

Tikkun

POLITICS + SPIRITUALITY + CULTURE

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

SUMMER 2014

NEOLIBERALISM
vs. THE RADICAL
IMAGINATION

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THINKING ANEW ABOUT

GOD

ESSAYS BY

Walter Brueggemann, John B. Cobb Jr., Gary Dorrien,

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Haroon Moghul, Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ,

Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mark I. Wallace,

and Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus

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The Torah warned us that if we didn't create a society based on justice, love, generosity, and caring for the earth, there would be an environmental crisis. Here it is. Recognizing this connection does not require us to believe that there is a big man in heaven making judgments and sending down punishments. Rather, the Torah is communicating a way of viewing the planet: that it is not a collection of dumb matter acting accidentally but rather a physical/ethical/spiritual integrated whole, and that when the ethical and spiritual dimension is out of whack, the physical is in danger of collapse.

We see this playing out in our own time. The ethos of materialism and selfishness, played out on a global scale through the globalization of capital, has led us to treat the earth as a bottomless cookie jar from which endless goodies can be extracted and as a bottomless wastebin into which endless garbage can be dumped. But the earth doesn't function this way. And the drought in the American West and other weather changes are only the tip of the melting iceberg! Weather and food production will be increasingly unpredictable in the next decades as the human footprint continues to grow toward the sixth great extinction of species (including perhaps the human species). That's why the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (tikkun.org/ESRA), while "unrealistic" in terms of the current received wisdom about what is possible in U.S. politics, is nevertheless the only realistic path to take if we want to save the planet from further environmental disasters.

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Online Exclusives

Tikkun is not just a print magazine—visit our blog at tikkun.org/daily and our web magazine site at tikkun.org. Each has content not found here. Our online magazine is an exciting supplement to the print magazine, and the daily blog brings in a range of voices and perspectives.

Visit tikkun.org/god-anew to read the powerful web exclusives associated with this issue, including contributions from Bradley Shavit Artson, John B. Cobb Jr., Matthew Fox, Catherine Keller, Donna Schaper, and Asma Uddin.

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A NOTE ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We welcome your responses to our articles. Send letters to the editor to letters@tikkun.org. Please remember, however, not to attribute to *Tikkun* views other than those expressed in our editorials. We email, post, and print many articles with which we have strong disagreements because that is what makes *Tikkun* a location for a true diversity of ideas. *Tikkun* reserves the right to edit your letters to fit available space in the magazine.

AIPAC AND IRAN

I was very disappointed in M. J. Rosenberg's post "The Israel Lobby Is Killing Iran Negotiations in Favor of War" on *Tikkun* Daily. [Editor's note: sign up for a free *Tikkun* Daily digest at tikkun.org/dailydigest].

Rosenberg makes the completely false assertion that the "Israel lobby" wants war with Iran, simply because Netanyahu, AIPAC, and many in the U.S. Congress do not want to remove the military option in dealing with Iran's nuclear proliferation—a proliferation that is in total violation of international treaties and threatens to spark a dangerous arms race throughout the region.

Rosenberg bases his whole premise (that Israel and AIPAC are seeking war) on his statement that "it is obvious that Netanyahu and the lobby understand that no country would accept a deal in which it gives up everything in exchange for maybe something later." I find this particularly funny, since although Rosenberg finds it so patently absurd that anyone would ask a country to "give up everything" in exchange for "maybe something later," isn't that exactly what so many people—on the left, particularly, as well as people of all stripes in the Arab world and in Europe—want Israel to do? Isn't that what "land for peace" was all about? Isn't that what Abbas et al. want Israel to do in order to enter into peace negotiations—to agree to all their demands, make concessions, and accept major preconditions (like going back to the pre-1967 borders) even before talks begin? Isn't that what Israel in fact *did* when it returned the Sinai in exchange for a piece of paper? It is amazing that what is so transparently ridiculous for others to accept is precisely what Israel is expected to rush into with open arms.

—David Kronfeld, *New York, NY*

REVOLUTIONARY SUICIDE

Lynice Pinkard's article in the Fall 2013 print issue, "Revolutionary Suicide," is one of the most profound and provocative articles I've read in many, many months. She's absolutely right. We have to commit suicide, or work on our own dying to the death-dealing capitalist society we've inherited and with which we've been complicit.

I spent about fifty years as an Episcopal priest trying to undo the domination system in the church. The church as a social phenomenon is designed to give divine sanction to the domination system that is destroying our planet and us.

I am now working on a new book with the tentative title *The Apocalypse and Beyond: A Manifesto for Creating a New Humanity*. There are three things we have to do to create a new postcivilized way of being human. The first is to repent: a radical turning around and dying to the old civilized ways in which we have been thinking, acting, and behaving, much like Lynice Pinkard's revolutionary suicide. The second is to work like crazy at nonviolently undermining all the capitalist strategies of domination while simultaneously recognizing that they cannot be defeated. Then we have to begin to create new underground structures and systems that can enable our heirs to survive the coming global apocalypse.

Thanks to all of you at *Tikkun* for supporting and encouraging the real humanity that is based on love and distributive justice.

—Peter Lawson, *Valley Ford, CA*

Lynice Pinkard's "Revolutionary Suicide" piece in the Fall 2013 print issue is a very powerful article. I was put off by the title—Suicide (!)—when we are threatened with death, the sixth great extinction. But then she makes clear that she is talking about living more fully, not

compromising with the forces of death, and recognizing our complicity with the death-dealing systems in which we are all embedded. Pinkard is asking us to address the beliefs and fears that embed us in these life-destroying systems that are leading us all off the cliff. Until we address our own complicity with them and commit to working in solidarity with everyone to dismantle these systems by stepping out of them, delegitimizing them, and creating alternatives to them, we will in fact be cooperating in collective suicide.

—Susan Singh, *Tulsa, OK*

MICHAEL LERNER REPLIES:

To see why these claims are not hyperbole, I encourage all our readers to check out Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's book *Resisting Structural Evil*, Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction*, and Jerry Mander's *The Capitalism Papers*, and then join our Network of Spiritual Progressives and help us advance the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ESRA) at spiritualprogressives.org.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Benefitting from the substance of Rabbi Lerner's Winter 2014 *Tikkun* article, "What Terms for Middle East Peace Would Actually Work?" the following is an organizational variation:

Agreed-upon subboundaries, with every person able to live anywhere in a combined overall Israel-Palestine state but able to vote only on issues handled by their own parliament, as per the Parallel State Plan (to be published this year).

Joint issues—such as sanitation, water distribution, and major crimes—needing to be agreed upon by both parliaments and 55 percent of both peoples, as per the Israel-Palestine Confederation Plan promoted by Joseph Alvarez.

MORE LETTERS

We receive many more letters than we can print! Visit tikkun.org/letters to read more.

Jerusalem divided, with each half serving as the capital of its respective nation, and joint municipal matters handled in the same manner as joint national issues.

A joint constitution limiting the immigration into each subsector, so that Israel would always have a Jewish Israeli majority and Palestine a non-Jewish Palestinian majority.

This plan could increase permanent acceptance by other Middle East countries, would allow both peoples to develop their separate distinctive cultures, and would also join them together in a partnership.

—Howard Cort, *Chicago, IL*

INTERNS AND VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Come volunteer with us in Berkeley, CA!

Potential areas for your labors of love: organizing chapters of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, promoting the Global Marshall Plan and the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ESRA), fundraising and grant writing, conference organizing, editing, proof-reading, campus organizing, research, or recruiting brilliant new authors. You can find more information at tikkun.org/interns.

Tikkun magazine is . . .

. . . a vehicle for spreading a new consciousness. We call it a spiritual progressive worldview. But what is that?

What Do You Mean by “Spiritual”?

You can be spiritual and still be an atheist or agnostic. To be spiritual, you don’t have to believe in God or accept New Age versions of spirituality. You don’t need to give up science or your critical faculties. We use the word “spiritual” to describe all aspects of reality that cannot be subject to empirical verification or measurement: everything pertaining to ethics, aesthetics, music, art, philosophy, religion, poetry, literature, dance, love, generosity, and joy. We reject the notion that everything worthy of consideration to guide our personal lives and our economic and political arrangements must be measurable.

What’s a Spiritual Progressive?

To be a spiritual progressive is to agree that our public institutions, corporations, government policies, laws, education system, health care system, legal system, and even many aspects of our personal lives should be judged “efficient, rational, or productive” to the extent that they maximize love, caring, generosity, and ethical and environmentally sustainable behavior. We call this our New Bottom Line.

Spiritual progressives seek to build “The Caring Society: Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth.” Our well-being depends upon the well-being of everyone else and also on the well-being of the planet itself. So we commit to an ethos of generosity, nonviolence, and radical amazement at the grandeur of all that is, and seek to build a global awareness of the unity of all being.

If you are willing to help promote this New Bottom Line for our society, you are a spiritual progressive. And if you are a spiritual progressive, we invite you to join our Network of Spiritual Progressives at spiritualprogressives.org.

Tikkun

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Midterm Elections 2014

NO MATTER WHO “wins” in the upcoming midterm elections, the people of this planet and the planet itself are likely to be the losers. We’ll lose because the Democrats are unwilling to take the bold steps necessary to create meaningful reform and transformation in our country. Intimidated by the threat of right-wing smears, Democrats have been reluctant to articulate and build support for a vision of what Western societies could look like if we got money out of politics, democratized our economy and our politics, repaired the damage done to the life-support systems of our planet by global capitalism, elevated media and political leaders that tell the truth, and prioritized social and economic justice, equality, and environmental sanity. The Democrats’ focus on a “minimum wage” may gain them some seats in Congress, but it is a pathetically inadequate step—compare, if you will, their plan for a minimum wage with what MIT economists have shown to be “a living wage” required to meet minimum standards of subsistence (see livingwage.mit.edu).

