physical abilities. . . Patriarchy, sexism, racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism still have a large hold on the individual and collective consciousness of the human race and we have a long way to go before we can say honestly that they've been dealt with."

Two Voices of God

In contrast to St. Augustine's famous dogma that humanity is tainted by "original sin," Lerner firmly believes in our human capacities, indeed predispositions, for caring for one another and our natural life-support systems. Indeed, many of his writings, as well as many articles in *Tikkun* and the activities of the organization of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, that he founded and that his wife Rabbi Cat Zavis continues to run, are dedicated to building a more humane socio-economic system and environmental sustainability.

Michael rejects the idea of a punitive and vengeful deity. In that connection, he introduced a very important clarification: "two voices of God." To Orthodox Jews, Christians, and Muslims, this is nothing short of heresy. Yet to anyone who wants to make sense of contradictory Biblical passages, it is a much-needed way of making sense of our religious heritage.

Michael distinguishes between, on the one hand, the passages in the Bible that reflect the pain and violence we have been subjected to and, on the other hand, the passages that express our human possibilities for caring and compassion.

Looking at our scriptures through this lens, we can counter the use of religious passages by "religious fundamentalists" to push us toward more cruel, unequal, and violent times when rankings of domination were the social, economic, and family norm. At the same time, we can see that there is in our scriptures ancient wisdom that recognizes the need for caring and compassion.

I should add that this sorting of religious scriptures is the theme of my recent online piece in the magazine Kosmos, called "Reclaiming Spiritual Wholeness: Separating the Grain from the Chaff in Scripture." Using the domination-partnership social scale introduced by my research and writings, I call for religious leaders from all the world's faiths to join in sorting the partnership and domination elements in our scriptures, recognizing that the essential nature of caring and compassion are at the core of our sacred writings.

I invite you Michael, as well as others who read this, to join in this vital enterprise!

Paths to Healing and Transformation

There is a consistent message in Rabbi Michael Lerner's life and work: It is our responsibility to create a better world.

Even though I sometimes disagree with Michael in what I believe has been his and *Tik-*

kun's double standard for Israeli and Palestinian beliefs and attitudes, I totally resonate with his message. I do not always agree with Israeli policies, but I think it is asking too much of Israel to disregard Palestinian calls for its destruction, schools teaching children to hate Jews as "dogs" and "pigs," and Palestinian rockets and terrorism. However, I strongly agree with Michael that it is up to each of us to do everything in our power to build a more caring and sustainable world.

Here too I want to thank Michael for, at every turn, providing us with what he calls "paths to healing and transformation." So, I want to conclude this short tribute to Michael with some excerpts that describe such a path. These are examples from his book Revolutionary Love where he outlines the following paths for real educational reform:

> "We will reshape our education system so that it teaches values of love, caring, generosity, intellectual curiosity, tolerance, social and economic justice, nonviolence, gratitude, wonder, democratic participation, and environmental responsibility without abandoning necessary scientific, reading and writing skills. . ."
>
> "Alongside reading, writing, and computer skills, and as wide an array of subjects as possible, we want an education system that helps students become the kind of human beings that can make a caring society actually work. A New Bottom Line in education will resist the corporate control of childhood as manifested in child-oriented media, branding, advertising, publishing, and school curricula. And we will insist that schools foster and support our children's capacities to be playful, spontaneous, joyous, loving, excited by ideas, emotionally and spiritually mature, creative, environmentally literate, and compassionate."
>
> "Since one of our goals in the Caring Society is to eliminate the racism and classism built into the structures of our society, we will seek to undermine them in our educational system both by teaching about them at every grade level but also by eliminating the disparities between poorly-funded urban schools and wealthier suburban or private schools. . . We will advocate for higher salaries for teachers in communities with below average incomes to ensure that all schools have highly qualified teachers."

Again, regarding education, he emphasizes the need for addressing and changing the gender stereotypes that play such an important part in maintaining domination systems. He outlines these paths:

> "Resisting the media-generated social pressures on young girls to increasingly sexualize their bodies as a way of achieving social recognition in their peer groups and the sexist consciousness that transmits the message that their fundamental worth is based on their attractiveness and sexual availability to boys. Instead, girls will not only be taught how to resist any kind of sexual abuse, but also how to claim their power without losing their capacities to be loving and caring for those who have not yet been able to fully transcend the sex-stereotyped conditioning that has been handed down in families and societies for millennia."
>
> "Teaching boys about the destructive impact of patriarchal forms of masculinity. We will challenge the demand that boys grow into men who have learned to suppress their feelings and who look down upon their own nurturing instincts, men who have been taught that 'real men' are those who know how to dominate and control others. Instead, we will affirm a masculinity of gentleness, caring for others, and valuing love."

He continues:

> "We will replace sex-stereotyped behavior for both girls and boys with a wide variety of choices about how to be a caring and loving person. Children will learn to have compassion for those in the past who were not able to transcend that sex-stereotyped conditioning that led to so much suffering by both men and women. And the burden of resisting sexual abuse and sexualizing girls must rest on boys and their socialization, not on girls who are the victims of these distorted sexist behaviors and conditioning."

And he adds:

> "Other important things we will include in the education we seek to promote in the Caring Society: *how to care for our bodies, healthy eating and exercise, and learning both the biological and miraculous dimensions of life. * best practices in preparing for childbirth, raising children, and elder care *how to care for nature and study its evolution and complexity *techniques of nonviolence, the history of class societies, and the wars, hurts, and distortions that classism perpetuates *skills in writing as well as skills in reading and listening to poetry and music, and appreciation of art and the great joy of literature from Western, Eastern, and Southern cultures, and learning languages of non-Western peoples *exploring different religions of the world from selected teachers who advocate for them, as well as from atheists who disavow all of them *how to speak effectively in public, as well as how to create podcasts, films, and whatever new forms of media emerge *how to play musical instruments *how to build strong friendships and loving relationships and for high school students, how to create healthy sexual relationships..."

> And throughout he emphasizes that "activism and democratic participation should be taught not only as a school 'subject,' but also as a lifelong practicum . . ."

Thank you, Michael, you are a courageous leader and a remarkable human being.

As a man, rabbi, writer, editor, and organizer, you have made it your mission to spread religious and secular ideals. You are a rare combination of visionary and pragmatist, and your long and productive career has been an inspiration to thousands of men and women worldwide.

With much affection and appreciation,
Riane Eisler

RIANE EISLER is internationally recognized for her groundbreaking contributions as a cultural historian and futurist. Her influential books include *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future*, and *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*. She is President of the Center for Partnership Studies; Editor-in-Chief of the Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies and keynotes major conferences worldwide.

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The Birth of *Tikkun*

NAN GEFEN

PREMIERE ISSUE

*(tē - kun) To mend, repair and transform the world.

TIKKUN

SYMPOSIUM:
"What Kind of Tikkun Does the World Need?"
Gar Alperovitz, Norman Birnbaum, Gordon Fellman, Laura Geller, Danny Landes, Marshall Meyer, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, T. Drorah Setel, Marie Syrkin, Michael Walzer

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WHY TIKKUN?
Michael Lerner, editor
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. . .

ON A SPRING DAY IN 1986, A TRUCK crawled up the narrow dirt driveway to Michael Lerner's house in the Oakland hills and dumped forty boxes of the first issue of *Tikkun* on the ground. Pulling out a copy, I felt both pride and distress. Michael and I had managed to publish this issue despite knowing nothing about the magazine business, but how were we going to get these heavy boxes up the steep stairs to the house before it rained and what were we going to do with all these magazines?

This moment remains in my mind when I think back to those beginning days of *Tikkun*. For me as the founding publisher, it was a time of excitement and challenge. Two years earlier I had moved back to the Bay Area and looked up Michael. He, like me, had trained and worked as a psychotherapist and dismissed the prevailing notion that the root of mental illness is individual pathology. What about the depressed client who struggles to raise two kids alone while caring for a disabled parent, or the one with symptoms of anxiety who has been passed over for a promotion because of the color of his skin? Surely their emotional distress is increased or even created by living in a society that fails to provide reasonable support for families and harbors a divisive racism.

At that time Michael was finishing up a research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health and investigating how union organizers could help prevent mental illness in the workplace. During interviews with hundreds of workers, he and his team observed that many of these people felt powerless to change the unfair system in which they worked and lived, and they'd given up trying. They had absorbed a sense of "surplus powerlessness" that kept them from pursuing any large-scale vision of change or joining with others to demand better working conditions. As a result, they became demoralized, and their mental health suffered.

The question that intrigued both of us was how to help people like them advocate for their own best interests and the interests of others. This was the key to changing social conditions, as well as improving their lives.

I was eager to take on a new project, as was Michael, and we began to think how we could do this work. We considered various possibilities such as organizing a national movement or setting up a series of workshops, and finally we hit on the idea of starting a magazine. Small magazines, we knew, had long been influential in the U.S. as a vehicle for naming what is

unjust and figuring out what needs to be done about it.

That decided, we first needed to refine the concept and become clear about who the audience would be. Throughout his life, Michael had been a committed, practicing Jew, inspired by the imperative to seek justice, and I joined him in this. The magazine would be rooted in Jewish values, we decided, although it would include writers from all backgrounds. The issues it raised would be universal, and the audience would be people on the left or center. Hopefully it would attract leaders, politicians, and activists, but it was for anyone who wanted to connect with others who were looking for ways to bring about equality and justice for all.

We next needed to find a name. We kept coming back to the Hebrew word *tikkun*. Historically the word refers to a set of prayers and excerpts from ancient sources chanted by Orthodox Jews, but it also has the connotation of amending and fixing. Since our aim was to heal and repair the world, it was the perfect title for the magazine. We ran it by friends who told us we were crazy, that nobody would buy a magazine with an obscure name like this, but in the end we decided to take the risk. Interestingly, the word did not cause us problems, and it now appears in one English dictionary defined as "connoting social action and the pursuit of social justice."

Having decided upon the basics of the magazine, we plunged ahead and prepared the contents for the first issue. We were wildly optimistic and ordered forty thousand copies to be printed even though we didn't yet have any subscribers. On that day in 1986 when all the boxes arrived at Michael's house, we had no idea if people would indeed be interested. The venture could have been a disaster, but fortunately, the magazine took off. This was in large part due to an ad that appeared in the *New York Times* with the headline "Finally a Liberal Alternative to *Commentary* Magazine." Michael, who wrote the ad, turned out to be an inspired marketer, putting his well-honed provocative and persuasive skills to good use. The magazine went viral in a 1980s way, and radio, television, and print media tracked us down, curious about our message. Our subscription base quickly grew to many thousands of readers, and a national distributor placed copies in bookstores.

Michael, with his know-how and connections to Jewish political and intellectual circles, settled into his role as editor and became the magazine's spokesperson. We collaborated on the content of the magazine, but most of my time was spent handling the publishing end. He was the visionary while my common-sense approach helped to keep us steady. The first few years of *Tikkun*'s life passed in a whirl, and our lives were organized around its needs. In response to the enthusiasm of our readers, we organized our first conference in New York and then our second, drawing large crowds of people together to talk about the importance of healing the world and how to go about it. There was no end to the significant work that needed to be done.

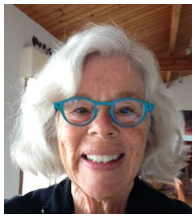
Michael and I married during this heady time. Even though our marriage did not survive, the magazine did, and it fast became an influential voice for change in political and intellectual circles. We were pleased that many people personally found community, connection, affirmation, and a sense of agency through its existence. But after a few years, I found myself drained by the intensity of the project and its overwhelming demands. I yearned to write, yearned for a quiet space to explore my mind, yearned to feel what was bubbling up inside me. I decided to leave.

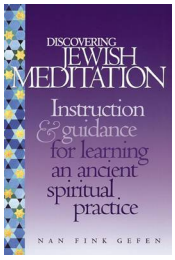
In the following decades, I kept watch over the magazine from afar and was enormously proud of its accomplishments. It continued to

thrive and grow under Michael's leadership, as I knew it would, and although there were changes such as an increased focus on psycho-spiritual concerns and a deeper connection to other faith communities, it has remained true to its origins. With his astounding energy and passionate commitment, Michael has been a leading prophetic voice, and the fifteen books he has written, his frequent speaking and media gigs, and the offshoots of the magazine (Beyt Tikkun synagogue and the Network of Spiritual Progressives) have added greatly to the magazine's impact.

He has had a lot of excellent help along the way, a bevy of editors, publishers, assistants of all kinds, interns, volunteers, consultants, friends, and family whose contributions to the magazine have been invaluable. Two people stand out at the top of this list: His closest friend, Peter Gabel, who was his sounding board as Associate Editor until his recent, untimely death. And Michael's wife, Rabbi Cat Zavis, who has graciously brought her talent and skill to the magazine and helped it continue.

I honor Michael, as we all do, for the gift of *Tikkun* during these almost-forty years. I thank him for the editorials that force me to look at myself and how I am living my life, even though they sometimes make me uncomfortable. I thank him for bringing us the voices of so many other brilliant women and men, leaving me with new ideas and always stimulated. I thank him for being my partner back in the 1980s when we co-birthed the magazine, a feat neither of us could have done alone. And most of all, I thank him for carrying the magazine forward through the decades, giving us hope that together we can heal and repair this broken but beautiful world.





NAN FINK GEFEN became the co-founder of Tikkun magazine in 1986 after practicing psychotherapy for fifteen years. In 1996 she began teaching Jewish meditation and co-founded Chochmat HaLev, a center of Jewish meditation in the Bay Area. In 2007 she founded *Persimmon Tree: A Magazine of the Arts by Women Over Sixty*. She is the author of several books, among them "*Discovering Jewish Meditation*" and "*Clear Lake: A Novel*."

Rabbi Lerner & *Tikkun*

DANNY GOLDBERG

Some time in 1986 or 1987 during *Tikkun*'s first year of publication I became a subscriber. There were always some pieces that were too academic for my pop culture brain, but I loved that Michael Lerner and the writers he published were breaking new progressive ground about the Democratic party, the American left, and what it meant to be a good Jew. The Jewish thing was a revelation to me because by the end of the Reagan era, the increasingly conservative public voices that identified as Jewish were dominated by the self-proclaimed "Jewish community" even though they never spoke for more than a small percentage of actual American Jews. No one in my family or my circle of friends identified with the wannabe Jewish leaders who insisted on lock-step support of the Israeli government, especially after the Lebanon War. The notion that the neoconservative Likudnik sycophants who wrote for *Commentary* and Marty Peretz's iteration of the *New Republic* spoke for American Jews writ large was absurd. My parents' Jewish heroes had been writers like Norman Mailer and Bernard Malamud, comedians like the Marx Brothers, and activists who were part of the New Deal and the Labor movement. The culture I embraced revolved around the Civil Rights and anti-war movements of the sixties, rock and roll, and psychedelics. The Jews I was proud of were Bob Dylan, Allen Ginsberg, and Lenny Bruce. In the Reagan era, before *Tikkun*, it often seemed like that kind of Jewish identity was gone forever from the public sphere, but Michael spoke and wrote for "us."

Unique among those who had been leaders of the anti-war movement of the sixties, Michael was a deeply religious Jew and uniquely among thought leaders who identified as Jews, Michael maintained the radical beliefs of the sixties. He loved Israel but hated the occupation. He abhorred Reaganism, but had a sophisticated progressive critique of the Democratic party and was relentless in his assertion that Democrats and the left were

morally and tactically wrong to down-play or ignore spirituality.

In 1995, after Michael co-authored *Blacks and Jews* with Cornel West, I hosted a fundraiser for *Tikkun* and started a friendship with Michael that included a spirited correspondence about our few political differences.

I could never convince him that my concern that the left of the eighties and nineties condescended to pop culture mattered as much as his concern that the left marginalized spirituality. And we even disagreed about the sixties. I believed that the psychedelic and Eastern spiritual currents of the time were as morally valid and influential as were the radical political movements that formed much of Michael's identity. He had been among the anti-war leaders who thought that the hippie idea was a distraction from "serious" politics. I loved to tease him about his presence at a planning meeting for the "Human Be-In" in San Francisco at the outset of the so-called "Summer of Love" in 1967 when he asked what "demands" would be expressed at the gathering. The Haight Ashbury mystics laughed at the suggestion and insisted that a "Be-In" was incompatible with such a doctrinaire notion. Decades later Michael was still outraged that members of the Grateful Dead were not more political, and I was still bemused that the self-styled radicals didn't get "it" whatever "it" was at the outset of the Summer of Love.

However, no matter how frustrated I would occasionally get at what I perceived as Michael's monomania, I always melted when I saw him in person and he flashed a certain kind of smile. I am not referring to the beatific grin he reserved for his admirers. I mean the child-like sunshine of a loving smile he would sometimes unveil–the smile of a brother.

In 1997, when Michael hit a brick wall in terms of financial support for *Tikkun* he made me an offer I was delighted not to refuse. In return for my covering *Tikkun*'s shortfall, in addition to having the title of "publisher," Michael would let me control one third of the editorial. My father Victor, who had been an Associate Publisher of *The Nation* for the previous several years and had grown frustrated at having no input into the editorial content, was happy to join me as a co-publisher.

For the next several years I worked with Michael which both enhanced and strained our relationship. A control freak to his bones, Michael almost immediately regretted having agreed to let us control part of the magazine's content. The problem was that Michael and my father never got along. I repeatedly had to explain to Michael that even when I agreed with his criticism of some of my dad's editorial choices (like having Colin Powell write a short piece), my relationship with my father meant a lot more to me than any dialectical argument about what was or wasn't consistent with Michael's concept of *Tikkun*'s mission.

Regardless of the tensions inherent in the relationship, I was always proud to be associated with Michael's writing. He combined a first-rate intellect with an unwavering commitment to his beliefs. The same year we joined him as publishers he was accused by former *Tikkun* staffers of having written letters to the Editor under a pseudonym. Michael was unapologetic about the content of the letters (invariably praising what he had published) and only regretted that he hadn't revealed his identity as the author of the letters. I heartily approved.

My Dad and I never came close to conveying an intellectual framework of the stature of Michael's, but I am proud of the series of interviews that Jack Newfield did with people like

Mario Cuomo and Jean-Bertrand Aristide and for bringing the thoughts of Zen Peacemaker founder Bernie Glassman into the pages of *Tikkun* for a time. Nonetheless I was not surprised that when Michael got his sister Trish Vradenberg and her husband to take over the funding we had provided (with no editorial strings attached) he jumped at the chance and my dad and I made a graceful exit.

As the years have passed my appreciation for Michael and *Tikkun* has grown. He has broadened the definition of intellectualism, Jewish thought, and progressive activism. He has never shied away from rejecting conventional wisdom in favor of the impulses of his own heart and mind. Some of the phrases he introduced like "the politics of meaning," and "surplus powerlessness" are as relevant today as they were when he coined them.

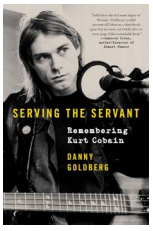
The fact Alan Dershowitz was so rattled by *Tikkun*'s appropriate criticism of him that he absurdly wrote that "*Tikkun* is quickly becoming the most virulently anti-Israel screed ever published under Jewish auspices" and that "support for *Tikkun* is support for the enemies of Israel" was a symptom of neo-conservative panic that Michael's views were resonating with millions of American Jews and many non-Jews as well.

It was emblematic of Michael's place in American culture that Muhammad Ali put it in his will that Michael would be the only Rabbi speaking at the champ's memorial service in 2016 along with the likes of Billy Crystal and Bill Clinton.

Because I was publicly associated with *Tikkun*, I still sometimes get push-back from progressive friends who are irked when something Michael says or writes doesn't conform to the progressive talking points du jour.

Writing about Michael's legacy, I am reminded of the final sermon Dr. King gave in which he used a biblical conversation between Jesus and two of his disciples as a framework for talking about the balance between the ego and service. King described what he called "the drum major instinct," the human desire for attention and praise and "that warm glow whenever we see our name in print." He gave examples of how the drum major instinct can be manipulated by advertisers, how it had been perverted by racists and also how it could best be harnessed to serve humanity. He spoke of his aspiration to be a "drum major for peace; a drum major for justice," and he reminded the congregation that Jesus had said "He who is greatest among you shall be a servant." Michael Lerner is and has been a Jewish drum major whose flamboyant and sometimes ostentatious intellect is always in service to the highest ideals. Mazel Tov dude.

Danny Goldberg, New York City, Sept 26,2022.



DANNY GOLDBERG served as the Publisher of Tikkun. He is president of Gold Village Entertainment and has worked in the music business for over 50 years. His most recent books include Bloody Crossroads 2020: Art, Entertainment and Resistance to Trump and Serving The Servant: Remembering Kurt Cobain.

Tikkun Interview:

Reflections from Jewish Feminist Thinkers

RACHEL ADLER, RABBI TIRZAH FIRESTONE & RABBI CAT ZAVIS

Interview of Rachel Adler and Rabbi Tirzah Firestone by Rabbi Cat Zavis regarding the legacy of Rabbi Michael Lerner.

Cat Zavis: How did you each come to know Michael?

Rachel Adler: I met Michael for the first time on a bus in the Bay area. It was going to a retreat or conference. I don't remember what it was. We fell into conversation and he told me he was starting a magazine and wanted me to write for it. He was a very interesting, compelling person. I was impressed and thought "Wow, can't wait to see what this magazine is going to be."

Tirzah Firestone: I remember receiving the announcement of *Tikkun*'s debut with Michael's name on the page. I was not only intrigued but ecstatic to hear that someone had seized the moment and had taken that word (i.e., *Tikkun*) and put it together with the state of the world and Jewish activism. Bringing these things together in one alchemical mess! I was perfectly enthralled. Then I started reading Michael, and started meeting him at Jewish Renewal events. He was talking the talk; I wanted more. Michael was, for me, a paradigm of intellectual brilliance and he was spearheading something completely new. I loved that.

Cat Zavis: Tirzah, you mentioned that he was talking the talk/walking the walk, and Rachel you nodded at that as well, can you elaborate on that and what that looked like?

Rachel Adler: Thinking about what Michael was propounding and what *Tikkun* was like, it was more consciously political and edgier than the more mainstream Jewish community magazine like *Moment*. Of course, after the reign of the wonderful Leonard Fein, *Moment* became even less edgy and that made even more room for *Tikkun* to be there for people whose Judaism was interwoven with political and ethical issues, and who wanted to not just discuss them but enact them.

Tirzah Firestone: This was back when I was married to a non-Jew in the late 80s. I don't know if this was under the reign of Leonard Fein or not, but I was so deeply pained and

hurt by the judgmentalism and restrictive definition of the Jewish spiritual quest. It felt like my parents' generation. The judgment and dictum about intermarriage was a party line, not a growing edge. Whereas *Tikkun* was the growing edge – both Michael and the magazine were intellectually sharp. Synthesizing ideas from different fields, doing interviews that were brilliant and inclusive, highlighting Jewish Renewal as a spiritually cutting edge and viable movement– all of this was percolating for me.

In particular, I felt that both Michael's politics and his observance – the way he lived, his own personal *halacha*, were a truly egalitarian Judaism. Then his work started coming forth about Israel/Palestine in an unabashed way. It was the first time I had heard anyone think in a socio-historical context about the intergenerational residues, the trauma residues in both the Palestinian as well as the Israeli Jewish communities. Something went off in me. So it was first, his egalitarian politics and then second around Israel/Palestine that I went "Oh my God, this guy is my teacher. This guy is saying things that no one before has said." That is where my own thinking about the collective trauma of both these peoples took off. I was a *chasid*, by that point, of *Tikkun* and of Michael's thinking.

Cat Zavis: Tirzah, I wonder if your book *Wounds into Wisdom* was grounded in some of Michael's teachings and exposure to his thinking about the trauma of the Jewish and Palestinian people.

Tirzah Firestone: Absolutely.

Cat Zavis: You've just touched upon this but I'm going to ask it more explicitly–How have Michael or *Tikkun* (even just the existence of *Tikkun* with its willingness to engage with so many different perspectives) shape your thinking, either in the past or present? Has *Tikkun* or Michael played any particularly unique role in your life, writing, thinking, etc.?

Rachel Adler: I find that I read with interest and I value the *Tikkun* anthologies that Michael created. There's a range of perspectives within them, and that makes it feel more hamish to me, because it feels more like Talmud when there isn't one right answer. I like that about *Tikkun* and I like it about Michael. *Tikkun* and Michael were very good sports. At least one of the articles I published ("In Your Blood, Live: Re-visions of a Theology of Purity" *Tikkun* Vol. 8, No. 1.) made people very, very angry. I was getting some unpleasant mail and I'm sure *Tikkun* was getting some unpleasant mail and they really hung in and they were very good about that. That is something I value.

Cat Zavis: That piece is such an exquisite example of embodied feminism in such a meaningful and profound way. Tirzah I don't know if you are familiar with this article. Rachel wrote it in response to an article she published 20 years earlier as a young Orthodox woman called "Tum'ah and Taharah: Ends and Beginnings."

Rachel Adler: I took that "Tum'ah and Tahara" article apart in the *Tikkun* article.

Cat Zavis: Did it seem that *Tikkun* was "the" place to publish that piece?

Rachel Adler: Yes, it seemed like the *only* place to publish it and I never even thought of publishing it anywhere else. People really felt I had taken something away from them. I understood they were sad and that is why they were so angry, but I just couldn't, in good conscience, act like the piece was OK because it wasn't OK with me anymore. I got some very unpleasant mail for about two years and I'm sure *Tikkun* got some too. And no one from *Tikkun* ever complained to me about it and that was lovely.

Cat Zavis: That was a very bold piece that you wrote. When I read it I thought, this is really, for me, one of the aspects I value about being a feminist–being able to look back at what we

did at a younger time in our lives and being willing to say, "I don't like that anymore, I don't agree with that anymore." And to do it in such a public, honest way was really moving.

Rachel Adler: Well, that was a *chiuv*. When you put stuff out there in a very public way and later don't believe it anymore, it seems to me you have an obligation to put that out there in a very public way as well.

Tirzah Firestone: One of the ways that Michael has really impacted me in a very personal way is Michael's High Holiday machzor. The first time I saw it was at Romemu in NY. I then asked him if I could use it for High Holiday services I was leading at a synagogue in LA. His conception of God; his connection to the Divine, Shechinah, and the many faces of divinity, has really touched me. For example, how he makes a space for all expressions of faith and non-faith, and how he includes everyone–all facets, all faces of the Jewish approach to the Divine, and a lack of faith as well. His depiction of God as the totality (forget his exact words, these may not be his words) of consciousness of the universe, the caveat at the very beginning of his machzor for how hard it is to davven, that we should not feel alone or strange. Because we are in a post-holocaust consciousness, the template is broken. We are in a different paradigm now. Saying it, articulating the difficulty that so many of us have. That is one extremely refreshing thing.

A second way he has influenced me occurred when I once stayed at his house, back in 1990 perhaps. I was sleeping in one room and came out first thing in the morning to the sound of Michael in the next room working out (on a treadmill, or bike, or something). He was breathing hard and davening at the same time. He was singing the *Elohai Neshama* prayer to his exercise breath. I was simply going down the hall, and I thought, "Wow, this guy's the real deal." I could feel that he was really invested in the words he was praying. It was all part of a body, mind, spirit experience that impressed me. This friend of mine had his own brand of *devekut*; his own brand of faith, and he lived it. This is how he brought it into his day.

Cat Zavis: What role did *Tikkun* play, if any, in the unfolding, expression, development of Jewish feminism?

Rachel Adler: It was a place where edgy things could be said and where people could get published. It wasn't the only place, I think of *Lilith* as well, for example, but *Tikkun* was one of the places that was very welcoming. So it was one of the places where one looked to read those things.

Tirzah Firestone: It was a place where Jews, non-Jews, halachic Jews and non-halachic Jews could have a forum that was fair, non-judgmental, and pluralistic. A space that was examining the evolution of Judaism, in post-holocaust America and beyond (in the diaspora) in an intellectually fair way. Often these conversations, in other places, were purportedly intellectual but they weren't, they were biased. I trusted *Tikkun*, and looked forward to the hard copy coming out every quarter. I trusted its intellectual fairness and freedom.

Cat Zavis: How can these ideas play a role moving towards the future for the current and emerging generation of thinkers and activists and what new horizons are before us that were never envisioned in *Tikkun*? Other places this is happening?

Rachel Adler: *Lilith* is still publishing, and I do see that some other journals are working at it. I have a review in the current issue of the *CCAR Journal* (aka *The Reform Jewish Quarterly*) of Elana Sztokman's new book "*When Rabbis Abuse: Power, Gender, and Status in the Dynamics of Sexual*

Abuse in Jewish Culture." I have to hand it to the *CCAR Journal*. They have been willing to publish some things that are very uncomfortable for their readership. They published my first article in 1993 on sexual abuse in pastoral counseling. They published two responses to it, to appear even-handed. One respondent said, there's no problem, and the other solidly backed me up. Unfortunately the problem went on. It's still a touchy issue, and *CCAR Journal* was the first place that was willing to let people talk about it. That's not nothing. I want to give everyone their due, including *Tradition*. They published Shira Berkovits' rigorous and unflinching view of sexual abuse in 2017–a detailed and brilliant essay that must have made some of their readership very, very squirmy. I'm always proud when Jewish institutions are willing to look at themselves, and when Jewish periodicals are willing to take risks. What makes *Tikkun* unique is that it wasn't even much of a struggle for *Tikkun*. They just did it.

Cat Zavis: I want to turn to Michael as a theologian, and his framing of God, and how you think his theological approach has contributed both to the Jewish Renewal world specifically and the Jewish world more broadly?

Tirzah Firestone: I hold Michael as a process theologian. This has to do with the *Ehiyeh* - I am becoming- Consciousness. The evolving concept of God as the mind of the universe, is not fixed and not static, and that makes a lot of people uncomfortable! People who get Michael and follow him are *Ehiyeh* people. And I'm one of them! It is taking divinity out of the fixed categories. Judaism as a theology is not fixed; that's why there are so many names for the Divine, so many faces and attributes, and all of that are God. So what Michael has done and is doing is very, very Jewish. He brings his own social justice ethic with him and that goes hand in glove with this theological orientation. Michael is the one who holds this integration of his theological understanding of God together with his social justice ethic and commitment, in the Jewish world, without flinching and without failing. And he holds our feet to the fire. For Jews who are invested in the spiritual path and praxis of Judaism, it cannot be without a social justice component. I remember him railing once at the Kallah, saying: "What's going on here? We're talking about God and we're talking about the practice of Judaism, but *tikkun olam* is missing here." And he was absolutely right.

Rachel Adler: I am not deeply knowledgeable about Michael's process theology but from what I have read, it's a lot warmer than most process theologies. I find myself sort-of on the edge. Process theologies make some valid points. Mordecai Kaplan has something to say, but in a less emotional, icy way. But Michael's theology feels lived and experienced and not just intellectualized. It is more sensuous and three-dimensional, not just in the head.

Cat Zavis: As Jewish feminists, can you speak about the value and role *Tikkun* played in being a place for Jewish feminist voices and uplifting those voices? Can you speak about Michael's integration of spirituality and activism? Walter Brueggeman, in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, argues that there is a significant difference between the type of change the prophets pushed for and what we understand to be social change work today. He says that the prophetic imagination demands more from us. It implores us to address "in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated." It is more than simply struggling for fixes to a broken system; what Brueggeman and Michael are speaking about is a transformation of consciousness and a transformation of our society that arises from an entirely new way of being.

Tirzah Firestone: We're talking about a radical systems transformation. Another way to say it is that we are talking about changing things at the top of the Eitz ha-Chaiim, rather than things at the bottom, the items that are bothering us and annoying us. Michael doesn't shy away from that kind of radical overhaul. He's a systems thinker. It is scary for some, and more than annoying–it's like you're unscrewing my reality, please don't do that! But neither were the Hebrew prophets popular in their time.

Rachel Adler: Transformation is different from mechanical tinkering! Transformation is the outrageous perspective that we envision in the world as we have it that can't be, and yet we witness it or help bring it into being. It's like the tree on fire that doesn't get consumed.

Cat Zavis: What are your wishes for the younger generations? How might they value from learning, integrating, and taking Tikkun's and Michael's vision, worldview, and message even further?

Tirzah Firestone: I have learned so much from the younger generation. I particularly love those who are cross-germinating with my generation.

Rachel Adler: I get worried about the changes I see in some younger students. They don't seem to read much. If you don't read widely and you dismiss what is not contemporary, it narrows your world and your thinking. And spending so much time online with a select group of people and topics who echo your preferences and thinking can render you unprepared to deal with difference and oblivious to how people unlike you may be living. That can have terrible consequences, socially and politically. It seems to be getting harder to get people to think in nuanced ways, and I find that ominous. We have to put more thought into reaching privileged young people. Economically, it is becoming harder for most people, and politically the world is becoming increasingly polarized. Young people will need to go out and struggle in it for a while before they develop questions about meaning and responsibility that demand deeper thinking and effort.

You can't break out of a small world if you're not noticing the people in it who don't have enough to eat; if you're not noticing there are people on the street. In Los Angeles, *kol v'chomer*, there are people begging for money and for food everyday, lots of them. There is something terribly, terribly wrong, and when I'm dealing with a group of students who somehow aren't getting that, that scares me a lot.

Tirzah Firestone: That is a caricature of what is happening to our brains right now with our community being online, the likes and posts of our friends, staying in our little orbs. It looks like it's global but it is very, very small and comfort-oriented. The kids growing up now – that is their language, their medium, all on the screen and from that their world can get very, very small. Obviously I'm generalizing here! It sounds like the answer to your question is not a very happy one.

Cat Zavis: It's so interesting because I think about the Jewish value of argument for the sake of heaven. It's such a strong value. The posts on Facebook have gotten horrifying. No space for conversation or discussion. It's very unsettling and distressing, this narrowing of a willingness to engage in different views, which is what *tikkun* as a concept, as well as the magazine, is all about. How do we get to *tikkun* if we don't open our hearts and listen to someone else's experience?

Tirzah Firestone: That's right; collecting all the sparks and diverging, landing in different places, orientations, different facets of the whole. My way around that myself is conversations on an individual one-on-one basis.

Rachel Adler: I am teaching a beginning Talmud class right now, and starting to discover questions that precede what I used to think were beginners' questions. For example, I have to devote time at the beginning to introducing the idea of multivocality. It's unfamiliar to them, and why wouldn't it be? They take the ACT, and the SAT, and the GRE and there is always one right answer! How could they be expected to immediately accept a system in which there are many answers that can be right? And you just have to discover what the particular circumstance or context is in which this one is right and in which this one is right. That is such a foreign notion to them.

Tirzah Firestone: I once heard that the essential icon or symbol for Judaism is the shape of a page of Gemara, in which you have the text in the middle, surrounded by the grandfather saying one thing, and the grandson saying another, often, diametrically opposed. Many voices, all there on the same page, a dynamic circle dance around the tradition. That is what is iconic about Judaism and one reason why we have lasted.

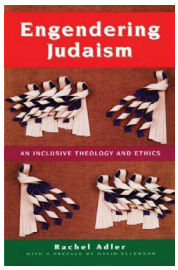
Rachel Adler: Even the stuff in the middle is all different opinions!

Tirzah Firestone: And that's all changing too.

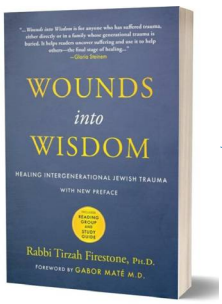
Cat Zavis: Any closing thoughts or reflections?

Tirzah Firestone: I'm hoping that this offering, that you're engaged in, Cat, will help it happen. That people will say, "Oh my God, we have a jewel in our midst! And why haven't I known about him? That's unfortunately the way life is and the way we operate. We don't see the jewels that are right in front of us. My wish, my bracha for you and your work, and for this edition, is that it causes people to stand back and say: Let me pay attention to all this richness. May that be one of the end results of this edition you are putting together.

Rachel Adler: Amen. I want to say to you that what you are doing is really a beautiful thing and that I hope that Michael knows that he has accomplished something really, really important and I hope he will feel a real *simcha* about looking back and looking at what he has done because it is immense.



RACHEL ADLER is the Ellenson Professor of Modern Jewish Thought Emerita at Hebrew Union College- Los Angeles. She now teaches part time for Academy for Jewish Religion-California. Her writings include *Engendering Judaism* the first book by a female theologian to win a National Jewish Book Award for Jewish Thought and over 65 articles, many of them reprinted in collections as well as the award-winning adult Jewish education book, Tales of the Holy Mysticat.



RABBI TIRZAH FIRESTONE, PhD, is an author, Jungian psychotherapist, and founding rabbi of Congregation Nevei Kodesh in Boulder, Colorado. Ordained by Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi in 1992, she is a leader in the international Jewish Renewal Movement. Her book *Wounds into Wisdom: Healing Intergenerational Jewish Trauma* (Monkfish) came out in April, 2019.

My Journey with *Tikkun* and with its Editor Michael Lerner

PAUL VON BLUM

My journey with *Tikkun* has been among the most gratifying of my long career as a writer and university teacher. The most significant feature of that relationship, of course, is because of its editor Michael Lerner, whom I've been privileged to know since the time that we were both active participants in the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964. I admire Michael enormously for his lifetime, relentless commitment to progressive values and activism that encompasses vigorous advocacy for such related themes as racial justice, gender equality, LGBTQ rights, Israeli and Palestinian dignity— *and* autonomy. Among Michael's most profound accomplishments was his creation in 1986 of *Tikkun Magazine*, the most prominent and enduring progressive Jewish publication in the United States.

Tikkun has been devoted to social justice and seeking a better world since its inception. The publication has attracted some of the world's most accomplished and celebrated writers and intellectuals over the years, featuring articles, book reviews, poetry, visual art, and other genres. It emerged from the momentous social protest movements of the 1960s, an era that changed the course and direction of politics, society, and life in general in this country for the better, despite its excesses. I am currently teaching my longtime course at UCLA on the history of American agitational movements, which typically has attracted large numbers of undergraduate students. I regularly share *Tikkun* content with my students and invite them to look further into its history and role in American cultural and intellectual life.

A huge byproduct of those turbulent times was that many people, including activists like myself, forged deep personal relationships, many of which have endured over the decades. Some of these connections could be called spiritual, like those in the Network of Spiritual Progressives, which Michael founded in 2005. I'm proud to be associated with this group, closely aligned with the magazine, and I'm equally pleased that it's an organization that brings together people of all religious traditions (and also non-religious people) committed to the progressive ideals it espouses. I acknowledge that I seldom use the word "spiritual" and that I still feel some unease with it; nevertheless, I use it here lovingly and I gratefully acknowledge that this also is one of Michael's exemplary accomplishments.

I have read *Tikkun* since the beginning. I can also be personal in explaining exactly why its Jewish character, yet totally accepting nature, drew me to its pages, beyond my acquaintance with Michael Lerner. I have a strong Jewish identity; it emerges from my status as a second-generation Holocaust survivor. My father was the sole survivor of his immediate family. Every other member was murdered in Auschwitz. I explain regularly, mostly to my students (many of whom are Jewish and in varying degrees observant) that this background has forged my personal *secular* identity as a Jew. It provides the foundation for my ethical vision of the world and my record of social and political activism since my teenage years.