Tikkun’s education and activism arm, the Network of Spiritual Progressives, has a vision and a concrete strategy to get money out of politics and reorient our society around an ethic of generosity based on the understanding that our well-being as North Americans depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet and the well-being of the Earth

itself. The Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (ESRA) provides a path for meaningful transformation of our entrenched system. The ESRA not only calls for banning corporate funding of elections (like the demand of Move to Amend), it also bans individual funding of elections (because even with corporations not contributing, the super-rich will still pour tens of millions into elections to get their way). All elections for the presidency, Congress, governorships, and state legislatures must be publicly funded. In addition, the ESRA mandates that large corporations retain their corporate charters only if they can prove a satisfactory history of environmental and social responsibility once every five years. (Please read more and sign a petition to support it at tikkun.org/ESRA.)

These two clauses of the ESRA—coupled with the Network of Spiritual Progressives’ domestic and global Marshall Plan to eliminate poverty and change U.S.-sponsored global trade agreements so that they benefit rather than disadvantage the poor in developing countries—could rein in the exploitative and environmentally destructive aspects of our current political and economic system. This is the real path to a change you can believe in. To join our efforts, please go to spiritualprogressives.org. ■

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New Leadership in the NSP

I’M PROUD TO ANNOUNCE that the Network of Spiritual Progressives has a new co-chair, Rev. J. Alfred Smith Sr., and a new executive director, Cat J. Zavis.

J. Alfred Smith Sr. was the force behind making Allen Temple Baptist Church (located in a high-poverty African American neighborhood in Oakland, California) one of the most successful and impactful churches on the West Coast. I highly recommend his new book, *Sound the Trumpet: How Churches Can Answer God’s Call to Justice*, in which he and a new minister, Rev. Bendt, discuss how to raise consciousness at a time when so many people want to avoid thinking about our societal crises.

Cat J. Zavis—a lawyer with a long history of social justice work who has most recently worked as a collaborative divorce attorney and mediator who trains other lawyers in mediation and empathic communication—was the founder of the Bellingham, Washington, chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. She is now moving to Berkeley, where

she takes on the formidable task of being executive director of our international Network of Spiritual Progressives. She will be working to help reconstitute some of the NSP chapters that fell apart due to the financial crisis and onset of disillusionment with President Obama, which sadly translated into widespread despair about the possibility of ever achieving significant change in this society. Cat will help rebuild these chapters, provide support to chapter leaders, and help create task forces in every profession (e.g., law, medicine, psychotherapy, teaching, tech, science, etc.) that can bring the values and principles of our New Bottom Line into these fields. If you have ways you’d like to volunteer your time and energy, or if you want to start a local chapter, create a *Tikkun* reading group, or engage with a professional task force, please contact her at cat@spiritualprogressives.org—she’d appreciate your support and engagement! ■

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The oldest known Holocaust survivor has passed away, but the trauma symptoms produced by the Nazi genocide continue to be passed down to new generations. Here, Israeli soldiers participate in a Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony outside the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem.



Trauma Legacies in the Middle East

BY TIRZAH FIRESTONE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN you put a daughter of the Holocaust in a room full of Arab trauma workers just back from the Syrian crisis? Cross-pollination or conflagration?

That's the question I pondered upon receiving an invitation to speak at a conference on "Transgenerational Trauma: Communal Wounds and Victim Identities" in Amman, Jordan. As a rabbi, psychotherapist, and human rights advocate, I had long been fascinated by the psychology of the Middle East. My curiosity was piqued. What might I learn about the psyche of my cousins on the other side of the Jordan River? I wondered. And to what extent might I be able to discuss my own research about Jewish historical trauma?

But several weeks from the event, the conference coordinator contacted me. Given the heightened tensions in Jordan, he said, it would not be advisable for me to mention that I was a Jew, much less a rabbi. And if I could leave out any references to my ties with Israel, all the better. The audience, he explained, consisted mostly of Jordanian and Syrian doctors, medical students, and trauma workers who were themselves overwhelmed by the magnitude of the crisis spilling over the border from neighboring Syria. The planning team wanted the conference to be strictly apolitical.

RABBI TIRZAH FIRESTONE is an author, a therapist, a member of *Tikkun's* editorial advisory board, and founding rabbi of the Congregation Nevei Kodesh in Boulder, Colorado. She serves on the board of T'ruah (formerly Rabbis for Human Rights–North America).

Now even more intrigued, though admittedly confused, I adjusted my bio to emphasize my training as a psychologist and steered the content of my talk toward the universal: principles of self-care, issues of secondary traumatization, and resources for self-regulation. As I spoke with knowledgeable friends who worked in the Middle East, I began to understand the context of the coordinator's concerns. I learned that Jordan has a huge Palestinian population—roughly 3.5 million in a country of under 7 million—most of whom are refugees from Israel's 1948 War of Independence. And while there are certainly cultural rifts between Jordanians and the Palestinians among them, the Palestinians are generally integrated into Jordanian culture. Most Jordanians are sympathetic to the Palestinians' plight and many share a feeling of hostility toward Israel. After learning this, I understood why attending the conference as an "American psychologist" rather than as a "Jewish psychologist or rabbi" would be the safest, most prudent way to go.

Trauma in My Own Family

What actually occurred in Amman is another story. I will get to that shortly.

But first let me explain what transgenerational trauma is and why it is of personal interest to both the Jordanian doctors and to me. "Cultural trauma," "historical trauma," and "transgenerational trauma" are all relatively new terms in the field of trauma psychology. They denote the response to chronic stress among whole groups of people and how this stress gets transmitted across generational lines. Studies of groups who have endured prolonged stress and suffering resulting from discrimination, war, genocide, and other forms of psychosocial violence show that such massive socio-historical traumas often initiate the transmission of trauma symptoms into second and third generations.

My own research has followed the psychological legacy of Nazi atrocities on Jewish survivors and their progeny. Beginning in the late 1960s with the work of Dr. Henry Krystal, hundreds of evidence-based clinical studies have been published about Jewish Holocaust survivors and the transmission of their trauma symptoms to successive generations. Chronic hypervigilance, anxiety, hopelessness, and an overriding sense of guilt are but a few examples. To be sure there are also positive adaptations to Jewish historical trauma: strength of will, an ironclad determination to survive, strong family ties, and the desire to heal others in distress, for example.

Although the suffering inflicted on victims of Nazi atrocities seems to be fading into oblivion—after all, the Holocaust is now seventy years in the past—the vestiges of such massive human aggression don't simply go away. Deep cellular memories are recorded and passed on. Especially when trauma has not been processed or integrated in a conscious form, its power increases. And as is true for any individual who endures a traumatic event, unresolved suffering has a way of unconsciously perpetuating itself. The late Israeli traumatologist Dan Bar-On taught that trauma that is silently endured often passes more powerfully from generation to generation than stories that are recounted. For him "the strongest form of transmission was the 'untold story.'"

My interest in this field is fueled by my own family legacy. My mother was a German refugee who escaped to England via the British government's Kindertransport evacuation efforts in 1939. She left scores of cousins, uncles, and aunts behind in Europe. All but one cousin were killed in the gas chambers. I knew nothing of my family's slaughter until I was forty, when that sole surviving cousin called me one day from Australia and introduced himself to me. It was from him that I learned the dark truth about my maternal family.

My father was a Jew from Brooklyn serving in the U.S. Air Force. He and my mother, who had immigrated first to Canada and then to America in 1942, married shortly after they met. Their first years of marriage were largely spent apart. Although I learned of it much later, my father participated in the liberation of Buchenwald and was deeply affected by what he witnessed there. I never heard him discuss it openly, but we found shocking photographs hidden away in his files after his death.



The trauma of the Nakba—the forced exile of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians that occurred during the creation of the State of Israel—also continues to be passed down to new generations. Here, a Palestinian man takes part in a Nakba Commemoration Day protest in the West Bank village of Qalandia.

"In some small way this conference served to humanize 'the other' for all of us," Tirzah Firestone writes. Here, participants in the transgenerational trauma conference say their goodbyes at the end of the four-day gathering in Amman, Jordan.



Visceral Inheritance and Intergenerational Tasks

It was not until I was a middle-aged adult that I beheld the vile pictures my father had photographed as a young man in April 1945. The sepia images of ravaged human corpses and the squalid conditions of their enslavement horrified me. Yet these pictures were also strangely familiar. Without words, my parents' pictures and the feelings that surrounded them had somehow become part of my internal reality. The legacy of my father's trauma at the liberation of Buchenwald—what he saw, the terror he felt, and the rage that ensued over the dehumanization of his people—was my visceral inheritance.

Consciously and unconsciously, parents and caregivers who have experienced extreme psychic trauma can deposit into a child what group psychologist Vamik Volkan calls "injured self-images," as well as the internal pictures of others who have participated in the same traumatic event. The child is then given the psychological task of assimilating and finding meaning in these transferred images, and then determining what outcome should follow from them.

When a large group experiences a human-inflicted collective catastrophe such as tribal warfare or genocide, each affected individual is left with an injured self-image. While these internal pictures are not necessarily the same, the shared event takes on a largely shared representation. These shared trauma images are then passed down to the victims' offspring, and they carry an implicit task commensurate with their pain. This task may be "Regain Our Honor" or "Never Trust Beyond Our Own Tribe." In the context of the post-Holocaust generations, one might see "Never Again!"—the slogan of the Jewish Defense League—as a passed-down task of this sort. Likewise, the Israeli slogan *Lo Lishloach v'Lo Lishkoach* (Don't Forgive and Don't Forget) fits this description.

"It is the transgenerational conveyance of long-term 'tasks' that perpetuate the cycle of societal trauma," Volkan said in his 2013 lecture, "Large-Group Identity and International Pain: Psychoanalytic Observation," at the International Psychoanalytical Association Congress. When the new generations are not able to fulfill their shared tasks—and this is usually the case—the tasks are passed down to the next generation. And off we go.

The task created by trauma may also be a benevolent one, though this is less commonly so the case. "Do Not Treat the 'Other' as We Have Been Treated" is paradigmatic of a pattern-breaking collective task. Herein lies the immense power and beauty of the Torah's counter-intuitive directives given on the far shore of the Hebrews' enslavement in Egypt: "Do not oppress a stranger for you know the heart of a stranger, seeing that you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 23:9). Taken as an intergenerational "task" whispered by a wise and cautioning superego after severe shared oppression, such orders run against the current of instinctual responses. (*continued on page 58*)

Neoliberalism's War Against the Radical Imagination

BY HENRY A. GIROUX

DEMOCRACY IS ON life support in the United States. Throughout the social order, the forces of predatory capitalism are on the march. Their ideological and material traces are visible everywhere—in the dismantling of the welfare state, the increasing role of corporate money in politics, the assault on unions, the expansion of the corporate-surveillance-military state, widening inequalities in wealth and income, the defunding of higher education, the privatization of public education, and the war on women's reproductive rights. As Marxist geographer David Harvey, political theorist Wendy Brown, and others have observed, neoliberalism's permeation is achieved through various guises that collectively function to undercut public faith in the defining institutions of democracy.

As market mentalities and moralities tighten their grip on all aspects of society, public institutions and public spheres are first downsized, then eradicated. When these important sites of democratic expression—from public universities to community health care centers—vanish, what follows is a serious erosion of the discourses of justice, equality, public values, and the common good. Moreover, as literary critic Stefan Collini has argued, under the regime of neoliberalism, the “social self” has been transformed into the “disembedded individual,” just as the notion of the university as a public good is now repudiated by the privatizing and atomistic values at the heart of a hyper-market-driven society.

We live in a society that appears to embrace the vocabulary of “choice,” which is ultimately rooted in a denial of reality. In fact, most people experience daily an increasing limitation of choices, as they bear the heavy burden of massive inequality, social disparities, the irresponsible concentration of power in relatively few hands, a racist justice and penal system, the conversion of schools into detention centers, and a pervasive culture of violence and cruelty—all of which portends a growing machinery of social death, especially for those disadvantaged by a ruthless capitalist economy. Renowned economist Joseph Stiglitz is one of many public intellectuals who have repeatedly alerted Americans to the impending costs of gross social inequality. Inequality is not simply about disproportionate amounts of wealth and income in fewer hands, it is also about the monopolization of power by the financial and corporate elite.



How can we resist the neoliberal pressure to reorient our colleges and universities toward market-driven values rather than public values? Here, students at Cooper Union in New York City protest the imposition of student fees for the first time in the free school's history.

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As neoliberalism has taken hold, our society has become increasingly structured around the state-sanctioned violence of mass incarceration. Here, a demonstrator in Chicago protests youth incarceration and the high rates of sexual violence against youth in prison.

As power becomes global and is removed from local and nation-based politics, what is even more alarming is the sheer number of individuals and groups who are being defined by the free-floating class of ultra-rich and corporate powerbrokers as disposable, redundant, or a threat to the forces of concentrated power. Power, particularly the power of the largest corporations, has become less accountable, and the elusiveness of illegitimate power makes it difficult to recognize. Disposability has become the new measure of a neoliberal society in which the only value that matters is exchange value. Compassion, social responsibility, and justice are relegated to the dustbin of an older modernity that now is viewed as either quaint or a grim reminder of a socialist past.

The Institutionalization of Injustice

A regime of repression, corruption, and dispossession has become the organizing principle of society in which an ironic doubling takes place. Corporate bankers and powerbrokers trade with terrorists, bankrupt the economy, and commit all manner of crimes that affect millions, yet they go free. Meanwhile, across the United States, citizens are being criminalized for all sorts of behaviors ranging from dress code infractions in public schools to peaceful demonstrations in public parks. As Michelle Alexander has thoroughly documented in her book *The New Jim Crow*, young men and women of color are being jailed in record numbers for nonviolent offenses, underscoring how justice is on the side of the rich, wealthy, and powerful. And when the wealthy

are actually convicted of crimes, they are rarely sent to prison, even though millions languish under a correctional system aimed at punishing immigrants, low-income whites, and poor minorities.

An egregious example of how the justice system works in favor of the rich was recently on full display in Texas. Instead of being sent to prison, Ethan Couch, a wealthy teen who killed four people while driving inebriated, was given ten years of probation and ordered by the judge to attend a rehabilitation facility paid for by his parents. (His parents had previously offered to pay for an expensive rehabilitation facility that costs \$450,000 a year.) The defense argued that he had “affluenza,” a “disease” that afflicts children of privilege who are allegedly never given the opportunity to learn how to be responsible. In other words, irresponsibility is now an acceptable hallmark of having wealth, enabling the rich actually to kill people and escape the reach of justice. Under such circumstances, “justice” becomes synonymous with privilege, as wealth and power dictate who benefits and who doesn’t by a system of law that enshrines lawlessness. In addition, moral and political outrage is no longer animated by the fearful consequences of an unjust society. Rather than fearing injustice at the hands of an authoritarian government, nearly all of us define our fears in reference to overcoming personal insecurities and anxieties. In this scenario, survival becomes more important than the quest for the good life. The American dream is no longer built on the possibility of social mobility or getting ahead. Instead, it has become for many a nightmare rooted in the desire to simply stay afloat and survive.

One consequence of the vicissitudes of injustice is the growing number of people, especially young people, who inhabit zones of hardship, suffering, exclusion, and joblessness. As renowned sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has stated, this is the zero generation—a generation with zero hopes, jobs, or future possibilities. The plight of the outcast now envelops increasing numbers of youth, workers, immigrants, and a diminishing middle

class. They live in fear as they struggle to survive social conditions and policies more characteristic of authoritarian governments than democratic states. Indeed, Americans in general appear caught in a sinister web of ethical and material poverty manufactured by a state that trades in suspicion, bigotry, state-sanctioned violence, and disposability. Democracy loses its character as a disruptive element, a force of dissent, and an insurrectional call for responsible change. In effect, democracy all but degenerates into an assault on the radical imagination, reconfigured as a force for whitewashing all ethical and moral considerations. What is left is a new kind of authoritarianism that thrives in such a state of exception, which in reality is a state of permanent war. A regime of greed, dispossession, fear, and surveillance has now been normalized.

The ideological script recited by the disciples of neoliberalism is now familiar: there is no such thing as the common good; market values provide the template for governing all of social life, not just the economy; consumerism is the only obligation of citizenship; a survival-of-the-fittest ethic should govern how we think and behave; militaristic values should trump democratic ideals; the welfare state is the arch enemy of freedom; private interests should be safeguarded, while public values wane; law and order is the preferred language for mobilizing shared fears rather than shared responsibilities; and war becomes the all-embracing organizing principle for developing society and the economy.

As individual responsibility has been promoted as a weapon in order to tear up social solidarities, experiences that once resonated with public purpose and meaning have been transformed into privatized spectacles and fragmented modes of consumption that are increasingly subjected to the surveillance tactics of the military-security state. The endpoint is the emergence of what the late British historian Tony Judt called an “eviscerated society”—“one that is stripped of the thick mesh of mutual obligations and social responsibilities” integral to any viable democracy. This grim reality has produced a failure in the power of the civic imagination, political will, and open democracy. It is also part of a politics that strips society of any democratic ideals and renders its democratic character inoperative.

The Neoliberal Co-optation of Higher Education

Neoliberalism succeeds, much like authoritarian regimes of the past, through the efforts it expends in the production of desires, identities, values, and modes of identification aligned with its worldview and values. Its adherents are increasingly produced by, and in turn reproduce, forms of neoliberal public pedagogy. And these new modes of pedagogy are distributed through a variety of educational sites and cultural apparatuses that call into being subjects defined exclusively by market-driven values and the prioritization of commercial values over public values. This is why it is crucial that American educators continue to address important social issues and to defend democratic modes of pedagogy, which must include mounting a spirited defense of higher education as a democratic public sphere or public good. The power of the imagination and critical reasoning, the willingness to dissent, and the capacity to hold power accountable—historically fostered by sites of higher learning—constitute a major threat to authoritarian regimes. Yet, it is increasingly the case that many institutions of higher education fail to take a position against the neoliberal state, instead defining themselves as part of a larger neoliberal rationality and social order.

Under the reign of neoliberalism, the university is turning into a modern-day version of the sweatshop for adjunct and non-tenured faculty. A university without a proper faculty and governance structure cannot be a university wedded to democratic values and education for empowerment and autonomy. On the contrary, it is a site of reactionary power where all vestiges of critical thinking and exchange are wiped out. Under such circumstances, education becomes obsessed with accountability schemes, redefining students as consumers, deskilling faculty, governing through the lens of a business culture, and dumping down the curriculum by substituting training for a critically



A student speaks out against the school-to-prison pipeline during an education rally at Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles.