I have also been an atheist since childhood, as were my father and mother. Like many Jews, I cannot believe in a God after Auschwitz and Buchenwald and the other extermination camps. The ghosts of the six million murdered Jews will haunt me until my death, which is why the Holocaust is also a regular part of my teaching. I also have other reasons for my atheism. And I don't observe Jewish rituals at all, although I fully respect those who do. Most – not all – of my observant Jewish students fully accept my judgment that I can define my Jewish identity for myself. My non-Jewish students come, usually, to understand that Jews are a people with a powerful historical and ethical tradition, not merely a specifically religious group.

The other profound feature of *Tikkun* that attracted me at the outset was its firm insistence that Israel needed to provide real justice for its Palestinian neighbors. Among other things, that stance demanded an end to the long Israel occupation following the 1967 War. I have read numerous articles in *Tikkun* exploring the complex situation in the Mideast and I entirely support the *Tikkun* vision of being pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian; the latter, of course, requires a full recognition of Palestinian rights and statehood. The reemergence of Benjamin Netanyahu to power with some proto-fascistic allies in November 2022, however, has caused me and many other progressive Jews to reconsider fundamentally whether we can support Israel at all.

I continue to believe that Michael's *Embracing Israel/Palestine* is one of the finest and most astute works on this entire issue. I've recommended it to countless students, colleagues, and friends since its publication. I've also regularly read his pieces on the situation in the region, especially the periodic outbreaks of hostility and Israeli oppression (and some Palestinian acts of terrorism) in recent years. I decry the human tragedy and the needless loss of life and property in the region. It's heartbreaking.

This topic is also deeply personal. I have regularly spoken about Palestinian (and Israeli) rights before university and community audiences in the United States, Europe, and Israel. Generally, my audiences have been sympathetic. But I have also gotten some jeers and many

critiques, always from Jews. The worst have been allegations of Jewish "self-hatred," which I'm sure that Michael and others associated with *Tikkun* have encountered. It is a label I find distressing and sometimes I try, with marginal success, to explain why this appellation is foolish and hurtful. It is similar to the nonsense that Alan Dershowitz has leveled at Michael and *Tikkun*. But that is the price of human rights advocacy, especially in this always delicate area.

My writing and publication journey with *Tikkun* spans twelve years or more. I think that I have published twenty or more articles and reviews in both the print and online versions of the magazine. A feature of my work in *Tikkun* has absolutely profound meaning to me: I have been able to pursue a broad range of topics that interest me and, I assume, many readers of the magazine. Many of my pieces have involved my work in the intersection of art and politics. This is an area that I have been fortunate to pursue professionally as a researcher for many years, with many academic publications and numerous advanced courses and lectures throughout the world. Some of my *Tikkun* articles have involved African American visual art, which is a very special area for me because it highlights my close connection to the Black community going back to my days in the Civil Rights Movement in the South and in California. I know that my close friends in the Black art community in Los Angeles have appreciated these articles greatly. I've tried to make these *Tikkun* articles accessible to general audiences, free of the jargon that is all too common in scholarly writing (not mine, I hope), often in art history.

Some of my *Tikkun* art-related articles are more broadly related to political and social commentary generally. A few, I recall, also address Jewish art historical issues. I've written about the trauma many of my UCLA students, especially Mid-Eastern immigrants, and other vulnerable populations, suffered under the Trump regime. I also wrote reservedly and cautiously in favor of identity politics, with a respectful rejoinder by the brilliant historian Eli Zaretsky. I've also written about the tragedy of Ethel Rosenberg and the horror of the Azerbaijani wars against the Armenian enclave of Artsakh––a conflict largely unknown outside the large Armenian Diaspora in the U.S. and elsewhere. Finally, in Summer 2022, I published a review of two baseball books by scholars Peter Dreier and Robert Elias. This allowed me to pursue my lifetime interest in that sport while also locating it in the broader context of history and racial, gender, and sexual politics.

What makes this so valuable to me is that *Tikkun* has given me space to pursue my broad, public intellectual interests; these interests go far beyond any single academic discipline. And this also relates to me in a profoundly personal way. Michael and his editorial colleagues have *never* questioned my qualifications to write about any of these themes and topics. Like any good editors of respected journals and magazines, they want only the highest quality work. They demand performance criteria rather than design criteria like formal degrees and academic titles. I've been a fierce advocate for interdisciplinary education and knowledge and the high priority of quality undergraduate education my entire academic life for over fifty years. This has been primarily at the University of California, an institution largely devoted to narrow academic specialization and the priority of research over teaching, despite its rhetoric to the contrary.

My public entry into a wide arena of speaking, writing, and teaching caused consternation and hostility (until fairly recently) among many faculty and administrative superiors for several decades. This was the case even with many "liberal" faculty members who were remarkably conservative about protecting their institu-

tional and personal privileges. I had my career and employment threatened on occasion, but I fought back successfully. I often remarked to my students and friends that if I could face hostile sheriffs and Klansmen in the South, I could also do the same with UC administrators.

My public writings in *Tikkun* and elsewhere got me the label of "dilettante" or worse. Once, I recall, I was called a "mere journalist." Although for some scholars that appellation is apparently anathema, I have no desire to eschew it. Several years ago, during a job interview at a prestigious Eastern University, the interviewer told me that "if I were hired, I couldn't write articles for magazines any longer." That cinched it for me. I decided I wanted nothing to do with the position. I later received an inadequate offer that I swiftly rejected, for this attitude and for other personal reasons, deciding to remain at UCLA. There remains, I believe, a continuing distrust in the academy for public intellectualism; it is breaking down slowly and *Tikkun* under Michael Lerner's leadership has played a significant part in this welcome development.

I often tell my students and my colleagues at UCLA, and also when I have the privilege of teaching in the Czech Republic, that I will continue teaching until I can't. I hope and expect to do the same with my writing and with publishing articles (and maybe even another book or two) on whatever topics that engage me. That includes writing for *Tikkun*. I want the exact same for *Tikkun*: that it shall also continue until it can't, but that goal should go far beyond what I expect to do personally. Its endurance and its longevity represent a remarkable American success story. This will be a memorable legacy for Michael Lerner that countless people will admire and respect for generations to come.

PAUL VON BLUM is a longtime faculty member at UCLA and author of ten books and numerous articles, reviews, and chapters. He is also a lifetime political and civil rights activist.

Tikkun Interview:

Reflections from a Contemporary Jewish Thinker

PETER BEINART & MARK LEVINE

Interview of Peter Beinart by Mark Levine regarding the legacy of Rabbi Michael Lerner.

Mark LeVine: When did you first heard about *Tikkun* and Michael Lerner?

Peter Beinart: I remember when *Tikkun* was created, while I was in high school, and thinking how exciting it was. It seemed like a magazine I should be reading. I already had a nerd-like appreciation for political magazines and was reading the *The Nation, National Review, The New Republic* (*TNR*), and others and understood even at that age that somehow there were a lot of people who were speaking as Jews and being recognized as Jews whose politics were connected to the Reagan administration: Elliott Abrams, Richard Perle and the like. That seemed alienating to me; even at that age it didn't make sense that *Commentary* was the most prominent Jewish magazine and was so conservative. So I actually remember the tag line from *Tikkun* – "All the rest is commentary…" I remember cutting that out and putting it on my wall.

Some context: My family was South African, so the politics of the state of emergency in South Africa in the 1980s were big for us, so was the first Intifada, which erupted right at the time *Tikkun* began publication. My father was working in Israel a lot and I was spending time there with him, so I was connected to the issue. In response to the first intifada *Tikkun*'s writing helped to shape my own perspective. I think I got some kind of award or citation from the local branch of the American Jewish Committee and was debating whether I should reject it because the AJC didn't oppose settlements. This awareness was definitely shaped by the ethos of *Tikkun*, then Times columnist Anthony Lewis, and others. But unlike Lewis, Michael was explicitly Jewish in his writing. So *Tikkun* was an important institution because it was a marker of the idea that there was an authentic and serious Jewish expression that was compatible with political progressivism, especially as Michael became a household name with the Clintons in the early 90s. To me it was very valuable.

Mark LeVine: As a South African/American Jew, how did *Tikkun*'s racial justice stances affect you?

Peter Beinart: I had some awareness then and deepening awareness later on. My father had been involved in the anti-apartheid movement in college in Cape Town, had a few run-ins with the Apartheid government – his phone was tapped, his car tires slashed, etc. My mother worked in townships. And I knew about more deeply involved Jews, the Jews in the ANC: Arthur Goldreich, Joe Slovo, Albie Sachs, Denis Goldberg, others – all these people loomed large in the way I processed being Jewish in South Africa. But the challenging thing was difficult, as almost to a person they were communists and atheists. Slovo maybe had a bit

of a *yiddishkeit* (i.e., Jewish) sensibility, but few of them had any interest in Judaism per se. The figures who represented official Judaism in South Africa generally accepted apartheid. There were very few rabbis like Heschel or the reform rabbis who went south to support civil rights in the US. It was a religious establishment that was deeply complicit – the prosecutor who prosecuted Mandela and others in the famous Rivonia Trial, Percy Yutar was an orthodox Jew. He demonstrated his allegiance to the White apartheid system through his persecution of Black people.

What Michael was doing with *Tikkun* just didn't exist as much there. The few lefty rabbis were sent out of the country quickly, and there weren't many people trying to fuse a deep concern for a Jewish future and serious concern with Jewish texts with a left/progressive politics on race, or anything else for that matter. And this was precisely what I found compelling about the magazine from the start.

Mark LeVine: The neocon takeover of Judaism in the US was like the existing Jewish establishment in South Africa.

Peter Beinart: Yes. In terms of how the leadership of the two communities functioned, that would be true. The US leadership has become even more conservative since then.

In terms of my own politics, they were progressive on Israel/Palestine, and that's part of what drew me to *Tikkun*. But at that stage of my life that issue wasn't what I was most engaged in, and so my political parameters as a progressive were supporting the two-state solution, Oslo, and the creation of a Palestinian state – this was before that concept was lobotomized. My father was Left in his politics but my mother's instincts were more traditional. Jews need to look out for one another, and so on. I didn't have enough experience with Palestinians to be able to think about the realities as opposed to the sales pitch of the "two-state solution." My unexamined assumptions were that Jews needed a country to be safe, but it's wrong to treat people this way, and that Palestinians deserved their own state too. It took me a while to engage people who challenged this perspective. It took me a long time to recognize the insufficiency of the two-state position.

Mark LeVine: In other magazines, like *The New Republic*, were there constraints on how far to the left regarding Palestine they could go? I mean, it was very hard for Michael and *Tikkun* to move to an anti-Zionist position at least partly because there was a feeling that, if not our major donors, then subscribers/readers weren't ready to abandon Zionism. Liberal Jews in the US were still largely "PEPs" – progressive except Palestine.

Peter Beinart: *TNR* was really interesting because it was not officially "Jewish" but clearly was very much a Jewish magazine. A bit like *National Review* was a Catholic magazine. For comparison's sake, in the 1980s and 1990s you didn't have a similarly "Black" [political] magazine, one that was effectively "Black" in its cultural and political identity, stories and reviews, language, etc., but wielded real influence in Washington. Coming back to *TNR* from Oxford, it was extremely comfortable in that sense for me, and also perhaps because I knew I wasn't going to write on Israel/Palestine much if at all. There was an understanding at the magazine that that parking space was taken, so to speak; meaning, Israel was Martin Peretz's passion and Leon Wieseltier's as well. So our terrain as writers at *TNR* was other stuff, you just didn't encroach on that.

I accepted this because it wasn't what I was interested in writing about. I was writing about American foreign policy and politics in other ways. And while I felt that Peretz had political views different than mine and, at times, views difficult to stomach, I think I was able to convince myself to rationalize them, in the

context of a set of Israeli leaders in the 90s and early 2000s – Rabin, Peres, Barak, even Olmert (who openly warned about Israel becoming an Apartheid state) who, despite Netanyahu and Sharon, allowed me to convince myself that they would accept a Palestinian state and that Israelis were thus at least in the process of working their way to recognizing they needed to do the right thing. This made the environment of *TNR*, when it came to Israel-Palestine, a little easier to experience.

Of course, if I'd been willing to look harder– Said wrote the essay on a "Palestinian Versailles" ("The Morning After," in the October 21, 1993 of the *London Review of Books*) right at the start of Oslo, and many other Palestinian and Jewish voices foresaw what its likely outcome would be – I could have challenged myself more. But for me at the time, that's how I navigated life at *TNR*. But then the combination of leaving the magazine and then the 2009 elections of Obama and Netanyahu, put all of this in a different light.

When Obama got elected there was clearly going to be a confrontation with Netanyahu and Lieberman and the organized Jewish leadership was behind Netanyahu, who had fervently opposed Palestinian statehood for decades, and Lieberman, who was clearly racist. I was an idealistic supporter of Obama, and while I was at *TNR* I had my own views and those of kind of hawkish foreign policy-slash-liberal humanitarian interventionism in places like Bosnia; policies which, whatever value they had at other places/moments, after 9/11 became truly disastrous. I was trying to rethink that by the time Obama was elected, and Israel was interwoven with that position in ways I wasn't fully conscious of.

Mark LeVine: What did the folks at *TNR* think of *Tikkun*?

Peter Beinart: They were dismissive of the magazine. Let's remember, *Tikkun* was in some ways challenging *TNR*'s perspective, offering a different way of being Jewish and liberal. *TNR* saw itself as Jewish and liberal but it was a liberalism that saw itself in opposition to the Left.

Mark LeVine: A "neoliberalism in fact"?

Peter Beinart: Yes; coming out of a certain take on what had happened in the '60s. There was a feeling that the Left had gone too far politically, that we needed to care about economic growth more, that unions had become a drag on the economy, and so on. The Clintonite "New Democrat" philosophy, etc.

Here you have to think about Washington, DC; the people who work/live there then and remain today are less likely to make clear distinctions and separate between the policies they support and the politics they think will win. The Mondale and Dukakis defeats and Clinton's victory created a sense of what politics could bear and that infused politics with a sense of what was the right thing to do. But *Tikkun* represented a very different understanding of, approach to, and hope for politics. It was California-ish and a bit new-agey, perhaps, but it was also more progressive, further to the Left, making more explicit Jewish claims for a specifically Jewish politics, whereas at *TNR* those claims were merely implicit.

Mark LeVine: In this sense, thinking about Michael's book *Jewish Renewal* and the idea of a conflict between "settler Judaism" and "Prophetic Judaism," how did this conflict pass through your lens as a journalist and progressive Jew?

Peter Beinart: I was evolving in terms of Jewish practice in this period. I had traditional elements because that's what happened in South Africa, but my family wasn't Shomer Shabbat, etc. But in South Africa it was like growing up in Baltimore or Brooklyn in the 60s, like a shtetl. We had our own norms: you went for Shabbat dinners, you didn't intermarry; those were

the parameters of being Jewish, and of course supporting Israel, the big Jewish school in Cape Town was and is called Herzlia, named after Theodor Herzl (and the wealthy suburb of Tel Aviv). And that's how my mom grew up and that's what she tried to replicate in Cambridge (MA). And what I realized in college was that what she was trying to do didn't work in the US. Americans who aren't Shomer Shabbat don't get together on Shabbat, and they intermarry. So when I came to college and started interacting with more observant American Jewish kids I understood quickly that if I wanted to replicate what I experienced as a kid – the whole family together on Shabbat, etc. – the only way to make that work in the US was with a higher degree of religious commitment. So I needed to try to take that religious observance and study it more seriously, which luckily for me, I really enjoyed. That was the arc of my life at that point.

Mark LeVine: Why didn't you move towards the Jewish Renewal movement?

Peter Beinart: I just didn't really know or come into contact with people like Arthur Waskow at that time, and didn't have the opportunity to be around those people where I was at the time. So I became more involved with Orthodox shuls, which I really loved. And I was lucky enough to be in an Orthodox synagogue that, because of where it was located, wasn't overly right-wing politically.

Yet what I appreciated about Michael then, even though I didn't know him and didn't find my way to a Jewish Renewal or Reconstructionist community, was that he was offering a way of trying to take religious commitment and observance seriously and connect with progressive politics. I had this anxiety that a progressive universalistic outlook would destroy one's Jewish commitment and identity. But Michael showed that this didn't have to be the case. *Tikkun* published things that were intellectually serious about Judaism. So that's what I tried to work on in my 20s, 30s, and 40s. Let's remember, though, that if we think of a venn diagram of being both religious observant and politically progressive, the intersection isn't very big; I was always very much drawn to those who were in that small intersection, and there were few [public intellectual] models for how you do it outside of *Tikkun*.

Mark LeVine: Looking at the situation today, what does it mean, in terms of the evolution of the Jewish public sphere, when voices and spaces like *Tikkun* seemingly aren't as important to younger Jews, even as they're becoming more progressive than ever.

Peter Beinart: Most Jewish magazines or magazines period, no matter how long they've survived, their major impact tends to be concentrated in a specific historical moment when their ideological points are particularly relevant. What *Tikkun* did was to keep alive, deepen, and flesh out an impulse, like *Breira* in the 70s, that was coming out of the civil rights and anti-war movements, trying to find a Jewish identity, and wrestling with the idea of an Israel that was doing inescapably problematic things. And *Tikkun* was a liberal/progressive magazine in a conservative political age – Reagan/Bush and then Clinton, and the neocons. And trying to keep alive the tradition of Jewish progressive and even radical politics at a time when it was a minority position.

Tikkun kept alive and deepened this project. Since the wars in Gaza and then Occupy, the rise of Black Lives Matter (BLM), of a Palestinian solidarity movement that includes many Jews, of Bernie Sanders, Jewish Voices for Peace (JVP), If Not Now, and even J Street, all of which begin or hit their stride in the Obama years, a younger generation of Jews that is less inhibited than their parents and grandparents emerged, one that's interacting more with Palestinians who are themselves becoming more

visible. And these young Jews are more likely to listen and learn from Palestinians and have a less fear-based Jewish political identity. My point is that all of these people, whether they know it or not, are the inheritors of what *Tikkun* built. But naturally they might take it in different directions than Michael's views, and they are in some ways politically even more radical when it comes to Israel, less tethered to a politics of Jewish statehood, for example.

Yet however important this development is, I worry at times that the twin interests of figuring out how to be truly progressive in the US and Israel/Palestine and also have a thick Jewish commitment might be something that not as many young Jews are as interested in as I would like; I wish more young people would be asking the question: not just what does justice look like, but what do we need to do to deepen Jewish knowledge so it's clearer why Judaism is worth maintaining.

Organized religion among White people in America is associated with the political right, so there's a stronger anti-clericalism among young people these days. As the American Jewish establishment has become more orthodox and right wing, it's produced a very unfortunate situation where opposing it can lead some young Jews to reject Judaism itself.

Mark LeVine: Well, the goal of *Tikkun* and the Politics of Meaning was precisely to bridge that gap, so where can we do that if that kind of space isn't there any more?

Peter Beinart: Well, first, it has to be said that there is a minority of young Jews for whom this does remain very important. A lot of kids are coming out of rabbinical school, and/or are doing Jewish studies, and are very committed to Jewish knowledge and practice and their progressivism, more so than in Michael's day. They really are his heirs, and there are enough of them that it's freaking out the leadership of the Jewish community. That says something. Inside non-orthodox rabbinical schools there's a fight over how to create spaces to have these debates. We can say that whatever form it takes, the work remains crucial because, I believe, it's important to keep the possibility of being part of a thick Jewish life experience, however you do it, which remains a very countercultural thing in an America that is so consumerist and materialist. This approach is really important to make one's life work, and yes, that is a version of Politics of Meaning. But the irony for me is that for Jews, the Palestinian issue, building a movement of Jews to be part of solidarity with Palestinians, requires a particular combination of universalism and particularism. If Jews just become universalist then why even worry about Palestine when there are so many other and even bigger issues to deal with like climate and global fascism? But having a special commitment to being Jewish, thinking about your special obligation to Israel/Palestine, keeps you committed to that issue.

Tikkun's legacy here, therefore, is not only arguing to the Jewish Right that they've hijacked our ethical tradition and turned it into idolatrous and brutal nationalism; it's looking at Jews on the Left and saying we need you in this struggle, whether or not you want to recognize that you have moral obligations to this struggle. In a way, it's a privilege that allows some Jews to disconnect from Israel/Palestine – you can disconnect if you have cousins in Herzliya but not if you have a cousin in Khan Younis, not if you're Palestinian.

Mark LeVine: So the two key issues are from the Left and the Right, so to speak.

Peter Beinart: In this way the Politics of Meaning lives on; the ideas have larger resonance now than before even if they're not directly articulated under that banner or through *Tikkun*. The reason that the American Jewish establishment is responding so harshly is because the ideas have gained traction. With polls showing that so many Jews, especially younger ones,

think Israel is an Apartheid state, if so many Jews weren't questioning Zionism groups like the ADL wouldn't need to spend so much time demeaning and attacking them.

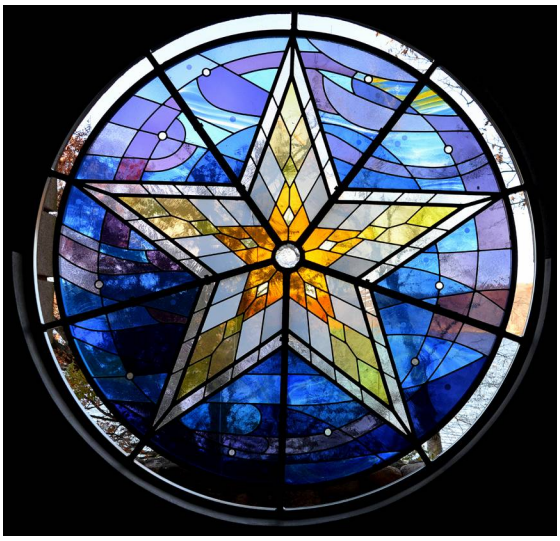
Mark LeVine: Let me push the question a bit more about venues for discussion and debate, which is so – perhaps stereotypically – central to Jewish public life. Without certain well-established spaces where new ideas can be debated and hashed out, tested and confirmed, rejected and/or transformed, how can the kind of Judaism you call for develop? Or are there other spaces now where that can happen – social media, substacks, clubs in rabbinical schools, JVP, etc. Is it just that the particular form of a "Jewish magazine," never mind a print one, is not necessarily as crucial for developing, testing out, and spreading ideas as it was a generation or two ago? Or is it that the very process of deep intellectual engagement and debate itself not as necessary for the present generation as people have seemed finally to coalesce around ideas of progressive politics, Palestinian rights, feminism, ecological justice, etc., to the point where we're beyond needing to debate them (at least internally) and more at the level of praxis, of action? But even here, at the point of action, with all the different groups engaged in a progressive Jewish praxis, many with competing or at least not synergistic ways of engaging in direct action, don't we still need intellectual spaces for these to be sorted out and also to think more self-critically and reflectively about our ideological and political positions, especially when they are becoming more acceptable than before?

Peter Beinart: I'm partial to magazines, which is why I'm connected to *Jewish Currents*, because I think you need spaces that can share the principles of activist movements but also critique them, not be beholden to them. The Left—including the Jewish Left—isn't composed of saints. Power, and even the desire for power, can corrupt. So it's important to have places that have some critical distance. I think *Tikkun* did that and I think new publications are doing that today. The forms of the media may change but the basic mission endures.

Let me end by pointing out a problem that is particularly relevant in this context: that people on the Left, because of their natural suspicion of hierarchy and tradition, don't always do a good job of paying homage and respect to those who've come before and in whose footsteps we walk. I think this is very important vis-à-vis *Tikkun*, for the new generation of progressive Jews to understand its contribution, and it bothers me that there are so many young American Jewish kids involved in struggles for Palestinian freedom that don't really know Michael's work, or that of Henry Siegman, Marcia Freedman, or Arthur Waskow. It's very important to make sure their work is known. It's empowering to know what came before us and that it has shaped our worldviews and given us spaces for action that didn't exist 20 or even 10 years ago. Maybe the struggles were hard and they couldn't go as far as this generation, but at the end of the day they produced something ethically to be proud of. And what better legacy can Rabbi Michael Lerner have than that?

PETER BEINART is Professor of Journalism and Political Science at CUNY and Editor-at-Large of Jewish Currents, an MSNBC political commentator, a frequent contributor to The New York Times, and a Non-Resident Fellow at the Foundation for Middle East Peace. His books include *The Good Fight* (Harper-Collins), *The Icarus Syndrome* (HarperCollins), and *The Crisis of Zionism* (Times Books).

MARK LEVINE is professor of history at UC Irvine and *Tikkun's* longest serving Inner Editorial Board member. He is presently completing a collaboratively written history of the Occupation to be published by the University of California Press. @culturejamming.



Settler Judaism is Murdering Judaism

What role does Spiritual Judaism play in overcoming the Challenge of Settler Judaism?

JEFF HALPER

"Concerned that progressive values widely held by American Jews were fueling growing skepticism about the Jewish state, the Israeli government launched an unprecedented plan to counter the trend, according to internal documents obtained by the Israeli watchdog newsroom Shomrim.... The documents reveal a $2.3 million partnership between Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and the Reform and Conservative movements in the United States focused on pro-Israel advocacy among young and liberal American Jews."

— Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 11, 2022

"Today, an all but unbridgeable political gulf has opened between Israeli and American Jews, with AIPAC [Israel's lobby in Washington] siding with the former in virtually every instance.... The leaders of the lobby long ago stopped talking about "Jews" and stuck mostly to talking about being "pro-Israel." Polls demonstrate that the term "pro-Israel" as defined by AIPAC and company is far more likely to appeal to Republicans and, especially, to conservative Christians than it is to American Jews, whose stubborn liberalism continues to frustrate both the leaders of American Jewish establishment organizations."

— Eric Alterman, "AIPAC vs. American Jews: The Toxic Victories of the 'pro-Israel' Lobby," *Ha'aretz*, August 7, 2022.

I've known Michael Lerner for many years, less personally, although we've met occasionally, and more for his involvement in the New Left and *Ramparts* in a previous *gilgul* and, over the past decades, as a prominent spokesperson for a Judaism of values, mainly through his magazine *Tikkun*, but also in his role as a rabbi and spiritual leader (I once spoke at a *Beyt Tikkun Yom Kippur* service at a service in Berkeley).

As part of this *festschrift* in honor of Michael and his work, I intend to engage in what, for me, is the highest form of honoring someone: taking them seriously as thinkers and doers through a critical evaluation of how well their ideas address issues they, like me, regard as significant. One issue that lies at the heart of our common endeavors is Israel, a place where I have lived for the past 50 years and which for Michael, as a Diaspora Jew, plays a defining, though not independent, role in both his individual and communal life. Israel has become central. We both share a great trepidation regarding Israel's role – in American Judaism, in the oppression of the Palestinian people; and in its global export of its technologies and political model of repression.

In this article, I would like to take Michael's most stark warning about what he calls Settler Judaism, which he regards as a dark "strand" of Judaism (less, tellingly as we will see, of Zionism), namely that it is "murdering" Judaism – with which I certainly agree – and examine it through our two different lenses: my critical political one as an Israeli Jew of the Left and Michael's Diaspora lens of Spiritual Judaism. My conclusions reinforce my long-standing antipathy towards "spiritual" approaches to politics: that by the very questions and concerns they raise, they depoliticize the issue/matter and construct self-contained universes that cannot (and do not) want to incorporate critical analysis, and deflect attention from the actual politics of the issue to idealized problems of a peripheral nature.

"SETTLER JUDAISM:" AN ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCT

Judaism, Michael tells us, has always had within it two competing strands. One he calls the *Right Hand of God*, "the voice that leads towards rigid boundaries, doing to others what we suspect they might want to do to us, and protecting ourselves from a world we believe to be essentially filled with evil and hatred… a perspective of fear and domination [that spawns] the rational strategy… to maximize advantage by learning how to be effective in dominating, manipulating, and controlling others…. And to achieve security, we must learn how to dominate others." Among the "others'' he mentions are the original inhabitants of the land who were subject to genocidal extermination; later Greeks, Romans, Christians; today, Arabs, all regarded "as inherently evil, beyond redemption, and hence deserving of cruelty and violence." By contrast, the *Left Hand of God* represents the other strand of Judaism to which we must strive as Jews and as people, "a voice of hope, trust, and caring for others that says the world can be based on love and generosity,.. [which] affirms the possibility of healing the world and transcending its violence and cruelty,... a love-oriented Emancipatory Judaism,… Love Judaism." It is what he calls Renewal Judaism, a mixture of the spiritual and political. "It is this love, compassion, justice and peace-oriented Judaism that the State of Israel is murdering." Let us Jews, he proposes, use Tisha B'av (the traditional fast-day mourning the destruction of Jewish life in the past) to mourn for the Judaism of love and generosity that is being murdered by Israel and its worshipers around the world, the same kind of idol-worshipers who, pretending to be Jewish but actually assimilated into the world of power, helped destroy our previous

two Jewish commonwealths and our temples of the past.

This sounds fairly straightforward and I, for one, would gladly sign on to Michael's denunciation, if not to save a particularly spiritual Judaism, then to rescue an American Judaism defined in large part by a commitment to human rights and social justice. But here comes the caveat. Michael, like the mainstream of liberal American Jewry, never renounces Zionism itself nor the State of Israel as irredeemably xenophobic, oppressive, and hostile to liberal Jewish values – manifestations in and of themselves of the Right Hand of God, not just some "strand." As opposed to Settler Judaism, which he confines to the Zionist right-wing (Sharon, Netanyahu) and to the religious-national settlers, he posits a pristine notion of a benevolent and historically necessary Zionism and the non-oppressive liberal democracy Israel could be – and in fact was intended to be, although it made some "tragic mistakes" on the way.

Listen to Michael's rendition of Zionism:

> "Jews did not return to Palestine in order to be oppressors or representatives of Western colonialism or cultural imperialism. Although it is true that some early Zionist leaders sought to portray their movement as a way to serve the interests of various Western states, and although many Jews who came brought with them a Western arrogance that made it possible for them to see Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land" and hence to virtually ignore the Palestinian people and its own cultural and historical rights, the vast majority of those who came were seeking refuge from the murderous ravages of Western anti-Semitism or from the oppressive discrimination that they experienced in Arab countries. The Ashkenazi Jews who shaped Israel in its early years were jumping from the burning buildings of Europe–and when they landed on the backs of Palestinians, unintentionally causing a great deal of pain to the people who already lived there, they were so transfixed with their own (much greater and more acute) pain that they couldn't be bothered to notice that they were displacing and hurting others in the process of creating their own state. Just as Americans have resisted seeing themselves as settler-colonialists building a nation-state that depended on wiping out the Indigenous populations of North America, so it was possible for Jews seeking refuge to ignore the pain and injustice that were part of the process of building a Jewish state in Palestine.
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> Their insensitivity to the pain that they caused and their subsequent denial of the fact that in creating Israel they had simultaneously helped create a Palestinian people… was aided by the arrogance, stupidity, and anti-Semitism of Palestinian leaders and their Arab allies in neighboring state…"
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> Israel took a tragic direction by refusing to allow non-combatant Palestinians to return to their homes after winning its war against the invading Arab states. It compounded that choice in the 1967 war against Egypt and Syria and refusing to allow those conquered in the West Bank and Syria to create for themselves a Palestinian state

It is this Zionism that Michael supports and does not appear to regard as a threat to Love Judaism. In the article for Salon that this piece takes its title from, "Israel has Broken My Heart: I'm a Rabbi in Mourning for a Judaism Being Murdered by Israel," he writes:

"My heart is broken as I witness the suffering of the Palestinian people and the seeming indifference of Israelis. All my life I've been a champion of Israel… willing to send my only child to serve in the Israeli Army (the para-

> troopers unit-tzanchanim).... And though as editor of *Tikkun* I printed articles challenging the official story of how Israel came to be... I always told myself that the dominant humanity of the Jewish people and the compassionate strain within Torah would reassert itself once Israel felt secure."
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> That belief began to wane in the past eight years [i.e., since 2008] when Israel, faced with a Palestinian Authority that promoted nonviolence and sought reconciliation and peace, ignored the Saudi Arabian-led peace initiative that would have granted Israel the recognition that it had long sought, an end to hostilities, and a recognized place in the Middle East, refused to stop its expansion of settlements in the West Bank and imposed an economically crushing blockade on Gaza.
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> But it is the brutality of that assault [on Gaza] that finally has broken me into tears and heartbreak.

Now dichotomies such as Michael makes between two contesting "strands" of Judaism in Zionism, a good (if sometimes flawed) one and a bad one, or his compartmentalization between the Israel he champions, to whose army he is willing to send his only child, and a Israel ruled by a pernicious Settler Judaism that has turned it into "an idol to be worshiped rather than a political entity like any other political entity," lie at the heart of the liberal defense of Zionism and Israel. While sincerely outraged by Israel's vicious assaults on Gaza and the excesses of the settlers, the sense of disappointment expressed in the phrase "Israel Has Broken My Heart" presupposes a moral enterprise taking the wrong path, as if the drift into Settler Judaism did not have to happen. True, the "other strand" that was always present in Judaism, be it in the Land of Israel or in the Diaspora, has gained ascendancy in Israel the past couple decades. But if we read Michael's criticism correctly, the situation can be reversed. Settler Judaism can be overcome and Israel returned to the essentially moral, justified, and indispensable national project that it is in essence.

And so we compartmentalize. As Michael defines it, Settler Judaism "reflects the ideology of settling the land that reaches its fulfillment as much in the book of Joshua (and in some quotes in the Torah) as in the reckless acts of Ariel Sharon and the current manifestations of the National Religious Party in Israel." It does not emerge from the settler colonialism of Zionism itself with its exclusive claims to Palestine/the Land of Israel or from its exclusivist nationalism reflective of its Eastern European roots, rather from the "pathological powerlessness" Eastern European Jews felt at the turn of the twentieth century.

The late Israeli journalist and author Amos Elon has a different take. In his insightful book *Israelis: Founders and Sons* (1971), he ascribes Zionism's unfeeling coldness to Arabs, an expression of Settler Judaism long preceding the state of Israel itself, to a kind of fatalism both bred into Israeli culture by the circumstances of its creation and as a justification for its actions and policies – *ain brera*, "there is no choice." "For almost its entire existence Israel has been in a state of war or semi-war," writes Elon.

Early Zionism was predicated upon faith in peaceful change. The discovery that this was nearly impossible has profoundly affected the Israeli temper. As in other liberation movements, whether social or national, the Zionist mystique of redemption has become powerfully intertwined with a mystique of violence....

Israelis are fond of saying that in this prolonged entanglement with forces that have often been superior, their main weapon has been an awareness of *ain brera*, there is no choice. *Ain brera* deserves to be inscribed on the currently motto-less national coat of arms.... It implies a fatalistic, daily shrugging of the shoulders; it

excuses much and explains even more… Israelis often say, "Yes, we live dangerously. *Ain brera*! There is no choice. But we are free!"…

The first thing to note is a spreading cult of toughness…. A spartan rigidity has developed over the years and now marks large segments of the younger adult population. It often spills over from the military life, where it was acquired, to the civilian sphere.... Frequent and prolonged periods of service in the army breeds a stark, intensely introverted, icy matter-of-factness in the young that contrasts sharply with the externalized, rather verbose emotionalism of their elders.

As we will see, I ascribe this attitude to the very agenda of Zionism itself, to the determining logic of settler colonialism. Yet neither Michael nor defenders of Israel see Settler Judaism as a problem in itself. After all, it did not always have a bad reputation. On the contrary, Settler Judaism used to be celebrated as an heroic expression of Jewish nationalism that brought Diaspora Jews pride. Witness the best-settler *Exodus*, its hero Ari Ben Canaan (strangely introduced as "a Palestinian in charge of the escape of German Jews") played by Paul Newman. At one point Michael even explains that the view of the Other as "inherently evil, beyond redemption, and hence deserving of cruelty and violence… actually [played] a very necessary part of keeping psychologically healthy in the long period of Jewish history when we were being oppressed and psychologically brutalized by imperial occupiers or by our most immoral 'hosts' in European societies." The issue is, then, that the *golem* of Settler Judaism has arisen to blot out the (liberal) promise of those glorious days – or more precisely, that right-wing Israeli governments and settlers have, since 2008, led what otherwise is a normal and moral Israel down a destructive path. An immoral form of Judaism safely compartmentalized so that it does represent Israelis or their Jewish defenders, although it threatens the very core of liberal Jewish values.

Attacking Settler Judaism allows Michael to attack the virtually indefensible actions of modern-day Israel without calling into question the idealized Israel to which liberal Jews cling, represented by "awakened" Zionists of the peace camp. While he is obviously and rightly exercised by Settler Judaism's ideology and its violent desire to cleanse the Land of its Palestinian population, he takes comfort in the prospect that, contained and neutralized, it will be suppressed by the forces of Enlightened Judaism. "For a new generation of Jews [both in Israel and in Western societies], bred in circumstances of power and success, a Judaism used as the justification for every nuance of Israeli power and occupation becomes a Judaism that has very little spiritual appeal…. The supremacist ideas of Settler Judaism create a religious ideology that can only appeal to those stuck in the sense that we are eternally vulnerable."

Michael's emphasis on the internal spiritual struggle between spiritually progressive and Settler Judaism not only deflects discussion from the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, it eliminates altogether a genuinely critical assessment of Zionism because it obscures the racist and colonial core of Zionism no matter the variety.

As I explain below, given what we know of Zionism as a settler colonial project from its inception, can we really accept Michael's contention that denying (not "ignoring") Palestinian national rights was merely an expression of "Western arrogance?" Or that Ashkenazi refugees "unintentionally" caused a great deal of pain to the people already living in the country slated by the Zionists to be an exclusively "Jewish" country? Or that the "Jewish refugees" "couldn't be bothered to notice that they were displacing and hurting others in the process of creating their own state," as if Zionism was not

a pro-active settler project whose very purpose, from the start, was to displace the indigenous population and take its land? (That is in fact how "colonization" has always proceeded everywhere, including Palestine.) Or, most surprising of all, that "Israel took a tragic direction by refusing to allow non-combatant Palestinians to return to their homes after winning its war," as if displacement was not a primal indispensable requirement for replacing an Arab country with a Jewish one? (Without mass expulsion – a far cry from "Israel took a tragic direction by refusing to allow non-combatant Palestinians to return to their homes" – almost half the population in the Jewish state within the borders of the Partition Plan would have been Arabs, making a Jewish state untenable.)

Nor does Spiritual Judaism offer a way to resolve the "conflict." Although Michael is politically savvy, his commitment to a spiritually-oriented approach to Israel/Palestine locks him into an idealistic analysis and strategy that is shockingly simplistic, patronizing and almost demonstratively doomed to failure. As he sets out in detail in *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Transform the Middle East* (2012), with the right spiritually-oriented strategy and a program of addressing the poverty in Israel that fuels support for the right-wing, an "awakened group" of Israeli peace activists, liberal Zionists, can "gather the kind of popular support that would position them to change Israeli policies" – meaning supposedly that Israel would start dealing justly with the Palestinians (in whatever form that might assume) and, by extension, that Israeli ethno-religious nationalism, the Right Hand of God, could shifted to a state of liberal democracy, the Left Hand. Indeed, Michael criticizes political "pragmatists" (like me) as break-away elements from the awakened group, people who only divert the efforts of spiritual progressives to raise public consciousness. Michael's contention that a change of consciousness is a precondition for political change is a view which I, as a social scientist, find downright wrong.