"The current crisis in public and higher education has made it alarmingly clear that educators, artists, intellectuals, and youth need a new political and pedagogical language," Henry Giroux writes. Here, Berkeley students protest the appointment of University of California President Janet Napolitano—former Secretary of Homeland Security—and call for a democratization of the university's governance system.



informed education. How else to explain the following comment made by the president of Macomb Community College? "Macomb is working with the federal government and other community colleges to better prepare students for the world that exists, not the world they want to live in." And how else to explain the attempts in Florida, Texas, and other states to defund the humanities and reward those disciplines and programs that blatantly serve corporate interests? Increasingly, it appears that the ideological assault waged by a range of religious, economic, and political fundamentalists on the university, which began during the radicalization of U.S. colleges in the 1960s, is now almost complete.

As South African novelist J.M. Coetzee puts it:

This assault on the [independence of universities] commenced in the 1980s as a reaction to what universities were doing in the 1960s and 1970s, namely, encouraging masses of young people in the view that there was something badly wrong with the way the world was being run and supplying them with the intellectual fodder for a critique of Western civilisation as a whole.

What has become clear in the last forty years is that illegitimate corporate rule has moved from occupying the state to dismantling all those public spheres over which it does not have full control, including higher education. Harnessing higher education to the demands of the warfare state and the needs of corporations has become normalized, fixated in the fog of common sense. If neoliberalism succeeds in reducing higher education to nothing more than job training, then imagination will be effectively banished from a once vibrant site of critical engagement.

Learning to Imagine a Life Beyond Capitalism

The current crisis in public and higher education has made it alarmingly clear that educators, artists, intellectuals, and youth need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which capital draws upon an unprecedented convergence of resources—financial, cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological—to exercise powerful and diverse forms of control. If educators and other cultural workers are to counter global capitalism's increased ability to separate the traditional sphere of politics from the now-transnational reach of power, it is crucial to develop educational approaches that reject the deliberate blurring of market liberties and civil liberties, a market economy and a market society. Nothing will change unless the Left and progressives take seriously the subjective underpinnings of neoliberal oppression. In the current historical moment, *(continued on page 59)*

The Shadow Side of Freedom

Building the Religious Counterculture

BY ANA LEVY-LYONS

AMERICANS, we love our freedom. We sing about it in our national anthem. We pledge allegiance to it. Our soldiers ostensibly fight and die for it. This nation was founded on a struggle for freedom from a parental power, culminating in the establishment of an “independent” nation of autonomous persons, each defined by his or her individual right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And, of course, it was the struggle for religious freedom that brought many of the European colonists to the Americas in the first place. So, it could be said that, at least for those who immigrated by choice, a love for the patriotic rhetoric of freedom is in our blood.

And yet, over the years, as the great freedom experiment of this nation has progressed, we have seen its shadow side. Today, the Tea Party and political conservatives in general hold the banner for a particular type of freedom—freedom from government regulations. We’ve seen the deadly results of this freedom on our ecosystems, on wealth distribution, on public health, on farm animals, and on the safety of our schools and city streets. Political liberals and progressives are quick to eschew this kind of freedom and argue for social and ecological accountability as a higher good.

But when it comes to “social issues” and religion, it’s liberals and progressives who hold the freedom banner. Reform Jews, liberal Christians, Unitarian Universalists, American Buddhists, yogis, spiritual progressives, and those who have no use for religion whatsoever reject the obligations imposed by religious dogmas, laws, and traditions. These groups privilege freedom differently yet no less adamantly than conservatives do. And this kind of freedom also has a shadow side.

Religious Modesty vs. Commodified Sexuality

In a previous *Tikkun* article, I wrote about Mayim Bialik, the Jewish neuroscientist-turned-TV actor whose religious commitments have become quite public as she regularly reflects on them in print and online. She is vegan (to model how to care for the earth) and she keeps kosher. She is a vocal proponent of attachment parenting. She adheres to Jewish modesty laws in what she wears onscreen and off: clothing has to cover elbows, knees, and collarbone. Bialik has struggled publicly with how to pull this off in the glitzy, sexy Hollywood world, especially when it came to finding a dress to wear to the Emmys. She called the quest to find this dress “Operation Hot and Holy.”

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“What was sexual liberation for one generation became, in some ways, oppression for the next,” Ana Levy-Lyons writes. “At the end of the long, bloodstained road of struggle for women’s freedom . . . is the great shining beacon really Miley Cyrus?” Illustration by Olivia Wise.



TV actor Mayim Bialik chooses to adhere to Jewish modesty laws — even at the Emmys.

While Bialik's story is charming in ways, some *Tikkun* readers may have mixed feelings about it. On one hand, a smart, confident, modern woman is standing up for her beliefs in a countercultural way. On the other hand, a smart, confident, modern woman is submitting herself to what is arguably a sexist, archaic set of rules invented by a bunch of men in the Middle Ages. Surely it can't be good for women or feminism to have a public figure legitimating such rules. Mayim Bialik is relinquishing her freedom, or so an argument might go.

Progressive agendas, including those of feminism, often center on personal freedom from precisely the kinds of laws that Mayim Bialik observes. The sixties and seventies were all about this movement toward freedom from religious and cultural norms experienced as oppressive. If it feels good, do it. Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. It was a youth culture that scorned tradition. Women embraced a kind of freedom we had never seen before and clothing became emblematic of that freedom—burning bras, exposing lots of skin, celebrating our sexuality instead of condemning it. Free to be you and me.

This was a vital step forward for our culture and it carried with it real advances for women as well as for people of color and LGBT people. But sadly, what was sexual liberation for one generation became, in some ways, oppression for the next.

How Capitalism Has Co-opted Sexual Liberation

As traditional religious laws and social norms lost their grip on our culture, they left a power vacuum. Capitalism rushed in to fill it. While women's bodies had certainly been commodified in the 1950s and earlier, the cynical use of sexuality to sell products seemed to reach a fever pitch after the sexual revolution. Now every newsstand, web medium, and TV show blares images of today's "models." Now it is inescapable. We are barraged by airbrushed women wearing almost nothing with body types that almost no one actually has. These women's sex appeal is what's important about them and they are, in some form or other, always for sale. And now girls as young as six are anxious about how their bodies look, and children aged nine and ten are dieting. Not just a few of them: 40 percent of them. Eating disorders have been on the rise every year since 1930. And the plastic surgery industry is booming. Meanwhile women still occupy only meager percentages of congressional seats and executive offices.

Is this the fulfillment of the dream of the empowerment and sexual liberation of women? At the end of the long, bloodstained road of struggle for women's freedom and dignity through the generations, is the great shining beacon really Miley Cyrus? It might sound silly, or even tragic, but one could probably trace the freedom impulse straight from the Edict of Torda granting religious freedom in Europe in 1568 to the Declaration of Independence in 1776 to the liberal movements of the 1960s to Miley Cyrus' 2013 song "We Can't Stop":

It's our party we can do what we want
It's our party we can say what we want
It's our party we can love who we want
We can kiss who we want
We can sing what we want

At the MTV Video Music Awards last summer, Miley Cyrus illustrated the point and conspicuously professed her freedom: she sang that song while gyrating, emaciated, and almost naked, pretending to masturbate on stage. She cynically used black women's bodies as props. She was surrounded by giant teddy bears, sardonically mocking the innocence of childhood. And all those nine-year-olds were watching it on TV. It all smacked of a kind of famished desperation in which nothing is sacred. Everything and everyone is instrumental: all is sacrificed to the giant engine—the entertainment industry machine that requires the performer to shock and arouse and sell, sell, sell. There are millions of dollars at stake. The message is: do it, or the marketplace will vomit you out.

So exhibit A, we have Mayim Bialik. Exhibit B, Miley Cyrus. Two opposite ends of the “modesty” continuum. Mayim Bialik would probably describe her wardrobe choices as obedience to a force and a law greater than herself. Miley Cyrus might describe hers as an exercise of freedom. But I would say that the reality is *exactly the opposite*. Mayim Bialik is exercising freedom from the powerful social pressures of her day, drawing strength and dignity from the teachings of her religious tradition. Miley Cyrus is submitting to a force and law greater than herself, obediently reproducing an image of female sexuality constructed by mass culture, selling everything she has, retaining nothing. And she, in her own words, “can’t stop.”

Liberal Aversions to Obligation

This issue of women’s clothing and sexuality is just one example of a much larger phenomenon. The old regimes of religious tradition have left a power vacuum and there is a new regime in town that is just as coercive. It is possibly even more coercive because it’s unspoken. It’s silent. It’s invisible. It pervades everything and it masquerades as freedom. Many of us spiritual progressives probably feel that we are impervious to these hidden forces. We like to think that we’ve reached a kind of enlightened, reasonable middle ground. That we are neither bound by the strictures of history nor cheapened by the excesses of modernity. We figure we are in no danger of becoming either Mayim Bialik or Miley Cyrus.

But we have to admit, we do have a *thing* for freedom. Culturally, liberal religious folks tend to be enchanted, enthralled with our freedom. It was the defining feature of our religious histories. Each generation of believers shrugged off a layer of religious doctrines and practices that felt oppressive. We shrugged off layer after layer of religious obligation until, when there were no obligations left to reject, the foe became the notion of obligation itself. Nobody tells us what to do. It’s our party. We can do what we want.

This point about our obsession with freedom became abundantly clear to me during an exercise I led with a group of religious liberals a few years back. I asked them to conduct a thought experiment to envision the laws and communal norms that the most “orthodox” and virtuosic practitioners of their liberal faith might observe. The group seemed flummoxed. I tried to clear it up for them, explaining that, for example, an observant Jew will keep kosher and say the Sh’ma twice daily. There must be parallel practices of an observant practitioner of their liberal faith. I wanted to know what those practices would be. But ultimately the question was unintelligible to them. It turned out that, without intending to, I had asked a trick question. Because an observant practitioner of their faith would observe *no* religious laws or communal norms since they regarded individual freedom from such laws and norms as the defining feature of their faith. Taken to the extreme, this suggests that the most virtuosic practitioner would be one whose spiritual practices were absolutely unique, guided by nothing but an internally derived wisdom.

It isn’t that this group of religious liberals was indifferent to the ethical and spiritual values of their faith. And it isn’t that they were ignorant of our human capacity to act selfishly and even forsake what we consider most holy. They knew, as we all do, that doing the right thing consistently is hard. Sometimes we don’t want to. Sometimes we don’t want to be loving, we don’t feel like being compassionate, we don’t care about dignity, and we’d rather not be honest. But clearly, to this particular group of liberals, what people did with their freedom of choice was less important than *that* they had this freedom. Yes, they valued community, social justice, and caring for the earth, but freedom was a higher value still.

Holding Other Values Above Freedom

Now there’s nothing wrong with freedom. Freedom in and of itself is neutral. It can be a beautiful and powerful thing. But to say that freedom is our highest value as religious people is to impoverish our faith and ourselves. We can’t hold our communities together

Is Miley Cyrus the paragon of sexual freedom? Or is she obediently reproducing an image of female sexuality constructed by mass culture?





TZEDEK

"As religious people, we should eat foods that were grown with ecological foresight and raised with compassion," Levy-Lyons writes. This Magen Tzedek seal is placed on food that meets traditional kosher standards and is also produced in accord with Jewish ethics concerning the treatment of workers, animals, and the earth.

only by a shared commitment to personal autonomy. If everyone is reinventing the wheel, we won't get any traction. We have other values, such as love, justice, compassion, dignity, and honesty. And unfortunately, our ability to advance those values in the world sometimes conflicts with personal freedom. Surely Mayim Bialik would enjoy the freedom to wear what she wants to the Emmys, but her spiritual values are more important to her still. And as a mother, she knows that the nine-year-olds are watching.

The scary thing is that sometimes we don't even know what freedom is. Sometimes, as in the case of Miley Cyrus, what we might think of as an expression of freedom is no more than subservience to the powerful cultural norms of our day. Our desires and insecurities are fueled by the media and by corporate interests whose strategies are so shrewd that they reach into the depths of who we are. And we can wind up demeaned by the very forces we think empower us.

So maybe there are two different kinds of freedom at issue here—freedom with a lower-case *f*, Miley Cyrus style: "It's our party we can do what we want." And Freedom with an upper case *F*, Mayim Bialik style: the Freedom to live our lives with integrity, regardless of the social pressures upon us. It's the Freedom to embrace our values and traditions within a community of accountability. It's the paradoxical practice of empowering ourselves by limiting ourselves, of gaining by relinquishing.

It is time for religious liberals and spiritual progressives to reclaim the mantle of moral leadership in this country. We need to redeploy traditional religious practices and disciplines in the service of our liberal theological ideals. And as much as it may gall us, this project will require religious commitments—"shoulds" and "should nots."

For example, as religious people we should eat foods that were grown with ecological foresight and raised with compassion. We should buy products whose manufacturing supports the well-being of workers, families, and communities. We should keep a Sabbath in which we radically disengage from social and economic structures each week. We should refuse to participate in violence or the production of the implements of violence. We should treat our bodies as temples, never inflicting unhealthy products, diets, or surgeries. We should regard our sexuality as sacred, not to be traded as currency for material or social gain. We should treat our neighbor and the stranger within our gates with loving-kindness.

As religious people, we should do these things and we should not enjoy the freedom to do otherwise. Because one thing we know as religious liberals is that it's not just "our" party—it's everyone's party. We are all interconnected and our actions have consequences far beyond what we can foresee. We are not isolated beings; we are part of the stream of history, connected with a heritage and pointing meaningfully toward the future. It is up to us to model the Freedom that yields dignity and integrity. The nine-year-olds are watching. ■



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

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A Ritual Dismantling of Walls

Healing from Trauma through the Jewish Days of Awe

BY WENDY ELISHEVA SOMERSON



THREE PELICANS SOAR in a synchronized formation high above the ocean. Massive and slightly awkward with their giant beaks and perplexing throats, they surprise me with their unlikely inevitability. Their fringed wings stretch across the sky like monstrous combs with a few missing teeth, holding the secrets of both sea and sky between their slightly curled tips. I watch as their pterodactyl-like silhouettes fade into the horizon, taking with them their giant and uncomfortable beauty.

I am pulled into a recurring nightmare. I sense the presence of a man in my bedroom. I am lying in bed on my stomach and he is suddenly on top of my back. His weight bears down on me; I cannot move. His hands circle my throat; I cannot speak. I can barely breathe. My body goes rigid with terror, but my freezing does not reduce the pressure. I decide to twist and turn my body in inviting ways; perhaps I can seduce the threat into something else. I wake up. The man is still here, pressing down on me, hands on my throat. I wake up again. He is no longer on top of me, but his presence lingers in the room.

WENDY ELISHEVA SOMERSON, one of the founders of the Seattle chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace, creates and leads Jewish rituals that integrate Palestinian solidarity and Jewish spirituality. In addition to writing and activism, she is learning to practice politicized somatic healing.

"Three pelicans stretch their wings over our heads, opening the gate between this world and the one to come," Wendy Somerson writes, describing the Rosh Hashanah ritual she enacted with two friends. The healing ritual drew her to create this encaustic painting, *The Day the World Was Born*.



Holy Days

The Jewish Days of Awe revolve around the destruction and creation of two physical structures. In midsummer, the Days of Awe begin with *Tisha B'Av*, a day of mourning that commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem and the calamities that have befallen the Jewish people since then. In the fall, we complete the cycle of the Days of Awe with Sukkot—a joyful celebration of our transformation over the previous two months by building and spending time in the sukkah, a structure with temporary walls and a partial roof, which we later dismantle. This journey of removing our walls is heightened in a concentrated form during the Days of Awe, but it is a circular process that we continually repeat over our lifetimes.

As I begin body-based therapy, the walls of my house—my body—start to crack open. My work with a somatic therapist begins the slow process of opening up spaces in my body that have been sealed shut. With each opening, more memories arise.

In massage, feelings of panic move out of my sacrum and fill my body with their revelations. My heart beats its way into my throat, and I fight the urge to retch. Memories suddenly line up next to each other precariously, like a row of dominoes just before the fall. I remember being at my best friend's house in first grade. We're lying on her bed. I tell her that I can only sleep on my stomach with my hands between my legs for protection. I recall the terror of waking up, over the years, from the recurring nightmare of being strangled. When I told my sister about the nightmare several years ago, she told me that Dad used to come into our room at night to drag her out of bed. She told me I pulled the covers over my head, pretending that it wasn't happening.

These memories from the past, stored in my sinews for decades, have found their openings. I have invited them in by making space for them in my body. Feeling my invitation, they have been lapping their brackish water against the wall, slowly eroding its function. Finally, our joint labor has created these openings, both holy and horrible. And my current panic can't close the holes or send the rushing water back.

I dream that an invisible force drags my body into a horizontal floating position about a foot above the floor. I gaze down at the wooden floorboards. I recognize that I am in one of the bedrooms I grew up in, being given an opportunity to make sense of my recent memories. Salt is scattered across the floor. I reach down and sort through the salt granules by pushing them to the left and to the right on the wood, but no patterns emerge. I wake up. I feel as if I've been given a question that reveals everything and nothing at the same time.

In midsummer, as we approach Tisha B'Av, the walls of my body begin to crumble. Although I have spent years building trust with Patricia, my somatic therapist, she and I have a moment of profound miscommunication. I am lying on a massage table. Energy runs from the center of my body through my legs in rough jagged spurts. My legs twitch in jerky movements as though they are trying to shake off grasping tentacles. Eventually, as I continue a steady breath pattern, Patricia and I get the energy to flow more evenly, like a gently rocking boat.

But the area in my chest grows very still. Sometimes one part of my body will resist the opening. My chest tells me to go ahead and recklessly throw open the windows and doors to let in the elements, no matter the weather. "Let the air, wind, or rain sweep through our dwelling and indiscriminately carry out these precious, moldy possessions," it tells me. "But I'm going to keep something hidden, safe in a secret enclosure, far from the light of the present."

"I'm going to do something I've done before. Just let me know if it's too much," Patricia says. Her hands encircle my throat. But this is not something she has ever done before. I immediately feel an immobilizing

panic, but I manage to tell her to loosen her grip. She wants to know what my tears mean, and I tell her briefly about the man from my nightmare. Her hands seem to tighten around my neck, and I ask her to loosen her grip again. The session ends.

My insomnia grows much worse. I can sleep only on my stomach, no longer on my side. When I wake up in the middle of the night, I feel as if the man is just outside my door or lurking by my window, and on some nights he hovers just over my bed.