So is Settler Judaism merely an insidious strand of Zionism that can be overcome by spiritual progressives, returning Israel to the Left Hand of God, or is it its defining element, rendering it irredeemable? Can, in fact, a nationalist-settler system like Zionism and its progeny, Israel, be redeemed through spiritual awakenings (aided by progressive politics) or must it be dismantled, decolonized (or healed as Michael might say) and transformed (another favorite term of Michael's), assuming another, more just form altogether, that form determined by critical analysis and political calculations? And should it matter to Jews abroad? If Jews like Michael – indeed, most Jews – define themselves as *Diaspora* Jews, i.e., Jews whose lives, religion, and culture revolve around Israel, can they escape being murdered, or having little say over their own ethnic, religious, and spiritual lives? Should they abandon Israel while they can, revalidate their history, experiences, and cultures outside the Land of Israel, in order to assert a Judaism of their own? Is Israel actually "Jewish," or do Jewish nationalism, religious orthodoxy and liberal Jewry represent different systems and cultures all together?

Zionism, which I equate with Settler Judaism, asserts hegemony over world Jewry just as it does over Palestine. And in so doing must delegitimize the liberal, prophetic, and Renewal elements that threaten to murder its own ethno-religious nationalism, unable to reconcile non-orthodox Judaism with a country akin to Orban's Hungary. For the first time since the self-proclaimed 17th century messiah, Shabtai Tzvi, the threat is not to the physical safety of Jews but to the integrity of what it means to be Jewish at all. Freeing themselves of Israel may be the only way liberal, non-Israeli-centric Jews can carve out a cultural space of their own in the face of what Marc Ellis calls a state-defined

Constantinian Judaism linked to a nationalism that is not theirs, an obscurantist religious orthodoxy that denies their very legitimacy as Jews and an inherently oppressive Settler Judaism whose values derive from an obsessive claim to a territory, the mirror opposite of Jewish life abroad.

Putting aside a preoccupation with spiritually redeeming Israel, let's take a hard, critical look at Zionism as a form of Eastern European nationalism and settler colonialism and at the state it spawned. I think we will conclude that changes in worldviews, values, and behaviors follow from systemic change rather than causing them. And since Israel and Israeli Jews cannot be shifted from the Right to Left Hand of God without disavowing Zionism's very purpose, to establish an exclusively "Jewish" state in Palestine, a project that requires the displacement of another people, the erasure of its national presence, and the seizing of its lands, we might well conclude that the only way to prevent Zionism from colonizing Judaism and emptying it of all content is to disassociate with it. Michael seems to get it, although his diaspora-ness prevents him from severing his ties to Israel, even in its present political constellation – so far, at least. "[T]he American Jewish community and Jews around the world have taken a turn that is disastrous, by turning the Israeli nation state into "the Jewish state" and making Israel into an idol to be worshiped rather than a political entity like any other political entity," he writes. "The worship of the state makes it necessary for Jews to turn Judaism into an auxiliary of ultra-nationalist blindness."

THE SYSTEMIC LOGIC OF ZIONIST NATIONALISM AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

What Michael asserts as the domination of the Right Hand of God in Settler Judaism I would subscribe to the logic of settler colonialism – ancient and modern. Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism in which foreign settlers arrive in a country with the intent of taking it over. The settlers' "arrival" is not a form of immigration in which the newcomers seek to integrate into the existing society, however, it is actually an invasion. The settlers come intending to replace the Native population, not integrate into their society as immigrants would (and, indeed, as Jews had done for centuries). The invasion may be sudden, violent, and massive, as in Joshua's conquest of Canaan, or it may be gradual and "peaceful" (despite the settlers' intentions), hardly registered by the indigenous until it's too late, as in the case of Zionism.

The goal of the settlers is to replace the target country with one created and built in their image, which everywhere necessitates displacing the local population, taking their lands and replacing them with the settler society – to transform, in our case, an Arab and by the late 19th century increasingly "Palestinian" country into a Jewish one. That is, what was becoming Palestine had to become Israel, in the process erasing the indigenous presence and denying them any claim to a cultural heritage or national rights. This "logic of elimination," as the anthropologist Patrick Wolfe calls it, is inherent in all settler colonial projects: The indigenous population must be disappeared through displacement, marginalization, assimilation, expulsion, or outright genocide.

Since settler colonialism is unilateral, it is inaccurate to call the inevitable struggle between the settlers and the locals a "conflict," since there is only one "side," that of the invaders who claim an exclusive entitlement to the country. The indigenous are not considered a "side." In the view of the settlers, they have no national, religious, material, strategic, or civilizational claims equal to those of the settlers; they are not an entity to be negotiated with, merely swept aside. Thus even their resistance to the takeover of their country is illegitimate,

framed in criminal terms ("terrorism," "murder," mere "violence" motivated by irrational hatred of the settlers who, after all, want only peace), not political ones.

Indeed, the very description of the clash between settlers and their victims as a "conflict" sets up a false symmetry that only benefits the colonists (and thus the Israeli-Palestinian "Conflict"). We have forgotten," cautioned the Zionist leader Moshe Sharett as far back as 1914,

that we have not come to an empty land to inherit it, but we have come to conquer a country from a people inhabiting it, that governs it by virtue of its language and savage culture.... Recently, there has been appearing in our newspapers the clarification about "the mutual understanding" between us and the Arabs, about "common interests" [and] about "the possibility of unity and peace" between the two fraternal peoples.... [But] we must not allow ourselves to be deluded by such illusive hopes ... for if we seek to look upon our land, the Land of Israel, as ours alone and we allow a partner into our estate – all content and meaning will be lost to our enterprise.

In order to justify their unilateral invasion (to themselves as well as to others), settler movements invent a narrative that supports their claim to the land over those of the indigenous populations. (Indeed, native peoples have no "national" narrative, having never needed one, which puts them at a great disadvantage when confronting settler propaganda, or *hasbara*.) Thus, the Spanish and Portuguese had the Church's Doctrine of Discovery; the French and Chinese their *mission civilisatrice*; Britain a pure profit motive, supported by its "civilizing mission" when necessary (the "white man's burden"); and the American settlers their Divinely-blessed "Manifest Destiny." As for the Zionists, they had a ready-made narrative: the Bible. God gave this land to us, the entitlement myth went, or, to quote Israel's Declaration of Independence, "the Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people." We are the "real" owners "returning" to take back what is historically ours. "This right," says the Declaration of Independence, "is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State." No mention of any other people in the Land, of their rights, of course, as befits the unilateral nature of settler colonialism. But if that issue arises, *hasbara* has the answer: it is "a land without a people, barren, just waiting for those who genuinely care about it to return and make it bloom" – imagery that from the start has characterized Zionist literature, poetry, art and music.

The flip side of Judaization is, therefore, de-Arabization. Our War of Independence is the Palestinians' Nakba, or catastrophe. Half the Palestinian population was driven out (and remain the world's longest suffering refugee population) and virtually all of their lands confiscated (only 3.5% of Israel's land remains in Palestinian hands). The Palestinians that remained became "Israeli Arabs," deprived of the status of a national group with collective rights or institutions through which they might perpetuate a national life of their own. As summarized in the 2018 Jewish Nation-State Law, "The State of Israel is the nation state of the Jewish People in which it realizes its natural, cultural, religious, and historical right to self-determination. The realization of the right to national self- determination in the State of Israel is exclusive to the Jewish People. The State views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value, and shall act to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation."

That same process of invasion, settlement, and *de facto* annexation repeated itself after the 1967 war. Today the settler enterprise has consolidated itself as a single Jewish state permanently ruling the entire Land of Israel/

Palestine between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River – an apartheid regime as it must be, since only by expelling the Palestinians or confining them to tiny Bantustans can the Jewish minority (about 49% of the population of Greater Israel) maintain its hegemony over a Palestinian majority. Today 7.5 million Palestinians live in almost 200 enclaves on only 15% of their homeland.

Zionism, particularly its Eastern European incarnation that dominated immigration and institutions until 1948, was historically a largely secular, even an anti-religious movement. Jewish orthodoxy was associated with the Exile and ghetto mentality, considered hopelessly reactionary. It took its Judaism – very different from the Judaism of liberal American Jews – from the national texts of the Bible: the Five Books of Moses and, not least, the genocidal Book of Joshua and the Israelites' conquest of Canaan, as Michael notes. This made sense not only because it gave Divine authority and historical substance to the Zionists' claim to Palestine, but because Zionist settler colonialism represented almost a recreation of the Israelites' own project of conquering, settling, and transforming Canaan into a "Jewish" country.

Since Zionism invokes Jewish national and historical rights going back to biblical times, it should be of no surprise that the ancient Hebrews/Israelites/Judeans were themselves settler colonists, although they bore little, if any, actual relation to modern Jews. Though Zionism used the biblical narrative to support its claim to Palestine, historians would come to the opposite conclusion: the Israelite conquest in fact disproves claims to Israelite/Jewish indigeneity. Much of the biblical narrative from Genesis to the Book of Joshua records the displacement of the indigenous Canaanites by means of divinely ordained genocide, beginning around 1200 BCE. Here we see the emergence of the biblical narrative of "Jewish" dominion:

- The covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:8) establishes the initial national/historical entitlement;
- Genesis 9:25-27, where Canaan is cursed by Noah, as is his father Ham, who then blesses his other two sons Shem and Japhet, establishes the right – indeed, the genocidal imperative – to replace the indigenous population deemed of lower worth by Divine power. Adds Deuteronomy 7:1-6,

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you – and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

- Numbers 13, where, with Moses' sending the spies into Canaan to map out the terrain, the actual process of Israelite settler colonialism begins:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel.... Then

> Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them,… '[S]ee what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land *is* rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land.'

- And, of course, the Book of Joshua, the chronicle of the Israelites' invasion and conquest (Ben Gurion's favorite book):

> After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them – to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates – all the Hittite country – to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

Once conquered, territory was allocated by tribe, an effective way of asserting control throughout the country, and Hebracizing place names (Gilgal, Jerusalem, Valley of Achor, Hebron, Bethel, Dab), further erasing the indigenous Canaanite presence and Judaizing the Land. This process of colonial consolidation lasted centuries.

Finally, the historian of ancient religions Pekka Pitkanen, author of *Migration and Colonialism in Late Second Millennium BCE Levant and Its Environs*, even identifies a second "colonial peak" in the Judaization of Canaan. Some three centuries after Joshua's conquests, Solomon enslaved the peoples remaining in the land whom the Israelites could not exterminate – the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (1 Kings 9:20-21).

The Bible represents a classic example of a settler colonial narrative of entitlement and replacement in which the authors invent genealogies, divine promises, a particularist religion and evil (Amalek) or rebellious peoples in order to justify their transformation of Canaan into the Land of Israel. Such a form of ethno-religious nationalism also dovetailed with the xenophobic tribal nationalism of Central and Eastern Europe, the only kind of nationalism with which the Zionists, most of whom were Eastern Europeans, were familiar. No matter that the Jews themselves had suffered from this kind of nationalism which excluded them more than any other people; they found it the perfect vehicle for their own nationalist project, and so imported it into Palestine. While Israel strives to present itself as a liberal Western democracy – a description Michael, Diaspora Jews and even Israelis accept minus the occupation, which, again, is seen as an unwanted and detachable appendage – it in fact is an Eastern European ethnocracy, a country that "belongs" to one particular people, the opposite of Western democracy and getting ever further away.

So while Michael may be correct that "Jews did not return to Palestine in order to be oppressors" (indeed, the "Arabs" were not a part of the Zionist equation), the intent to assert Jews' exclusive claim to Palestine, based on their entitlement to the Land coming from the Torah, could not possibly have led to another outcome besides displacement, conquest, occupation, apartheid, and Settler Judaism. Settler Judaism is not merely a by-product of Zionism that can somehow be excised in order

to return to a moral national movement; it is the essence of Zionism. Sharon, Netanyahu, Smotrich, and Ben Gvir do not merely represent the Right Hand of God, they are not deviations from some moral enterprise. They are Zionism's inevitable products.

The aim of replacing an Arab country with a Jewish one can never accommodate Michael's Love Judaism. The shift from the Right to Left Hand of God does not depend on awakening Israelis' social and spiritual consciousness. Being structurally determined and made the *ain breira* default by the logic of settler colonialism. By its nature settler colonialism is infused with all the ingredients of the Right Hand of God: a world filled with fear, insecurity, and hatred in which Arabs are regarded as inherently evil, beyond redemption, and hence deserving of cruelty and violence." It has to be, since settler colonialism, Settler Judaism, Zionism, Israel can never find peace, justice, reconciliation or security, built as it is on ongoing injustice and violence, never able to genuinely secure itself against the necessary and permanent resistance of those it oppresses.

The Left Hand of God has no space whatsoever in such a system. It can only emerge after a *political* process of decolonization followed by the rise in Palestine/the Land of Israel of a just, egalitarian, inclusive polity, and society that corrects the injustices – Palestinian self-determination within a civic state that includes Israeli Jews, the return of the refugees, and the redistribution of the land as a start. It is that post-colonial period of reassembly and reconciliation that a process of psycho-social rehabilitation between and within two traumatized societies will be needed. I'm not sure that it will rise to Michael's aspiration of a spiritual rebirth, but it could certainly contribute to the emergence of a new political community, a new shared society that enables the young, in particular, to move on towards a brighter future. What Michael's consciousness-raising will not do is create within the Israeli public of today a willingness to entertain such a prospect. As Michael himself has pointed out, a just postcolonial reality will have to be imposed as it was on the whites of South Africa. Only after comes the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

It is within this context that the religious-national variation of Settler Judaism arose, the main focus of Michael's attention. Despite the opposition of most *haredim* (ultra-orthodox) to Zionism, a number of rabbis given prominent positions in the Zionist establishment endeavor to bring secular Jewish nationalism into an acceptable orthodox theological framework. The most significant figure in this regard was Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who's embrace of "Religious Zionism" in the early 1900s enabled the marriage of settler nationalism and religious orthodoxy – and earned him the title Chief Rabbi of Palestine. From Kook's Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva arose, after 1967, the Gush Emunim settler movement, by then under the "spiritual" leadership of Kook's son, Zvi Yehuda.

The amalgam of ultra-nationalist Israeli Jewish orthodoxy with the messianism now released with the conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, has resulted in a form of Settler Judaism as far from liberal Western Jewry as possible. For a young generation of violent messianic settlers for whom Palestinian are not only usurpers and terrorists but the embodiment of Amalek, the mission of Judaizing the Land of Israel and returning to a pre-rabbinic form of Judaism has replaced any recognizable form of religious orthodoxy, let alone liberal Judaism. They aspire to the ethnically-cleansed priestly State of Judea and Samaria alongside the secular state of Israel – their version of the two-state solution, and they today sit in powerful positions within the Israeli government. Bezalel Smotrich, one of the most

extreme and violent settlers, now heads the Civil Administration, Israel's military government over the West Bank that possesses the power to clear Palestinians off their land, seize it, and build upon it massive settlement cities and highways incorporating Judea and Samaria inextricably into Israel proper.

It is surprising that Michael and liberal Jews even consider Zionism "Jewish;" it certainly denies their Judaism. While Zionism, of which a mainly orthodox Settler Judaism is an integral and by now dominant part, claims to represent *all* the world's Jews, one of its elemental principles is the negation of the exile. Zionism sets up Israel as the *only* place where a viable and "genuine" Judaism that restores the people's national identity is possible. All Jewish life outside Israel is seen as ephemeral, at best only semi-Jewish (evincing a shameful "ghetto mentality" forged out of religious and national weakness), certainly not rising to the status of a legitimate Diaspora. And indeed, most Jews outside of Israel have accepted this, wittingly or not, by defining themselves as *Diaspora* Jews.

SUMMING UP

As is obvious from what I've written, I agree wholeheartedly with Michael that Settler Judaism poses a death threat to non-orthodox Judaism, from its mainstream liberal Rabbinic form through Spiritual Progressives and on to any Jew, religious or not, radical Left to conservative, for whom Judaism offers a cultural heritage of humanistic values from which to imbibe. In my view, Judaism abroad (not "diaspora" Judaism) sits for the most part on God's Left Hand. The *haredim* outside of Israel – and many inside as well – represent another case. Standing apart from Zionism, Israel and the orthodox Constantinian Judaism of the nationalist orthodox, Sephardi Shas, or the "modern" orthodox of Lakewood, NJ, refuse to define themselves either as diaspora Jews (except in the sense of the Land of Israel) or by Settler Judaism, which they see as a threat to their version of Judaism as much as Michael sees it as a threat to his. Still, their reactionary xenophobia, extending to other Jews, would place them, in Michael's schema, on God's Left Hand, despite the spiritualism that marks Hasidism. Unlike Michael, however, I equate Settler Judaism with Zionism itself. That means that Zionism and the very state of Israel threaten to murder Judaism, even as they claim to represent its "true" expression.

The threat to liberal and progressive Judaism is not, I would argue, the threat posed by Settler Judaism to Jewish spirituality. It is not the spiritual in Judaism that Zionism is targeting, but the political. Zionism targets liberal Judaism's commitment to social justice, human rights, universalism, and a tradition of critical thought and politics. It is the *prophetic element* of Judaism that so threatens Zionist Settler Judaism. It is precisely that, that Zionism strives to negate, and it is on this ground that it must be repelled.

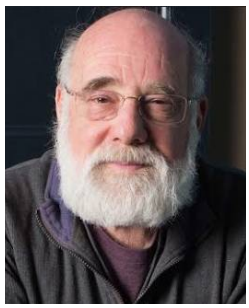
Zionism has not yet murdered Judaism but it has undermined its moral and historical integrity. Just as Israel must de-Zionize in order to finally find its place in the Middle East, so, too, must Jews abroad de-Zionize in order to reclaim their own Jewish traditions, experiences, communal validity, and values. Distancing themselves from Israel would place the world's Jews more firmly in God's Left Hand. It would also free them not only to criticize Israel but, as Michael says, to treat it as a political entity like any other political entity instead of as an object of worship. Signs of a Jewry mortified by Settler Judaism and assertive of its own values are emerging. Unlike Michael's Spiritual Judaism (hopefully to change in the future), prophetic strains of Judaism are actually disavowing Zionism. The decision of the Jewish Voice for Peace

declaring itself an anti-Zionist organization is a case in point. Its manifesto, "Our Approach to Zionism," states that:

The Jewish Voice for Peace is guided by a vision of justice, equality and freedom for all people. We unequivocally oppose Zionism because it is counter to those ideals.... Through study and action, through a deep relationship with Palestinians fighting for their own liberation, and through our own understanding of Jewish safety and self-determination, we have come to see that Zionism was a false and failed answer to the desperately real question many of our ancestors faced of how to protect Jewish lives from murderous antisemitism in Europe. While it had many strains historically, the Zionism that took hold and stands today is a settler colonial movement, establishing an apartheid state where Jews have more rights than others. Our own history teaches us how dangerous that can be....

Rather than accept the inevitability of occupation and dispossession, we choose a different path.... We choose solidarity. We choose collective liberation. We choose a future where everyone, including Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, can live their lives freely in vibrant, safe, equitable communities, with basic human needs fulfilled.

And once Jews outside Israel liberate themselves from Israel, thereby removing a key pillar of international support for Settler Judaism, they not only become part of the political movement to transform Greater Israel into a state of all its citizens, Israeli and Palestinian alike, they play a role in liberating Israeli Jews as well. That cannot be done by an awakened group of liberal Zionists in a settler state that is structurally and ideologically incapable of moving to God's Left Hand. After achieving a just and inclusive post-colonial polity and society through political means, however, the psychodynamic approach advocated by Michael might well play an important role in the process of healing, transformation, and reconciliation that must follow it.



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Jeff's latest books are *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification* (London: Pluto, 2015) which was shortlisted for the *Palestine Book Award, and Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine: Zionism, Settler Colonialism and the Case for One Democratic State* (London: Pluto, 2021).
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On Being Without a Passport in Palestine

JOSHUA SCHREIER

Last May, I lost my passport in Palestine.

My brother and I had just arrived at our hotel in downtown East Jerusalem. We are both American professors in Jewish Studies, and we planned to join a group of other US-based educators for a faculty development seminar. We were going to travel around Israel/Palestine to meet and talk with Palestinian academics and activists living and working in areas under Israeli military occupation, including East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Nablus. We were also going to meet people in Haifa, which is technically not under occupation, but rather part of what's called Israel proper or Green Line Israel, the 78 percent of British mandatory Palestine that became Israel in 1948.

Soon after we checked in at our hotel, we went out for a walk down Salah ad-Din Street, a main commercial area, visited a coffee shop, and then turned right at the corner at Sultan Suleyman Street. That's when I noticed my passport was no longer in my pocket.

I was plunged into panic. Through one absent-minded lapse, my condition suddenly echoed what Palestinians in the region experience constantly: Israel may call itself the Jewish state, but it is, above all else, a state. As a foreigner, you need a passport to enter and leave. Israel also vigilantly polices internal crossings—notably into and between parts of the West Bank and Gaza, occupied territory Israel conquered in 1967, and that constitutes 22 percent of the country's land.

I revisited the coffee shop and retraced my steps. Twice. Then I contacted the staff of the Golden Walls Hotel, where we were staying, and I got in touch with the organizers of our trip. No one had seen my passport. As the evening wore on, all I could do was focus on calming down. Everyone was sympathetic, but no one had useful advice.

Penny, the American director of the research center, did offer a consoling reminder: "Hey, you lost a passport, not a leg. Something will work out." This was about five months prior to Israel's brutal invasion of Gaza, but even then the IDF, in the course of policing the Occupied Territories, was inflicting hundreds of casualties on the country's stateless Palestinian population per year. In early January, since the conflict

erupted in October, 2023, the UN estimated that Israel was blowing one or both legs of ten children a day. Penny had a point.

As my desperation mounted, I was talking on the phone with one of the local organizers of the trip, around two o'clock in the morning. He offered words roughly to this effect: "I can't promise anything, but it will probably turn up."

"Really?" I asked. I was not overcome with optimism.

But he went on to explain that the merchants of East Jerusalem were a tightly knit group. He'd posted a notice about my missing passport to their shared Facebook group. Should my passport find its way into their custody, "they'll get in touch," he assured me.

I was still skeptical—and still anxious. Not only was I effectively exiled from the seminar, I was also afraid I wouldn't be able to fly home. Even with a passport, travelers in and out of Israel can expect a thorough inquisition if they catch the attention of airport security. Wrong or halting answers to a battery of questions such as "What did you do in Israel?" "Do you have family here?" and "Where did you go?" can land you in a miniature purgatory of your own until your interlocutor is satisfied.

A former student of mine—Jewish—once told me she missed her flight going to Israel because she confessed to having taken a history class on the Israel-Palestine conflict. She took a flight the following day.

But leaving Israel seemed even scarier. Colleagues and friends—albeit non-Jewish ones—had experienced security personnel taking their cell phones and scrolling through the pictures in search of evidence that travelers had not just visited holy places or approved tourist sites, but had also gone to the West Bank or spoken to Palestinians. I'd also heard horror stories about how slowly the new U.S. embassy in Jerusalem works. Procuring a new passport, it was clear, would be an ordeal.

The night wore on. I was unable to sleep, and I felt powerless. I also felt I was imposing mightily on my Palestinian hosts, who routinely contended with far greater problems.

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As I tossed and turned, I reflected on another grim irony: the next day was Nakba Day, the annual commemoration of the atrocities inflicted on Palestinians in 1948.

Originally, the term Nakba (Arabic for catastrophe) described the collection of massacres, military assaults, sexual violence, and forced expulsions the pre-state Zionist militias inflicted on Palestinians in 1948. The militias—chiefly Haganah and Irgun—realized a longstanding goal of expelling most indigenous non-Jews from the land that became Israel. Over the course of the Nakba, 750,000 people were expelled from their homeland. They became refugees virtually overnight.

Nakba now references an ongoing process. It has become a shorthand term for the military occupation of the land Israel additionally conquered in 1967, including the dispossession of 5.5 million Palestinians living in these territories. It also refers to Israel's refusal to allow Palestinians living elsewhere to return home. Nakba now encompasses the denial of basic rights and protections under Israeli military rule.

As during the 1948 Nakba, Israel's current rationale for its policies of dispossession and repression boils down to "security." Despite this, apologists for Israeli policy concede that the ultimate reason to deny Palestinians basic rights is demographic rather than military. In the Orwellian euphemisms favored in such circles, granting subject or exiled Palestinians

citizenship would threaten the racial balance, err.."Jewish character" of Israel.

During the commemoration of Nakba Day, such worries move to the head of Israel's security agenda. Israel keeps a tight lid on Palestinian speech and expression, banning most public observances of the holiday.

As a Jew temporarily without papers in Palestine on Nakba Day, I found myself athwart conventional categories, a privileged visitor to Israel, yet lacking documentation to prove it. I was hoping for a spasm of altruism from people enduring grinding conditions of oppression. I was praying that a passerby—most likely, a stateless Palestinian passerby—would find and return my passport, on the very day set aside to remember the systematic expulsion of their people from what has become the Jewish state.

As I lay in fear, thinking about these besetting ironies, I realized Zionists had a long history of cultivating anxiety and fear—not only among Israel's real or imagined enemies, but among Jews like me.

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From the beginning, Zionism was conceived in fear. Even before the push for a Jewish state in the Middle East emerged as a nationalist movement with the founding of the Zionist Organization in 1897, proto-Zionists such as Leon Pinsker (1821-1891) described those Jews who did not understand their need for a separate homeland as sick men. Observing mounting anti-Jewish violence in the Russian Empire, Pinsker feared that Jews not in search of a homeland could not diagnose, let alone effectively treat, their "illness."

Zionist leader Max Nordau (1849-1923) feared the putative weakness and feminization of Jews. In his famous essay "Jews of Muscle," he called for the adoption of an athletic, masculinist Jewish ideal to face down the burgeoning anti-Semitic threats Jews faced in Europe.

The poet Haim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934), whom Israel would later honor as its first national poet, made the terrorized Jews of Kishinev his inspiration. He likened the victims of the horrific pogrom of 1902 to "cockroaches" and "dogs." He derided them for hiding, and then seeking their rabbis' counsel, rather than fighting back against the men who raped their wives and daughters.

Zionist settlers brought this cult of ethnic self-assertion to Palestine, one that was alien to the Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as to Ashkenazi Jews who already lived there. Their goal of establishing a Jewish state was a separatist project—a new society sundered from anti-Semitic Europe, but also segregated from the indigenous population. The dual Labor Zionist projects of the "conquest of land" (of Palestine) and "conquest of labor" (which meant obtaining jobs for Jewish settlers, even at Palestinian workers' expense) became central to launching Israel as a new society exemplifying Jewish autonomy and self-determination.

There were other Jewish responses to anti-Semitic violence, and indeed, most Jews did not subscribe to Zionism in its first decades. But the deeper foundations of the Zionist project hark back to longstanding preoccupations with anti-Jewish violence, powerlessness, and fear.

If Zionism was born of fear, it also came to depend upon fear. To justify the coercive undertaking of launching a separate Jewish economy and society in a corner of the Ottoman Empire where the indigenous population was only about 4 percent Jewish, Zionists presented Palestine's non-Jewish population as a threat. It was anything but a tough sell: given the stated Zionist goal of creating a Jewish-majority

society in Palestine, the local population really was a threat. Not to Jews, mind you—Jews had been living in Palestine for centuries, and their numbers were actually increasing in the nineteenth century—but to the realization of Zionist hopes.

Some Zionist organizations cultivated fear as the key entering wedge to the creation of a segregated social and economic order. With the dynamic native Arab society now branded as an existential threat to Jewish autonomy, early Jewish leaders of the Yishuv (the pre-1948 Jewish community) exhorted Jews to refrain from patronizing Arab business, hiring Palestinian employees—they even tried to organize separate unions for Jews and Palestinians.

This broader understanding of the segregationist agenda at the heart of the Zionist state's founding is crucial to making sense of Israeli policy more than a half century into the Occupation and 15 years into the siege of Gaza. Both are rooted in this agenda, and both feed on Palestinian responses to this agenda. The trauma of the violence carried out by Hamas on October 7 sent the Likud-led Israeli state back to these same psychic foundations and proceeded to trigger the much greater horror of the months since.

In America, supporters of Israel cultivate fear among a different audience: not only among Diaspora Jews here, but also among the political establishment writ large. It's become a mantra in such circles that Israel perpetually faces an "existential threat" from hostile regimes on "all sides" (a claim that ignores Israel's numerous peace treaties) as well as from the Palestinians under Occupation. The same goes for the companion (if entirely contradictory) claim that Israel serves as a safe haven for diaspora Jews. I can't think of any other state that bills itself as a refuge that simultaneously teeters on the brink of annihilation.

Even now, as sympathy for Palestinians surges among young Americans, fueling a growing demand for a ceasefire in Gaza, self-styled defenders of Jews in the United States claim that antisemitism has "rotted" Harvard and other lead institutions of the old establishment. It matters little that most alleged trespasses provoking such spittle-flecked outrage remain purely hypothetical, just as it doesn't matter that most of these same have spent the last few decades inveighing against "woke" and "politically correct" suppression of free expression in universities and other redoubts of public debate. No, what matters is the overall climate of fear once again being ritually summoned as a first-line Jewish casus belli. Just as it had in the pre-state period, solidarity (a lack of fear) among Jews, Palestinians, and others who would help build a shared society in the Holy Land threatens the Zionist dream. Fear is the most important commodity in the emotional economy of Israel advocacy.

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These policies of separation and fear are manifest across today's Occupied Territories—not only in the ruins of Gaza, but along the West Bank, which is home to more than 3 million Palestinians thrust into new, albeit underreported, conditions of terror and precarity at the behest of the Israeli government.

Israeli state forces lock down the subject population via a vast network of walls, fences, roadblocks, limited-access roads, and soldier-staffed checkpoints that slice up the West Bank. They also prop up this infrastructure with a dizzyingly complex regime of permits, dividing people into a byzantine taxonomy of legal statuses.

On the most basic level, there are 9.8 million full citizens of Israel (79 percent of whom are Jews), and then five million stateless Palestin-

ians. Palestinians live in a state best described as apartheid throughout the West Bank, the besieged enclave of Gaza, and the gray zone of East Jerusalem. Movement through or between these areas is monitored and often blocked by the Israeli military: depending on where one starts and where one is headed, even holders of valid permits or foreign passports can expect their papers to be checked several times a day.

The state of Israel frequently reminds its citizens and guests that they should be afraid. Its reminders are strewn along roadsides on the edges of densely populated areas in the West Bank—categorized as Area A, nominally administered by the Palestinian Authority, which works in cooperation with the Israeli government.

On red road signs, Israeli authorities remind Israelis and foreigners of the putative dangers of being among Palestinians: "Entrance for Israeli Citizens Is Forbidden," they announce in Hebrew, Arabic, and English, urgently advising that passing through non-Jewish neighborhoods is "Dangerous to Your Lives." It would be hard to overstate the cravenness of such messaging: even as Israeli settlers continue to seize and settle more Palestinian land, harass and attack Palestinian civilians, often with the open support of the Israeli soldiers who enforce the Occupation, the state of Israel hews close to the established Zionist dogma: local Palestinian civilians are the ones who are "dangerous."

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I vividly recall how the fear of Palestinians played a central role in my own education about Israel. When I visited as a child, I recall picking up a matchbox on the street (I collected them) only to be warned by a concerned older relative who had emigrated there that "Arabs put bombs in matchboxes." Once, at my Hebrew school (run by people I otherwise remember as thoughtful, liberal, kind, and extremely patient), we were asked to tackle a moral thought-exercise. It required reading brief biographies of 10 fictitious kibbutz members, of whom only 5 could fit in a similarly fictitious bomb shelter. Our task was to decide which Jews should be saved "when the Arabs bomb the kibbutz and everyone outside is killed."

Years later, when I came back to Israel as a recent college graduate to study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the wake of the first Intifada, I was consistently warned to avoid East Jerusalem because I might be attacked. Later in the academic year, hoping to better learn Hebrew, I asked to switch into a dormitory suite with some new Hebrew-speaking friends. But since those friends included Palestinian students, the authorities at Hebrew University forbade it, saying that they could not allow Jews and Arabs to live together because "it caused problems."

The message was clear: the authorities at Hebrew University believed they had to uphold the society-wide mandate of segregation on their own campus grounds. That meant keeping foreign Jewish students like me quartered with either each other or with Israeli Jews. The segregationist logic here never converted me, but I remained struck by how fear served as the strongest fiber in the relationship I was encouraged to have with Israel. Experiencing Israel as a foreign student was less about the array of actual people who lived there than it was about the Jews, whom the state really represented. The housing office's job was to protect me from the others who lived in Israel.

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As I arose on Nakba day, having slept very little, I realized none of this training had worked. I was not in the least bit afraid of Palestinians as a group. If anything, I had particular admira-

tion for the culture. I had Palestinian and Arab friends and colleagues. Without my passport, however, I was terrified of the Israeli state.

I was determined to keep this raging anxiety under wraps when I met my colleagues for breakfast in the hotel lobby; I promptly failed. Eventually, I did manage to contact the U.S. embassy through email, while my hosts contacted the liaison for Palestinian affairs at the United States Consulate.

Later that morning, guides from a Palestinian organization took us on a tour through the Old City of Jerusalem, an area in which tourists can navigate relatively freely without showing soldiers their papers. The tour included the many buildings in Palestinian neighborhoods that had been seized from their owners and occupants and handed over to Israelis or Israeli institutions.

The groups of soldiers frequently planted near these houses highlighted how such seizures have served an important political purpose—in addition to taking more land, they also cultivate Palestinian frustration. This, in turn, reinforces the perverse dynamic whereby Israelis regard all Palestinians as security risks who must be kept in line with constant, humiliating interrogations and shows of force from the IDF. The reservoirs of fear must remain full. We returned to the hotel after lunch.

Later that afternoon, I was standing by the front desk of the hotel and talking with some of my American colleagues and Palestinian hosts. The phone rang and the receptionist answered. She looked around, saw me, and asked, "Are you Joshua?"

I was, despite not holding the documents to prove it.

The person on the other end of the line was calling from the office of the American consulate. Someone had found my passport, and it was at the consulate in Tel Aviv. I melted in relief, thanking him profusely. I also mentioned how odd it was that my passport had found its way to Tel Aviv as I had lost it in Jerusalem only about 18 hours earlier.

Well, it hadn't. The consulate staffer explained that he wasn't actually holding my passport; he'd better ask the person he had spoken to verify the location. I should sit tight.

Shortly afterward, he called back —again to the front desk of the hotel—and corrected the story. My passport was at a small smoke shop whose owner had called the American consulate. He gave me the address. It was a block from where I was standing.

A pedestrian had found my passport on the ground and given it to one of the merchants lining Salah ad-Din Street. The merchant had seen the Facebook posting, but not before he got in touch with the embassy.

I ran over to the smoke shop to find a small, well-kept establishment with Plexiglas shields over the counter, presumably installed during the pandemic. It was among the cluster of small shops at a busy corner. A group of a half dozen or so men were waiting to buy something or talking, so I hovered in back, waiting for a chance to talk to the good-looking, slightly harried youngish man behind the counter. I had on hand some cash to offer as a reward. When I got up front, I told him who I was. He smiled, turned, grabbed a small paper bag, and gave it to me. After I took my passport, I thanked him and handed him some cash as a reward, which he good-naturedly refused.

"Oh, no thank you!"

"Please, sir. You sort of saved my life."

"My grandfather would never have allowed me to take that," he explained in perfect, unaccented English.

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

Well, "shukran! Thank you!" I said, over and over again, as I was finally able to relinquish my clenched state of apprehension and fear and feel blessed relief wash over me.

He said, "You're welcome," in English, but I kept thinking of how one can say that in slightly elevated Arabic: La shukra 'aala wajib, or "no thanks (are due) on a duty."

But I wanted to give some shukr for his wajib. So later that day I brought him a box of fresh halawiyyat, or deserts, from nearby Jaffar Sweets in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, the same area I was grimly instructed to shun during my year studying at Hebrew University. My young merchant friend reluctantly accepted my gift, but not before mordantly noting, "You don't give up, do you?"

I thought once more about how I'd been rendered a panicked mess over the loss of my proof of national belonging, his act of kindness that rescued me, and the permanent condition of statelessness Israel subjects his people to. I thought to myself, "Actually, dude, you don't."

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The whole petty ordeal I'd just weathered had swiftly transported me to the far side of the landscape of fear. I had spent most of Nakba Day in fear of instruments of the modern Israeli state, anxiously anticipating how to travel around—or even out of—a putatively Jewish country founded on an ideological platform of refuge and protection for my people: in many cases, Jews who had lacked passports or any legal belonging.

Now I was suffused in relief. I had papers. I felt safe. And it was thanks to the work and basic (yet somehow remarkable) decency of a collection of (mostly stateless) Palestinians. These individuals had helped return a lost passport to an absent-minded American Jew. They did so on the banned anniversary of Palestinian trauma, amid the ongoing horror of occupation, all carried out in the putative defense of a people to whom I ostensibly belonged.

My eighteen anxious hours of imaginary statelessness were eye-opening. When Israel boasts of being a Jewish state, the adjective tends to resonate more than the noun. But even setting aside the fact that Israel does not govern according to what many Jews understand to be Jewish core values, Israel is first and foremost a state. It operates with the full complement of the modern coercive mechanisms of other states—all heightened and weaponized under the mandate of overseeing the occupation of 5.5 million stateless inhabitants.

Those Zionists who promote a Jewish state that necessitates the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland justify Israeli policy's abject lack of humanity by cultivating fear among its citizens and its would-be supporters abroad. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy abetted by state-sanctioned brutality, a recursive embrace of segregationist impunity that inevitably provokes violent responses that in turn generate more fear among Jews. This was demonstrated in spectacular fashion on and since October 7.

But another key element of the Zionist regime is the everyday fear nourished by separation, by road signs, by political messaging, and university housing policies. It's this relentless drumbeat of fear—inscribed into the country's landscape and replicated on laptop screens and checkpoints in all the bureaucratic outposts of the Jewish state—that convinces good liberals that denying basic rights to an ethnic group is perfectly reasonable.

This logic appeared in all its stark, brutal idiocy when I was saved from stateless limbo in Israel,

on Nakba day, by the everyday kindness of stateless individuals whom the culture of Israeli solidarity had trained so many of us to fear.

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In addition to a number of articles, he is the author of *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (Rutgers, 2010) , and *The Merchants of Oran: A Jewish Port at the Dawn of Empire* (Stanford, 2017).

Poetry at Tikkun, the Why and the Wherefore

JOSHUA WEINER

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, 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 Michael Lerner, from the beginning, intuited the role that poetry had to play in promoting a progressive vision. Also, he knew that readers liked them!–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, Wis□awa 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 1990's. 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 (from Chicago) and a book of cultural & political reporting, *Berlin Notebook: Where Are the Refugees?* (LARB). He is also the editor of *At the Barriers: On the Poetry of Thom Gunn*. His translation of Nelly Sachs' 1959 volume, *Flight & Metamorphosis* (FSG) has been short-listed for the 2023 National Translation Award. 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 joined the editorial staff of Tikkun in 1987; he served as the magazine's poetry editor from 1997 to 2021. He teaches at the University of Maryland and lives with his family in Washington DC.

Poem "Psalm"

JOSHUA WEINER

This poem, "Psalm", can be found in my first book, *The World's Room*, published in 2001. I wrote it during an earlier summer, a few months after Michael appointed me poetry editor (and after about eight years of working on the staff to help bring poetry to the magazine). I was still unknown as a writer, there was no real reason for Michael to think I could do this job well; but he showed confidence in my abilities, to the extent I had had the chance to demonstrate some of them; and he just kinda rolled the dice with me and let me have a go at it. Well, that lasted about 23 more years. What the poem expresses is something that Tikkun cultivated and nurtured in me at that time; I knew it then, and it gives me pleasure to share that with Michael now. I don't think I could have or would have written the poem without the values and points of view of the magazine filtering into my frame of thinking and feeling. On the occasion of this festschrift, I bow deeply to Michael in gratitude and acknowledgement, and with affection, jw

Psalm

Joshua Weiner

When I sing to you I am alone these days
and can't believe it, as if the stars

--while gazing up at them--just shut off.
Astonished:

I search out the one light, brightest light
in the night sky, but find

I cannot find it without weaker lights to guide me
like red tail-lights on a car up ahead

after midnight when I'm sleepy, that illustrate
how the highway curves,

curving to a hook, and maybe save my life
and it means nothing to me

because nothing has happened, not the faintest
glint of drama.

(Raining gently, the tarmac turns slick, moistened
to life with renewed residues;

I can sense it with my hands on the wheel,
the drops--not too heavy--

drumming off-time rhythms on the metal roof,
the metal surface like a skin tense and sweating

and the road empty now, there are so many
exits . . .)

Where is my family, both hearth and constellated trail of flicker
I have always followed to your word?

There, but mastered by fear of dark compulsions
and loathing atrocities committed in your name,

they hit the dimmer switch and extinguish themselves
whenever I sing your praises. . .

Who can blame them?
(I can't help but blame them.)

And anyway they are far from me
(farthest when they come to visit)--

I should be self-reliant, in my armchair
like Emerson reading by a single lamp;

I should not need them, finding in you
myself, little firebug needing no outlet,

my soft light blinking as I oxidize my aimless flight
to love, to the good,

even my glowing chemistry unnecessary now
in the ultimate light of day.

But what good would that do me?
With you, in you, perhaps others do not matter,

but this isn't heaven, and I cannot make a circle
all on my own--

Photon, luciferin, meteor: as I burn myself
to pieces, I only pray

let my sparking tail remain a moment longer
than our physics might allow,

some indication, however brief, that there continues
(amen) a path to follow.

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"The Breasted God" Poem, An Introduction

FRANCES PAYNE ADLER

Dear Michael,

Let me tell you the story behind the poem. I had come to a canyon of muscled sycamore, come without words to the weeks of waning summer, come to surrender my deepest silence. It was there, in late summer of 2000, that I read your book, *Jewish Renewal*.

A friend had offered her house as a writing retreat before I went back to teaching. A gift, a house filled with light, with books – feminist and Jewish books. A gift, as was your book, there, on the shelf.

And your vision, on page 313, stood right up on the page:

> "...(T)he name of God can be shifted. God tells that very thing to Moses at the burning bush: that God was known to Moses' ancestors as El Shadie, the Breasted God, but that now God will be known as YHVH. If that switch from female energy was necessary at that period, then any name suggesting maleness may need to be abandoned in this period."

I had been teaching feminist creative writing for years. And your words were the 'click,' the 'way in' to the poem I had come there to write.

There you were writing about the moment of shifting from El Shadie female energy to male energy. And there I was, at that time, co-creating a shift from male military energy to a female educational one.

Your words illuminated the circle I was standing in. And the poem came.

I had been hired just a few years earlier, along with other founding faculty, to transform the former Fort Ord military base into a university. Fort Ord, closed by the Army, after 80 years of training soldiers for war.

We were hired to design California State University Monterey Bay, CSU's new 21st campus. To re-imagine what education could look like for the 21st century. Instead of educating men to fight each other, what would it look like to educate women and men of many cultures to listen and learn from each other to resolve differences?

Our Provost was a woman. Four of our five Deans were women. More than a third of our students were Mexican American, many first in their families to go to college. We were in the process of co-creating a campus committed to diversity and social justice.

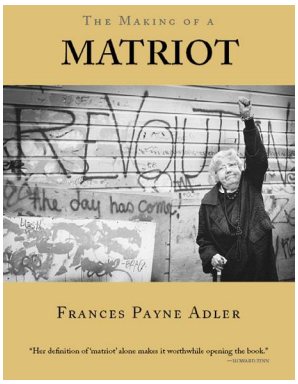
And so this "Breasted God" poem, as part of your festschrift, with thanks for your vision, for illuminating the circle, and for being a catalyst for the poem.

- Frances Payne Adler, Sept. 20, 2022
For Michael's Festschrift.

The Breasted God

"…(T)he name of God can be shifted. God tells that very thing to Moses at the burning bush: that God was known to Moses' ancestors as El Shadie, the Breasted God, but that now God will be known as YHVH. If that switch from female energy was necessary at that period, then any name suggesting maleness may need to be abandoned in this period."

- Rabbi Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal*



After two millennia, the Breasted God returned and wouldn't you know it, artists set to work immediately, and crosses and stars of David became breasts **oo** or **8** the shape of infinity signs.

And She sent out the message in one thousand and seventy languages: *We're here forever so clean up and come over. I'm inviting the whole family in for tea*.

So I went. We all went. You could hardly get in the door. Everyone I've ever loved was there. And so was everyone I've known and heard about, and all of you I had yet to know.

Well, first off, She served tea. I mean, She Herself served it. And She had all our favorite teas, from each of our families' tea bins, *Of course, why wouldn't I*, She said, and sat down. *So tell me*.

She wanted to hear our stories. She opened Her desk, turned on Her computer and its Translation Program, the one with the built-in speakers so we could all understand each other, and as we talked, She took notes.

I mean, *She* took notes. Any other place, an assistant would've taken notes. *I'm going to write down all that You tell me, and then I'll read it back to You so You can tell me if I've heard You right.*

Sounded like She really wanted to hear, alright, and what's more She was writing it down. *It's up to You how you do this.*

Well, no surprise, we couldn't agree on
how to do it. We soon realized that in Her house
no one had any more power than She did or
each other, so we just did it, told our stories.
One at a time.

It was like a Grand Intervention.
Of course that's how it was.
How could it be any other way?
We all knew what a muck we'd made of things.

And here's another thing: in Her house,
we discovered that what we all had in common,
everyone of us, was a fine-tuned Baloney Factor Meter.
And we used it. We were at that place where enough was enough.

So we sat there with this large I mean large family
and told each other our exact experiences. That was tough.
But we were in Her house and we felt emboldened by the group.
We talked, we heard, we used The Meter.

And it went on into the night and next day and next night and years
and we talked and listened and metered. And there rose in the room
a kind of centrifugal caring. Each word carried it.

And She took down each of our stories and the group's responses
and read it all back to us and we listened and we looked at each
other. Hard.

We knew so much about each other, that by then we *were* a family.
It was clear how we had hurt each other, how we loved each other,
where we had failed, where we had gotten it right.

And at last She said, *So go home and clean up what You now know*
and invite me to come visit. I will sit in Your kitchens next time,
see Your stories for myself. And then I will tell You mine.

Frances Payne Adler, 2002

Frances Payne Adler. "The Breasted God."
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Poet **FRANCES PAYNE ADLER,** poetry editor at *Tikkun*, is Professor Emerita and founder of the Creative Writing & Social Action Program at California State University Monterey Bay. She is the author of five poetry books, including *The Making of a Matriot* (Red Hen), and co-editor of *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing* (University of Arizona Press). A portion of "Dare I Call You Cousin," her exhibition about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, done in collaboration with Israeli artists Michal Fattal and Yossi Yacov, can be seen at *https://persimmontree.org/spring-2022/dare-i-call-you-cousin-2/*

Yom Kippur's Call for Environmental Repentance

Overcoming Social Sin

CYNTHIA MOE-LOBEDA

Comments delivered at Yom Kippur service on Sept 23, 2015 at Beyt Tikkun Synagogue Without Walls in Berkeley, CA

First, I must thank you, the people of the *Beyt Tikkun* community, for the invitation to be with you during these High Holy Days and also for the splendid spirit and warmth with which you have welcomed me to your community and to the Bay Area. I am grateful to you for making me feel at home!

I cannot talk with you in this context without also naming the deep tension that I experience in doing so as a follower of that extraordinary first-century Jewish teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. I am painfully aware that my faith forbearers, throughout history and still today, have brutalized and murdered yours. I am particularly aware, because I am situated in the Lutheran heritage, that Martin Luther's violent writings against Jewish people are some of the most vitriolic antisemitic writings the world has known. They added fuel to the Holocaust.

Learning of that some years ago is one of the reasons that I believe one cannot be faithful to a religious tradition without being highly critical of where it has betrayed itself and the good it seeks to express. So, I am situated very critically within Lutheran traditions. Rabbi Lerner once wrote that the Scripture contains both the word of God and the word of human brokenness. Reading that—long before I knew him or *Tikkun*—was very helpful to me in understanding that religious traditions, including my own, both pass on and betray the good that they seek to know and embody.

Human brokenness and betrayal of the good to which we are called gives rise to the profound need for and power of repentance. This need and power bring us to today, Yom Kippur.

Let me ask you a question: how many of you have experienced some moments of anguish, grief, anger, or hunger to repent when your heart faces the realities of climate change or of the economic injustice in our world today?

Take a step back in time, if you will, some millions of years. Imagine a world of splendor and abundance beyond belief, a dawn every 24 hours. Sun called forth from the indigo sky. Birdsong fills the air. Fragrance wafts from living blossoms in glorious shapes and colors. Drops of glistening water powder the land at the birth of each day. Air shimmers with flut-

tering leaves. Light rays dance. Luscious fruits hang from trees. Everywhere is breath. Life is birthing.

In this fertile circle of life, the weave of interdependence is breathtaking: a radiant ball of energy from eons past issues energy to meet the needs of all. All that dies nurtures life for others. A decaying log nurses her young. Death brings life. Days and planets, creatures and colors are born and die and bring new life. Complexity and simplicity unite.

It is a wild, raucous, fire—spewing, earthquaking, communion of life, joined in the hymn of all creation, praising the Source of all that is. Only one thing surpasses the splendor of this world. It is the radiant love of its Creator embracing Her creation and coursing through it. This world is beloved.

In the world's most recent moments appear creatures of particular consciousness. As all other creatures and elements, these human ones are crafted from the dust of longpast stars, fashioned as community, by community, and for community. They depend for life itself on a web of inter-related beings and elements. Take a moment now to close your eyes and give profound thanks for all of the beings who enable you to breathe this day—hundreds of unseen organisms living in their eyes, hair, and guts, thousands of life forms in a foot of soil, trees of the Amazon Forest.

The Source of all, the Holy One, reveals to the human ones their lifework. They are called not only to praise God but to love. Forever beloved by God, they are to receive God's gift of liberating, healing love, allowing it to work through them to transform whatever thwarts God's gift of abundant life for all. They are created to be lovers—offering to God, self, others, and the entire creation the marvelous and mysterious love that they are fed by the Great Mystery who gives them life. For by so doing, they are given, in the image of that Mystery, hearts of infinite compassion. And—as you well know—they are given ten guides or principles or rules for living. All are grounded in one firm foundation: You shall love your god (Deut. 6:5) and "love your neighbor" (Lev. 19:18). This norm of love is a gift to the world from the Torah and the prophets of ancient Israel. It is a particular kind of love centered in liberating justice. According to this norm of justice-seeking love, Earth's bounty is sufficient to provide for all, but only if no one accumulates too much.

However, rejecting God's guides for living, some of the human creatures have crafted contrary rules. The new rules enable a few—largely descendants of Europe—to use most of Earth's bounty, and to use it up at deadly cost to countless others around the globe. The species created for justice-seeking love now lives the opposite. They—or rather, we—live in strata. For those on the bottom, "poverty means death."[1] The pathos of our situation stuns. We, the few who consume far more than our fair share of Earth's bounty, are complicit in ecocide and brutal economic injustice—not by intent or will, but by virtue of the economic and political structures that shape our lives.

Humankind now hovers on a precipice. One side of the precipice—continuing unchecked and unaccountable corporate and finance power to maximize profit, consumption, and the use of fossil fuels—does not look good. The other side, however, is the potential before us: the vision that we all hold in varied forms of a world in which: 1) all people have the necessities for life with dignity, and 2) Earth's life-systems flourish.

In the words of the Torah: The Holy One "set before [the human ones] life and death, blessings and curses," and commanded them to "choose life so that you and your descendants may live" (Deut. 30). They are choosing death.

They alone now threaten Earth's capacity to sustain life.

This great choice is before us now—ways of life or ways of death. The choice of life requires radical change on all levels of being. Where something great is required of humankind, something great is required of religion. The task of religion in the early twenty-first century (the end of the petroleum era) is to plumb the depths of our religions' traditions for the moral-spiritual wisdom and moral-spiritual power to heed this calling.

We must bring the gifts of varied religious traditions into conversation with each other and with other bodies of human knowledge in the quest for just and sustainable ways of being human together. Judaism, it seems to me, offers myriad gifts to the world for this great work of our day.

We look briefly at two.

One gift is the call to repentance—the gift of Yom Kippur. As taught by your rabbi, Michael Lerner, this is *not* a call to guilt or self-flagellation. Rather it is a call to turn the other direction, to turn back to God from the idols of accumulation, consumption, addiction to fossil fuels, and such.

What would it mean to turn away from ways of life that are killing people the world over? What would enable us to embody repentance as radical resistance to systems of economic and ecological violence, and as a lived commitment to build more just and sustainable alternatives?

One potent tool for such repentance is what I call "critical mystical vision." By this I mean a mode of vision that sees three things at once.

The first is seeing "what is," especially social structural sin where it parades as good or where we are seduced into ignoring or denying it. That is, we are called to see and understand more fully the forms of ecological devastation and social exploitation that pervade what may look like a good life.

Before we go any further, please note two things carefully:

1. We are talking about the **impact** of our lives, not our **intentions**.
2. We are talking about the impact—and therefore the moral weight—of our **collective** lives, not just our **individual** lives. By collective lives, I mean, among other things, our public policies and the corporate practices that concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few.

Daring to see the impact of our collective lives draws us into a stark landscape—a terrain from which we would far rather flee. But please have the courage to go with me into the region of social sin or structural sin. I do promise that this is not where we will end up in my comments today. The great truth shaping all that I say is the surmounting power of God's liberating healing presence. Repentance is one step toward it.

So, we step with courage to see the unprecedented twofold moral crisis now facing us as a result of the practices and public policies that shape our daily lives. The first fold is ecological. The Torah teaches that God created a fruitful, fecund Earth—a planet that spawns and supports life with a complexity and generosity beyond human knowledge. Fundamental to Jewish faith is the claim that it is "good'' (Genesis 1). According to Genesis' first creation story, "God saw that it was *tov*." The Hebrew *tov*, while often translated as "good," also implies "life-furthering." And God said time and again that this creation was *tov*, a good that is life furthering.

Here we arrive at a haunting theological problem. The primal act of God–creating—creates not only a magnificent world. This God creates a magnificently *life-furthering* world. The scandalous point is this: we are undoing that very "*tov*," Earth's life-generating capacity. We—or, rather, some of us—are "uncreating." Indeed, one young and dangerous species has become a threat to Earth's life-generating capacity. The credible scientific community is of one accord about this basic reality.

Less widely accepted, however, is a corollary point of soul-searing moral importance. It is this: the horrific consequences of climate change and other forms of ecological degradation are not suffered equally by Earth's people. Nor are the world's people equally responsible. Those least responsible for the Earth crisis are suffering and dying first and foremost from it.

Here we have moved into that ominous link between ecological degradation and social injustice, and the second fold of the moral crisis shaping our world today: the social justice impacts of ecological degradation. Eco-justice is the term used to designate this nexus of social and ecological.

It was in India that I realized more fully the extent that race-based and class-based climate injustice permeates our lives. Climate change may be the most far-reaching manifestation of White privilege and class privilege yet to face humankind. What do I mean? Climate change is caused overwhelmingly by the world's high-consuming people who are disproportionately descendants of Europe. Yet, it is wreaking death and destruction first and foremost on impoverished people who also are disproportionately people of color. The now nearly 60 million climate refugees are primarily Asian, African and Latin American. That number will increase dramatically and will overwhelmingly represent people of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and low-lying Pacific Islands.[2] The Maldives, for example, a nation of islands no more than a mile wide, is threatened with loss of its entire landmass due to rising seas. Martin Parry, chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) Working Group II, declares: "The people most affected by climate change are and will be those living in developing countries ... and within those regions it will be the poor that will be most affected."[3] Even a slight degree of warming decreases the yield of the world's food staples—wheat, corn, barley, rice—in seasonally dry areas.[4] Subsistence farmers and people with little money will go hungry. We will not. Coastal peoples without resources to protect against and recover from the fury of climate-related weather disasters are not the people largely responsible for gas emissions. Nor are they, for the most part, white.

Many voices of the Global South recognize this as climate debt (or climate colonialism). In theological terms, these are manifestations of "social sin." The prayer of Al Chet (confessing sins) in which we have named where we have "missed the mark," is calling us to confess such social sin.

ENOUGH—DANGER LURKS

Facing realities such as these breeds despair and powerlessness. To acknowledge the widespread suffering that may be linked to my material abundance would be tormenting.

How could I live with the knowledge if I truly took it in? And if I dare to see, then I also view the power and complexity of structural injustice and the relative insignificance of individual efforts at change. Where would I find the moral-spiritual power to transgress tidal waves of cultural, political, and economic force pushing to maintain the way things are? A sense of inevitability may suck away at hope.

I speak straight from the heart here. As a young person, when I first learned about social sin or social injustice — especially U.S. economic imperialism — I fell into profound despair that lasted for a long time. In making my way out of that despair I learned that seeing "what is" is dangerous and unwise unless that form of vision is accompanied by a second and a third.

The second form of vision is seeing "what could be"—more just and sustainable alternatives. This means attuning ourselves to the movements, groups, and people—both distant and near—who are working in multiple ways toward more just and regenerative societies. These efforts remain largely unknown to much of the American public because they are not highlighted in the public discourse. They include the work of *Tikkun* magazine and the Network of Spiritual Progressives to promote a ''New Bottom Line" and a constitutional amendment that will, among other things, rescind the rights of personhood granted to corporations and take big money out of elections.

Work toward alternatives also includes fair trade channels, vital and growing networks of small local businesses, grassroots resistance to unfettered fossil fuel extraction, eco-theology, greening synagogues and mosques and churches, boycotts, demonstrations and civil disobedience, public policy to keep fossil fuels in the ground, alternative energy sources, urban gardening, carbon neutral towns and cities, local agriculture, socially and environmentally conscious investing, and a host of other examples. You of *Beyt Tikkun* Synagogue are part of that vast movement. Seeing the outpouring of creative alternatives—its power as a global movement—is vital to critical vision. A Chinese proverb cautions, "unless we change direction, we will get where we are going." Changing direction begs first recognizing, even dimly, alternative viable destinations. This is the second form of seeing in critical mystical vision.

The third mode of vision is recognizing the transformative and repairing presence of the Holy One, coursing throughout all of creation, and working within it to repair and transform this world. That is, acknowledging sacred powers at work in the cosmos enabling life and love ultimately to reign over death and destruction. I call this "mystical vision."

"Critical mystical vision," then, is a phrase to signify the union of vision in these three forms:

1. Seeing "what is going on," and especially unmasking systemic evil that masquerades as good.
2. Seeing "what could be," that is, alternatives.
3. Seeing ever more fully the sacred transforming and healing Spirit of life coursing throughout creation and leading it—despite all evidence to the contrary—into abundant life for all.

My point is that this three-fold vision is crucial for repentance. That is because we cannot repent of cruelty and injustice unless we admit that it exists and that we are part of it. Acquiescing to the way things are in this climate-violent and economically violent society, rather than repenting, resisting, and building alternatives, is so very easy in part because we fail to see clearly the full reality of the horror. Not seeing it, we fail to repent of it. Said differently, the seductive lure of the way things are is so fierce, so mesmerizing, so seemingly impenetrable because we do not fully see the depth of the crisis and, in particular, the extent to which those who "suffer most acutely [from climate change] are also those who are least responsible for the crisis to date."

Judaism brings to our perilous situation of climate change and gross economic violence the call to repent — to repent collectively for our collective wrongdoing. Judaism issues this call straight from the heart of its High Holy Days

— and offers powerful rituals to guide people in this repentance. It may be a necessary step toward freedom from social sin, and from climate sin in particular. We can repent only if we honestly see: 1) what is going on, 2) more just and sustainable alternatives already in the making, and 3) the Transformative Power of the Universe at play, including in our communities of repentance and resistance. Judaism has, at its heart, capacity to hold these three in one lens. Vision of this sort is subversive because it foresees a future in the making and breeds hope for moving into it.

Jewish traditions offer a second gift to the great work of our day. That gift is the life-changing norm of love, understood not only as an interpersonal virtue but as an ecological-economic calling. We began these comments with God's call to the human creature—heard in Torah—to love God, neighbor, self, and the created world. Two millennia of people in the heritage of Sarah and Abraham have sought to understand and heed this calling "to love the Lord your God" (Deut. 6:5), and "to love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Our responsibility as people of faith, Martin Luther King, Jr., declared, "is to discover the meaning of this command and seek passionately to live it out in our daily lives."[5] What love is and requires is a great moral question permeating Jewish as well as Christian history.

The question for us takes new form: what does love mean for the world's high consumers if we are, through climate change, killing people and threatening Earth's God-given capacity to generate life? Never before in this three-or four-millennia-old faith tradition have the stakes in heeding our calling been so high.

If sin is structural — not only individual — then so too is the force that counters sin: love. Love in our day takes structural form, as it did in the teachings of Torah and the Prophets. More specifically, today love in its structural form becomes ecological as well as economic and political. This means that love is lived out not only in how we treat one another but in how we shape our business practices and the corporate world, our institutions, our public policy. To illustrate, love itself may beckon us to seek a constitutional amendment to limit corporate powers, or demand water justice in California, or stand up against racism in the criminal injustice system, or work for climate reparations, or counter free trade treaties that really bring "freedom" to exploit.

In closing, it is an astounding moment in history to be people who serve the God revealed in the Hebrew Prophets, the Torah, and the Wisdom writings, and in the life-transforming, world-mending Spirit of *tikkun olam* that is present with and within us, and that speaks in winds and waters calling mountains to bear witness and skyscapes to sing.

Today U.S. citizens of relative economic privilege bear a sacred calling. It is to reverse a fiercely compelling trajectory of climate violence linked to economic injustice. That is, we are called to resist ways of life and power structures that generate climate change and its disproportionate impact on the world's already impoverished people, and to rebuild Earth-serving, justice-seeking ways of being human in the twenty-first century. Will the people of this synagogue step up to the plate? Will we heed the calling?

My purpose in these comments is to nurture among us all, myself included, moral-spiritual power to repent of what we are doing to the Earth and its vulnerable people by the way that we live, and then — with joy and courage born of faith in the Transformative Power of the Universe, the power known by some as Yud Hey Vav Hey, God, or Allah — to change direction and, in the words of Torah, to "choose life" so that we and our descendants might live.

DR. CYNTHIA MOE-LOBEDA is author or co-author of seven volumes, including the award-winning *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation*, and over 50 articles and chapters. She has lectured or consulted on six continents regarding faith-based resistance to systemic injustice, moral agency and hope, ethical implications of resurrection and incarnation, climate justice and climate racism, and economic justice. Moe-Lobeda is Professor of Theological and Social Ethics at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS), and the Graduate Theological Union's Core Doctoral Faculty. She is Founding Director of the PLTS Center for Climate Justice and Faith.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Notes - Salvadoran Jesuit priest, Jon Sobrino, in conversation.

[2] By 2050 the number is predicted to grow to over 1B.

[3] In an interview with the International Institute for Environment and Development, "IIED Interviews: Martin Parry on Climate Change" at *https://www.iied.org/11501iied*. Parry is chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Task Group on Scenarios for Climate Impact Assessment and member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the United Nations Environment Programme's Climate Impacts and Responses Programme.

[4] Parry et.al., Contributions of Working Group IL (Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York: Cambridge University Press).

[5] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Strength to Love," *A Testament of Hope: the Essential Writings and Speeches of M. L. King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 48. Here King is speaking specifically of the commandment to love enemies.

Network of Spiritual Progressives & Progressive Islam

Reflecting on Synergies & Future Hopes

ADIS DUDERIJA

As a scholar-activist, a first-generation Australian Bosnian of a Muslim background, I have been a major theoretician and advocate of progressive Islam for some two decades. For a similar amount of time, I have also been following Tikkun and reading the works of Rabbi Lerner including my favourite book of his The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right. In 2017 I co-founded the Australian chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP Australia) in Brisbane and in the intervening period have organised and taken part in a number of activities and events co-hosted by NSP, Australia most notably a five webinar series on constructive conditions for interfaith dialogue inspired by the work of Catherine Cornille from Boston College and recently in 2020-2021 and more recently (October 2022) a webinar co-convened with Centre for Process Studies on Process Thinking and Human Living.

One could forgive the reader at this point entertaining the question as to why is an Australian-Bosnian of a Muslim background engaging with a Jewish led organisation in the United States and its award-winning flagship magazine Tikkun under the leadership of the remarkable Rabbi Michael Lerner? The answer to the question is to be found in the worldview affinities underpinning progressive Muslim Thought and that of the NSP/Tikkun Olam to which I turn next.

I first learned about Tikkun Olam from some progressive-minded Muslim communities in the United States in the aftermath of 9/11. I got my hands on the first copy of the magazine eight years later while attending the World Parliament of Religions Symposium in Melbourne in 2009, as a PhD candidate researching progressive Islam's approach to the Islamic intellectual tradition. Having been active in interfaith circles since my undergraduate days in the late 1999s, one element of Tikkun that I particularly enjoyed and appreciated intellectually at that time was, and today remains, its cosmopolitan inter-faith outlook and orientation as evident in the background and the calibre of the authors it attracted and the topics it broached. I remember during those days having had a fervent desire to be published in Tikkun, something that came true a decade later - not just once but twice!

I had the honour and privilege of publishing a highly condensed version of my work on progressive Islam in Tikkun in 2018, in addition to an essay on how to overcome patriarchy by means of adhering to progressive Muslim thought in 2019. The point that I want to make in this respect is that in many significant ways my engagement with the ideas of Rabbi Lerner, (and the Magazine itself) and the worldview and philosophy underpinning the NSP has been very important in my academic efforts in shaping and theorising of progressive Muslim thought (as outlined below). Rabbi Lerner's progressive politics and universal approach to the Jewish religious tradition and spirituality that we find in his numerous brilliant books and writings as well as his embodiment of these ideas in his life's experiences have served as an important platform for the development of some of my ideas about my own politics and my desire to develop an approach to the Islamic tradition that is as equally universally spiritual, cosmopolitan and committed to the highest humanistic values based on the spirit of radical amazement and a "Path to a World of Love and Justice" that underpin the philosophy and vision of the NSP.

The strong philosophical influence of Rabbi Lerner, Tikkun and NSP becomes particularly evident when one examines my academic theorising of progressive Muslim thought that goes back to 2007 and that has culminated in the writing of two monographs on this subject in 2011 and 2017 respectively. Therein I have provided a detailed explanation of the most significant delineating features of this approach to the Islamic tradition that can be summarised as follows:

1. an intellectualised and epistemologically contemporary non-patriarchal form of Sufi thought based on a panentheistic view of the Divine
2. an approach that welcomes creative, critical and innovative thought based on epistemological openness and methodological fluidity,
3. a form of Islamic liberation theology,
4. a form of Islam that affirms gender egalitarian/ non-patriarchal worldview,
5. a human rights-based approach to Islamic tradition consistent with the modern human rights era ethos,
6. a form of Islamic thought based on rationalist and contextualist approaches to Islamic theology and ethics, and
7. a form of Islamic thought that affirms robust form of religious pluralism on ontological/philosophical, epistemological, and hermeneutical grounds.

Now let us compare this delineation of progressive Islam with the philosophy of the NSP and how Tikkun describes its own vision and mission. The NSP's philosophy on its website is succinctly described as follows:

Most people yearn for a world of love and real human connection and to live meaningful lives that transcend material well-being, that tie us to the ongoing unfolding of spirit and consciousness, and that connect us with the inherent interdependence and love that permeates and inspires all being. To achieve this world, we need a multifaceted revolution – political, moral, cultural and spiritual – that awakens us to the dignity and value of all peoples, regardless of race, creed, gender, religion, class, where they've come from or what they've done, and helps us connect with the beauty and awe of the universe. This revolution must be grounded in love for all people, for life, and for the planet.

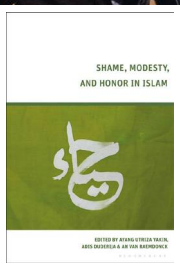
On Tikkun's website section "About Tikkun" the reader is informed about its vision and purpose as follows:

> "We are a prophetic voice for peace, love,

environmental sanity, social transformation, and unabashedly utopian aspirations for the world that can be. We speak to, and hear from, people from all communities, all races, all religions, all ethnicities, and all ages."

Given the above, the philosophical and worldview affinities that present themselves immediately are multiple and deep. Progressive Muslim thought like Tikkun (and the NSP movement) are expressions of a universal spirituality anchored in the concept of the Divine rooted in Love, Beauty, Awe/Majesty and Justice. A shared vision of the Divine, that welcomes novelty and creativity, and appreciates the joys, sufferings and "miracle" and mystery of human existence and the entire cosmos. A commonly held belief in the mystical sense of the Divine that is, from the perspective of the human, simultaneously puzzling and awe-inspiring. A common perspective on the Divine that although deeply informed by the respective rich religious traditions in which they grew out of, transcends the parochial doctrinal divisions of reified religion. An image of the Divine that rejects the patriarchal and utterly transcendent God of classical theism. A relational-oriented view of the Divine whose ultimate vision is to guide humanity to realise its highest potential mirroring the above-named ontological qualities of the Divine (Love, Beauty, Majesty, Justice) itself in whose self-image it was created. A shared concept of the Divine that embraces the entirety of creation in all its diversity and complexity. A commonly held idea of the Divine that has a real concern for the material conditions of humanity, especially for those on the margins and the dispossessed, that demands universal "prophetic" solidarity from each human being in speaking truth to power in face of injustice by means of principled nonviolent resistance. A shared image of the Divine that safeguard's the inherent God-given dignity and sacredness of all of creation including that of Mother Earth itself.

What do I wish for Tikkun (and by default to Rabbi Lerner) and NSP for the foreseeable future? First, a personal well wish for the Rabbi and my expression of appreciation for his beautiful idealistic world-vision and inspiring legacy that he leaves us with. Second, as I mentioned above in my role as the co-founder of NSP Australia I recently co-convened an online seminar with the Centre for Process Thought (CPT) on process thinking and human living. In my brief address during that seminar, and as a member and participant of both organisations, I emphasised the remarkable synergies between the respective philosophies and the worldviews underpinning CPT and NSP. As such one of my future hopes is for this cooperation to be continued and deepened, as much good can come out of future cross-fertilisations in thinking and social engagement between these two communities. Another hope of mine is that Muslim thought leaders and intellectuals worldwide, but particularly those in the USA, will engage more robustly with Tikkun/NSP and appreciate the tremendous value behind its philosophy, vision, and mission. Finally, I also hope that Tikkun leadership and its readership as well as NSP more generally will find the ideals of progressive Islam and its proponents valuable partners in the urgent task of healing the world (tikkun olam) together for a brighter future for all.



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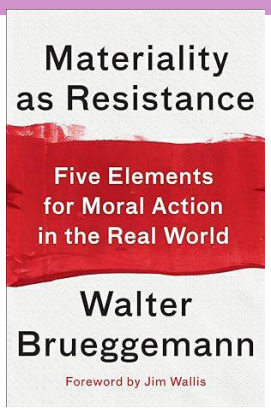
Tikkun Interview: Reflections from a Christian Theologian



WALTER BRUEGGEMAN & CAT ZAVIS

Interview of Walter Brueggeman by Cat Zavis regarding the legacy of Rabbi Michael Lerner.

Cat Zavis: It's such an honor to speak with you Walter. I've read your works over the years and was really sinking my teeth into them recently and appreciating so much of what you've written and the thousands and millions of people you've inspired, including Michael. If I can begin with a somewhat obvious question, could you explain how Michael and other *Tikkun* writings and ideas have influenced, shaped, and informed your thinking in the past and/or the present?

Walter Brueggeman : Well, I think Michael has, over time, articulated a very generous trajectory of Judaism, and I am late and slow coming to understand Judaism. So he has been my teacher and I've been blessed by his work. It seems to me that he has a singular capacity to insist on the claims of his faith while at the same time making important room for other people with other faith claims.

And particularly, I think he has educated me a great deal about the whole vexed Palestinian question and how a responsible Jew may think about it in the context of the state of Israel. So I have simply felt that he has been my teacher and my colleague as I have tried to learn beyond the small scope of my own faith and my own learning. And it's a great blessing because of his great and open imagination.

But I also think he has modeled being a good listener and being open and really wanting the conversation to advance and not simply to be a stalemate between entrenched positions. And he's brought great graciousness to that most important enterprise. When I first came to *Tikkun*, I was always so deeply impressed with and enjoyed his willingness to have so many different voices in dialog with each other.

Cat Zavis: I would agree, because he's one of those rare thinkers – today, at any rate – who really believes that we gain more knowledge and more wisdom, and our positions can shift and change, based on talking with people and getting more information. In this historical moment this seems almost impossible.

Walter Brueggeman : That's correct.

Cat Zavis: In contrast to demeaning and putting each other down; creating a separation between "us" and "them."

Walter Brueggeman : And in his presence, you feel like you don't really want to be that way. He calls out the best in people.

Cat Zavis: So what do you consider to be some of his or *Tikkun*'s greatest contributions? And I think this fits together, particularly with your project, if you will. Some if not many people in the religious world are uncomfortable with the idea of mixing religion and politics. Or bringing politics into religious spiritual spaces and vice versa. Many in the secular political world are really uncomfortable mixing politics and religion or bringing religious spiritual concepts and ideas into political spaces. *Tikkun* and Michael have worked to change that. But if you

can speak to that from your own perspective, because you do that in your work.

Walter Brueggeman : Well, I think the biblical faith that Michael and I share, as a Jew and a Christian, is insistently and relentlessly political. It cares about how the community distributes its resources. It cares about who has access and who has leverage and what responsibility people with power and money have for those who are vulnerable and left behind. So there's no way to get around that unless you siphon off the Bible into spiritual and other worldly matters, which is a greater temptation for Christians, I think, than it is for Jews. So that's an uphill battle among Christians, always to insist on those public elements of the Bible.

Cat Zavis: I think this is something that you and Michael really emphasize. How it's the fusion, if you will, of spirituality and politics–that you can't have one without the other.

Walter Brueggeman : That's right. So we're trying to back away from the dualism that has so shaped Western thinking. Obviously, the Bible wants to reject that kind of dualism in favor of the view that all of reality is under the same governance and therefore, in every sphere of our life, we have to attend to the will, purpose and rule of God.

Cat Zavis: I'm curious, when you use the word God, what does God mean for you? How do you conceive of and understand God? Who or what is the God that you pray to?

Walter Brueggeman : Well, it's the God that is articulated in the narrative of Israel and in the memory of the Church. I always start with the *Exodus* that God is the great emancipator who has taken the side of the disadvantaged and the left behind. And of course, it's not difficult for a Christian then to see that that's exactly how Jesus also invested his life. So I am rather simple minded about who God is, taking my understanding from the narratives and the songs of Israel.

Cat Zavis: What do you say to folks who still struggle with this? The term God can be such an off-putting term for so many people. They are often stuck in a vision of God as a big old man in heaven.

Walter Brueggeman : I try never to have an argument of that kind because it's totally unproductive. The question is whether these kinds of stories in which God is embedded, whether they ring true in people's own experience. Everybody I know is struggling with some dimension of emancipation in their own life. Everybody I know wants to know whether the future has a purpose or whether it is simply one damn thing after another. So if we have the patience to see what those claims are, they are claims that are very close to the lived experience of almost everybody. And the problem is to unburden our faith questions from the whole philosophical legacy in which the West has been trapped.

Cat Zavis: Can you speak to that some more?

Walter Brueggeman : Well, I think the philosophic categories of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence are just singularly unhelpful because as you know, the Israelite tradition has no truck with that. But it's always about justice and mercy and righteousness and compassion and steadfast love. Those are very different from overarching philosophic categories. And that seems to me, the place where the issue has to be joined.

Cat Zavis: How do you respond to the argument, if you will, that, well, you're only uplifting one voice in the Torah, the voice of love. But what about the other voice? There's another voice in the Torah that's a voice of destruction, power over, violence, rape.

Walter Brueggeman : Well, you and I spend a great deal of energy on those texts. And it seems to me that we have to take those two kinds of texts and let them adjudicate each other. And so the question I think is not which one is true, but which one is adequate. That's not making some kind of cosmic claim, but it's making a claim for how we will get through today. And obviously the trajectory of violence does not help us. It does not help anybody get through the day. So that's my way of thinking about it.

Cat Zavis: So what you're saying is that we can read both these texts and ask ourselves which one is going to be more productive and more helpful in this historical moment?

Walter Brueggeman : I also like to entertain the question, if you take one of those bad texts, why did someone value it? Why did someone think it could possibly be true? And I think that's very often very illuminating about the way in which we have arrived at those texts, and whether there are places in our contemporary life where those texts speak better to us than we might imagine. I think it's an endless process of negotiation, which, of course, the rabbis have always known.

Cat Zavis: They love to negotiate and discuss and debate endlessly. One feminist scholar refers to them as texts of terror, and there's all sorts of different names we can give them. I have a new book by one of my teachers, *Rape Culture in the House of David*, by Barbara Thiede, and it's brilliant. Her project is to really challenge those of us in the Jewish and other religious worlds who try to soften what happens in these texts. Too often we want to just ignore them or brush over them. For example, David didn't really rape Batsheva, it was this love affair, etc. And she says really clearly that if we do that with our texts, then we are likely doing the same thing in modern times. In other words, by denying the rape culture, for example, that is part of our ancient texts, we will (and are) inevitably allowing the rape culture in which we currently live to continue unchecked. We are essentially saying it's okay now as it was then. We're going to just gloss over it. She says very explicitly that when we ignore and don't grapple with the realities of what those texts are, that we are doing the same in the modern time, and also that we are dismissing the voices of the oppressed and the raped and the harmed in our society because they're going to read those texts and it's going to speak to them as their lived reality as victims.