Trauma and Teshuvah

As I try to make sense of what has been happening in my body, the summer days threaten to shorten, and my mind turns to the approaching High Holy Days and the central concept of *teshuvah*, which can be translated as a turn, return, or repentance. I turn and return to trauma from my childhood because something about it haunts me; it eludes my conscious memories and returns to me mostly in nightmares, dreams, and bodily symptoms. Reading *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared: The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation*, I consider Alan Lew's words:

If the purpose of ritual is to render the invisible visible, then what is the profound, universal, unseen, and unspoken reality that all of this ritual reflects? What journey of the soul, what invisible journey of transformation, does all of this make visible?

Have I been handed an opportunity to return to and resolve this trauma? Terror and insomnia are assaulting my days and nights, yet I recognize the edges of an opening: what may become possible when the walls of my house are in shambles? When my usual protection fails, when my heart is surrounded by fewer brambles, am I somehow closer to resolving this story? We tend to move toward transformation only when we have no other choice. While tearing down is often necessary before rebuilding can begin, few of us willingly choose to break down our walls. The destruction often feels like something that is happening *to* us without our consent, yet I long to find a way to assert my agency in this time of re-injury. As I sort through the rubble of my fallen walls, I search for new ways of relating to the past.

I keep mulling over Lew's idea that teshuvah "is only complete when we find ourselves in exactly the same position we were in when we went wrong—when the state of estrangement and alienation began—and we choose to behave differently, to act in a way that is conducive to atonement and reconciliation." As I turn to face the past, I am reliving my response to the original trauma, but I don't feel that I had control over what went wrong in the first instance. My alienation is more a result of being harmed by the people who were supposed to protect me.

So what is my responsibility to behave differently now? I am experiencing an opportunity to repair one of the consequences of abuse—the way in which I leave my body to repress the knowledge of what I experienced as a child. Although this leave-taking has helped me survive, it also prevents me from fully knowing myself. Making teshuvah, in this case, means turning away from denial, returning to my body, and choosing reconciliation—a reconciliation with myself that allows me to choose authentic connection with others.

Making Amends

When I get advice from another somatic therapist, Jennifer, about how to approach my concerns with Patricia, she asks, "So the original trauma was coming from your right?" I mumble something vague while my mind sprints to catch up with that possibility. Chronic pain runs up and down the right side of my body from my numb foot to my right shoulder, which perpetually shrugs upward as though it is attempting

This encaustic painting, *Softening*, depicts Somerson's process of healing from within.





"During Sukkot, we sit in the temporary sukkah, which is open to the sky," Somerson writes. "We let go of the illusion that our walls can protect us from pain, disconnection, and death."

to kiss my earlobe. Jennifer tells me, "Both times you've talked about it, you've turned your head to the right."

At the end of summer when I make my yearly return to the coastal area of La Push, Washington, I recognize for the first time its gravitational pull as the corner of the earth where I feel the perfect balance of opening and containment. Night after night, as I sit on the pile of stones and logs watching the sun set behind the jagged sea stacks, my left side faces the ocean—open to the possibilities of its powerful tides. My right side is held by the sturdy land: the beach, and beyond that the tiny rows of cabins sitting on scrubby hills dotted with miniature Sitkas. Paths from the cabins, lined with wildflowers and tangled blackberry brambles, lead down to the sea, where migrating pelicans glide overhead.

Attempting to repair the broken trust in our relationship, Patricia and I practice the art of apology. While Patricia is the one literally making amends or teshuvah, my ability to accept her apology must come from an ability to forgive and trust—not only her, but also myself.

Walking toward me from the other side of the room, Patricia stops several feet away. She asks if she can come closer. I say yes or no. "I am sorry," she says. Each time. And then she moves forward or backward. We repeat this process many times. We stare straight into each other's eyes. At first nervous laughter escapes from my mouth, and my heart beats erratically. My shoulders shrug up, and anxiety prickles my chest. I say thank you to the first few apologies, and questions tumble through my mind: "Do I deserve an apology? Am I asking for too much? What is Patricia thinking? Does she resent me?"

But the simple repetition of the activity allows me to drop more deeply into my body. My laughter fades. I stop externally acknowledging her apologies at all, and I focus my attention inward. The questions change: "Do I believe her apology? What is her body saying to mine? How is my body responding?" I notice Patricia's shoulders are back. She is fully present in her body and within her dignity, but she is not rigid. Nor is she shrinking or appeasing or making herself smaller in any way. Her eyes are soft. She moves back when I tell her to. She moves forward when I tell her to.

I accept that she is genuinely sorry. I accept that she hadn't intended to cause me harm. The poured water of her apology fills my stomach and then spreads out, dousing my nerves with calm. My shoulders relax downward, and my center of gravity shifts and settles lower in my belly. I feel my breath unfurl into the space surrounding me as I reclaim my place in this relationship.

I notice: Her brown eyes are not vacant. Her brown eyes are not trying to annihilate me. Her brown eyes are not my father's.

At the end of the session, Patricia asks if and how she can hold me. I let her sit next to me on my left, and I slump sideways against her, while she puts her arm around my back. I sob while she comforts me in a way that I wasn't comforted as a kid.

The Day the World Was Born

Rosh Hashanah, which kicks off the ten High Holy days, commemorates the day the world is born, the day we start over, the day that something was created from nothing. It begins with the blowing of the shofar, the ram's horn, which forms a bridge between heaven and earth. When this bridge appears, we have the opportunity to feel our own divine origin. Yet this divinity is not based in our worldly achievements. We find divinity, instead, in our murky, shameful parts—the ones we hide away and see as faults. When we turn our attention inward, we can find the holy spark that resides within our darkest places. *(continued on page 60)*

THINKING ANEW ABOUT GOD

A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF *Tikkun* readers, perhaps inspired by the surge of New Atheist thinking, have told us that they don't believe in God. No worries! Our managing editor and many of our authors identify as agnostics or atheists too.

Some of you have also told us that even though you support the magazine's controversial stance against Israeli oppression of Palestinians, its opposition to racism and homophobia in the United States, and its powerful critique of global capitalism, you nevertheless see *Tikkun's* talk of spirituality as a slippery slope back to God. And you've said you're uncomfortable with this because you see beliefs in God as playing a reactionary role in contemporary society.

When these kinds of attitudes are expressed in many hip contemporary religious communities, a common reply is: "Well, the God you don't believe in is the God we and most contemporary spiritual/religious people don't believe in either. Those sexist, racist, homophobic, and hierarchical conceptions of God are not really what most enlightened God believers are talking about in the twenty-first century. And from Martin Luther King Jr. to Pope Francis, it is often religious leaders who are the most outspoken in their opposition to the ethical distortions of the contemporary world."

Yet many liberal and progressive people continue to be unaware of the truly radical notions of God that progressive theologians and believers are exploring. That's why we've decided to present some of those radical notions in this special issue of *Tikkun*. Visit tikkun.org/god-anew to read the powerful web exclusives associated with this issue, including contributions by Bradley Shavit Artson, John B. Cobb Jr., Matthew Fox, Catherine Keller, Donna Schaper, and Asma Uddin.

We'd be delighted to hear your critiques of these articles: please send responses to letters@tikkun.org or directly to our managing editor at alana@tikkun.org.

What Takes the Place of What Used to Be Called God?

BY SALLIE McFAGUE

TALKING ABOUT GOD has never been easy. Augustine, an early Christian theologian, claimed that all our language about God is like babies babbling. The Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas said everything he had written was “straw.” And the Jewish dictum that we should not even pronounce God’s name certainly has not made the task easier.

In our present community, conversations about God are further complicated by the fact that increasing numbers of people—including spiritual people—resist the idea of God. This ambivalence was reflected in *Tikkun*’s cautious invitation to write about what “takes the place of what used to be called God.”

Who is the God that we do not believe in? One problem with God-talk is that the conversational partners often assume that everyone means the same thing by the word “God”: the “guy in the sky,” or some more or less nuanced version of this stereotype. Both inside and outside religious communities, people often assume that “God” refers to a supernatural, all-powerful being who created the world and controls much of what happens on earth, both in public and personal matters. This image may never be discussed, but in ordinary, commonplace conversations, this is the God in whom we do not “believe.” Well, who would believe in such a God?! This view is totally out of line with everything else we know about our world, including postmodern science; hence, it is no wonder that so many educated, thoughtful people do not know how to think about “what used to be called God.”

Theism, Pantheism, and Panentheism

As a contribution to this discussion, I want to suggest just one thing: let us look briefly at three models of God—theism (or deism), pantheism, and panentheism. The first model says that God is distant from the world, abiding in a different space and controlling the world from a position of radical transcendence. This is the position that is usually

assumed in ordinary conversations. The second model says that there is no distinction between God and the world, since the entire world is sacred and infused with the divine. This position underscores radical immanence, claiming God and the world are essentially one. The third model is panentheism, in which God and the world are related in both a transcendent and immanent way, and the world is seen as *within* God but not identical with the divine.

What difference does it make which one of these models is assumed by conventional God-talk?

Conversations “about God” need to be clear about the model one has in mind because to assume everyone means the same thing by the word “God” is to already have answered the question in a particular direction.