Walter Brueggeman : That's right.

Cat Zavis: How do you grapple with that? We might wish that Bathsheba had had a greater say in the text. And it really is remarkable that that story is in the text; they didn't screen it out. It's almost as though the narrator is saying, I'm going to sneak this in here, maybe the king won't notice that I recorded it this way. At the same time, there are the incredible liberating texts and myths in the Torah. For example, as you brought up, the *Exodus* story. How do we help people connect to these myths? These stories that are so powerful, but so many people resist them for many understandable reasons?

Walter Brueggeman : Well, I don't know the answer to that, but I think it has to begin with interrogating people about their pain, their real pain; not their ideological pain, but the deeper, real pain. I think that is the connector. And what the acknowledgment of real pain does is permit us to get beneath the ideological cover-ups that too many people traffic in, and permit the openness to think another thought, and to acknowledge another possibility.

Cat Zavis: So kind of like a trauma informed exploration. I teach what I call prophetic empathy and revolutionary love. And it's really that idea of really being empathic, but then also bringing in the prophetic voice of the world that we

want. **Walter Brueggeman** : Exactly. Exactly

Cat Zavis: And marrying those, if you will. I'm curious in your life, because I know Michael has often in the Jewish world in particular (more so than he has in the Christian or Muslim or other spiritual faith traditions) been met with a lot of pushback and resistance, particularly on his stand on Israel-Palestine. But he's often been pigeonholed as being "just political." His theology and his deep spirituality have often been dismissed or disregarded because of its political foundation. Have you experienced that as well?

Walter Brueggeman : Well, I have. Of course I have. You know, and so I have really worked to position myself in the church community as too liberal for conservatives and too conservative for liberals. And most of it works that ways. But, you know, you take your bruises along the way.

Cat Zavis: Where do you turn in those times? How do you find comfort?

Walter Brueggeman : Back to the text. I also have good friends.

CZ: Do you have a regular spiritual practice?

Walter Brueggeman : Well, I'm an active, practicing church member. And my prayer life and my tithe of money and those kinds of things. I find my active prayer life and going to church very comforting. I have disciplines that help me. The prayer life does propel you into a different posture toward the world.

Cat Zavis: And so my next question is: how do you all of these ideas that we've been speaking about, how can they play a role moving towards the future for the current and emerging generations of thinkers and activists? So for younger folks, how do you imagine these ideas influencing them, playing a role? How can we reach them?

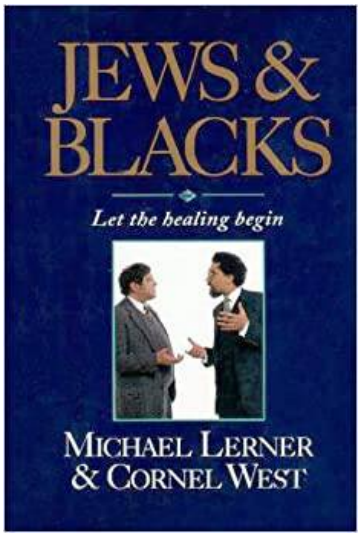
Walter Brueggeman : Well, I don't know a lot about that, but my impression is that younger people, like my grandchildren, they are much more attuned to the real human questions of justice and mercy. And they're not misled by a lot of sloganeering about that. So if we in the church had our wits about us, we could easily make those connections with young people. But we've got so much baggage that we have to bring along with us, that it makes conversations with young people difficult.

I think there are a lot of potential allies if we get past the sorts of things that seem to divide us that are in fact of very little importance. So I'm very hopeful about that. I think the energy transfers from one thing to another. I think the energy now around abortion and Roe, I think that's going to feed into other things and will mobilize people about many other things.

Cat Zavis: Michael talks about that. He speaks about the movement of social energy, whether it is moving towards love or domination/fear. We have been so manipulated with fear in the last few years. So my other question for you is, Do you have any reflections or thoughts about the rise of anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitism in the Christian world and any repairs or *teshuva* that might still need to be done or that could be done?

Walter Brueggeman : Yes, sadly, it's very much alive. I think, you know, we have to counter it wherever it surfaces and stand up against it. But you know much more about that than I do. It's always sitting there as a threat and we have to speak up and not let anything go by, or be silent or indifferent, wherever it arises.

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN is William Marcellus McPheeters Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary. He is a past president of the Society of Biblical Literature andan ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. He has recently published *Materiality as Resistance* (WJK Press), *Money and Possessions* (WJKP), and *Gift and Task* (WJKP).



Tikkun Interview:

A Black Theologian and Activist's Reflections

CORNELL WEST & MARK LEVINE

Interview of Cornell West by Mark LeVine regarding the legacy of Rabbi Michael Lerner.

Mark LeVine: How did you and Michael first come to work together?

Cornel West: I'd always considered my dear brother Michael Lerner as a spiritual giant and a towering intellectual figure and the legacy of Heschel. I'd been reading him for years, and when he approached me and said he'd like to do the text that became *Jews and Blacks* in 1996–this was right after *Race Matters* came out, it was the moment when I first had hit the national scene–I said, "Absolutely." He'd invited me to come to a New York gathering with Michael Walzer and Peter Gabel and other folk; I thought it was a magnificent idea because you have two hated and haunted and hunted groups–one for 2,000 years, one for 400 years–that always had rich overlap in the American empire with the role of American Jewish socialists, communists, and progressives making great contributions to the Black American freedom movement. We knew there was a moment with rise of neoliberalism that would foreground the narrow identities and conceptions being put forward as a Jew or Black, and we wanted to put out a new profile as rich, profound, and prophetic Jewish and Black traditions, highlighting moral dimensions of being in solidarity with the oppressed, and with each other. We'd go visit each other's homes, meet each other's families, and so on. This created a special bond between us.

In fact, *Jews and Blacks* was an important intervention that created a strong working relationship for the next fifteen years or so. For me it was a matter of trying to bear witness against the grain in both communities, because both were shifting to neoliberalism and neoconservative leadership, wrestling with the challenge of Israel itself, and the ways we were trying to keep in contact with Jewish security and justice and Palestinian freedom and justice. It was a very treacherous course to stay on and we were trying to help each other stay on that tightrope.

Mark LeVine: But I recently learned that you actually got your BA in Near Eastern languages and literatures, so your connection to the region goes way back. What was it like then for an African American to study a subject that even today has very few African Americans focusing on it, and did that connect you to Palestine/Israel even before you knew Michael?

Cornel West: Yes, I studied three years of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures at Harvard as part of my major, from 1970-73. In fact, I can still remember I was co-President

of the Black Students' association, we'd taken over the President's office, and I had to leave to take my Hebrew exam and then return. But in those days the protests were about Apartheid in South Africa. The issue of Palestine hadn't really surfaced yet at Harvard at the time. But it certainly helped set the stage for my relationship with Michael, given I'd been immersed in many of the same texts he was.

Mark LeVine: When Michael wrote *The Politics of Meaning*, the original subtitle was *Restoring Hope And Possibility In An Age Of Cynicism*. Have we come further or is it even worse since that period in the middle of the 1990s? From the cynicism of the '90s where have we arrived at now?

Cornel West: This is a very difficult but important question. After "greed is good '80s," they managed to turn people's anger to cynicism and, now, to fascism. You might remember the 2004 elections, Bush's reelection despite the illegal invasion of Iraq. We were losing our democracy because of free market fundamentalism and militarism abroad, and authoritarianism at home, which were squeezing the juices of our democracy dry. It was hard, at that time, to get an audience to pay attention to our warnings of a neo-fascist resurgence. One reason was because there was so little fundamental focus on the [US] Empire and 800 military bases around the world. So when Obama comes in he's fighting six wars at the same time yet people are viewing him as a great exemplar of decency and giving him the Nobel Peace Prize, and so on. It was very hard to tell these truths and not be dismissed.

The idea with his [Obama's] rise to power was clearly to make the hierarchy more colorful. And so the major issues became racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender diversity *within the Empire*, instead of against it, which was clearly what was necessary. And we kept saying that corporate greed is pushing the whole system towards catastrophe, and we're going to have a major "chicken coming home to roost" moment the way things were going. And when they do, the whole planet is going to suffer. The problem was that the managerial class said, "We have Obama, it's historically unprecedented, a Black man heading up the American Empire, we have to protect him. Your criticism of him, Lerner's criticisms of him, need to be dismissed. And in fact, you all need to be ashamed of yourselves; we have this magnificent breakthrough and you all can't appreciate it..." and so on.

But we *knew* there was going to be a white supremacist backlash. White supremacy is always the face of American fascism, just like anti-Jewish ideology is always the public face of German/European fascism. So the backlash against Obama was primarily against the professional managerial class that was so excited about him because he represented everything they stood for, which was precisely what was alienating so many Americans.

Michael was saying, "I come out of prophetic Jewish, Heschel tradition, spreading *chesed*–kindness–to the poor, widows, and orphans, the oppressed and working people. And similarly, I said, I belong to the same tradition, just now connected to a Jew named Jesus, so we were very much focused on this critique of Obama and the system he represented, but coming from the opposite direction: of love and not hate.

Mark LeVine: Well, certainly at the top level its clear people weren't paying attention. But below that, with your students then, so-called Gen-Y, the energy seemed to be shifting during this moment – post-Seattle, post-9/11 and Iraq invasion, and post 2008 meltdown, no?

Cornel West: That's what Occupy was about. That was so important. The problem during that period was that the intellectuals in the

Academy were critical in their jargon, but they weren't witnessing.

Mark LeVine: There was no real praxis.

Cornel West: Yes! You could go to a university and hear the most marvelous critiques of America, liberalism, even capitalism itself; but in terms of witness, who is actually out there, well it was Michael, Chris Hedges… Barbara Ehrenreich, Noam Chomsky, Peter Gabel, Susannah Heschel, and some others. These are folk who are bearing witness, not just writing to get the next chair or title in the Academy.

Mark LeVine: Both you and Michael are at heart philosophers, and what *Tikkun* was doing, and your books were very much doing as well, was, in my view, creating spaces to make philosophy relevant again, spaces for what you call "wrestling" with philosophy and what Michael also was doing, via the idea of Israel – Yisra-El, literally: "he who wrestles with God" – he was wrestling with his tradition. For me it was a space where the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will could coexist. In what ways has that struggle changed? What have you changed in your message, language, and arguments since the Obama moment, or are they still fundamentally the same.

Cornel West: That's a very good question. Well first, I'd start with my book *The American Evasion of Philosophy* [published in 1989], which deals with the last line of Emerson's argument in his essay "Experience," which talks about the crucial transformation of genius into practical power. But here we're not talking about this transformation in the individual sense that he intended it, as if that kind of broad societal transformation can be achieved by self-sustaining and self-overcoming individuals who flex their intellectual, social, political, and economic muscles in order to build "the Kingdom of man over nature," as Emerson wrote in his classic 1836 essay *Nature*. We are way beyond that. We're talking about philosophy as a force that can foster a collective transformation of the world. So, the question is, how do we do that in particular historical circumstances?

One of the differences in what I said then and now is that the spiritual decay has become decrepitude, and, as I began to discuss more in *Democracy Matters* (from 2004), the arrogance is producing an American empire that is not just hollowed out and emptied out, but has created an ecological crisis that is in fact even worse. So, there's continuity with what I was saying then, in terms of spiritual decay. When I wrote my 1982 book *Prophesy Deliverance*!, which is now being reissued for its 40th anniversary, edited by Princeton Theological Seminary President Jonathan Lee Walton, there was a focus on spiritual decay and moral cowardice in the middle classes and bourgeoisie of all colors. That's where Marxism and prophetic Christianity came together. The difference between 30-40 years ago and now is that, on the one hand, we're still dealing with racism, homophobia, white supremacy, transphobia, and so on, but today the neoliberal hegemony of that era has been so thoroughly shown to be unable to meet the needs of everyday people, and people are so spiritually, as well as financially desperate, that they are raw enough for either fascism or a true radicalism to emerge.

It's in this way that I discuss philosophy as struggle. It is wrestling just like the name Yisra-El – wrestling or struggling with God – is about struggle. It has to critique patriarchy, white supremacy, imperialism, state power, and other forms of unaccountable power. Ultimately, I see philosophy as simultaneously vocation, invocation, and provocation, wrestling with the love of wisdom.

If we look at the chapter "Sorrow Songs" in W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Soul of Black Folks* there

is a new energy and vitality despite wounds and limps from such "wrestling." It's bodily, intellectual, spiritual, collective. That's the genius of Hebrew scripture that you have all these dimensions held together simultaneously. So you have Black, African people under conditions of barbaric slavery redefining themselves in light of their rich African heritage and Hebrew [scriptural] heritage. You already get a deep elective affinity between Black and Jewish folk. The question is, then: How does one sustain one's own spiritual and moral wrestling with hounds of Hell–that is, organized hatred, organized greed, organized hypocrisy and organized fear? Those take different forms in different historical moments; when brother Lerner and I emerged it was Reaganism, and all that organized fear was beginning to take on a new life when we wrote that book. Here we are in 2022 when we have actual visible neo-fascist groups that have moved to the mainstream of the Republican party.

America always had neo-fascist groups and always treated Black folks to Jim and Jane Crow, which is semi-fascist. But now as neoliberal order loses its institutional capacity, we tried to push brother Bernie to offer alternatives to neoliberal rule that was losing legitimacy, but we couldn't deliver. What's clear is that now, with neo-fascist alternatives looming large, the kinds of things brother Lerner and I were talking about in the 90s have become much worse.

Mark LeVine: Culture is very important here, one supposes. You talked in a lecture – a sermon, really – at the New School earlier this year about making "philosophical music, theoretical music, personal music." Is that the way to do praxis today – to make it broadly and deeply musical?

Cornel West: Well, what you're talking about is the kind of deodorized neoliberal discourse that passes for mainstream Democratic discourse. It's scared to death of keeping it funky, because then we might talk about US invasions and occupations as well as Russia's, right? And that can't be allowed. So culture, political music–like Fela Kuti in Nigeria, for example, or James Brown– allows you to let the odor out, to break down the neoliberal ideology and reveal the truth beneath. That truth is what brother Michael and *Tikkun* have been trying to reveal from the beginning, what I have tried to reveal, and what we tried to reveal with *Jews and Blacks*, for example.

Mark LeVine: So how can we deliver the Politics of Meaning message in this context? Do we need, so to speak, new medicine or just a new delivery mechanism?

Cornel West: I think it's both, brother. One of the things that brother Lerner has always been able to acknowledge is the level of contempt ordinary people have for the professional managerial class, which is largely neoliberal and also conservative, but what Lerner has been able to do in his intellectual practice as an organic intellectual is to distance himself from neoliberal arrogance and greed of the professional intelligentsia. That's how he's been so self-sacrificial without teaching at Berkeley, San Francisco State, Stanford, or wherever he could have probably taught. But no, he kept his distance from that and remained sensitive to fears and anxieties of everyday people. Only 34% of Americans go to college, most Americans don't go to college and their predicament is very important. They are the main losers of corporate globalization and shift to high tech and Silicon valley.

The example of brother Lerner is very important: Remain true to the vocation and seek a calling that remains true to truth-seeking and -speaking. So, we need an understanding of the forces of Trump and neo-fascism, which is grounded in the hatred of the professional managerial class. It blinds them to

the degree that they are the losers, not just in how the managerial class has excluded them from the ever more concentrated wealth, but culturally as well.

Mark LeVine: They have lost, or at least are losing the so-called "wages of whiteness," to paraphrase Du Bois?

Cornel West: Yes, exactly. And this also blinds them to what is beneath and behind Trump and company, which is big militarism, big money, and Wall Street. And that's what we were trying to get them to see with brother Bernie and why a slice of Bernie's people have moved to Trump, because they are so hurting and they see that mainstream politicians and parties on both sides have simply abandoned them, whatever their rhetoric. We can see the roots of this going all the way to the [1982] book by Robert Lekachman, *Greed is Not Enough: Reaganomics*.

Mark LeVine: But someone needs to be there to give them the sustenance. This is what scares me about the state of academia today. I think about who you studied with. I think about Angela Davis studying with Marcuse and Adorno, and Michael with Heschel and so on. I think about the philosophical giants that nurtured the generation that produced Angela Davis, Judith Butler, Cornel West, Michael Lerner, and so on; you all were standing on the shoulders of giants that were fundamentally challenging and transforming, but still grounded in the idea that the goal is not just understanding but transformation, to paraphrase Marx's well-worn 11th thesis on Feuerbach. And that went right through the original post-structuralists and postcolonial scholars, Deleuze, Foucault, Said, etc., who, no matter how complicated or jargonized their arguments, were still at heart trying fundamentally to heal and transform the world. Where is that impetus today? Because it seems to me – and perhaps this is why deeply intellectual magazines like *Tikkun* have lost their space in the public sphere – that people don't even understand the importance of philosophy, of truly critical theory, thought, and praxis. Look at the attacks on philosophy today, on Humanities more broadly.

Cornel West: It's true, the neoliberal devouring of the intelligentsia has been immense. And yes, we all had giants to stand on. Think of Stanley Aronowitz, Sheldon Wolin, Richard Wolf. Think of the *boundary 2* crowd (of Paul Bové, William Spanos), Judith Butler, Angela Davis, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and of course Jameson. Luckily some of us are still around!

Mark LeVine: Michael used to say that "It's getting very lonely to be doing this. There are less and less people." (f you talked about Palestine, back in the day, you had a giant like Said; but on the other hand today there's never been more people who understand what's happening and support the Palestinian struggle for liberation. But even as people understand more, that's coming at a time people are able to do less, perhaps because so much is going wrong everywhere that they don't know where to put their energy. Is there something that the two or three generations of intellectuals since yours and Michael's have missed in terms of grounding themselves in praxis, in material reality, as a core part of remaining a vital or "organic" force?

Cornel West: Well, I would add poetry to philosophy and other sources to enable spiritual formation and ethical cultivation, you can look at Heschel–both Heschels, Abraham Joshua and Susannah–or Daniel May, the new editor of *Jewish Currents*, Michael of course, and tie them to Du Bois and the best of the Black intellectual tradition as well. But we can't downplay another side: massive oppression, massive distortion and misinformation coming from the well-to-do and powers that be. If the

real cost to be paid for action is repression then you're going to have fewer people doing it, fewer people who want to be crushed, jailed, etc. What we had under neoliberalism, ironically, is a massive increase in surveillance, massive national security, massive repression of any serious voices coming forward, with new technologies that have made this easier than ever before. And so many people willingly enter such regimes of surveillance, so they've surrendered before the fight even starts.

Of course in the 1950s we had the Smith Act, deportation, incarceration; in the 1960s we not only had COINTELPRO, but incarceration of the Panthers. The fact that the younger generation came along and said that we really want to follow examples of the previous generation of organic intellectuals across the board, that's great, but let's remember, beyond the fact that there was hardly any financing then and even less now. This is what Michael has been dealing with from the start; he and I used to go back and forth searching for funds. We were (are) marginalized. We struggled and continue to struggle with financial support because if you go too far you lose your donors and support. At this point, we are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the media. And if you really go too far, they drag you to jail. You can't overlook these mechanisms of repression that are moments on the road to what is now a more visible neo-fascism.

Mark LeVine: So, if you had one thing to think about or we haven't really mentioned, such as your book, *The Radical King*, perhaps Heschel plays the role for Michael that King plays for you? If we were going to think about how to have Cornel or Michael for this generation and how to have a magazine – or maybe there's no way, the public sphere today doesn't fit, so maybe you have a podcast, substack, etc., - but do you think the idea of a progressive magazine equally grounded in progressive and spiritual dimensions, is that still important, or perhaps now we need something new?

Cornel West: One thing remains clear: philosophy is a force–if we think of Marx's 11th thesis, not merely for interpreting, but for changing the world, fundamentally and progressively. So the question is how do we do it relative to specific historical circumstances. One of the differences between what I stress now vis-à-vis thirty years ago is that the spiritual decrepitude is producing an American empire that is not just hollowed out, but has created an ecological crisis that is in fact much worse.

Mark LeVine: How do you "feed" people, so to speak, without philosophy?

Cornel West: Music, for that matter, and art and all of these approaches that are tied to ethical, aesthetic dimensions. But it's still just as important to have people committed to life of the mind, connected to forms of social movement activism. Sure, the forms can be more digital now, with podcasts and whatever, but what we should end this interview with is that we should mention that Michael was one of the towering figures who kept alive a genuine vocation with a life of the mind and spiritual and social transformation in light of situating himself in a prophetic tradition. Indeed, it must be understood that vocation and tradition go hand in hand; you have to be grounded in the latter to truly undertake the former. It was a prophetic tradition open to Christians like myself, open to Buddhists, to Muslims agnostics, atheists, and everyone in fact; but for him it was rooted in the rich and deep prophetic Judaic tradition. And today we still need examples; there's no such thing as any kind of social movement without people in concrete flesh and blood positions willing to say and write what's on their mind,

and connect with others to enable them to understand and act.

Mark LeVine: One last question. I'm sure you know Toni Cade Bambara, the great playwright, documentary filmmaker, academic, and activist, who so famously said that "the goal of art is to make revolution irresistible." What can you say to young people today who want to continue the vocation of you and Michael, to make revolution irresistible. When you think of the role of the artist, the intellectual, the thinker today, can we still play that role? Can we still get people to do this very difficult and, as we see in Iran today, and across the world, often very dangerous thing? How does this generation, from your vantage point, carry on this prophetic mission – vocation – of trying to make revolution irresistible?

Cornel West: Well, first of all, revolution is about truth and the condition of truth to allow suffering to speak. But – and this is so important–at the same time it's about beauty and joy as well. To paraphrase Rilke [in "The First Elegy"], it's wrestling with the "terror, which we can still barely endure." And, coming out of my own Black tradition, it's about fun and funk – if there's no joy in the struggle then they're not going to be there for it; you're not going to stick around. With brother Lerner there was alot of joy, times we spent in his living room, there was alot of joy traveling the country, C-SPAN, Howard University, any number of controversies; despite the work and the stress, we had a lot of joy, a good time serving the cause. And that always tied the work and the message to truth and beauty.

Mark LeVine: So in the end, as James Brown said…

Cornel West: "Make it funky!"

DR. CORNEL WEST is the former University Professor at Harvard University and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University. Cornel West graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard in three years and obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton. He is the first Black person to receive a Ph.D. In Philosophy from Princeton University. He has written 20 books and he is best known for his classics, *Race Matters and Democracy Matters*, and for his memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*.

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Tikkun Interview: Reflections from a Presidential Candidate

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON & CAT ZAVIS

Interview of Marianne Williamson by Cat Zavis regarding the legacy of Rabbi Michael Lerner.

Cat Zavis: Marianne Williamson, it's so lovely to talk with you about *Tikkun* and Michael, and the influence and role they've played in your life. Starting off, I'd like to ask: Is there any particularly unique role *Tikkun* or Michael has played in your life, writing, thinking, etc.? And if so, what and/or how?

Marianne Williamson: Absolutely. I first saw Michael Lerner speak when I was in my twenties, and I know it was when I was in my twenties because it was in New York City. And I remember what chapter of my life it was. I have no idea what the specific event was, but it was in an apartment building in New York City and it was on the first floor. You took a few steps down and there was a room full of people. And he was talking about the *Politics of Meaning*. I had never heard anything like it in my life.

Cat Zavis: Wow.

Marianne Williamson: That was my first exposure to anyone living today, putting such ideas together. And it made a tremendous difference in my thinking after that. I remember when he met Hillary Clinton and so forth, and there was more talk about him, but I had already been exposed. So that was and has remained for me, the template of political thinking combined with spiritual commitment that has informed my political journey.

It was a very easy alignment because I'm Jewish. I knew it was the essence of *tikkun olam*. So yes, Michael Lerner has been an absolute lodestar for me for many, many years.

Cat Zavis: How have his thinking, writing, and ideas shaped you and your thinking both in the past and the present? I'm particularly curious about how it may have informed your various efforts to run for office–the Senate, House, and Presidency.

Marianne Williamson: Well, with a general sense of a *Politics of Meaning*, of course, as I said, it has influenced my thinking. But I think where I have been particularly instructed by Michael has had to do with the Middle East, his book about Israel and Palestine. His thoughts on the topic were my first introduction to a progressive Jewish view on the topic, and that has been extremely important for me.

And that issue, of course, is only becoming more important and more critical as the years have gone on. Something that has been and that remains the most important factor for me as a Jewish woman; as a Jewish woman who loves Israel and as a Jewish woman and as an American who very much disagrees with the prevailing political attitudes within the Israeli

government, how to juxtapose all of that. That remains with me and deepens as the years go by.

Cat Zavis: And as we look to the future, which looks somewhat bleak at the moment, how can these ideas, how should these ideas, play a role moving towards the future that we yearn for? How can we draw on these ideas to help us get to where we're striving for current and emerging thinkers and activists?

Marianne Williamson: My father used to say the Jews do not believe in miracles, but we rely upon them. Moses parted the Red Sea. I take the Bible very personally. God always sends someone. And the someone is a collective, obviously, at this moment. But to me, if you look at our current circumstances only through the lens of rationalistic thinking, we're cooked, we're done.

Humanity is clearly on a collision course with itself. But for those of us who believe in miracles, and to me, to be a person who loves God is to embrace the realization that in God all things are possible, that there is a power within a quantum field, beyond the mortal mind, out of which emerge unlimited possibilities. Then we praise the miracles to come.

In the Talmud it says that during the deepest night, act as if the morning has already come. No Jew has to be reminded of the cruelty of human beings, whether you are talking about our slavery in Egypt or you're talking about the Holocaust, any more than any Christian has to be reminded of the crucifixion. But sometimes I think we tend to forget that both of those horrors were followed by ultimate redemption and resurrection. The point of the story is not the slavery in Egypt, but the delivery into the promised land, just as the part of the story of Jesus is not the crucifixion, but the resurrection. So, to me, in many ways, the Jews are the keepers of the story of human history.

In our very selves, we have known the worst horrors and we have known the greatest glory. And I believe that just as God asks us to never forget the horrors, God also asks us to keep the faith with the glory that God has always shown people. And I believe that God's truth is never-ending. Eternal truth applies to every moment and every circumstance. Ours no less than any other.

Cat Zavis: I tend to use slightly different language, but I have the same vision and worldview as you. And I always say to people, if we humans can get our act together, let's say if we can start to move this ship in a different direction and reset ourselves in a new direction, we have no idea what the possibilities are, what will happen to the planet, its capacity to regenerate and to be life serving again. We have no idea what could happen. It could be truly miraculous and scientists would be fumbling around trying to figure out how to describe the miracles that unfold before our eyes. And later on, suddenly they'll find scientific answers that answer their questions. But how do we speak in this historical moment to the disconnections that are so profound?

The ways in which, particularly in the left, identity politics, creates separation, even as we want to obviously uplift and support all the demeaned in our society. How do we speak to young people today? How are they responding to this message? And how do you imagine us being successful in participating in and uplifting this really important message for younger generations?

Marianne Williamson: Well, let's take what you just said and divide it into two parts. The first thing you said was about humanity. You kept saying if humanity can, then you said humanity

could. So, first of all, we must move beyond that. It's if humanity chooses to, humanity can.

If humanity chooses to, we will. Now, when you talk about science, scientists can tell you right now what we need to do to stop fossil fuel extraction and so forth. But there's nothing [new] for science to tell us really. We know this now. Rather, these are issues of qualities of personhood. Now if humanity chooses, if we are courageous enough, there will be nothing scientists can do to explain that. It will be for rabbis and ministers to explain what enabled the heart to be so activated with courage and conviction. And that's really the story.

What made Moses ultimately say, okay, I'll go? At first he resisted it. He said, "No, not me, you got the wrong guy." Right? And the Hebrews resisted it too, Right? So this is not something the scientists can explain. The scientist's job is to explain what we can do. We already know what it is. We have the people. They're your friends. My friends. They know what to do. Actually, we're a democracy and, you know, humanity is clearly on a collision course with itself. We're on the Titanic. Yes, we're headed for the iceberg. We can still turn around. There is still time. If we choose to.

Now, then you talk about young people. I think it's important that we remember that people who are young today are not 20th-century creatures. They either were not born in the 20th century or just the first few years of their life; they are not only different generations, but they also weren't even born in the last century. They weren't even born in the last millennium. They can feel that the constraints are too tight for them, for their rambunctiousness and audacity. Every generation moved things forward. Every generation has that. Our generation had that. But these kids today have a deep knowledge that the old paradigm is an unsurvivable way for humanity to move forward.

Now, that also leads to great despair. You know, when I was young, we were fighting the US war machine, Vietnam, etc. But when we thought about the worst that could happen, we weren't considering the possibility of global catastrophe and species annihilation. These young people are. You have young people all over this country and probably all over the world who, under normal circumstances, would be considering having a child. But they're not. If that's not a siren going off, I don't know what is. But I also see within them, and this is the eternal nature of life, force, and audacity. I see rambunctiousness and openness to hearkening to the call of changing direction. That's why I go back to what I said. You and I, as keepers of the story and keepers of the faith, need to hear, "if we choose to, when we choose to, we can."

That's what I see. I see some sad, some desperate, some cynical, some angry, but also, charmingly, poignantly, movingly responsive to the message that we're just going to all have to show up now, aren't we. These kids are the same age as I was when I went to Mauthausen, the concentration camp in Austria. As I left, I saw the plaque honoring the Americans and the other soldiers, who liberated Mauthausen, those young soldiers who were 20 years old.

This country fought the Nazis in World War Two. We are not as desperate as those times were. Are they really that much more desperate than what the abolitionists were facing, what the women suffragettes were facing, what the civil rights workers were facing? I think that a study of history and the perspective of history leads us to believe that this is just the latest iteration. This is what overreach by capital does. This is what forces of selfishness do, as FDR called them, this is what those who lust for power do. It was always baked into the cake. This is what the slave owners did. I mean, this is what happens. Okay, we get it. Let's not be the

first generation to wimp out on doing what it takes to turn things around.

Going back to Michael, one of the reasons Michael's work is so important is he's one of the people who has given us a blueprint. Once again, going back to "If we could." We know we could. We have been given the blueprint by people such as Michael when he talks about a Global Marshall Plan.

We don't know what to do. We do know what to do. Will we have the courage to show up now, realizing the hour is so late? Enough with excuses, enough with incrementalism, let's do it? And yes, I think that young people – it's so interesting that in my experience, young people get it and all people get it. But alot of people in the middle are still under the delusion that the system will offer them what they need.

Cat Zavis: Right. But if we can get it right or they can do it, we could.

Marianne Williamson: Right. Right. If you're young enough, you're very clear: the system isn't giving you anything. You're shackled with school loans, you're living with your parents. So you have no patience with listening to the idea that the system's going to give you what you need. And old people are like, Can we stop with the bullshit now? Can we just speak the truth now, please. And there are tremendous social and political potential lies in that directness and bluntness and clarity.

Cat Zavis: I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about how to. Some of my goals and ideas like the Global Marshall Plan and the Environmental and Social Responsibility amendment to the US Constitution are still today viewed as too idealistic, too radical to X, Y, and Z, and, envisioning a world based on a new bottom line where we actually measure success by the degree to which we care for each other and care for the planet,rather than focusing on accruing money and power.

And everybody's like, that's not possible. Still today, people respond this way in the face of what we're seeing with the, as you said incredible selfishness and greed and capitalism that's run completely amok. So how, if you think that those ideas are of value, how do we bring them back to life, , or get them out there? What are your thoughts?

Marianne Williamson: Many people are saying I ran for president talking about how it should not be economic principles, but rather humanitarian principles. That or many people are saying it's really basically the progressive vision. I've always thought with Michael that his problem was that he had an almost codependent desire for people to get it.

Now, prophets are never heard immediately. That's not how it is. Michael told me once, many years ago, about a book he read by Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*. In it she argues that you know you're codependent when you want them to get it. And a girlfriend of mine said to me once about some man. She said, He's going to get it, Marianne, but not today and not from you.

You know what I'm saying? Anybody who's in the public feels, I mean, how many times are my ideas attributed to Nelson Mandela or Rumi? That's the way of the world, you know, the first person who puts it out. So I think that, of course, it was all picked it up by osmosis. People have learned from Michael Lerner who don't even know they've learned from Michael Lerner.

He was talking about that stuff back before I think I even started lecturing on A Course in Miracles. So I am one person and I hope he feels I've taken it forward to the best of my ability. And I'm one of the thousands of people.

That's what would be my hope for Michael, is that he does not underestimate.

Sometimes the people who lay it down the strongest, they are the ones who seed the culture. They are not necessarily the ones whose name is on you know, on the packaging at the end. But the cognizant, they'll always know. But for most people, it's not like they know or care who was talking about this stuff before anyone else, you know? But I think Michael wanted to be both; he wanted to both be the new and prophetic voice and also be recognized commercially and within the mainstream. And I just don't think that ever happens. I mean, I think about it, you know.

Cat Zavis: I think what he really wants, particularly now, is just the world to transform. It's so painful.

Marianne Williamson: Exactly. But you know how that is. And he's a very smart man. And he reminds us that the arc is long, as MLK famously put it. It was 40 years between slavery and the promised land. No, I think we're in the middle of a quickening, because people are looking around and going, What the hell is happening?

That's the good news; but the bad news is how many people are now saying we're going to all die if we continue like this. You have to be really in deep denial or ignorance to not recognize today that this is unsustainable, what we're doing now. I think it's all now about whether we have the courage.

This is not about science. This is about spirit. Will we have the courage? Because I do think and by the way, I want to say something else here that you may or may not want to print. Michael should be grateful that he did not make it as a more commercialized figure because they would have come after him.

Cat Zavis: More than they did.

Marianne Williamson: And it will take courage to take this next leap. Yeah, but we have been trained and we have been trained in large part by Michael.

Cat Zavis: Yeah, I remember a couple at a birthday party. A couple of friends said to him, you have moral courage.

Marianne Williamson: Absolutely. So, what his model is to me, what he's modeled is serious, searing intelligence. That's what his greatest gift to me has been, the intellectual analysis.

Cat Zavis: Yes. It's been so steeped in spirituality and faith.

Marianne Williamson: Yes. Yes. And also, the distance and perseverance. And he would not stop. You can't look back and go, well, look at Michael Lerner. He got tired. He stopped. Nobody will ever say that.

Cat Zavis: When scientists would look back on the miracles that you and I know could happen if and when humans make the necessary choices, then scientists will try ..

Marianne Williamson: To explain it.

On the material level. And they will. They will.

Cat Zavis: Exactly.

Marianne Williamson: And they will analyze it, whether that this materially happened. But we'll know it happened because of something that happened in our heart. There is a term in sociology called the local discontinuity of progress. And it's the idea that you never know. You can never rationally predict where the next great step is going to come, but it always comes from the innocent believing heart.

That is the space of miracles. It's the faith of the heart. And part of faith is that God is a great and infinite possibility because it's faith that has a power that is greater than this world.

Cat Zavis: Yes, maybe we live to see that unfold.

Marianne Williamson: We live whether we're in a physical incarnation or not, but we'll live to see it, whether we know it or not.

Cat Zavis: Whether we're in this manifestation or a different one.

Marianne Williamson: I think at this point in our lives, the goal is to die knowing that you ticked the boxes before you left here, that you did what you could. And Michael Lerner at the end of his life will know he did everything possible, everything he could before he left here. And I believe with all my heart that the God of his understanding will say to him, job well done, man.

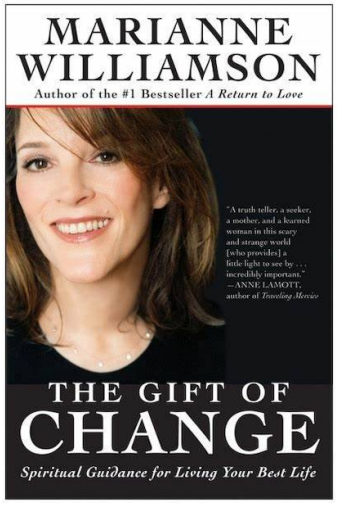
Cat Zavis: Right?

Marianne Williamson: With great praise and thanks, beautiful.

Cat Zavis: Thank you.

Marianne Williamson: You're so welcome. And I'm thinking of you. And please count me among those who are here for you.

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON is a best-selling author, political activist, and spiritual thought leader.For over three decades, she has been a leader in spiritual and religiously progressive circles. She is the author of 15 books, four of which have been #1 New York Times bestsellers. Williamson founded Project Angel Food, a non-profit organization that has delivered more than 16 million meals to ill and dying home-bound patients since 1989. The group was created to help people suffering from the ravages of HIV/AIDS.



Growing the Movement for a Politics of Meaning

Some Personal Statements

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BRUCE NOVAK, JESSE RABINOWITZ, MARK LEVINE, RICK ULFIK, ROSA NAPARSTEK, & RUTH GARBUS

INTRODUCTION:

A group of activists in the Politics of Meaning movement reflect on its impact on their lives, the culture and the spiritual and political crises in America. All of the writers participated in the work of the "Foundation for Ethics and Meaning" or "FEM," and were deeply influenced in their life and work by the politics of meaning approach to social transformation.

FEM was a grass roots, 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization established by Michael Lerner and by Mark LeVine in 1995. The idea first came to Mark after reading an article in Mother Jones magazine in late 1994 which argued that a major factor behind the victory of the Republicans and their "Contract With America" in the mid-term congressional elections that fall was the incredible (but ill-understood) power of well-funded, well-connected conservative think tanks." The Foundation's activities and research sought to challenge the present economic and cultural dominance of market driven hyper-consumption, and the worship of material wealth, power and celebrity, the political, spiritual and ethical apathy, and the ecological and human damage this worldview produces. FEM's work was to encourage a holistic and community spirit of caring that promotes tolerance, justice, and reconciliation. Moving beyond outdated Left/liberal and Right/conservative paradigms, FEM worked with organizations and with the public to develop a unified language that could offer a sophisticated and accessible critique of the current bottom line, and a coherent program for its transformation.

MARK LEVINE

Looking back on the foundational statements of the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning, I'm shocked both that how consistent my politics have remained for the last 30 years thanks to the grounding I obtained working with Michael, and that 30 years have passed since as a young graduate student and collaborator with Michael I read that fateful article about the power of right-wing think tanks and suggested

to Michael that he try to raise money to create something similar. Michael's answer was as immediate as it was, by this point, predictable: "Great idea! You do it."

People were always coming to Michael with great ideas, or what they thought were great ideas, and he couldn't possibly do most of them even if he wanted to. So when he responded with a progressive variation on the famous Nike slogan, I took it as a personal challenge to do just that. I had started off as an intern at Tikkun several years earlier after meeting Michael at his second Tikkun conference in Israel, which coincided with the beginning of my graduate student career in what was then still known as Near Eastern Studies. I still don't know which was more powerful: stepping foot in the place I had thought about for so much of my life and seeing the cruelties I'd read about as a Peace Now activist for the previous 5 years, or the empowerment and wonder I felt at listening to Michael speak against them in Jerusalem, in Hebrew, in front of a packed room of hundreds of Israeli and international activists, scholars and media. I was hooked and I knew Tikkun, and Palestine / Israel, were going to be at the center of my life for the foreseeable future.