To explain what I mean when I use the term, let me suggest an answer by referring to a theologian who has greatly influenced my thinking: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a twentieth-century French Jesuit. He claimed that when he was seven years old he realized he had a passion (*continued on page 62*)



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God and Goddess Emerging

BY MICHAEL LERNER

GOD IS ALL that is, was, and ever will be, and more. God is also all that makes possible the transformation from “that which is” to “that which can and ought to be.” That “can and ought to be” includes a world based on love; caring; kindness; generosity; joyful celebration with awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur and mystery of the universe; social and economic justice; peace and nonviolence; living in harmony with the earth and each other; and playfully celebrating our freedom and the development of our understanding of ourselves and our world.

But that is not the whole story of God, only the most uniquely Jewish and revolutionary aspect. When Judaism came into existence, it did not have to invent the notion of the world as sacred—that was already common knowledge. Judaism focused on bringing to the world a revelation about an aspect of God that was not adequately known or appreciated: God as the Force that makes transformation and a world based on love, generosity, and justice possible. It took the *elohim* (the various forces that had been understood to be sacred) and recognized them as one unified Force, a Force whose essence was freedom, love, justice, transcendence, and compassion: YHVH.

So long as humans are trapped in material scarcity, class societies, patriarchy, and other systems in which some human beings dominate and misrecognize others, the YHVH aspect of God (God as the Force of transformation) is badly needed. As I’ve described in *Spirit Matters* and in *The Left Hand of God*, these systems of domination result in a spiritual crisis worldwide. In the face of this crisis, the YHVH aspect of God provides a ground for hope that a fundamental healing and transformation of the world (*tikkun olam*) is possible.

When patriarchy and class oppression have been transcended and human beings are able to live together in accord with the basic injunctions of Torah (e.g., loving the stranger, seeking justice, pursuing peace, protecting the earth, sharing and replenishing the resources of the planet, and treating



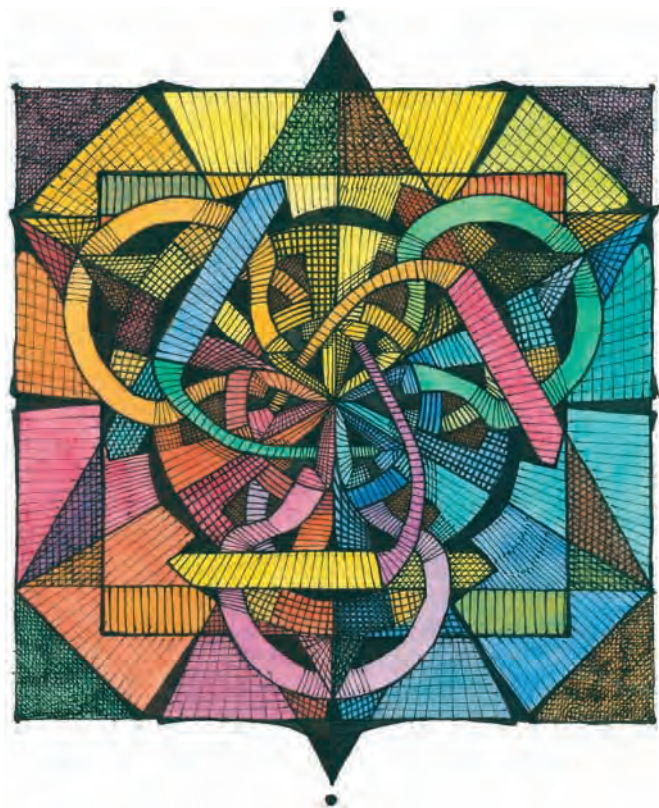
32 Paths of Creation by David Friedman.

everyone with kindness and openhearted generosity), other aspects of God’s reality may become more relevant to humanity. This Jewish conception of God as YHVH—the Force that makes possible this transformation to a world of love and social justice—will then be less significant. But in the current historical moment, YHVH is badly needed, though this conception or face of God needs to be infused with what contemporary Jewish feminists call the Goddess.

El Shaddai: The Breasted God

This idea of God being seen differently in different circumstances is reflected in the Torah text itself. God’s name (and the conception the name points to) changes from Genesis to Exodus. God tells Moses that “[I] appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by My name YHVH I made Me not known to them” (Exod. 6:3). El Shaddai—the Breasted God—may well have been a more feminine conception of God that the Jews had available to them in Canaan. Perhaps this conception later seemed less appropriate for the harshness the Israelites faced when enslaved in Egypt, so God’s liberatory face was revealed. The idea of YHVH was a different way for Jews to represent this God to themselves, a face of God that sustained us through long periods of powerlessness and oppression, keeping hope alive.

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Kosmic Knots by David Friedman.

In my view, the current moment of struggle to change the world requires a reclaiming of this El Shaddai feminine conception, which is most needed to overcome the internalization of capitalist values by much of humanity in the twenty-first century. Some Hasidic masters point to Shaddai as deriving from the Hebrew words *sheh dai* (literally “that is enough”) rather than from *shadayim* (breasts). My gloss: the first human experience of enoughness is at the mother’s breast, and in a historical moment in which capitalist materialism pushes us to believe that we must have more and more things so that “the economy” can expand endlessly—meanwhile destroying the earth and threatening the future survivability of human and animal life on this planet—it is precisely this God of “enoughness” and of loving motherly energy that is badly needed to counter the internalized demands of the capitalist order. So in this historical moment, El Shaddai must be wedded to YHVH in order to transform our economic and political system to ensure the survival of life on this planet.

It’s not uncommon for many people today who are otherwise sophisticated to think that they are rejecting the Jewish God when they tell you that they can’t believe in some all-powerful, all-knowing, Unmoved Mover who sits in heaven and sends down blessings or curses according to his mood and who can be influenced by prayers or sacrifices. It is true that Jewish prayers sometimes reflect this notion of God, but it is not true that it is the only Jewish way of thinking about God. Indeed, all the Abrahamic religions have had a

multitude of ways of understanding God, often influenced by the dominant worldviews of the society in which their adherents have lived.

The Hellenistic Focus on Omnipotence

As Babylonian, then Persian, then Greek, and then Roman imperialists conquered Judea, Jews began to understand YHVH within the discourse of the then-dominant Hellenistic culture. Some Jewish thinkers sought to adapt our conception of God to “reality” as then experienced in a patriarchal world in which “power over others” defined the way the elites and those whom they employed as teachers, soldiers, scribes, and priests of religion actually lived. Two thousand years ago the Jewish philosopher Philo sought to reconceive God in terms that would fit the dominant Hellenistic paradigms of Greek philosophy, with its notion of God as the Unmoved Mover, the all-powerful and all-knowing. Medieval Jewish philosophers, including Maimonides, continued in that same direction. The notion of omnipotence or omniscience comes from Hellenistic cultures and their conception of the universe, in which the highest good is to be a spirit abstracted from need, emotion, and body. Perfection is to be totally un-needy, independent, and self-caused. This may well fit the spirit of primitive or even more evolved commercial or capitalist environments, but it’s not the only possible conception of the highest good.

Abraham Joshua Heschel demonstrated in his book *The Prophets* that this notion of an all-powerful, all-knowing, emotionless God is not the biblical conception of God. The God of the Bible is emotional, passionate, and in need of human beings as partners in the process of *tikkun*—the repair and transformation of the world. To the Greeks, this was a scandal. God had to be complete, perfect, and unchanging, transcending the vicissitudes of history. Eventually many Jews were influenced by Hellenistic thought, and elements of Hellenistic beliefs found their ways into the prayers, the philosophy, and even the folklore of the Jewish people.

Similarly, in later periods, Christian conceptions (themselves influenced by both Hellenistic thought and the Persia-based Mithra religion) were taken up by both popular and high Jewish culture. In patriarchal cultures, the ideal was the all-powerful male, supposedly the embodiment of the God who needs nothing and is self-contained, while women were denigrated because of their perceived neediness (as expressed through their emotionality). Moreover, the conception of God as more powerful than the dominant rulers of the world gave Jews, as a then powerless and subordinated people, a measure of hope that this God could eventually help us overcome the oppressive realities of the world in which we lived. So no wonder it was appealing to embrace the notion of an all-powerful God.

God as a Loving Force of Transformation

Yet in the Aleynu prayer, said three times daily and enshrined in the Mishnah some eighteen hundred years ago, the goal we sought was *le'takeyn olam be'malchut Shaddai* (translatable as “transform the world under the rule of the breasted one”). We were aspiring for the female energy (also referred to elsewhere as Shechinah) of love, kindness, and compassion (*rachamim*, from the Hebrew word *rechem*, meaning “womb”) to become the shaping force in reality. And that energy is not self-contained but rather is always seeking a partner, always in relationship, always in need of the other. Heschel talks of God’s need for humanity as part of the path to finish the work of creation and redemption. And though he doesn’t name it as such, I believe that Heschel’s God is YHVH merged with El Shaddai—that is, the transformative power now understood as seeking a world of love and generosity, and seeking to be in loving partnership with all humanity.

With this reintegration of the feminine and masculine energies of God, which I believe to be so badly needed today, YHVH becomes the Force of transformation that makes possible a world based on love and generosity. But that Force does not act with force; it acts through love. The Shechinah or feminine presence of God is the face of God that is needed again, and becomes explicit in the Kabbalistic tradition, particularly in the Zohar; gets expression in some strands of Hasidism; and is now desperately needed in all the religious traditions of humanity. For a starter, God is not just Father but also Mother. This God contracts Herself in order to make space for an “other,” human beings, who will eventually become partners with God in tikkun, the healing and transformation of the world.