We really thought we were on to something when, less than two years later we held our first ever National Summit on Ethics and Meaning in Washington and over 1,800 people attended, with everyone from Paul Wellstone, to the AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, to Pete Seeger giving the audience the most rousing speeches and music you could imagine. As the vacuity of the Clinton promises of "New Democrat" version of capitalist renewal became clear, we absolutely had the answer and the crowds and the incredible energy in the room over the course of three days proved it.

And yet, none of it was enough. If anything, over the next 4 years it seemed the ability to develop a progressive yet spiritually grounded politics that centered on feminism, the environment, and love instead of profit moved further from reality than ever before. By the time we had our second summit almost four years later in New York City, the crowd was smaller and the mood was darker. The hopefulness of the early Clinton years had given way to a feeling of impending doom, even if no one could quite figure out where it would come from.

The accuracy of our assessment became clear when Bush II won – or was handed, it really doesn't matter – the presidency in 2000, and then became inevitable with the horrific attacks of September 11th, 2001.

If ever a progressive Politics of Meaning was more desperately needed for the United States, and the world, it was in the days, months and years after 9/11. And yet it seemed the world was further than ever from being able to embrace it, even if millions of people understood its necessity and were working towards it.

The new century, and the global war that began with it and shows no signs of ending, have shown both the failure of the present world order and the extreme difficulty of moving beyond it. Simply put, capitalism – even in its increasingly necropolitical and suicidal form – is the world's most intense addiction, like fentanyl and meth put together. Even if you know all the ways to overcome it and to heal, if the patient doesn't want to or is too weak to change there's nothing you can do. And it really seems like it's an open question of whether humanity as a whole is up to the task of saving itself. But even now, whether it's the DSA, Bernie, or more radical politics, I cannot find a political approach that seems more likely to create the sense of community without which no solution will be possible than the Politics of Meaning.

Certainly, wherever I've travelled, across the Middle East, Africa, South Asia or the Americas, and especially working with Indigenous activists and scholars, Michael and Peter's core ideas remain as relevant as ever, and shape every conversation I have. In particular, the focus on culture has reaffirmed my belief in the positive power of art as a transformational force in intensely conflictual political dynamics. And so I remain committed to POM. As a musician, as a scholar, as an activist, as a teacher, and as a journalist, it has been at the core of everything I played, recorded, written, or taught for the last 30 years. I remain convinced that the only hope for the United States or the world as a whole to avert irreparable disaster is a fundamental transformation of global politics and the economy from an ethics of selfishness and materialism to one of love and caring. As someone who has long been alienated from organized religion, including organized Judaism, I was never able to follow that part of FEM's activities, as it developed into the Network of Spiritual Progressives. But the more I have traveled and the more I've learned, the more I have worked with refugees and the more deeply I have moved into indigenous ways of knowing and being, the more I see that they are, at their core, the ground upon which PoM and every other spiritually grounded, deeply embracing progressive political ideology has been founded.

Finally, when I see how my colleagues turned life-long friends from the original steering committee of FEM have developed our ideas, from deeply inspired innovations in psychotherapy, law, education to the arts and organizations such as We,The World founded by Rick Ulfik, the power of PoM to shape lives decades after we were all actively involved in the movement organizationally remains clear. I hope a new generation can find the inspiration and creativity we did with PoM as the challenges of transcending the current system become ever more acute.

JESSE RABINOWITZ:

I came of age in the 1970s, and was very influenced by the social and political upheavals and movements of that time. After getting my degree in clinical psychology in 1985, I was largely focused on developing my practice and livelihood. However, in the early 90s, an old friend sent me a gift subscription to Tikkun Magazine, where I began reading the work of Michael Lerner and Peter Gabel. As a psychologist, I was particularly taken with their research and writing about the relationships between mental health, spirituality and the social and occupational conditions of working-class Americans. All of the psychological training that I had received focused on the individual and family sphere, but didn't address the larger social, occupational, spiritual, and political milieus within which we and our families are embedded. Moreover, I was very convinced about the soundness of Michael and Peter's analysis of the larger spiritual crisis in America, which, at that time, was known as the Politics of Meaning.

I became an avid reader of Michael, Peter, and others who wrote about these topics in Tikkun, but was not active in any other way. Then, I found out that Michael was coming to speak to an Episcopal group in Richmond, VA, where I lived and practiced. At that time, I was a member of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Richmond, and I worked with the church to partner with the Episcopal Diocese and organize an event that would be open to the public. Michael's appearances were very well-attended and popular, and the events gave me an opportunity to get to know him a little bit.

It wasn't too long after those events that I was contacted by Michael to invite me to a leadership retreat at Point Reyes, CA, which was being held for the purpose of training Politics of Meaning activists. This was the beginning of a long and fruitful time, during which I met my future friends and fellow activists, participated in the founding of the National Foundation for Ethics and Meaning, as well as in the founding of the Richmond Community for Ethics and Meaning. In both organizations, I was involved in helping to put on many public gatherings for the purposes of consciousness-raising, teaching, and transformational processing of the ideas embodied in the Politics of Meaning. In the Richmond group, we also did some consciousness-raising in the Virginia General Assembly about the importance of spiritual, environmental, and mental health issues in the workplace.

While it has been some time since my involvement in these groups, I am grateful that I had the chance to be a part of these programs of social change. Although I am not directly active in these ways, currently, the concepts have found their way into my clinical practice, where I am far more likely to help my patients attend to the larger spiritual, social, and political issues that impact their mental health and well-being. I feel very lucky to have been turned-on to Michael and Peter's work, and to have met and worked with so many dedicated, passionate activists, serving the cause of spiritual, emotional, political, and social transformation.

BRUCE NOVAK

The Foundation for Ethics and Meaning seeks to spread the simple yet transformative truth that people yearn to live for a purpose that is higher than themselves. We seek to provide a variety of venues, intimate and large, in which people can come to discover this truth in themselves and others, and thus come to live and act, and inspire others to live and act, in this fundamental truth with the potential to be personally, socially, and politically transformative.

In the spring of 1999, we staged a small, sold-out conference of 200 in an outpost of the Children's Aid Society in Lower Manhattan—primarily through the seemingly unlimited energies and deep rolodexes of Rick Ulfik, Mark LeVine, and Ralph White of New York's Open Center for Holistic Learning. The first event -- with the somewhat immodest title "Re-Imagining Politics and Society at the Millennium: Creating a Just, Caring, and Sustainable World"—was keynoted by Michael Lerner, Peter Gabel, and former Harvard economist David Korten of Yes! Magazine. His deeply inspiring book, The Post-Corporate World, had just been launched at the UN. The success of this first event gave us the courage to mount a much larger event with the same title the following year, as the Second Summit on Ethics and Meaning (the first held staged by Michael and Peter in Washington DC four years earlier).

That event in Upper Manhattan, was held in a variety of venues, but centered in the Riverside Church, where Martin Luther King had once made his earth-shattering break with LBJ, coming out against the Vietnam War. The event featured over 200 speakers and attracted over 1000 attendees—even though in occurred during the midst of tremendous windstorms that swayed the upper levels of the tower of the church in which many of the smaller meetings were held, and doubtless affected attendance—took up major chunks of all our lives over the next year. Rick, Mark, and Ralph again led the way and took care of most of the logistics. But each of us took charge of a different track that allowed people of varying professions and interest groups to come to know one another intimately over the course of that long weekend, as well as taking inspiration from the

seemingly unending plethora of major, deeply inspiring speeches taking place in the Riverside sanctuary.

That event spawned coverage on NPR and the Nation. And, very importantly, it brought us two central new members who helped us steer the organization in a new direction over the next five years, employing the model of community building of The Different Drum, by M. Scott Peck, the famous author of *The Road Less Traveled*.

I had written about Michael and Tikkun at the end of my 1994 University of Chicago Master's thesis on Whitman's Democratic Vistas. Whitman claimed that democracy is in its deepest nature far more a spiritual than a merely political phenomenon. And the Politics of Meaning, which had been famously embraced by Hillary Clinton just the year before, was the most compelling social embodiment of that deeper, truer understanding since the Social Gospel and Civil Rights movements.

Then, magically, Michael came to Chicago to give the Aims of Religion Address in Rockefeller Chapel, 1996. He was in the middle of organizing a movement to bring this spiritual understanding of politics into vibrant life. My heart leapt up that night as it had never before done. And from then on my life unfolded into an indelible new vibrancy. I attended the first National Summit on Ethics and Meaning in DC that was a mere six weeks later, helped organize the Chicago Summit before the DNC in August of that year, and, the very morning after, got on a plane with Michael and Peter to attend a politics of meaning leadership training in Point Reyes, overlooking over the Pacific.

I encountered a great many ideas there, but one in particular became central to my life both as a professional educator and as an educational revolutionary believing that how we teach and learn together, both in and out of school, can transform the way we live as human beings and citizens. This was the idea of "sociotherapy" introduced by one of the psychologists in attendance: the understanding that, above and beyond the practice of traditional doctor/patient therapy, there is another, larger practice—the central practice of spiritual democracy—through which we can all love one another into being. I came to experience the spiritual core of the politics of meaning as the revelation of creative and redemptive love for ourselves, others, and the world altogether: a "drawing out" ("educare") of the soul that is by nature divine, in the experience of what Thich Naht Hahn calls "Inter-being."

One of the first things I did on returning to Chicago and starting my PhD in Education was to start a Politics of Meaning group that eventually became something of a model for the community building activities that, for about half a decade, became central to the Foundation for Ethics and Meaning. I was also lucky enough to find groups of professional educators—The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning of the National Council of Teachers of English and the burgeoning international movement for Holistic Education—with a similar mystical bent exemplified in events organized for participants to love one another into being, seen as a potentially world-transformative act. Out of my passionate participation in these two communities emerged two books *Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom: Being the Book and Being the Change* (2011), which I co-wrote, and *The Routledge International Handbook of Holistic Education* (2019), which I initiated and co-edited.

In recent years I have come to see that, beyond inspirational communities and books, what is above all required for the definitive establishment of a Politics of Meaning is a philosophical system of concepts to undergird its practices, enabling them to become universal. Over the past decade or so I have

found this in the late work of the philosopher Edmund Husserl, and some of those who have followed from him—no accident, of course, because Michael Lerner's great teacher Abraham Joshua Heschel was trained by the great Husserlians in 1920s Berlin!

Husserl identified a metaphysics of relationality that he named the correlational apriori: the understanding that the nature of consciousness is that of a dance between the soul and the lifeworld. Stemming from this people develop and experience empathy. And since empathy is a phenomenon taking place in storied time, it has three poetic dimensions. Each soulful I has a past, a present, and a future. So does each Other with whom we meaningfully, dancingly engage. And so does the world that is our dance floor, and that each act of dancing love seeks to conjure into eternally loving Interbeing.

So the Politics of Meaning can ultimately be seen as a way of being and creating society poetically making "hope and history rhyme," in the words of the poet Seamus Heaney often invoked by President Biden in his campaign.

Husserl's student and amanuensis Edith Stein put this in educational terms. All large societies up to now have put their prime educational efforts into the generation of war force and work force. If they instead chose to emphasize the acquisition of "life-force" through various forms of humane, empathic dance, we would live in a far more loving world than the one we live in now. Our species has for too long been taught primarily to march in file, while buried within us is the potential to engage in a cosmic tango.

Hearing Michael speak on February 29th, 1996 turned me indelibly from an intellectual wallflower to a lifelong activist. I have spent the rest of my life trying to figure out how we can inspire others to embrace this path as well. And despite the apparent darkness of our times—when democracy is in deep peril through a virus-like withdrawal from reality—it strikes me that this darkness can herald a new dawn: a willed descent into darkness required to summon a collective counter-will to new light. Perhaps only the spectacle of a farcical movement to make America and the world anti-empathic again can summon a redemptive counter-movement of sufficient life-force to make America and the world truly and fully empathic for the first time!

When the definitive history of our times comes to be written, Michael and Peter's envisioning and initial enactment of the Politics of Meaning will surely be seen as foundational for a new world of Inter-being, in which our species can finally live in accord with our deepest, dancing nature.

ROSA NAPARSTEK

My political life began at the age of 13 when I joined Ha'Shomer Ha'Zair, a socialist Zionist youth organization my parents had belonged to in Poland. It taught socialist ideals, values of community, collectivity and the responsibility of Jewish people around the world to build a socialist state in Israel embodying the highest vision of a new socialist man and woman. I, at that time, did not learn any of the history of the founding of the Jewish state and the inherent challenges in building a socialist/Zionist state.

However, I did learn a great deal about camaraderie, collective work and the importance of values. At the age of eighteen, when most Shomerites were expected to go on Aliyah, move to Israel, I did not, arguing that there was much work to be done in the United States to help build a better world and I was more equipped to do so here. I left the organization and went off to college to become a physicist, feeling that I need to know how it all began before I could actually change it. Of course, I soon

learned "The fault…is not in not our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings."

As a student, I was a political activist. Then later after many years in various political groups, organizations, movements, and as a lawyer, I came to believe that meaningful change can only come through fundamental personal and political transformation. This requires a profound shift in how we view politics and the recognition that process is a political act. I am of the radical belief that 'the means is the end,' and that our way of being dictates our way of doing. It is not enough to challenge the status quo. We need to go beyond worker/capitalist, male/female, black/white, gay/straight/ gender to the fundamental contradiction (still in the language I was familiar with) underlying all of it- our estrangement from and ourselves and each other, the I/Thou split.

In 2000, I attended the FEM Conference at Riverside Church in New York City, "Reimagining Politics and Society at the Millennium." The conference was transformative to me, and I connected through it to the Politics of Meaning movement, which had an enduring impact on my life and work. FEM's then website (*meaning.org*) stated:

> "We live in a remarkable moment in human history, a moment in which the long-term goals of the human race for the past three thousand years, to establish a society based on love, caring, mutual respect and solidarity, have suddenly become the short-term survival requirements of the planet and for the human race."

Together with my dear friend Ruth Garbus, whom I met at the 2000 FEM Conference, we brought community building work to the FEM Community as a form of building the kind of inter-solidarity that we envisioned.

I am now a visual artist and a political activist, working to develop a new body politic integrating knowing and feeling and the personal/ political. I am interested in the connection between art (the aesthetic experience) and its transformative power. I present my work in conjunction with community building circles, a process that allows participants to explore their own feelings and deepen connections with one another.

In my artwork, I use any medium, form, method, context to explore and challenge our socially and culturally acquired distortions and prejudices. These are the templates through which we view the world, imprisoning ourselves and each other- often judging, excluding, and precluding opportunities for love. My goal is to use my artwork as a point of departure for participants' self-exploration and to explore art as the "still point" of connection to self and interconnection with other. The aesthetic experience can create an open moment allowing us to be more emotionally present and sensitive.

As co-founder and director of Artists Unite, a nonprofit organization (started as the Quality-of-Life Committee in 2001), whose aim is to increase artists' ability to make and show work and the public's ability to experience art in their lives, I have been able to organize around and with the fundamental principles of the Politics of Meaning to create its one-of-a-kind community-city arts program. As an artist, my work and artists statements are influenced by the Politics of Meaning and are part of my exhibits.

I believe that the Politics of Meaning is very much more present in today's social discourse, although not by name as such. It permeates the recognition many had/have from Covid experience as to what is meaningful work, what is a meaningful life. The interest and emphasis on relationship and love and gratitude and why is there so much loneliness speaks to the need for community…communion. Our social networks are failing and people are looking for more.

RUTH GARBUS

A latecomer to FEM, I became involved because of my heart's insistence that I identify with a group that was both progressive and spiritual. My role as the leader of the New York Women of Vision and Action had come to an end, but my desire for affiliation and progressive agendas had not.

I read somewhere…could it have been in the Village Voice….of a retreat in a Jewish camp near Accord, New York for persons involved with the Tikkun Conference in 1999 at Riverside Church. I read about the weekend, and felt drawn to attend. Words like "spiritual progressives" were a large part of my identity.

As we gathered in a circle in 2000, I intuitively knew these people shared my vision, and I quickly identified with them. Rick Ulfik, Jesse Rabinowitz, Nanette Schorr, and Rosa Naparstek were there, along with others whom I found interesting, relatable, and potential soul mates.

The group decided on monthly meetings and I offered my apartment for meetings. Thus began four (4) years of meetings at my apartment. Rosa and I began community development within the group, with some success. We received training with the Scott Peck model of community building, and adapted it to our group.

Because of our increasing enthusiasm for community building, Rosa and I began, under the auspices of FEM, the Center for Community Dialogue. We did workshops of Commuity Building with City Council members, at Fordham University, Pace College, and the Brecht Forum. Also, we presented community building workshops at the Tikkun Washington Conference in 2003, where Michael Lerner presided and gave a stirring keynote.

I cannot imagine my life without community building.

FEM beliefs and culture affects all my relationships, thinking, and politics. I am currently writing a biography, Emergence, and recognize the depth FEM's spiritual and political values have permeated my life, my judgments, and my relationships.

RICK ULFIK

How Rabbi Michael Lerner Changed My Life – Forever

Rabbi Michael Lerner:

> "Rick, I am impressed by all the good work you are doing with We, The World. Can I take some credit for getting you started on this path?"

Rick Ulfik:

> "Absolutely – without a doubt!"

(Note: As I am writing this, Hamas has launched a major attack on Israel and Israel has responded with a massive counter attack. All the time I've known Rabbi Lerner he has worked on solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.)

I first heard about Rabbi Michael Lerner late in 1994 when I saw a small event notice in the New York Times. I was struck that the title of his event was actually longer than the event description. The event was titled: "No Mr. Gingrich You Don't Have A Mandate To Undermine Social Justice In The USA!"

At the event (which featured Gloria Steinem) I was impressed by Michael's 45 minute long Keynote Address, which I later got the recording of. I went up to him and said "Here I am. What do you want me to do?" He invited me to attend his weekly Salons on the Upper West Side in Manhattan.

I noticed that the literature Michael would hand out to volunteers and the public had voluminous amounts of wording. I remembered the recording I had of Michael's Keynote Address he gave at the event I met him at. I listened to his speech and proceeded to create bullet points of his main points. I created a One Page Presentation that turned out to be very useful to him and the others he was working with.

Being a composer and studio musician at the time, it was very exciting (and different) for me to work directly on social issues. I became one of Michael Lerner's main conference organizers, along with Mark LeVine, under Michael's organization the Foundation For Ethics and Meaning (FEM).

Mark LeVine and I, along with other FEM activists, went on to organize a major national conference in 1996 for Michael Lerner (in collaboration with Peter Gabel and Tikkun Magazine staff).

In 1998 Michael and Peter left the FEM Board when Michael had a life threatening health crisis. Though he fully recovered, he realized he had to cut back on his activities. So Michael invited me, Mark LeVine, Nanette Schorr, Bruce Novak and other FEM activists to constitute the new FEM Board.

In 2000, in collaboration with Ralph White and the New York Open Center, the Foundation For Ethics and Meaning Board (along with Ruth Garbus, Rosa Naparstek and Jesse Rabinowitz) and a new organization that I founded (We, The World), convened "Re-Imagining Politics and Society at the Millennium". It was a massive global conference with 252 world class Speakers including Riane Eisler, Naomi Klein, Cornel West, Peter Gabel, Marianne Williamson, Jonathan Granoff and, of course, Rabbi Michael Lerner.

Rabbi Lerner went on to create the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP). Meanwhile, I became hooked on activism and I went on to expand the activities of We, The World and the WE Campaign at WE.net. We, The World is an international coalition-building organization to unite and amplify the efforts of changemakers working for the Common Good. We now have branches in Botswana, Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda and Rwanda.

Our 11 Days of Global Unity/11 Campaigns for Change has become an inspiring international movement for peace, justice, sustainability and transformation with participants and supporters that have included: Desmond Tutu, Jane Goodall, Deepak Chopra, Marianne Williamson, Ralph Nader, Bill McKibben, Eve Ensler, Arun Gandhi, Riane Eisler, Jonathan Granoff, Hazel Henderson, Peter Gabel, Rabbi Michael Lerner and many others.

So, yes, my life changed forever – due, in large part, because of meeting you Rabbi Michael Lerner! I am deeply grateful to you for directly involving me in your work, and inspiring me to take the path I am now on. Much love to you.

Postscript from authors – How has the PoM vision impacted our culture? Have the ideas endured?

Jesse: I don't think there's any question. I spend a lot of time watching my son's generation in action and they are very tuned in to the importance of ethically-sound, emotionally-sensitive, and diversity-tolerant behavior, whether personally, in the workplace, and in larger cultural, educational, political, and social arenas. I think that's the result of communities like POM that have taught, advocated, wrote, and protested so visibly in our culture. It is why the intense backlash from the Right is happening, I think, because the message has gotten so much louder and

is penetrating many more of our social spaces, which threatens their clinging to the old ways.

Mark: I think the basic underlying assumptions of PoM have been validated many times over in the last 25 years. We have seen that governance without a grounding in ethics and a sense of the world as greater than the sum of its parts ultimately leads to disaster. We see that a huge swath of this country is literally drowning in a politics of meaning - but one based on hatred, materialism, extreme religion, and an identity based on dominance, exclusion and even "eradication" rather than love, solidarity and togetherness. It is becoming very difficult for Democrats to reach out to the other side because we are operating from not just two very different value systems but two different epistemological systems, of how we know the world and live in it and what we think our role in it is. In that sense, Tikkun and the writings and activism we at FEM have done all these years has at least held the ground, so to speak, offering an alternative that is waiting for people to understand its importance. I think this generation is beginning to see it. As we see how close we are to destroying ourselves and so much of the planet it becomes clear we need a very different grounding ethos than capitalism and materialism more broadly, and that opens space for a progressive rather than regressive/conservative PoM to come to the fore. Groups like Jewish Voice for Peace embody that in the foreign policy realm. Other younger and more radical environmental activists are putting our ideas into practice, consciously or not.

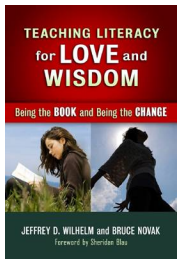
Rosa: Excerpt from: I Forgot that Love Existed: By Van Morrison, oft quoted by Peter Gabel.

"If my heart could do my thinking
And my head begin to feel
I'd look on life with eyes anew
And know what's really real"

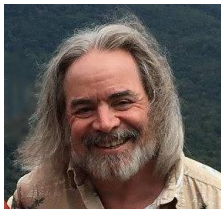
RUTH GARBUS practiced as a therapist, led community building workshops with Rosa Naparstek, was a facilitator of the Episcopal Missions Network in the Schools, and was organizer and leader of New York's Women of Vision and Action. Wrote two plays: one on Margaret Fuller, the other on Etty Hillesum. At present, I am at work on my autobiography, Emergence. I now live in Woodstock, New York with my partner, Nick Lyons.

MARK LEVINE, one of Tikkun's longest-serving Editorial Board members, is a Professor of Middle Eastern history at UC Irvine and a 2020-21 Guggenheim Fellow.

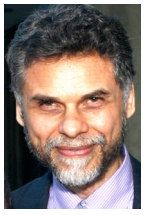
ROSA NAPARSTEK was born in Siberia, came to America in 1951 after 5 years in a refugee camp, grew up in Detroit, (where she later worked with James and Grace Lee Boggs), lived in Bay Area, now live in New York City. The animating question of her life has been what is the source of cruelty? She has come to believe that it lies in our ability to deny our own pain, fear, and vulnerability.
Rosa's art can be found at *https://www.rosanaparstek.com*



BRUCE NOVAK, a member of the FEM Board since 1998, Bruce has taught grades 6-PhD, was the recipient of a 2013 University-Wide Teaching Award from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and has authored many articles and published two books exemplifying a Politics of Meaning approach to education: *Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom: Being the Book and Being the Change* (2011) and *The Routledge International Handbook of Holistic Education* (2019). He is currently working on a portrayal, for a broad public audience, of the integral relationship between empathy-centered education and an empathy-centered democracy--The Opening of the American Heart: The Great Educational Awakening on the Horizon of Democratic Life--in which the words "and crown thy good with brotherhood, [sisterhood, and inter-specieshood]," are not just paid lip-service to, but made intentionally integral to all institutions of human life.



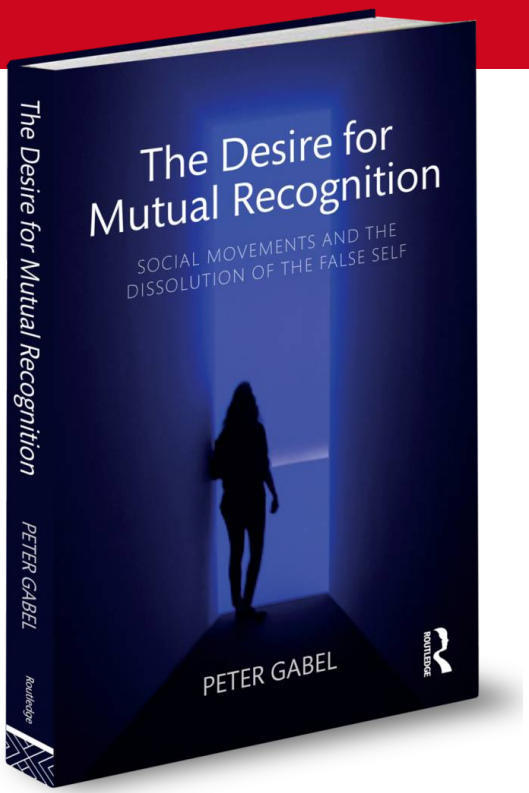
JESSE RABINOWITZ has been a clinical psychologist in Richmond, VA since 1985. He specializes in mindfulness, gestalt therapy, LGBTQ issues, and spirituality. Jesse also has a theatre background, and wrote and performed a one-man show, "Cry Out", based on the life and work of Beat poet Allen Ginsberg. He lives with his wife, Brenda Goodman, a gerontologist and end-of-life doula.



RICK ULFIK is Founder of We, The World at *https://WE.net* doing global coalition and movement-building for the Common Good since 1998. Rick is the Co-Creator of 11 Days of Global Unity - a transformative international movement with major supporters including Desmond Tutu, Jane Goodall, and Deepak Chopra. Rick has also written music for ABC TV, the Olympics, feature films, and has performed with Phoebe Snow, Carlos Santana, and Judy Collins. Rick is the former Co-Chair of the Foundation for Ethics & Meaning.

Moving the Tectonic Plates in Medicine and Law

Appreciations to Michael and to Peter



BRUCE HIRSCH & NANETTE SCHORR

BRUCE HIRSCH

IT WAS IN THE SECOND YEAR OF MEDICAL school that I read Rabbi Michael Lerner's *The Politics of Meaning: Restoring Hope and Possibility in an Age of Cynicism*. Reading the book was like drinking ice water in the desert. The scientific curriculum in medical school offered massive information but left untouched my ambition to connect with another, to embrace meaning, to become a healer. Michael's book, *Spirit Matters*, published in 2000, included a vision of a spiritually informed health care that supported my decision to become a specialist in infectious diseases. As a doctor, I witness the shared vulnerability of all humanity to pathogens and plasmids as well the contagious power of patients and families propagating wisdom, hope, and caring.

This is a difficult time in American medicine. In the hospital and in the clinic, the computer commands the work-day, maintains lists of patients to see, and tasks to complete. I pause and take in a deep breath. I remember Michael's prophetic clarifications: each and every person is a sacred manifestation of this awesome generating universe. Michael's writings support an empathetic curiosity. The electronic medical record is forgotten and the world of the exam room is filled with this specific human being coping with specific clinical, social, psychological, and spiritual adversities. The wisdom of the body models the response to injury and disease, striving for survival, pushing always towards thriving health. Michael's message is redemptive. Michael calls us to re-create the hospital as a holy place. Spirit matters deeply in this busy work. Our individual well-being is determined by the health of each living being on this crowded hot world where pandemics spread at the speed of passenger jets.

Michael has diagnosed the body politic. The ill-health of our society reflects the pathology of the bottom line of power, money, and self-aggrandizement. Our health system does poorly with health outcomes but succeeds in financial outcomes. "If I am only for myself, what am I?" the sage Rabbi Hillel asked millennia ago. Michael's diagnosis of the current Hobbesian nightmare clarifies the correct therapy: to acknowledge health care as a right

and establish a Medicare for All; to cherish the multiple dimensions of well-being and welcome the pastor, masseuse, nutritionist, energy healer, educator, and counselor to join social worker, nurse, and physician at the bedside or our beloved family and neighbors; to engineer healing throughout our society respecting the requirements of education, leisure and safety for well-being; to be grateful for the opportunity to be generous to ourselves and others as it is precisely in that generosity that we achieve transcendent meaning.

I prescribe antibiotics and antivirals at the *Left Hand of God*. My specialty has been to witness successive epidemics of microbes, epidemics of misguided selfishness, each wave of disease illustrating the wisdom of Michael Lerner. It is the generosity that recognizes our essential unity with each other that brings us hope for meaning and the healing of life on earth. If not now, when?

Thank you Michael.

NANETTE SCHORR

Growing up in the Jewish tradition, I had felt from the earliest age that living a full and meaningful life required engagement with the world's sorrows and injustices. As the Torah teaches, "Justice Justice shall you pursue," "Love your neighbor as yourself." As I grew up in the years of cultural and political ferment of the late 1960s and the 1970s, deeply influenced by the movement for civil rights, the women's movement, critiques of capitalism and the growing awareness of human rights, I became more and more drawn to identifying my core sense of purpose as that of being an activist for social justice and social transformation.

In 1989 I began to read *Tikkun Magazine*, and was intensely drawn to the vision articulated there of a *Politics of Meaning* in which each human being is valued for their intrinsic worth, and where the values I cherished were fully embodied. *Tikkun*'s powerful approach to social change focused on creating "a new bottom line," which measured the success of each sector of society (economy, government, schools, health care, education, the legal system) based not on whether they maximize money, profit and power, but by the extent to which they maximize love and caring, kindness and generosity, empathy and compassion, social, economic and environmental justice, peace and nonviolence. The *Politics of Meaning* vision was grounded in the understanding that we carry within us a powerful longing for authentic connection to others, through which we can be seen and affirmed. Because of this, successful social movements towards equality and justice in all spheres must focus on the development of a program which addresses in a healing way the alienation and isolation which foster injustice.

My personal connection with *Tikkun* began with my attendance at a powerful and deeply moving conference organized by Michael and *Tikkun* in Jerusalem in 1991 aiming to bring together the branches of the Israeli peace movement, and heal rifts within it. Not long thereafter, Michael moved the magazine to New York City, and there created a vortex of energy around the politics of meaning ideas. I had the opportunity then to participate in the work of advancing this vision. During this vibrant period notable events were created such as a Town Hall called "No, Mr. Gingrich," that offered a counter-vision to the Contract with America that was being advanced at the time, and a memorable event on the politics of meaning at the 1992 Democratic Convention in New York City.

In 1995 Michael introduced me to his dear friend and colleague Peter Gabel, co-editor

of *Tikkun*. Peter was a lifelong activist and law teacher, and had spent years creating and sustaining a law school within the progressive alternative university New College. In working with Michael, and then with Peter, I felt that I had found a spiritual home for my life's work.

WORK IN TRANSFORMATION OF THE LAW AND LEGAL CULTURE

The *Project for Integrating Spirituality, Law, and Politics* (www.spiritlawpolitics.org) emerged from a gathering of 1,800 social activists in Washington DC in 1996, growing out of Michael's powerful capacity for organizing, and out of Michael and Peter's profound work. This first *Politics of Meaning* conference was a dynamic and exciting event, showcasing visions of transformation in all sectors of society. There, 50 of us who were lawyers and law professors, law students and legal workers, first came together to form what initially became the "Law Task Force" of the new *Politics of Meaning* movement.

The *Politics of Meaning* and the Law model (which later evolved into the Project for Integrating Spirituality, Law and Politics or "PISLAP") (http://www.spiritlawpolitics.org) had four pillars –

- fostering the use of restorative justice in the criminal arena,
- implementing understanding-based mediation and restorative practice models in the civil arena,
- developing a spiritually-informed approach to law and social change, and legal processes more generally, so that the legal system reflects our social commitment to fostering empathy, compassion, and mutual understanding.
- renewing legal education in ways that reflect these values

In this arena, lawyering was to be a vocation where one could bring one's full self, and law and legal culture a central public space for fostering empathy and understanding through the healing of conflict, and for reawakening a sense of the integrity or sacredness of all beings and of the natural world. Legal education would help to redefine the working ethics of the profession. Legal ethics would foster the conduct of legal proceedings to promote truth-telling, compassion, reconciliation, and responsibility for the well-being of the other, as well as of the self.

Over the years, we developed a community and movement around this shared work. Our *PISLAP* community has met many times to develop and deepen our thinking and experience, and we always sought to ground our community in shared experience and support for the ways these values were being brought forward in practice. On one occasion we gathered in Atlanta at the offices of the Georgia Justice Project (https://gjp.org), built next to Ebenezer Baptist Church, and embracing the spirit of Dr. King. At GJP, with our friend Doug Ammar, we saw in action the work of lawyers acting according to the highest ideals of solidarity with their clients -- supporting them through representation visiting them in prison, providing access to employment and other forms of support upon their re-entry into the community, and seeking to legislatively break down barriers to opportunity for Georgians impacted by the criminal justice system. Peter was fond of describing the aspiration we shared in PISLAP as helping legal culture transform itself to become worthy of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s statement that "Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love." Michael's inspiration, and Peter's leadership in hewing to this vision, his writing developing core concepts (most recently and profoundly, *The Desire for Mutual Recognition: Social Movements and the Dissolution of the*

False Self) and his warm, embracing presence, kept our movement growing and expanding.

Transforming legal practice is extremely difficult without parallel transformations occurring in other sectors of the culture to support it. Michael and Peter's brilliant and deep overarching vision, developed further in Michael's writing, in the pages of *Tikkun*, and in the work of the Network of Spiritual Progressives (https://spiritualprogressives.org) sought to keep front and center the importance of changes like this across the culture – in art, education, government, media, health care. They both felt that for any one sector of the culture to sustain transformation, there must be parallel shifts transforming and moving the tectonic plates across all sectors of our society. Their powerful work, and deep integrity, continues to remind us to deepen spiritually, think, study, and act.

PETER GABEL

I met Peter Gabel in 1995 when he was in the process of leading the development of a platform plank on changing the law and the legal culture to be delivered at the outstanding *National Summit for Ethics and Meaning*, organized by *Tikkun* and the newly formed Foundation for Ethics and Meaning ("FEM) in Washington DC, and attended by some 1800 people.

Peter's grace, sensitivity, eloquence and brilliant insight were immediately evident.

Peter's commitment to connecting us to an understanding of the ways in which fear of the other evolves in each of us from infancy, and his evocation of the powerful human desire for mutual recognition and presence to each other, shone through in all of his work. These understandings, forming a seedbed from which hope for social transformation can emerge and social movements can grow, were expressed by Peter in his writing, his editorial role in *Tikkun* Magazine, his movement building work, and in his relationships with others.

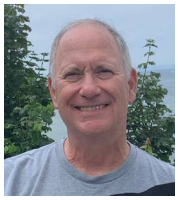
Peter and Michael developed the politics of meaning analysis, which has provided a foundational framework for understanding and healing some of the deepest divisions that exist in our country today. With warmth, energy, playfulness, and deep commitment, they collaborated, sometimes on separate but complementary tracks, sometimes together, to challenge the way that is, and impel us to say yes to co-creating the possible. We do this, they propose, by developing alternate realities in every sphere of life that have the potential to become the dominant realities. Neither Peter or Michael have permitted their vision to be limited by the politics of the possible.

In his writing, whether for academic circles in law reviews, lay readers, as a frequent writer for *Tikkun* magazine, or in blogs or recordings, Peter combined a sophisticated psycho-spiritual understanding of human dynamics and the movement of social forces, with a profound empathy for our ever-present yearning for mutual connection. His books, including, *The Desire for Mutual Recognition: Social Movements and the Dissolution of the False Self; The Bank Teller and Other Essays on the Politics of Meaning; Another Way of Seeing*; articles, such as "The True Meaning of Bush v. Gore," "Communalizing the Neighborhood," "The Spiritual Dimension of Social Justice;" "The History and Meaning of Originalism," and videos (https://www.petergabelauthor.com) embody and speak to these themes, and collectively give energy to the project of developing social movements which move us towards societies which are just and equitable, and where each member of society is seen, valued and recognized.

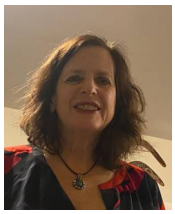
Peter not only wrote about his ideas, he lived them. Peter built, over many years, the important alternative university, New College, co-created a School of Law within it, and engaged

in many endeavors to build social movements. His work in PISLAP, the Project for Integrating Spirituality Law and Politics (www.spiritlaw-politics.org) on changing the law and the legal culture reflected his commitment to bring forth parallel efforts which embody the possibility of transformation. With his partner Lisa, longtime union organizer, and son Sam, hip hop artist and activist, Peter co-created a community of connection in his life. He elevated the work of others, and brought his warmth, friendship and grace through his writing and through personal connection.

Deep appreciation to Michael, and to Peter, dear friends and comrades, for their lifelong contributions, and to all that they have brought to our culture and society.



BRUCE HIRSCH is a member of the Network of Spiritual Progressives and is active in the New York City chapter. He is a physician who specializes in infectious diseases.

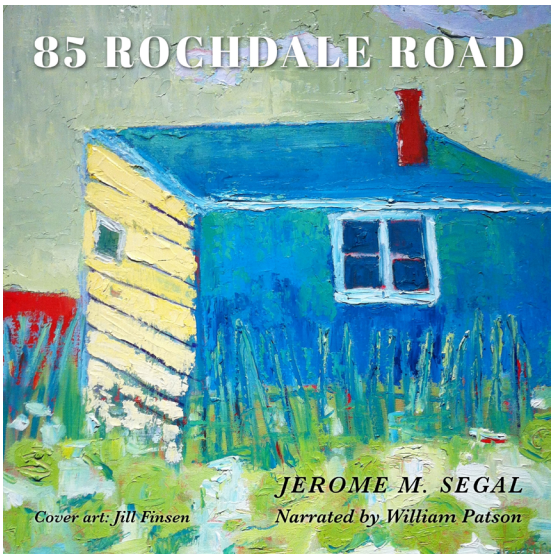


NANETTE SCHORR is an attorney whose life's work has been in representing and advocating on behalf of low-income communities. She is a member of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, and is co-founder (with Peter Gabel) of the Project for Integrating Spirituality Law & Politics (*spiritlawpolitics.org*)

Nanette Schorr & Rabbi Michael Lerner

New Direction for the Tikkun Community

Bread and Roses Socialism



JEROME M. SEGAL

Over the years, most of my involvement with *Tikkun* has centered on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but drawing on a 1996 *Tikkun* essay, "The Politics of Simplicity," this essay focuses on the politics of meaning, its relationship to the politics of simplicity, and on a possible new direction for the *Tikkun* community: Bread and Roses Socialism.

Like the politics of meaning, bread and roses socialism offers a comprehensive social agenda, one that has been organized in terms of nine utopian transitions, pursued through realistic means:

1. Leveling, and Limiting the "Meritocracy" - Going beyond equality of opportunity to equality of outcomes
2. Creating the Voluntary Simplicity Option
3. Re-inventing work
4. Repurposing schools
5. A Beauty-For-All Renaissance for America
6. The Last Shall be First – A Marshall Plan for the Bottom
7. Creating More Great Places to Live
8. Friending the Earth
9. International Conflict Resolution with Centrality Given to the Abrahamic Challenge: Israel-Palestine and Iran

(For the substance of these headings see: www.BreadandRoses.us)

Much of this overlaps with the *Politics of Meaning*, and some is also part of the

existing progressive agenda. [NB: Tikkun and the Network of Spiritual Progressives has a 10-point platform for transforming our society - A Path to a World of Love and Justice (https://spiritualprogressives.org/philosophy/a-path-to-a-world-of-love-and-justice/)] The most distinctive elements of bread and roses socialism are "Creating the voluntary simplicity option" and "A beauty-for-all renaissance for America."

In what follows I focus on "Creating the voluntary simplicity option" which in my political campaigns, most recently the 2022 Maryland Gubernatorial Primary sharpened into a call for the option of a 3-day workweek.

The central value judgment here is this: In our wealthy society, no one should be compelled by necessity to devote more than 3 days a week to alienated labor. This objective offers a somewhat different approach to late-stage capitalism. Rather than making the policy aim overthrowing capitalism, or transforming corporations into entities open to spirituality, love, and caring, the main goal is to shrink capitalism in our daily lives.

Capitalism in its essence is a form of economic production in which workers don't own their tools (capital) and thus sell (alienate) their labor to those who do. This is The Job System, a term provided by the late Frithjof Bergmann. There are job creators (who purchase labor for tasks they need done) and the rest of us: who are job seekers, job holders, job retirees, or job-besotted students training to service the needs of the job creators, and hoping to beat out their peers in the competition for the very limited supply of jobs that are also truly authentic work, jobs in which one gets paid for doing work so authentically one's own that one would do it for free if one didn't need the money.

The 3-day week is not mandatory. It is the option to limit our involvement in The Job System to 3 of the 7 days. This, I believe, is very different from fighting for the 5-day week, or even the 4-day week. With just three days in the Job System and leaving 4 days for inherently meaningful time-use, I believe we cross a tipping point that will transform the basis of social identity and status, and thus self-respect and personal identity. While bread and roses socialism is committed to pursuing income and wealth equality, it will give rise to a "classless society" in an additional and deeper sense of the term, a society in which a person's social identity and personal identity will not be primarily defined by how they earn their income. The question "Who is so-and-so?" will no longer be primarily about their success or failure in the competition for job system status, but about their passion-activity, their authentic work, their values, talents, and character.

For example, the middle-aged guy bagging groceries in Whole Foods, rather than being taken as someone who failed to achieve the American Dream, will be seen as possibly a poet, or a scholar, or a church volunteer, or a loving parent who prefers to work at the supermarket because it is close to home or allows him to de-compress or perhaps to compose a poem while he bags and makes enough money to cover his needs if he lives modestly.

The young person in high school or college will not have to give dominant consideration to the job market and how their course of study will or will not equip them for "success." Rather they will know that they are guaranteed employment, and that every job, with only three days of labor, will provide sufficient income to cover their core material needs, and thus that every job is compatible with a vibrant life.

This goal of making it possible to meet core material needs with fewer hours of work is not merely aimed at assisting people in downsizing. It is also a sweeping anti-poverty framework that will mean higher, not lower, levels of consumption for those at the bottom. It is intended to benefit all, across the income spectrum. The option of voluntary simplicity (deliberately choosing to consume very modestly) need not be something a person chooses for a lifetime. It could be something one adopts for a decade, or for a few years in order to re-tool, or go back to school, or just until they complete their novel, or perhaps to just to try a year at Walden Pond, and see how it works out. Essentially, it is a form of freedom, whether we choose it or not.

THE COMPONENTS OF THE 3-DAY OPTION

This consists of a) Guaranteed Basic Employment–A legal right to 3-days of paid employment; b) A Time Liberty Right–The right of any job-holder to limit their weekly hours on their job to 3 days (24 hours); and c) 3-Day Sufficiency–Making it possible to meet core needs with only 3 days of work per week.

3-Day Sufficiency – How to Get There

The standard 40-hour, five-day week, can be thought of as ten blocks of time, each 4 hours, a half-day. 3-day sufficiency requires being able to live modestly, at what used to be called, "a standard of health and decency" with no more than 3 days of paid employment at a minimum wage. There is no single policy that will make this possible. But it can be done through a mix of policies that address both disposable income and the cost of necessities.

On the income side this includes higher minimum wages (perhaps $20/hr., selective tax eliminations or reductions for those who live modestly, and enhanced income supplements through existing "refundable" tax credits ("refundable" meaning that the government pays you, rather than you paying the government, if you have no tax liability to reduce). This includes the child tax credit and the earned income tax credit, which together, during the pandemic could provide low-income families with over $8,000 a year, and are similar to, though more modest than, universal basic income.

In addition, some people will find that they can supplement Job System income with income from authentic work pursued in the liberated days. Some may be able to transition totally out from The Job System.

On the cost side there are many creative policies that will have a major impact. To see this, consider what we actually work for today.

Average household expenditure shares in 2021 are shown below, with the corresponding amount of work time required for the expenditure, based on a 40-hour week:

- Housing – 33.8 percent or 13.5 hours, almost 1 ¾ days.
- Transportation – 16.4 percent or 6.6 hours, over ¾ of a day.
- Food – 12.4 percent or 5 hours, just over ½ day.
- Insurance, pensions, social security – 11.8 % or 4.7 hours, just over ½ day
- Healthcare – 8.1 percent or 3.2 hours - less than ½ day.
- Entertainment – 5.3 percent or 2.1 hours – a ¼ day.
- Other – 12.2 percent or 4.9 hours, another ½ day, plus a bit.
- Total - 100% or 40 hours, five days.

Even putting aside any increase in disposable income for those at the bottom, the full shift to the 3-day workweek could be achieved for most Americans if ways were found to trim 2 days, or 16 hours from the total of "need-required labor time," the best measure of economic progress.

The big opportunities are with housing and transportation, which together make up half our expenditures and represent 2 ½ days of work.

To cut the cost of housing, I have proposed one-time zero interest loans for building small or even tiny homes. New homes today are three times the size of what they were in the 1950's. A zero interest $100,000 loan could be paid off in ten years at $833 a month, after which one would be mortgage free at a very early age. Combined with progressive property taxes, or an exemption for the first $100,000 of home value, this could reduce total expendi-

tures by 20%, freeing a full day of labor time. Almost the same time-liberation is achieved immediately by paying off $100,000 over thirty years, ($278/month).

This, of course, may not be feasible in super-expensive places to live such as San Francisco, but housing costs in much of the country are today vastly lower, and can be substantially reduced, as we expand the great places to live.

The ¾ day per week we devote to transportation can be reduced to ¼ day. Almost all transportation spending is for the car. We need to transition to electric vehicles, and they are typically expensive. The Tesla is the best-selling EV in the world and it starts around $65,000. Even with the major tax credits now available for their purchase (e.g. $7,500) most EV's are quite pricey. But very inexpensive EV's are possible. The second-best selling EV in the world is the Wu Ling Mini, available only in China. It sells for $4,500 and 40% of the company that makes it is owned by General Motors. For $10,000 we could have a small EV that meets American safety standards and has a bit more power. With the existing $7,500 subsidy, this could be available for $2,500, paid off over five years at zero interest at $42/month.

On health care we can use the tax system to cap expenses to 7% of income, by modifying what is already available for the 10% of households who itemize deductions. This would be done by replacing tax deductions for medical care that exceeds 7.5% of taxable income, with a refundable credit for all expenditures over 7% of income, regardless of whether one itemizes deductions.

It is quite true that Americans are not eager to live in small homes and to drive small EV's, but our present consumption preferences have been formed in the context of invisibility, one in which the true time-cost for our over-consumption is not seen. Imagine walking past your neighbor's small house, with their Wu Ling Mini parked outside, and immediately thinking, "Wow, they decided to work only 3 days a week!" In time, the big house with one or two SUV's outside will look like the home of someone who made foolish choices. Some might say, "But I need it for my family," but what if the alternative is that your family gets much more of you?

The 3-day work week would open a space in which, secure from economic anxiety, people would pursue the good life as best they can find it, be it in relationships with friends and family, in service to others, in political struggle, in pursuit of knowledge, or in the arts and literature. With social policies that are targeted modifications of what already exists, plus a willingness to consume modestly, this life option is within our reach.

AMERICANS ARE READY

Last year, seeking to gauge how much political potential there is for a new kind of socialism of this sort, I commissioned John Zogby Associates to do a poll of the attitudes of American voters towards bread and roses socialism and some of the specific policies associated with it. The poll surveyed 1006 likely voters, and has a margin of error of +/- 3.2%.

The results are quite exciting. Here are some of the key findings:

Interviewees were told:

> "Bread and Roses socialism is a new set of ideas that blends Bernie Sanders type policies with a key goal of simple living: being able to meet basic needs with a modest income so that one is free to reduce the amount of time one puts in at the job. This would involve a cultural shift towards lives with more leisure time, or more meaningful work, rather than more money and more

stuff. Under this approach, everyone would have a legal right to a 3-day job. And with policies such as higher minimum wages and strong limits on the costs of meeting core needs of healthcare, education, housing, transportation. and childcare, everyone could have a vibrant life even without a super job. The other 4 days a week could be devoted to pursuing our passions, whatever they might be, with or without pay, or just having more time with friends and family. What do you think of opening this option, to whoever wants it, a central goal of social and economic policy?"

Overall, there was a solid positive response; 47% said they "liked or loved it" and 29% said they "disliked or hated it." Among those with an opinion this broke down as 62% viewing it positively and 38% negatively.

Support among Democrats was even stronger. Here, 25% said they would need to know more. Of those Democrats who expressed an opinion, an overwhelming majority, 84% say they "love it or like it" and a mere 16% say they "dislike or hate it."

I take from this that there is broad support for cultural change towards a more equal, more secure, more leisured, less competitive, less career oriented and less consumerist society. This was supported by the answers to several other questions.

TIME TO RE-THINK THE AMERICAN DREAM

Having been told that bread and roses socialism seeks "a cultural shift to a New American Dream" of a society that is less competitive, and that this involves greatly reducing the cost of meeting basic needs, voters were asked if they believed "it is time we re-thought what we should mean by The American Dream."

54% said yes, 30% said no. Among Democrats, 62% said yes and 17% said no. Republicans were evenly split with 43% saying yes, and 44% saying no, and among Independents 58% yes and 28% no.

WHAT KIND OF AMERICAN DREAM?

Asked what version of The American Dream best reflected their aspirations, some 69% chose: "Having enough income to live a relatively modest, but decent and secure life, and then have lots of leisure to pursue the things in life that are most meaningful."

Only 16% said they aspired to live in the top 10% or more. And only 15% said they aspired to financial success of the sort that would enable one to "possess anything you want." Interestingly, there was almost no difference between Republicans and Democrats on this.

RE-THINKING THE MISSION OF SCHOOLS AND CHILDHOOD

The poll asked voters to respond to the following statement about children and schools in our culture:

"American parents are reasonably concerned about their children's economic future. Most parents look to schools to better enable their child to succeed in the competition for good and secure jobs. But collectively this reasonable desire from American parents only makes the competition more intense. It's like everyone standing on tiptoes to see better at a parade. It doesn't increase the number of good jobs. We need to find a way to increase good jobs for all rather than enhancing the competition among school children. Under the current system, all we're getting is stress on our kids, and schools moving away from really important areas such as history, the humanities, and the arts."

A striking 60% of Americans somewhat agreed or strongly agreed, and only 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Of those who offered an opinion, 70% of Americans agreed somewhat or strongly.

Among Republicans, 46% agreed or strongly agreed, and 41% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Among Democrats 76% agreed or strongly agreed, and 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The poll also asked questions about specific policies that are part of the bread and roses agenda:

	All voters	All Voters	All Voters Who Expressed an Opinion	Democrats Who Expressed an Opinion
	"Support or strongly support"	"Oppose or strongly oppose"	"Support or strongly support"	"Support or strongly support"
Zero interest mortgages for building small and tiny homes so one can be mortgage-free in 10 years	55%	22%	71%	89%
Making gasoline a public utility; fighting inflation by price controls.	50%	33%	60%	83%
Manufacturing very low-cost electric vehicles, even if we need a government owned company to do it. Then subsidize them and sell to low-income families for $3000, thus reducing the need for income and labor time.	48%	30%	63%	84%
Greater equality of outcomes. Gradual re-distribution of wealth to equalize household ownership of corporate stock.	45%	39%	54%	79%

In addition to these, the poll asked a number of questions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of them was on a policy I have long advocated:

> "If there is very little likelihood of reaching a successful agreement to end the conflict through direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under US mediation, do you agree or disagree that the United States should turn to the United Nations to develop either a new plan or a new process for moving towards peace?"

Here we found 53% supportive, 28% opposed, and 20% unsure. Among Democrats, there were 67% in favor and 12% opposed, while Republicans were divided equally.

With respect to all of these issues, of voters who had opinions, there was clear majority support for all of them. While Democrats favored all of these more than Republicans, these are policies that would tend to unite Americans across party lines.

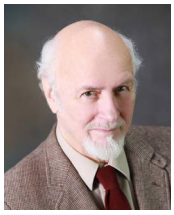
My central take-away from this is that most people don't have to be convinced to rethink what they want out of life, they already have a hunger for social and economic arrangements that are about time and meaning. They already prefer economic security, great equality of outcomes, less competition, less stress. Even now, most Americans are saying that for them, this is the real American dream. The surprising thing is that up until now, those seeking pub-

lic office have not made attaining this societal and cultural shift the central goal of social and economic policy, and the center of their political campaigns.

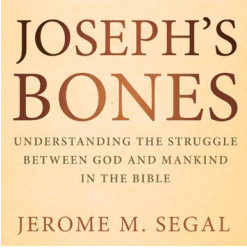
So the potential is clearly there, perhaps with further conceptual modifications, for building a new politics that blends the politics of simplicity with the politics of meaning. The key to doing this is not more articles, but the proliferation of candidates.

For me, I have stopped running for public office – I'm the same age as Michael– a few months younger–but through these campaigns we have developed a concrete policy agenda covering major utopian transformations (see: www.BreadandRoses.us) and these can serve, at least as a starting point, for anyone interested in running for office from the bread and roses perspective.

I urge members of the *Tikkun* community to take the plunge and run for office on such a platform. It is the next phase, building on the pioneering work and prophetic insights that Michael has contributed over a lifetime, a contribution that is unique in our society.



JEROME M. SEGAL is the author of The Olive Branch From Palestine; Agency and Alienation; Graceful Simplicity; Creating the Palestinian State; and Joseph's Bones: Understanding the Struggle Between God and Mankind in the Bible. In 2018, focusing on Bread and Rose Socialism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he challenged Senator Ben Cardin in Maryland's Democratic Primary. He got 20,000 votes.



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The Arc of a Friendship

MARTHA SONNENBERG

It amazes me that I have known Michael Lerner for 58 years. As friendships go, ours has been complex and evolving, with its ups and downs, its times of closeness and times of distance; but it is, when all is said and done, a friendship that has aged well.

It was in 1965, the year after the UC Berkeley Free Speech Movement, that I first encountered Michael Lerner (not yet a rabbi). I was an 18-year-old sophomore and Michael was a 22-year-old graduate student. It was a heady time in Berkeley. On The Terrace, the University's outdoor café, you could have lunch and listen to or participate in every kind of political discussion you might imagine. I was in awe of these political "heavies", the Communists, the Socialists, the Maoists, the Fidelistas, the Trotskyists, and every sectarian splinter group in between. And then there was Michael, who talked with everybody, but didn't really fit in with anybody, because he had his own unique perspective, combining radical politics with an appreciation of psychology and Jewish spirituality. In those days, and sadly in these days too, political people engaged in impersonal thinking, and were uncomfortable, and often disdainful of anything hinting of psychology or spirituality.

I spent the summer of 1965 in Israel, on a socialist kibbutz. People there asked me about an American guy going around Israel and talking about peace between Israel and Palestine. Did I know him? Well, I knew *of* him…When I got back to Berkeley I enrolled in Richard Lichtman's course, 'The Philosophy of Karl Marx,' and Michael was the Teaching Assistant for the course. Michael translated Hebrew correspondence from my Israeli cousins. While doing this he took the opportunity to challenge (a very Michael thing) my Jewish identity, or lack thereof. He planted doubt in my certainty about the incompatibility of socialism and spirituality. And over the next five decades Michael Lerner, who went on to become a rabbi, continued to talk about the breadth of Jewish spirituality—he was able to delve beneath the religion to reach its spiritual core, and reveal the intimate connection between transformative politics and spirituality, the concept of *Tikkun Olam*. He suggested as well that politics had a transformative core that went beyond resistance to the negativity in the world, beyond reformist and solely economic solutions. to a core which envisioned a society in which humans could become their best selves, unalienated and authentic human beings.

Michael has never been bound by the dogmas, the ossified thinking of some parts of the Left. His activism has always had an imaginative spark, a creativity which others may dismiss but which invariably proves to be effective. He has always had a vision of the social movement he wants, and of a better world for us to inhabit. These qualities led him to be a founding member of the New American Movement (NAM) in response to the disintegration of the student left in 1969. His 1972 article in *Socialist Revolution*, "The New American Movement: A Way to Overcome the Mistakes of the Past," was read by many disenchanted and discouraged leftists, I among them, and gave us new inspiration. NAM was to be a movement which could reach out to working-class America and make a connection to the radicalism of the New Left.

Through his work as a therapist at the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, he addressed the question of why people see no alternative to a life that is unfulfilling, and in so doing contribute to their own powerlessness. He called this "surplus powerlessness" and wrote a book of the same name. For any movement to succeed, he said, progressives had to understand this psycho-social powerlessness and find ways to heal it. Many years, and many books later, he developed this concept more fully in his most recent book, *Revolutionary Love*. Progressive forces, he wrote, "have to learn to address the unmet spiritual and psychological needs that the capitalist system is unable to acknowledge…about which the Left has been tone deaf."

What Michael Lerner has offered is no less than a paradigmatic shift in how we approach transformative politics and how we imagine a socialist society might be. Why paradigmatic? Because the perspective he proposes, the spiritualization of socialism, the integration of love, generosity, empathy, and compassion as defining principles of socialism *and* socialist strategy, is as radical a departure from traditional materialistic and economistic socialist theory as quantum mechanics is from classical Newtonian mechanics. The paradigmatic shift requires a revolutionary change in the worldview of transformative politics and of how we behave in the process. Rabbi Lerner has spent a lifetime bringing spirituality to politics and social activism, and in revealing the progressiveness within Judaism.

TIKKUN MAGAZINE

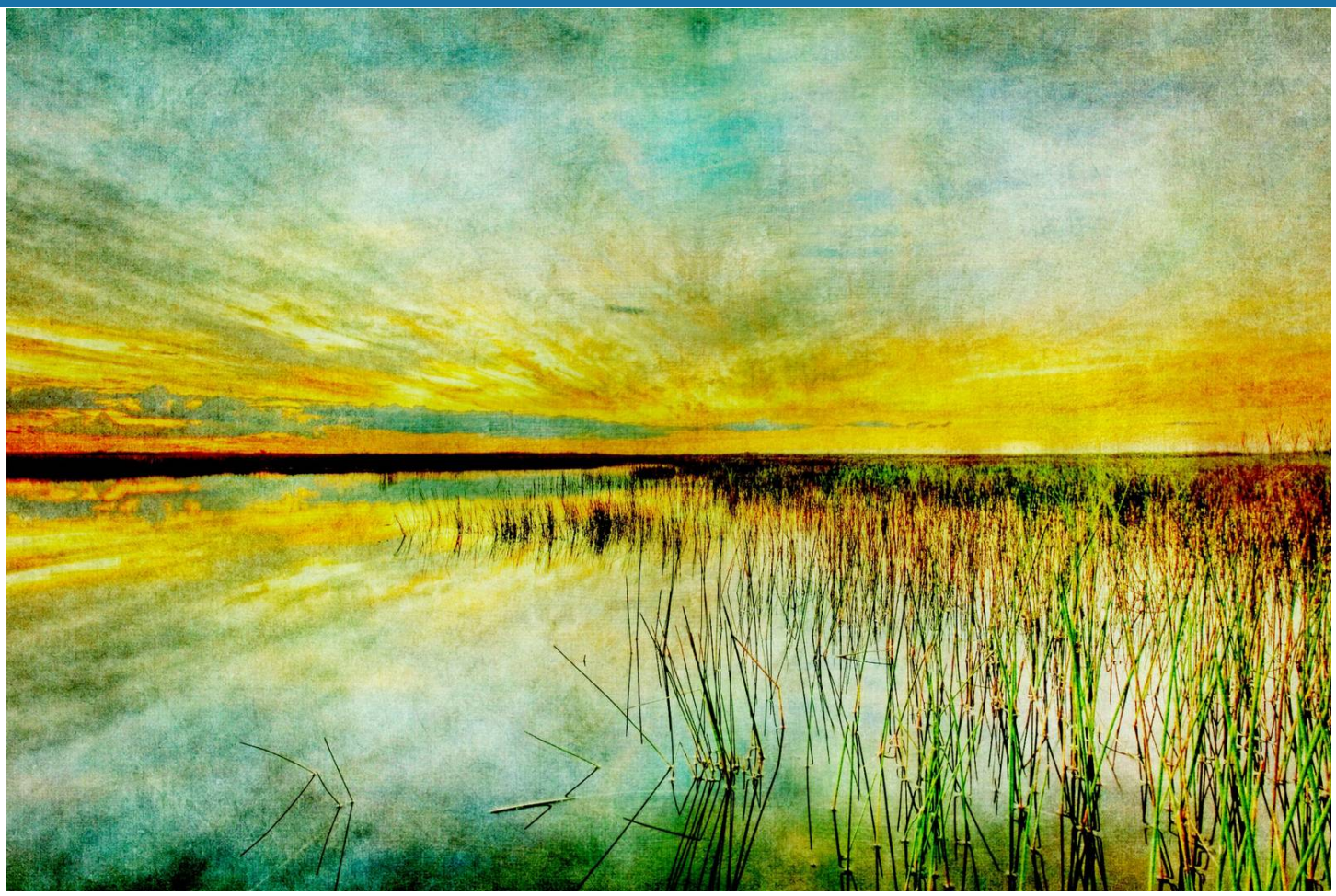
In 1986 I was immersed in my medical career and hadn't the time or energy to devote to politics; and I was once again disillusioned

with the radical left. Then *Tikkun* magazine appeared, and I felt excited and inspired by its intention, "to heal, repair and transform the world." I avidly read each issue. Nowhere else could you find a journal dedicated to civil rights, feminism, progressive Judaism, peace in the Middle East, *and* attention to cultural issues, art, and poetry. Nowhere else could you find writers like Edward Said, Barbara Garson, Paul Buhle, Paul Wellstone, Ariel Dorfman, Matthew Fox, Marge Piercy, Chaim Potok, and others together in one journal. Where else could you find an interview with Abbie Hoffman (Vol 4, No 4), or a prescient article about psychedelics (Vol 10, no 5), as well as on-going discussion and debate about whether, how, and if, Israel defined the Jewish State or the state of being Jewish. Sometime in the 90's I told Michael that I considered *Tikkun* to be the best thing going on the left. What I didn't tell him then was that I had a secret desire to write for *Tikkun*.

In 2013 my husband and I moved from Los Angeles to the Bay Area, and Michael and I renewed our friendship. I studied Torah once a month with Michael and Cat Zavis and a group of *Beyt Tikkun* members and fellow travelers. These sessions were thrilling and enriching and were followed by wonderful potluck lunches and more comradely discussion and laughter. After one of these lunches, I finally admitted to Michael my desire to write for *Tikkun;* I wanted to write something about Che Guevara; did he think that was appropriate for *Tikkun*? Michael enthusiastically encouraged me, supported me, and boosted my self-confidence until I finally submitted "Kaddish for Che," in 2017 (Vol 32. No 1). The following year, in the midst of the "MeToo" movement, I wrote about Shulamith Firestone. (Digital format, Feb 14, 2018) More encouragement led to my working with Cat Zavis on a whole issue of *Tikkun* devoted to looking "Beyond Patriarchy" (Vol 34, No 1), and on an issue devoted to "Re-envisioning Socialism." (Vol 35, No 1). There were further essays and reviews; it has been a great honor and pleasure to contribute to *Tikkun*. Michael's encouragement allowed me to fully explore writing in a way I had never done. I don't know that it would have happened, or happened just as it did, if not for him. But that is the magic of friendship.

We of the generation who said, "Don't trust anyone over 30," are now in our late 70's and 80's. For Rabbi Michael Lerner these nearly 60 years have led to a richness and multi-dimensionality in his life. In all that he has done, and continues to do, he draws from his experience as a young radical in the 60's, a leader of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and a co-founder of NAM (the New American Movement), a clinical psychotherapist, a writer and editor, a Jewish renewal Rabbi, drawing from the Hebrew Bible's mandate to "love the stranger" and the wisdom of the Hebrew prophets, and finally as an elder, a sage. The arc of his life has taken him through the certainties of his youth, through critiques and acknowledgement of life's uncertainties and complexities, to some humility and wisdom from which we can all benefit, young and old alike.

MARTHA SONNENBERG, MD, is a former chief medical officer, a certified physician executive, and an infectious disease specialist. She is currently a consultant in issues of quality and safety within hospitals, and in developing medical leaders.



Karen Arnold

For Michael on his 80th

ARYEH COHEN

For Michael on his 80th, his gevurot/courage, boldness birthday. Michael published my first political opinion piece in Tikkun in the 90s. He created a space in which it was possible to publish progressive Jewish ideas which were both strongly progressive and grounded in Jewish text. Over the years, and because of the courageous path Michael blazed, Tikkun became a home for me and many others. Thank you. Happy Birthday. It is in this spirit that I contribute the following.

The Rabbinic notion of tar'omet is something I keep coming back to. I have not translated it because it is not easy to translate. One first runs across tar'omet in a rabbinic legal context in Mishnah Baba Metzia 6:1 "One who hires artisans, and they deceived one another—they have grounds only for complaint [tar'omet] against one another." The discussion in the Talmud tries to stabilize the idea of "they deceived one another" which can mean the employer deceived the workers, or the workers deceived the employer, or even the workers deceived

each other. Each of these interpretations generate narrative possibilities which are played out in the Talmudic discussion.

There is little to no discussion of the word tar'omet itself. Most commentators understand that the mishnah is, in a sense, saying that there is no ground for legal action, no basis for demanding compensation and yet there was a wrong done.

The Talmudic discussion frames the issue as one of legal swindling. One example that is suggested is if the employer tells a contractor to hire workers for four dollars and the contractor tells the workers that the owner will pay them three. If the workers agree to the terms, in a market in which three dollars is a going wage if not the only going wage, then the agreement is considered binding even though it is recognized that the contractor caused damage. The uncoerced agreement by the workers is legitimate and legal and therefore they have no recourse. At the same time, the legal system recognizes that they have been swindled and therefore validates their complaint, their outrage. Though, again, the court can or will do nothing about it.

The anonymous voice of the Talmud, the stam, who is orchestrating this whole discussion, attempts another avenue. He raises the possibility that the case of the mishnah is one in which the employer told the contractor to hire workers at four dollars and the contractor then told the workers three dollars. The reason that up till now the workers were assumed to be stuck in this deal, despite the immoral conduct of the contractor, was because they had "reasoned and agreed" to the terms. However, the stam now objects saying: "Do you not accept the implication of the verse in Proverbs (3:27): 'Do not withhold good from the one who deserves it…'?" That is, there seems to be a positive obligation to not swindle the workers based on the idea that if a good is to come to a person, you should not intervene to stop that from happening. There seems to be an implied duty to increase good or justice in the world, by not making it harder for the needy to fulfill their needs.

The verse immediately following the above verse in Proverbs is: "Do not say to your fellow, 'Come back again; I'll give it to you tomorrow,' when you have it with you." Here too, the issue is not the lack of generosity but rather the encouragement of immediately helping your fellow if you can immediately help them.

The discussion goes on in this way for a while, and then, the stam finally dismisses this whole line of reasoning as not very fruitful since the word "deceived" in the Mishnah (hit'u) can also be translated as reneged (hazru). The discussion is then started again from the beginning. However, I would like to tarry on the moment of tar'omet and "Do not withhold good from the one who deserves it."

The word tar'omet comes from the same root as ra'am which means thunder. A tar'omet then is not a whining but a thundering complaint. In what context would this be seen to be at all helpful? In other words, if there is an evident harm that was done, even though in a technical and legal manner the action was fine and therefore there is no recourse, is not a court's ruling that the complainant can yell and scream just pouring salt into the wound?

When a judge finds that a huge corporation is paying its workers a legally mandated minimum wage which forces those workers to decide whether to pay rent or buy food, yet there is nothing the court can do about it, is this not an additional insult to the workers?

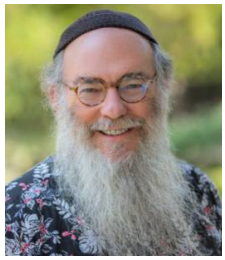
The original authors of this mishnah must have had something else in mind.

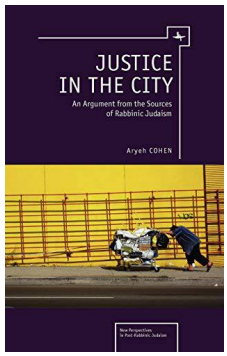
I want to suggest that tar'omet only works in a society which also takes the imperative of "Do

not withhold good from the one who deserves it…" seriously. By seriously here I mean that there would be significant social penalty for withholding good from one who deserves it. In this type of society, tar'omet would actually have consequences. An example of this was the #MeToo movement in which the tar'omet of women who were harmed, at times, brought significant consequences upon the men who harmed them. This is not the place, but it would be worthwhile studying this case to understand the social mechanism that led to this after years, decades, generations of male impunity even in the face of tar'omet.

The work then is to create a society that assimilates an obligation of care, and rejects the notion of withholding good from those who deserve it. In that situation a tar'omet would cause social pressure to right a wrong which was perhaps technically legal. In that world corporations and their CEOs could not get away with making millions or billions while their workers have to choose between rent and food.

In a sense this has been Michael Lerner's life's work. We are committed to carrying it forward.





PROF. RABBI ARYEH COHEN is on the inner editorial board of *Tikkun*, and is a Professor of Rabbinic Literature at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Literature of the American Jewish University. He is a member of the editorial board of *Tikkun*. He is a co-convener of the Black Jewish Justice Alliance (BJJA), the previous co-chair of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), and the President of the Society of Jewish Ethics. Cohen's last book was Justice in the City: An Argument from the Sources of Rabbinic Judaism.

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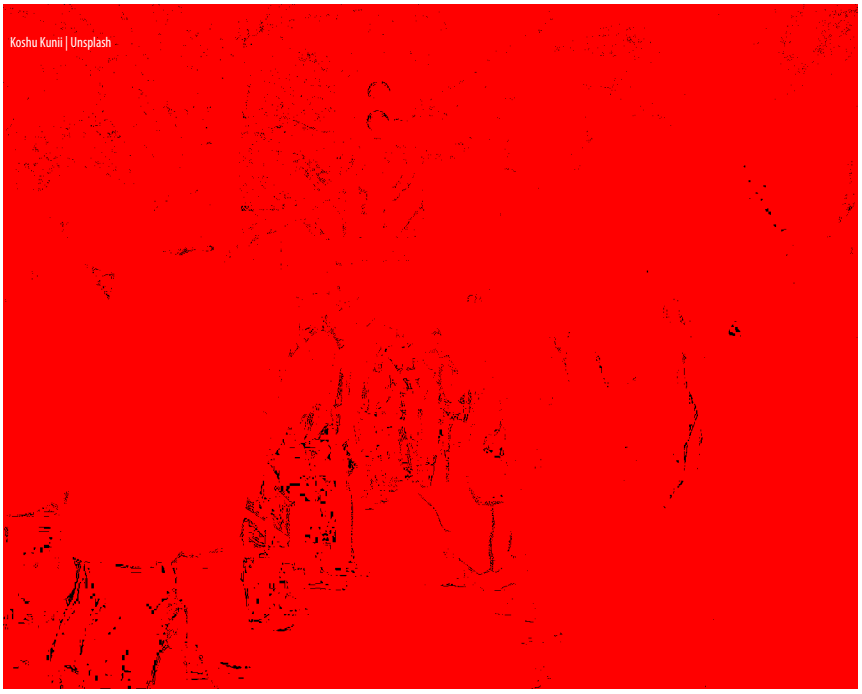
Environmental Crisis, Fascism, and the Deterioration of the Left

ROGER S. GOTTLIEB


Koshu Kunii | Unsplash

Many years ago, Michael invited me to write a book review column for *Tikkun*. I was grateful for the invitation, very much enjoyed the opportunity to engage with a wide variety of books, and often benefited from Michael's incisive editorial comments.

It is now 2022, Michael and I are very much older, and as bad as things were when I first joined the *Tikkun* stable they are now much, much worse.

The guiding values of *Tikkun*, widely shared by *Tikkun*'s writers and readers despite substantial theoretical differences, included the belief that progressive politics and the wisdom of the world's spiritual traditions were both essential to the creation of a just, caring, and rational society. As well, there was the firm conviction that progress towards that society required careful discussion of and reflection on alternative perspectives. This last point was embodied in Michael's frequent willingness to publish writing he disagreed with.

How can these values help us face the environmental crisis, the global rise of fascism, and the deterioration of much of the left into Stalinist tendencies of groupthink and repression?

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

In the 1980s a bleakly humorous t-shirt bore the phrase— "Oh, nuclear war, there goes my whole career." An easy update, but requiring more words, might be "Oh, climate crisis, plastic-filled oceans, dying species, unbreathable air, social conflict from millions of climate refugees, wars over water…there goes…." The environmental crisis is the ultimate, unshakable background of all other human concerns. Simply: every human community depends on an encompassing nature from clean water to pollinating insects to the fertility of earth and the biological vitality of human beings.

All these natural forces and supports are deteriorating. Virtually no aspect of the crisis—from greenhouse gases to water pollution to toxins

in the blood of newborns—receives the recognition and response needed. The snow on top of Mt. Everest is too polluted to drink; parts of the rainforest now give off rather than absorb CO2; in some forests insect life has decreased by two-thirds; toxic chemicals are implicated in lower intelligence, emotional instability, and greater tendency (see under "mass shootings") to violence.

Markus Spiske / Unsplash

It is to these facts that our energies need to be directed, on these realities that our passion should ultimately focus. And the clear connections between the environmental crisis and other political issues—class, race, and gender—make it clear that we do not have to abandon those issues to be environmentalists. The poorest suffer most from climate change; racial minorities are disproportionately polluted and have worse medical care to deal with the effects of pollution; the oppression of women and the domination of nature share common roots in patriarchal and anthropocentric ideologies. And it is largely women's unpaid caring labor that nurtures the cancers, birth defects, and respiratory problems pollution causes.

It is by comparison with the ever-growing environmental crisis that all other political activities must be evaluated. From pronouns and bathroom use to microaggressions and cultural appropriation, too much of the "left" has turned its passions towards issues which are, realistically speaking, trivial in comparison with the environmental crisis.

Of course, being misgendered or micro aggressed can be hurtful and unfair. And violence against racial or gender groups can be lethal. But in Bombay and Mexico City birds are dropping dead off the trees from the heat, as are many people; in California important reservoirs are down 50, 60, 70%; in Louisiana's "cancer alley" (between Baton Rouge and New Orleans) and on Native American reservations cancer rates are 2, 3, 4, 12! times the national average. The U.N. estimates that air pollution causes three to six million premature deaths every year. Tens of millions of people are environmental refugees—fleeing areas that have become literally unlivable. The amount of death and suffering coming from the environmental crisis dwarfs other sources.

Perhaps it's easier to be angry if some white person wears a sombrero at a Halloween party than at the crushing pollution in black neighborhoods; perhaps changing "women" to "persons who menstruate" is more manageable than getting off fossil fuels. Perhaps such concerns constitute a welcome relief from the overwhelming need to drastically alter humanity's relation to the rest of the planet—especially because embedded economic power (global capitalism), political power (the militarist state) and cultural forms (addictions to meat, overconsumption, and personal ease) all resist the needed changes.

So, I understand why it's hard to focus on the environmental crisis, even for progressives. But it's still a catastrophic mistake.

FASCISM

There is a direct connection between fascism and the environmental crisis, since virtually all extreme right-wing political parties and regimes—from the U.S. to Brazil to India to Russia to Hungary—tend to be climate deniers, supporters of fossil fuels, and ignorers of widespread chemical pollution and deforestation.

As I use the term, "fascism" is characterized by aggressive nationalism that stresses opposition to some (racial, gender, religious, ethnic, political) enemy; elimination of basic rights through attacks on the press, surveillance, repression of dissent, stacked courts, and laws protecting 'national honor,' 'security,' or religious purity; a toxic masculinity that subordinates women and exalts aggression and violence; avoidance and denial of environmental concerns, including the well-being of other species; and cultivation of violent mobs and/or independent armed militias.

With the advent of fascism, no reasoned response to the environmental crisis is possible. And features of liberal democracy that we have taken for granted—the rule of law, politicians held responsible for crimes, maintaining the accomplishments of the labor, feminist, and anti-racist movements—are all undermined. How bad can it get? Ask the Russian people arrested for the slightest challenge to the invasion of the Ukraine; the women in the Philippines who are made to bear their rapist's child; gay people in Poland—where over 100 localities have declared themselves 'gay free zones'; teachers in several U.S. states who are forbidden to discuss racism; Muslims in India subjected to state sponsored attacks.

Historically it has always been the case that fascism doesn't limit itself, doesn't stop while it's ahead, but always seeks more power and control. It can be stopped by losing a war; or by a dramatic refusal of the mass of the population to cooperate. Presently, however, global fascism (depending on the country) receives widespread support due to fear and anger caused by the loss of white, male status; challenges to heterosexual norms and traditional religions; suppressed anxiety over environmental change; a state elite determined to retain power at all costs; and the alienation, ADD, psychic numbing, and depression caused by cell phones and social media.

Corporations capitalize on all these factors, seeking to retain every bit of profit they possible can.

As the environmental crisis is the lynchpin of our biological existence, so fascism threatens the replacement of authentic political life by totalitarianism, violence, and lies.

THE SAD STATE OF THE AMERICAN LEFT

I do not know how many progressive, left liberal, woke people suffer from the ills I will describe. (I suspect that the environmental movement has the least and struggles against racism and gender oppression the most.) I do know that in college campuses for instance, these ills frequently dominate left discourse and action. Informal conversations with colleagues from other universities support this view, as do countless media accounts. Most important: through representation in social and traditional media, for many people these ills have come to define the left. The result is that a good deal of the progressive political movement has rendered itself ineffective at best and utterly self-defeating at worst.

Let us start with the most encompassing problem: the inability to engage in or tolerate serious disagreements. There are, for instance, many ways to think about gender, how to lessen racism, what transgender means for the larger population, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In many contexts, however, raising questions about these issues is simply forbidden—and the consequence of offering a different opinion is vitriolic rejection and at times the threat of violence.

I am not talking about questions from people who reject the basic principles of progressive politics. The "opinions" –if they can be digni-

fied with the term—of Nazis, white or male supremacists, people who think biblical quotations settle political issues, and climate change deniers do not merit our time or energy.

But there are a host of other, much more reasonable opinions—or at least questions—firmly within the orbit of progressive politics, that have been forbidden. For example, it is certainly worth discussing whether transgender women belong in battered women's shelters, women's sports, and women's prisons. Such a position reflects a concern with the safety of women and a recognition of the difference in the life experience of women at birth and men at birth. Is it a mistaken position—possibly. But how are we to investigate the question if those who pose it are visited with contempt and rage?

Does Israel have a right to exist? Or if it does not, is it first on the list of countries to be dismantled and not after, say, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Russia? How does Israel's oppression of the Palestinians resemble what the U.S. did to Natives, or continues to do to Black people, or Afghanistan do to women? If Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is genocide, why is the Palestinian population increasing, and is slightly greater than the Jewish population of Israel? How much left wing anti-semitism is bound up in the focus on Israel and ignoring the violence in other nations against religious minorities, women, LGBTQ, and native peoples?

Are wholesale characterizations of white people as "white supremacists" really accurate? Even if they are, is broadcasting this characterization an effective way to find allies among white people? Is there some other way to respond to white chauvinism that might lead to more political success and less white resentment and consequent isolation of anti-racist forces?

Even a casual look at many progressive contexts would show that raising these questions is, bluntly, forbidden. This inability to tolerate disagreement dooms the left. When serious questions cannot be raised for fear of shunning, we have entered the realm not of progressive politics but of left fascism; i.e., left ideological rhetoric combined with a political practice that is repressive and serves only as an emotional outlet and a way for some individuals or groups to exercise power and gain status.

I understand that oppressed groups are legitimately enraged by what they have faced and continue to face. And that there is a kind of cathartic pleasure in expressing that rage in global condemnations, demands for agreement, and expulsions of dissidents. Such expressions may be inevitable, but while they may feel good in the moment, they are not good politics. I.e., they are not productive parts of an attempt to make basic social changes, an attempt that requires the largest possible support throughout the population.

The descent into left fascism has many causes. As I indicated earlier, a good deal of it is aimed at issues that are far easier to address than the environmental crisis and right-wing fascism. Too many fall into the illusion that making a lot of noise on social media is an effective political strategy. As well, given the history of the left intra movement struggles, repressions, splits and the like are—sadly—the norm rather than the exception. Yet in the present moment the stakes are so high, and the inability of the left to come together in solidarity—not "allyship"—such a blow to our hopes, that it should be named and resisted.

How is such resistance possible and what might it look like?

To begin, we can be clear that open discussion, respectful interaction, and the ability to think (at least) twice are not peripheral values to the struggle for a just, rational, and caring society, but are absolutely essential to it. These should

not be sacrificed on the altar of efficiency, support for marginalized groups, hurt feelings, or political correctness. Without these values there simply is no hope for progressive political movement worthy of its name. The history of the left's failures and betrayals make that crystal clear.

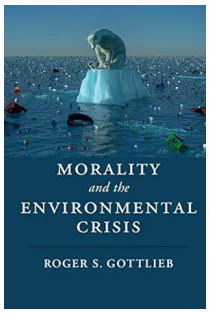
Next, and fully in line with *Tikkun* tradition, appeal to some cardinal spiritual virtues—e.g., humility and compassion—might help lessen the moral arrogance that so often attends left fascism. The certainty of the truth of not only 'our' position—but the position of some fraction/faction—undermines our ability to connect to other people. Without that ability what kind of movement can we build? We will end up with a group getting progressively smaller as the tests for political purity and moral perfection get more and more extreme. Like right wing fascism, the left's variety is never satisfied but always wants more—agreement, conformity, and above all people to control and despise. The search for innate moral superiority for some oppressed group—like the old time Leninist search for the "revolutionary vanguard"—is a fundamental error that only leads us on to an olympics of oppression and the assertion that truth inherently resides in some groups rather than others.

Last, the absolute necessity for solidarity in the face of the vastly richer and better armed right wing suggests that at times cooperation with people who share only some of our perspectives is necessary. I have always supported women's right to control their own bodies, but does that mean I shouldn't work with a left-wing Catholic nun who opposes abortion? A person who has struggled to protect undocumented workers, created battered women's shelters, supported striking workers, and organized for environmental causes? Can we who are in such desperate straits in such desperate times afford to cancel potential allies because they do not agree with us on everything? Can we not make common cause while respectfully disagreeing?

If we cannot, we are lost.

Michael, I suspect, would say that it is certainly possible—that our resistance will succeed if only we trust that it can, in the meantime paying no heed to the "reality police" who preach despair.

I wish I shared Michael's optimism, but I personally have little hope left. I do try to find the courage to continue in the struggle, even at my advanced age. I am secure only in the knowledge that living with love is better than living in hate or despair, and that whatever I think the future will hold (nothing very good) my ignorance is so vast that I'd better try to do my bit in the present and let the future take care of itself.



ROGER S. GOTTLIEB is the award-winning author or editor of 21 books of philosophy, religious studies, environmentalism, and contemporary spirituality. *Morality and the Environmental Crisis* received "the book most likely to save the planet" award from Independent Publisher and was semi-finalist for the Siskiyou Prize for new environmental literature. His short story collection *Engaging Voices* and his novel *The Sacrifice Zone* won Nautilus Book Awards; as did *Spirituality What it Is and Why it Matters*, which was also called a "best book of the year" by Spirituality and Practice. He is the recipient of the Prophetic Witness Award from Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light. *His website*.

Appreciations for Michael

RABBI DR. BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON, DAVID KORTEN, LETTY COTTIN POGREBIN, & JULIE OXENBERG

I have watched Michael with wonder across the years. His courage in standing in the light, sharing his insights, and summoning us to a Torah of compassion, engagement, and prophetic morality has been a challenging inspiration. He showed us how and gave us a push to liberate Judaism from behind the stained-glass, plush pews of the sanctuary out to the streets and the people, where it really belongs. His goad to activism on a host of issues (labor justice, environmental consciousness, feminism, Israel-Palestine, and others) led the way for others to follow. But I want to take a moment to focus on an area that I believe will be his legacy long into the future. Michael insisted that ideas take their meaning only in the richness of lived relationships, in actual lives intersecting with others. His insistence on meaning and the human need to live with meaning grounded his economic and social critique and tied it back to a fuller vision of Torah. And in that regard, I have long thought of Michael as one of Judaism's greatest theologians, rooting his theology in the expansion of Elohim (God as found in nature) to Adonai (the God of revelation, which is profoundly a shift from impassive force toward moral and compassionate love). Michael brings together the transcendence of divinity as beyond all, with the immanence of a God who cares that we care. That is the core message of Torah, revealed by God's angel, Michael Lerner.

Dear Michael, I salute you. I teach your insights. And I send you my love.

בברכת שלום

RABBI DR. BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON

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I am deeply grateful to Rabbi Michael Lerner for his extraordinary contributions to the second of my two defining life transitions.

In 1992 I moved from Manila, Philippines to New York City. I was returning to the U.S. to share what I had learned during my many years of working in international development about the institutional forces driving global poverty. Michael's interest in my work led to my becoming a regular participant in the discussions in his New York apartment that led to the formation of his Network of Spiritual Progressives. My relationship with Michael became a transformational experience.

His invitations to write for *Tikkun*, helped to advance and build public awareness of my critique of corporate rule and its devastating social and environmental consequences. The most notable of my invited *Tikkun* contributions was my scathing July/August 1999 review of Thomas Friedman's book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* in which Friedman mindlessly celebrates the rapacious capitalism that currently puts humans on a path to self-extinction. https://davidkorten.org/the-lexus-and-the-olive-tree-review/

Even more important, however, was Michael's focus on interfaith dialogue dedicated to creating the world we want. This was a major contributor to shifting my focus from critiquing failing systems to crafting alternatives. My current priority is advancing the human transition to an Ecological Civilization, which I'm pursuing with the Club of Rome and other international institutions. https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/ecological-civilization-from-emergency-to-emergence/.

Thank you, Michael.

DAVID KORTEN

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Dear Michael,

We've known each other for more than four decades–since you first visited me at Ms. magazine when I was an editor and you were promoting The Institute for Labor and Mental Health. We haven't been close over the years but we've never lost touch and you remain an important influence in my life.

I salute the ferocity of your passions. I appreciate your intrepid engagement in the most urgent philosophical, moral, and ethical issues of our time. I'm grateful to you for making "the politics of meaning" meaningful, and for founding and nourishing *Tikkun*, a pioneering voice on the American left. I admire you for providing an intellectual and ideological home for so many progressive Jews,; many of whom were rootless and searching; for being a stalwart champion of so many writers' words and work, including my own; and for being a brave exemplar of a life that amalgamates creativity, spirituality, activism, and love,

Long may you continue to trouble the comfortable and comfort the troubled.

Thank you for your friendship.

LETTY COTTIN POGREBIN

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I first met Michael shortly after 9/11 (2001). I saw an ad announcing a conference the "*Tikkun* Community" was convening at a synagogue in NYC to develop an activist response to the recent harrowing attacks on our nation; a strategy that would be psychologically-informed, spiritually grounded. Wow! That was my first introduction to a "politics of *meaning*."

Imagine where a governmental response to 9/11 incorporating the above wisdom, insight, and values might have led, rather than the predictable ongoing catastrophe generated by the US's military invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

As a clinical psychologist with a spiritual sensibility, who also holds a masters degree in international diplomacy, the *Tikkun* community (drawn from the Jewish imperative to engage in "Tikkun Olam", to heal and repair our world), was virtually a perfect fit. I could bring my *whole* self to *Tikkun*. In most organizations in which I'd previously participated, especially at

that time, I could bring only a part of myself, address only an aspect of my felt calling. *Tikkun*'s approach, in contrast, sought to understand and address the vital inter-penetrating roles that emotional need and collective spiritual longing play in the success of our politics; and to explore how meaningfully engaging these domains can help prevent the appeal of demagoguery (a kind of *dark* politics of meaning) from gaining sway, and move the needle further towards justice, equity, sustainability and peace.

Joining together the realms of psychology, spirituality and politics (as well as art, poetry, music and more) gives us far more *essential* tools to address the existentially-threatening challenges of our day. In today's highly polarized world it can take accessing other dimensions of consciousness (eg., emotional vulnerability, raw pain, communal longings, creativity that can move us beyond words, contemplative stillness, spiritual uplift), underneath the seemingly irreconcilable surface-level endlessly ping-ponging "debate", to break through and create the groundwork for new higher-level syntheses of understanding to emerge.

I'm not alone in perceiving that our species stands at a critical developmental juncture in which the energy of our modernist/post-modernist era focused on separation, individuation, compartmentalization, specialization, the rapid advancement of empirical, scientific, technological and other "ego"-capacities, must now be applied towards helping us to achieve a far more integrated, heart and meaning centered approach to living together sustainably on our one, inextricably interdependent, shared planet earth.

"*Nothing in this world is so powerful as an idea whose time has come,*" Victor Hugo famously noted. Although the magazine is closing, Michael Lerner's radical vision and integral perspective are needed more now than ever. Fortunately, *Tikkun* has sown countless seeds, which can be used by those who remain in its community, and continue to absorb its pages.

POWERFUL CONNECTIONS —

In the context of encountering *Tikkun*'s perspective I felt like I had come home. *It was also fun*. I've met some of the coolest, most interesting, committed people I know through my activism with *Tikkun*, many of whom I remain working with to this day.

On a professional level I also met countless amazing figures. One of the most meaningful *currently relevant* opportunities I got through *Tikkun* was the chance to interview the internationally-renowned, exquisitely humane, brilliantly insightful Palestinian psychiatrist and human-rights activist *Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj* who founded the **Gaza Community Mental Health Program**, what I understand to be the first program of its kind in the Gaza Strip. Dr. El-Sarraj's profound insights into key psychological dynamics impacting Palestinian and Israeli societies, and their relationship to one another, remain extraordinarily relevant even in the midst of the absolute horror, tragedy and crime currently transpiring, as do some of his culturally-specific ideas for turning things around and moving forward. I highly recommend that anyone interested read this powerful interview published in *Tikkun* (https://read.dukeupress.edu/tikkun/article-abstract/18/6/59/91108/An-Interview-with-Eyad-El-Sarrat/)

PERSONAL MEMORIES —

I was always impressed by Michael's **Bold** vulnerability. I remember traveling to San Francisco to attend *Beyt Tikkun*'s High Holiday services one year. The image of Michael, dressed all in white, standing on the balcony of a room at San Francisco State College where the ser-

vice was being held, singing boldly out loud to all who could hear "*We are not embarrassed!*" comes to mind. Michael understood just how harmful and constricting our human fear of appearing vulnerable, weak, making a "fool" of ourselves, allowing ourselves to experience even a *moment* of "naive" hope (a fate some on the left in particular appear to fear more than death itself!) can be and seemed determined to boldly smash through such limiting constraint through song!

Of course, Michael's boldness, even *chutzpah*, could sometimes get him into trouble! Like the time (at one of his conferences in Washington DC) when I had to help walk congressman Barney Frank back from the ledge of quite possibly physically attacking Michael altogether! Michael had taken out one of his full page ads in the New York Times suggesting (shall we say "aspirationally"), *in big lettering no less*, that Barney Frank was among those in the Democratic Party who had *already* endorsed a resolution against the Israeli Occupation that Michael wanted to advance. Apparently representative Frank was unaware of having made any such endorsement even though he had accepted Michael's invitation to be the key-note speaker at *Tikkun*'s conference. Although it was dicey there for a moment, (imagining a brawl breaking out between Michael and Barney Frank was not pretty!; anyone who can picture them both might agree that while their politics may not always fully align, they do appear to share some temperamental traits), thankfully walking the Representative up and down the hallway outside the room in which the conference was being held, and letting him *emotively* blow off steam, seemed to help. Like the true professional politician he was, while some of us held our breath as he took the stage, Representative Frank was able to take a deep breath himself and actually proceed to be quite charming and funny to the large crowd assembled to hear him speak. And Michael's physical well-being, thankfully, remained intact!

One last experience I'll name, that many who've engaged with the *Tikkun* Community and *Beyt Tikkun* have been blessed to share, is encountering the infectious joy, connectedness and openness of the "Shabbat Michael" (as someone who worked with him once called it). I remember a particularly meaningful experience of this when Michael led a packed Fri. night Shabbat service outside as part of a 9-part program our Boston Tikkun group presented during the 2004 Boston Social Forum, running parallel to the Democratic National Convention being hosted in Boston that year at the same time.

"Wow!", "fantastic!" "Incredible!", "amazing!" Rabbi Lerner proclaimed as he inspired scores of people (many of whom were secular bread and butter activists) to look up to the heavens and experience, *in a fully embodied way*, Abraham Joshua Hershel's depiction of "awe and wonder at the grandeur of creation!" In a Shabbat service with Michael one encountered the synthesis of his brilliant insight, authentic "radical amazement", fully-embodied faith brought to life, connection, humor as well as inspiration to go forward joyfully healing and repairing our world. Even many hard-core atheists present were truly moved.

VISIONARY IDEAS —

What I draw from Michael's theological perspective at its core is Hope, but not, dare I say, a naive, blind or superficial one. It emerges from Michael's view of the radical message of Judaism (and by extension I believe Christianity and Islam as well), *the possibility of* ***possibility***, the view of G-d as the "Force that makes **possible** the transformation of what *is* to what *could and should be*." A Force that enables us to

"*heal*" that which ails us and "*transform*" it into energy that can create greater "*love, caring, kindness and generosity*."

While Michael is fully aware that such *healing*, integration and *emancipatory transformation* must impact our core economic and political systems in order to take root and allow us to evolve our world, his "radical" view of G-d tells us that this is *possible* to do. In fact it's our job (via our injunction to engage in "Tikkun Olam" [and equivalent notions in other spiritual traditions]) to do it. Believing that how things *are* currently (with respect to morally unconscionable inequities of money and power, horrific violations of person, culture and spirit through raging wars, etc.), is "reality" and how things will *always* statically *be* organized, in Michael's interpretation of theology, is a form of **idolatry**; turning the current snap-shot of what *is* into a god of sorts, and failing to perceive the *greater power* we have an obligation to turn towards (even if perceived as the spirit within) to work to heal and transform this morally unacceptable current state of affairs. Those of us on the left can hide within the protective shell of cynicism. Michael's injunction to not be realistic is an important contrast to the protective (but limiting in vision and courage) strategies above.

It's important to note that, while I'm not a religious scholar by any means, I do think Michael's view of the "radical message" of Judaism *comes from the tradition itself* and his quite learned, in-depth rabbinic understanding of it, not just some New Agey ungrounded (or less grounded) set of proclamations.

Michael is well aware that there are "two voices" or sets of voices in the Bible and larger Jewish tradition. But he labels one "**the voice of G-d**", those inclining us towards seeing the sacredness in *all* life, towards living our lives fundamentally with the attitude and energy of *love* (by loving G-d with *all* your heart, all your soul and all your might and loving your neighbor as yourself, and the stranger in your midst), by proclaiming that G-d is One and that *all* human beings are made in that loving G-d's image, recognizing that the greatest power does not reside in worldly empire and material accumulation but ultimately in the realm of spirit, that the soul within us is pure and while we *can* and must atone for the many ways we "miss the mark", there is always somewhere for us to return, in addition to the many injunctions to us to pursue justice, righteousness and to heal and repair our world.

The other voice in the Bible, *ample though its expressions are*, are those that champion strategies of gaining security through power over, domination, conquering, killing, acts of vengeance, etc., Michael labels these "**the voice of accumulated pain**." In making this contrast, Michael suggests not only that the more *essential* "voice" is that [set] pushing towards greater levels of justice, caring, compassion, and love, but that we *can* and must work to *heal* causes, residues and impacts of traumatic pain expressed through this contrasting "voice", frequent as it's utterances are throughout our tradition, and within us all at times even today when we contract in fear.

I view all of the above as a tremendous source of hope and possibility/responsibility, even when things appear hopeless.

APPLICATION —

Along the lines of the above, it seems to me that our key Abrahamic religions themselves need to be further healed, evolved and transformed, or certainly the interpretations of them most audible currently in our public squares, from Texas to Tel Aviv (or Jerusalem, or Judea) to Tehran to Türkiye, and beyond. Nowhere perhaps is this need more pronounced at this

time than in Israel-Palestine (although the US gives it a heck of a run for it s money). *G-d as real-estate agent* theology seems to rule the day, from the Jewish version, "G-d promised US the land", to the Christian-Zionist version, "Jesus will only return when the Jews control all the [relevant] land", to the Islamist version, "only Muslims can be in control of the land." An ethic of equitable sharing, no less prioritizing building peace and justice on earth as the true path to the Promised Land , is extraordinarily far from view here, to put it mildly. Why is this?

The answer is complex, impacted heavily by the interests prioritized by global capital and the theologies that serve it. But still, there have been periods when more "emancipatory" theology has helped oppressed groups to win liberation struggles, gain greater civil rights, even become emancipated from slavery altogether. What was different then, and why aren't liberation theologies playing a more prominent role in empowering our social justice struggles today?

Aside from other reasons, I think various big-monied interests took note of such successful "Social Gospel" sstyle movements above and have strategically worked over a long-period to build the power of politically-focused more reactionary religious movements, like the Evangelical Christian Right in the US, in response. Nonetheless, I do think the theological, spiritual and ethical underpinnings of what I'm calling the "*G-d as real estate agent*" theologies above (clear examples, I imagine, of religious priorities Michael would characterize as representative of "the voice of accumulated pain" in our traditions, and certainly causing more of it) could be pretty easily and effectively challenged if there was enough focus, organization, will and resources applied towards doing so. Especially if new effort was also put into culling the more "emancipatory" core messages and potentials within all 3 key Abrahamic religions, and developing new ways and means of articulating these that are captivating, relevant and inspiring to people today.

Michael has not only given us some invaluable interpretive lenses and processes for doing the work above; he has boldly articulated a profound emancipatory theology we can continue to promulgate, and a reason to believe in the *possibility* that it can indeed make a difference.

CONCLUSION —

Ultimately, I agree with Michael that only promulgating a truly integrative vision, one that puts love and caring for one another, and for our planet, at the center (as the New Bottom Line of our society and of humanity as a whole), will allow us to achieve human "salvation" right here on earth, our species' only home.

I think what Michael said about the prayer of Kaddish at our beloved Peter Gabel's memorial is appropriate to say now regarding the closing of *Tikkun* magazine. Michael said that the actual words of the Kaddish are not about the person (or in this case the magazine) who has passed. They're about affirming that the vision will stay with us even after the person (or entity) we are mourning is gone. So I can affirm that I will stay with and carry forward in my distinct ways, *Tikkun*'s vision, that our world can in fact be more centrally-based on love, caring, kindness and peace. Thank you Michael for the profound light you have been, the brilliant clarity you have put forth, the bold vulnerability you have modeled, and the tremendous resources you have left for us all. Wow! Awesome! Fantastic! Amazing!

Thank you, Michael.

JULIE OXENBERG, PHD.

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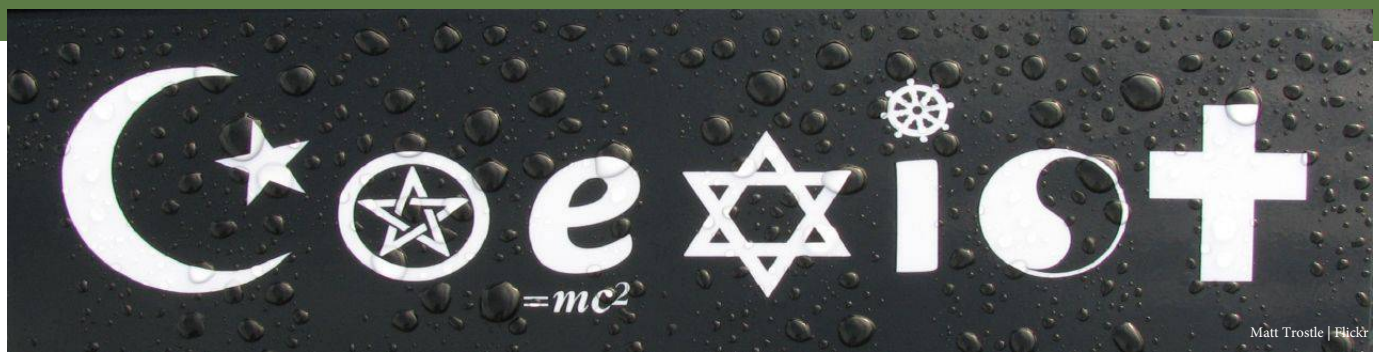


Matt Trostle | Flickr

Thank you, Rabbi Lerner

JOHN B. COBB, JR.

It is a privilege to honor Rabbi Lerner. His existence and his work have had special importance for me, especially in my understanding of Judaism.

My father taught me that Jews as a group were to be especially admired. He thought they were purer in their devotion to the prophetic tradition than Christians. Christianity was everywhere enculturated in other patterns of thinking that often obscured this commitment to justice and to speaking truth to power. Jews, he thought, maintained this great, and historically unique, tradition.

My father's views were shaped in his upbringing in Macon, Georgia. I would like to have met some of the Jews he knew there. It was his experience with them, not academic study, that shaped the admiration he transmitted to me.

I don't remember knowing Jews in my childhood in Japan. My limited experience with Jews in Georgia was that they were less likely than Christians to acquiesce in segregation and the gross injustice of white Christian treatment of Black people. Stories of what was happening to Jews in Germany certainly increased my sympathy for Jews and my sense of Christian failures.

Like almost everyone I knew, I was supportive of the Jewish establishment of a homeland in what had been Palestine. Most of us thought very little about what was happening to the prior inhabitants. I expected that Jews would be generous in dealing with them. I knew, of course, that we Western Christians had been far from generous in dealing with the indigenous people of the Americas. But given my admiration for the Jewish commitment to justice, I expected much better of their treatment of those they displaced. Perhaps they would offer a model for powerful people in their relation to weaker ones.

Gradually, I was disillusioned. I tried to make excuses for the massive injustices Zionists inflicted on the Palestinians. After all, their crimes against the Palestinians were not comparable to what they had suffered in a supposedly Christian country.

Jesus calls us to take the beam out of our eyes before dealing with the speck in the eyes of others. Jews settled in Israel under circumstances that made their toughness very understandable. In time, I assumed, their commitment to justice would lead to improvements in their treatment of Palestinians.

But time passed, there were no improvements, and I gave up. Apparently, what Jews derived from the prophetic tradition did not apply to their relations with the Palestinians. Perhaps

their moral superiority had been because of their relative powerlessness in Christian countries rather than their magnificent scriptures. Power has certainly corrupted Christians. Perhaps it corrupts Zionists as well.

The call of the oppressed for justice is right and important. It is far better than mere acceptance of oppression. But it is not, in itself, the prophetic tradition. That tradition universalizes the call for justice even when acting justly is costly to the one who is just. The test is whether one who is in power seeks justice for those who are not.

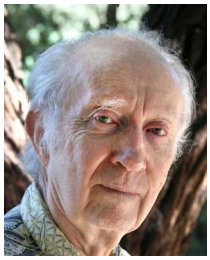
That in fact Zionists did not live up to my ideas about Jews would not have surprised me so much. There were special circumstances. All people fall short of their own ideals. But there seemed at times to be no protest from the American Jews to whom I had looked for moral leadership. Their tendency was more to silence Gentile criticisms than to engage in criticism themselves. I felt I could not talk honestly with most of my Jewish friends. Some of them made one feel that if they were not uncritically supportive of Israel, one was "anti-Semitic" like the Nazis.

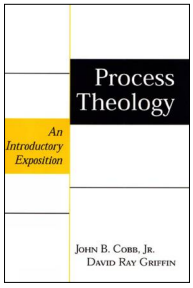
The Jew I follow – Jesus of Nazareth – said that his Jewish hearers had been taught to love their neighbors and hate their enemies. He called on them, instead, to love their enemies. I had thought that this was unfair to the Jewish scriptures and certainly not true of contemporary Jews. I knew that we Christians fall far short of Jesus' norm. I hoped Jews were better. But so much of what the defenders of Israel did and said seemed to express an indifference to Palestinian suffering that felt like hatred, and I heard so little criticism from American Jews.

It was, for me, a great relief, indeed, a great joy, to find that there were, after all, Jews who believed Palestinians should be treated justly. Rabbi Lerner was all that I had hoped to find among Jews, a true prophet. He was committed to justice even when that separated him from many of his own people. He spoke truth to power. And he was not alone. Thousands of other Jews supported him.

Long ago I noticed that the accomplishments of Jews in the field of intellectual life were markedly disproportionate to their numbers. I put Jews on the pedestal of brilliance. I continue to look to them for leadership there.

But I do not now put Jews in general on the moral pedestal they once occupied for me. I see that when they have power over others, their advantage determines their action much as in Christian countries. Still Jews remain for me my older brothers and sisters in faith. I follow one who was exceptionally radical in his Jewishness. He is still not widely followed in either community. But there are some in both traditions who refuse to hate those whom the world calls our enemies. We try to work for justice for them too. Rabbi Lerner gave expression to that commitment under the most difficult of circumstances. He is for me, on a pedestal. He is one of my saints.





JOHN B. COBB JR. taught at Claremont School of Theology. To develop the implications of Whitehead's philosophy he cofounded Process Studies, the Center for Process Studies, the International Process Network, and the Institute for Postmodern Development of China.

Heather Mount | Unsplash

Understanding the Means and the Ends

DR. STEPHEN ZUNES

Michael Lerner will go down in history as one of our country's great thinkers. *Tikkun* will long be recognized as the vehicle through which Michael and other great thinkers of our time could share their understanding in ways they were unable to do anywhere else. Their influence has been profound. Both Michael and the magazine have combined analysis, vision, and strategy—all three of which are vitally important if there is to be any hope of real change. And Michael never lost sight of the individual while addressing the big issues.

Much of the mainstream and conservative religious establishment has long obsessed with individual morality while ignoring the immorality of capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, militarism, and other societal institutions. Meanwhile, some on the left who recognized this systemic immorality would belittle the importance of individual morality. Michael understood that both were important. Rather than believing that the ends justified the means, he recognized that means and ends were inherently connected. He also recognized how the entire capitalist system—based on individual greed, competition, and materialism—actually encouraged much of the individual immorality condemned by the very people who supported that system.

I never got the impression that Michael was a strict pacifist, but he always had an acute recognition of the importance of strategic nonviolent action and nonviolent conflict resolution. Long before Erica Chenoweth and other strategic analysts provided the empirical data demonstrating how unarmed civil resistance was more powerful than war in bringing down dictatorships and challenging injustice, Michael—through both his own activism and his knowledge of history—understood its power. He recognized that not only were nonviolent methods better at building broad-based popular movements and undermining the forces of oppression, but that nonviolent methods would more likely result

in nonviolent ends. Instead of tearing societies apart, it could bring people together. Instead of instilling the message that power comes through the barrel of a gun, it demonstrated that power came out of ordinary people engaging in massive noncooperation, public protests, strikes, boycotts, and more. It was also a demonstration in his faith that people—not institutions, not armies, not governments—would ultimately set things right.

At a time when popular movements in this country against neoliberal globalization, economic inequality, and racial injustice have been undermined by (mostly white middle-class) radicals insisting on a 'diversity of tactics" (i.e., street fighting, vandalism, etc.), it is critical to recognize that real radicalism—in the best sense of the word—comes not from emulating the violence of the state, but choosing one's own weapons systems of mass noncooperation and nonviolent civil resistance. This is not a sentimental pacifism or a naïve belief that the oppressors will somehow see the evil of their ways and convert, but a recognition that those who engage in any kind of campaign—whether it be military, electoral, or nonviolent direct action—must be strategic in their thinking. Being right is never enough. This points to another great legacy of Michael and of *Tikkun*—morality is important, but so is smart strategic thinking.

Much has been said about how Michael and the magazine played a critical role in bringing forth a pro-Israel/pro-peace agenda when much of the Jewish community and even many non-Jewish liberals were embracing not just hawkish but effectively racist views towards the Palestinians. Michael has long recognized that Palestinian rights and Israeli security were not mutually exclusive but mutually dependent on the other. He has been unhesitant at calling out unfair attacks on Israel and any manifestations of anti-Semitism in criticism of Zionism while forcefully challenging the oppression and racism by the Israeli government and the ways the United States has encouraged the more reactionary and militaristic elements in the Jewish state. He recognized that Zionism has had elements of both a national liberation struggle and a colonial settler movement and has sought to strengthen the former while minimizing harms brought about by the latter. His stature helped create a reference point by which thoughtful critics of the Israeli occupation found support and vindication. Despite growing awareness of intersectionalities regarding race, gender, and class, even the more "woke" segments of the activist community have not taken anti-Semitism seriously enough. False allegations of anti-Semitism by both rightwing and mainstream Zionist groups against those opposed to the Israeli occupation has created a "crying wolf" phenomenon whereby it has become harder to challenge real anti-Semitism in the growing pro-Palestinian community. Michael and *Tikkun* have provided a means of discerning what's real and what's not, making both the fight for Palestinian rights and the fight against anti-Semitism stronger.

Under Michael's leadership, *Tikkun* provided the kinds of articles difficult to find anywhere else. The magazine would look at little known yet extremely important global conflicts, such as Morocco's forcible takeover of the nation of Western Sahara—the other US-backed occupation few people know about. It addressed the global debt crisis in new and important ways. It tackled important strategic questions on how the left could better impact policy. It examined how identity politics can be both empowering and divisive. It recognized earlier than most the critical importance of addressing climate change and providing better stewardship for our planet. It addressed personal issues of faith, morality, psychology, philosophy and more. It provided important

analyses of the great threats facing humanity while providing reasons for hope. It was a source for understanding and inspiration which led thousands to look forward to each issue. And, in a time of social atomization, it provided a community for which so many of us longed.

Tikkun, like much of the media on the left, has done a great service in exposing the fabrications used to justify U.S. imperialism over the decades, not just by Republican administrations, but by many Democrats as well. In the critical months prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Chuck Schumer, and some other Democratic leaders threw their weight behind the Bush administration in order to undermine the global antiwar movement and reject the pleas by the vast majority of Mideast scholars and mainline religious leaders to not launch an illegal, unnecessary, and predictably disastrous war based upon lies. Unfortunately, this had led to a kind of cynicism which has led some on the left into a reactive posture of assuming that virtually every foreign policy initiative by the United States is rooted in imperialism and to dismiss concerns about human rights abuses and even war crimes by "anti-imperialist" governments as U.S. propaganda.

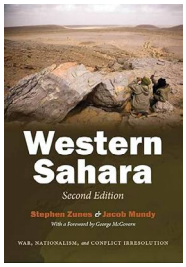
In the not-so-distant recent past, most countries and popular movements opposing U.S. imperialism were relatively progressive, even if sometime autocratic. Today, however, the leading forces challenging U.S. hegemony—the Salafists (Al-Qaeda, ISIS), Iran, Putin's Russia—are decidedly reactionary and many governments originally rooted in socialist movements (China, Nicaragua, Venezuela) now can hardly be considered progressive either. Just as many liberal supporters of Israel still view that country as if it is still in the heyday of Labor Zionism rather than the rightwing racist entity it has become, many leftists are failing to recognize the nature of many of the forces challenging U.S. hegemony. This does not mean we shouldn't continue to oppose U.S. imperialism, expose how U.S. policy in many cases have given rise to these reactionary tendencies, and push for non-military alternatives to challenging these threats, but we must not be naïve regarding the nature of some of the forces the United States is currently battling. This is why the progressive yet nuanced perspectives offered by *Tikkun* are sorely needed.

Many of us raised white and middle class in Michael's generation were radicalized by the Vietnam War. We began by wondering why a country dedicated to freedom, justice, and democracy around the world would be waging such an evil war. Upon further reflection we realized that Vietnam was but one manifestation of U.S. imperialism. We then began to wonder why a country with such great domestic institutions and policies would have such a terrible foreign policy. Upon further reflection, we were able to recognize the deep injustices within American society. It is no accident therefore that the Black Power movement, the Chicano rights movement, the second wave of feminism, the modern environmental movement, the LGBTQ movement, and the counter-culture all grew out of that period. It underscored the recognition that any system that would produce the horrors inflicted upon Vietnam and would continue prosecuting such an illegal, immoral, and unwinnable war despite such widespread opposition was fundamentally flawed and needed to be radically changed.

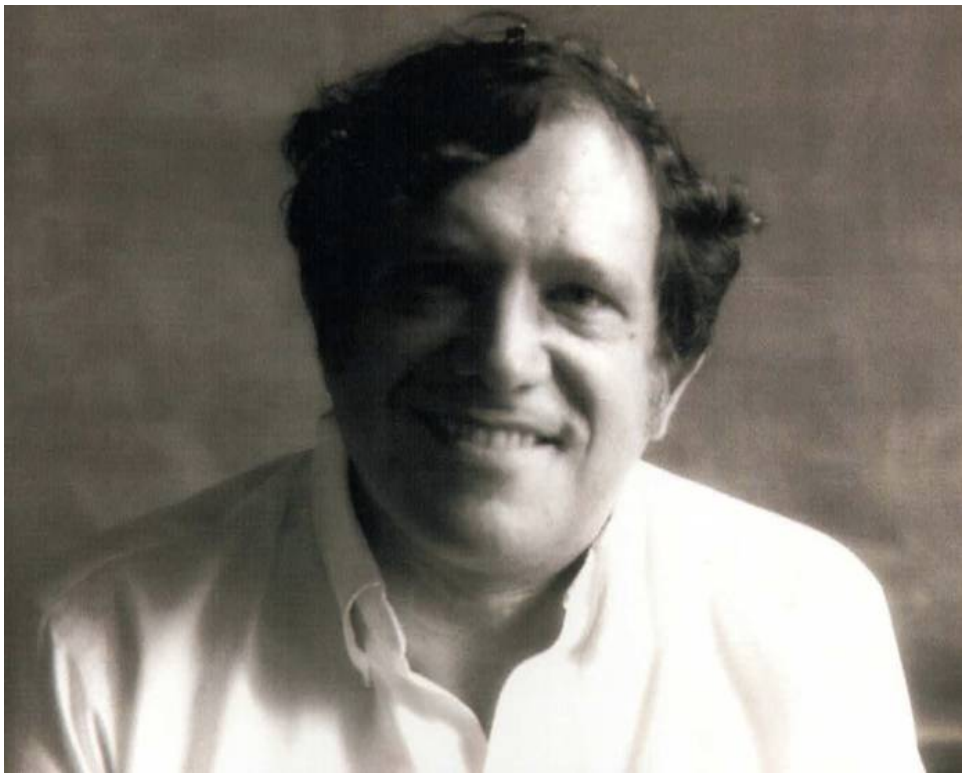
We are starting to see a similar radical transformation among today's youth through the threat from climate change. The danger is obvious and the solutions are relatively clear, yet society is failing to take the urgent actions needed due to inherent flaws in the political and economic system. This is leading

young people to question everything from consumption to the gender binary. For the first time, Americans between 18 and 35 have a more positive view of socialism than they do of capitalism. And at stake is alot more than the risk of being drafted to fight an unjust war. Human survival is at stake. More Americans have taken part in mass protests over the past six years than at any time in U.S. history, including the 1960s. We are entering a critical period in human history, which makes the prophetic voices found in *Tikkun* more important than ever.

We owe a great debt to Michael for making *Tikkun* and its community possible. He will be remembered not just for being smart, but for being wise. His holistic approach to life, as both an individual and as a member of society, will long be an inspiration for the world.



DR. STEPHEN ZUNES is a Professor of Politics and International Studies at the University of San Francisco, where he served as founding director of the program in Middle Eastern Studies. Recognized as one the country's leading scholars of U.S. Middle East policy and of strategic nonviolent action, Professor Zunes has served as a senior policy analyst for Foreign Policy in Focus project of the Institute for Policy Studies, an associate editor of Peace Review, and a contributing editor of *Tikkun*.



Michael Lerner

Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

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

***Tikkun* uplifts Jewish, interfaith, and secular prophetic voices of hope that contribute to universal liberation.** A catalyst for long-term social change, we empower people and communities to heal the world by embracing revolutionary love, compassion, and empathy. We promote a caring society that protects the life support system of the planet and celebrates the Earth and the universe with awe and radical amazement. We support ethical, spiritual, economic, and political ideas that seek to replace the ethos of selfishness, materialism, nationalism, and capitalism with an ethos of generosity, caring for everyone on the planet (including animals), and every attempt to build local and global solidarity while enhancing love.

INTERESTED IN STAYING CONNECTED WITH THE VISION OF *TIKKUN*, WE INVITE YOU TO FOLLOW THE NETWORK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVES AT HTTPS://WWW.BEYTTIKKUN.ORG/NSP/