What would a Mother God be like? A mother who sees her children growing up and making mistakes adopts mothering approaches appropriate to her child’s developmental stage. When the child is in infancy and early childhood, she will act to protect the child, correct its mistakes, and teach the child her own wisdom about what will bring that child safety and happiness. But as the child becomes older and reaches adolescence and beyond, the mother recognizes that respect for the child’s dignity and freedom requires that she no longer interfere in the child’s life, even when she is certain that the child is making wrong or even disastrous choices. She can continue to put out her teachings, but she can no longer stop the adolescent or adult child from making choices she knows will be harmful. She may cry as she witnesses the destructive consequences of the grown child’s choices, but she will not try to interfere, because even if it were possible, doing so would in effect eliminate that child’s freedom and self-determination, infantilizing and thereby undermining the freedom of the child, created in the image of God, to make its own choices.



Transcending and Including by David Friedman.

Why God Doesn’t Intervene

The partner God seeks in humanity is one that embodies God’s freedom and hence must be allowed to make its own mistakes. What God can do is simply to continue to put out into the world her message of the kind of world she/he/it wants to see. This message is received in many different ways by humanity, depending on the psychological, intellectual, and spiritual frameworks that various segments of humanity have developed—these varying frameworks influence how different communities hear God’s voice.

One reason many smart and sensitive people have trouble thinking about God is that they imagine God to be a Being who could and should have intervened to lessen the sufferings of the Jews and others during the Holocaust, and in other instances of unacceptable and horrific human suffering, but didn’t. Although they know that they don’t really believe in this god of miracles intervening in human history, they are angry at “him” for not existing and so won’t allow themselves to know the God that does exist.

There’s every reason to be angry that the world has been so full of hatred, evil, and unredeemable suffering (experienced not just by Jews but by much of humanity). To the extent that one wants to conceptualize God as a big spirit in the sky that could have intervened and didn’t, there’s every reason to be angry at this god.



God is in everything, and we are in God. God is everything about the universe that makes transformation possible—from our Milky Way to the distant Andromeda Galaxy pictured here, and beyond!

I believe that anyone who wants to give the actually existing, living God a chance needs to first engage in a certain amount of rage at the god they wish existed and who has let them down. By expressing our anger and disappointment that God is not some big patriarch in heaven who kindly intervenes in human life, we can get beyond that vision; then we can be open to acknowledging the God who does exist, a god who will not intervene and undermine human freedom, a God who at this stage in the evolution of the consciousness of the human race will only repeat her/his/its message calling for a world of love and justice and compassion and stewardship of the earth to anyone who will listen.

Who Is the God Who Does Exist?

On one hand, God is everything in the universe (or multiverse) that makes possible the transformation of *that which is* to *that which can and ought to be*, and the Force in the universe that we can experience as calling us to become her/his/its partner in healing and transforming the world in accord with its potential to be loving, caring, generous, just, etc. This is an account of how God manifests in our lives. But it doesn't answer the ontological questions: What is this Being? Is it a separate being from us, or is it simply a way of describing an aspect of the natural world? I'm committed to saying it is something more, but how do I explain what that "more" is?

I'm sure my answer (like any answer) is likely to be at least as misleading as it is accurate, because our language has developed to describe and re-identify experiences we have in daily life, whereas God is a reality that transcends daily life and its categories and hence cannot be fully described in everyday language. I can point to my own experience of overwhelming joy and awe at the mystery and magnificence of the universe, my encounter with God through daily prayer and meditation, and my radical amazement as I rejoice in

nature and hear the still small voice of God's revelation. I can even in my role as rabbi show you the Jewish path to having similar mystical experiences to mine, but none of my words are sufficient to do more than point in the direction of this experience. Just as I can neither fully explain mystical, meditative, aesthetic, psychedelic, and love-related experiences, nor recapture in language what is so deeply moving and exciting in these experiences, I'm unable to really reach through language to the dimension of the holy, sacred, awesome, and unique experience of God. All the less so, then, can I tell you what God really *is* in her/his/its essence. All that I can do is tell you two stories that try to capture in human terms what occasionally helps me to think about what I'm in relationship with when I'm in relationship to God—a Being that transcends our categories.

God as the Consciousness of the Universe

God is the consciousness of all possible universes and more. All the actual and possible universes are in this consciousness in the same way that my thoughts are in my body but not reducible to any part of my body. My body swims in a field of consciousness that both permeates every part of my body and extends beyond it. In a similar way, the actual and possible universes swim in the consciousness that is God.

But consciousness is not some ghostly reality separate from the physical world, for one important reason: the whole notion of a physical world, like the notion of consciousness, is a human construct. Our language necessarily dichotomizes and separates reality into distinct elements, but the real world—the universe and all its dimensions—is never broken into distinct elements. The entirety of all that is has always been in relationship to all the rest of what is. The universe is a field of interacting realities that can never be separated

from each other except in human categories. As Continental philosophers have tried to teach us for a long time, in dissecting reality with those categories we also kill it. Our categories give us access to the dead universe, but rarely—except in poetry, music, art, and spiritual, religious, mystical, and psychedelic experience—do we get an inkling of what a universe of relationships is really like. Rarely do we get an inkling of what it means to proclaim, as we Jews do several times a day, the oneness of all being and all reality, and then to say that in the end of time, when tikkun has come about and the world has been transformed, fixed, repaired, and mended, not only will God be One (as she/he/it already is), but her name will be “One.”

Describing God as the consciousness of the universe, and thereby trying to explain God by using a familiar category, gives us an idea of who God is—or so we think, until we realize that this consciousness is actually a mystery as well. And though for a long time scientists have been promising that they will soon be able to explain what consciousness really is, they are still only grasping at the physical correlates of consciousness. They will never be able to explain the inner subjective experience of it. Though sometimes we are encouraged by our dualistic language to say that we *have* experiences, the fuller reality is that we *are* our experiences, which are taking place in and around us in our physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual unity, which we call “me” or “I.” And this “me” or “I” is intrinsically part of an infinity of other physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual unities that together constitute the life force of the universe (or multiverse).

The case for a universe that is intrinsically teleological, not a product of blind physical forces that collide and combine by accident, has recently been bolstered by Thomas Nagel, for whom I served as a teaching assistant at the University of California, Berkeley, in the mid-1960s. In his book *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*, Nagel argues for “a cosmic predisposition to the formation of life, consciousness, and the value that is inseparable from them.”

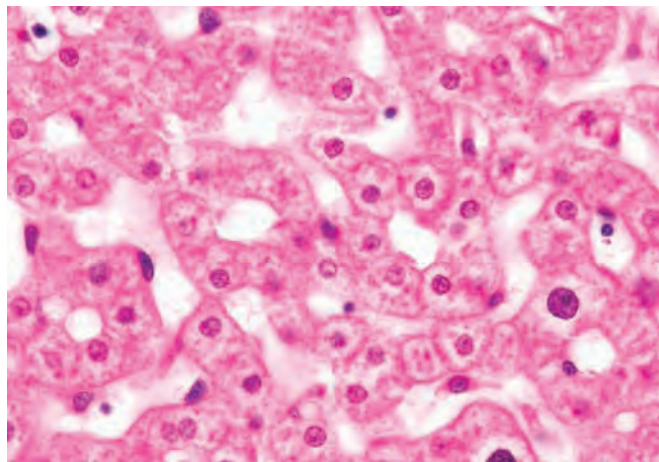
Nagel himself wants to steer away from the notion of a pre-existing God that makes all this happen, so he goes on to say that “the tendency for life to form may be a basic feature of the natural order, not explained by the non-teleological laws of physics and chemistry.” Nagel goes on to argue:

Once there are beings who can respond to value, the rather different teleology of intentional action becomes part of the historical picture, resulting in the creation of new value. The universe has become not only conscious and aware of itself but capable in some respects of choosing its path into the future—though all three, the consciousness, the knowledge and the choice, are dispersed over a vast crowd of beings, acting both individually and collectively.

Nagel does us a real service by reminding us that “it is too easy to forget how radical is the difference between the subjective and the objective, and to fall into the error of thinking about the mental in terms taken from our ideas of physical events and processes.”

So one approach we might take is to say that this preexisting teleological tendency of life to form and to develop consciousness, intentionality, and an awareness of the need to build an ethical world is simply a central part of what we mean by saying God is running the universe and directing its evolution in a particular way. Or we can avoid the potentially scary (to some) similarity of that claim to the claims of “creationists” by saying that God evolved as part of this process. My teacher Zalman Schachter-Shalomi alludes to this kind of evolution of God when he says that God was “a young God” when she/he/it was involved in the mistakes that God made in dealing with humans in the Torah. God is developing along with human beings, and although God was part of the universe from the start, God is becoming self-conscious through us. Or to put it another way, we (and all other self-conscious beings) are the elements in the universe through which God is becoming self-conscious.

But the evolution of God in this way is not an accident—it is not a product of the accidental collision of material elements in the cosmic stew. Rather, it is the manifestation of the tendencies of the universe, no matter how many billions of years it may have taken to get here and how many billions more it may take, for the consciousness of the universe to actually find companionship in a self-conscious being (whether human or nonhuman) capable of being spiritually, ethically, emotionally, and intellectually God’s partner and hence the true fulfillment of being “created in the image of God.” (*continued on page 62*)



“The liver cell is part of something larger, it ‘knows’ and responds to that larger something, and it is absolutely dependent on that larger totality,” Rabbi Lerner writes. “Human beings stand in similar relationship with God,” and with as much understanding of God as the liver cell has of the being in which it is functioning.

The Empty Throne

Reimagining God as Creative Energy

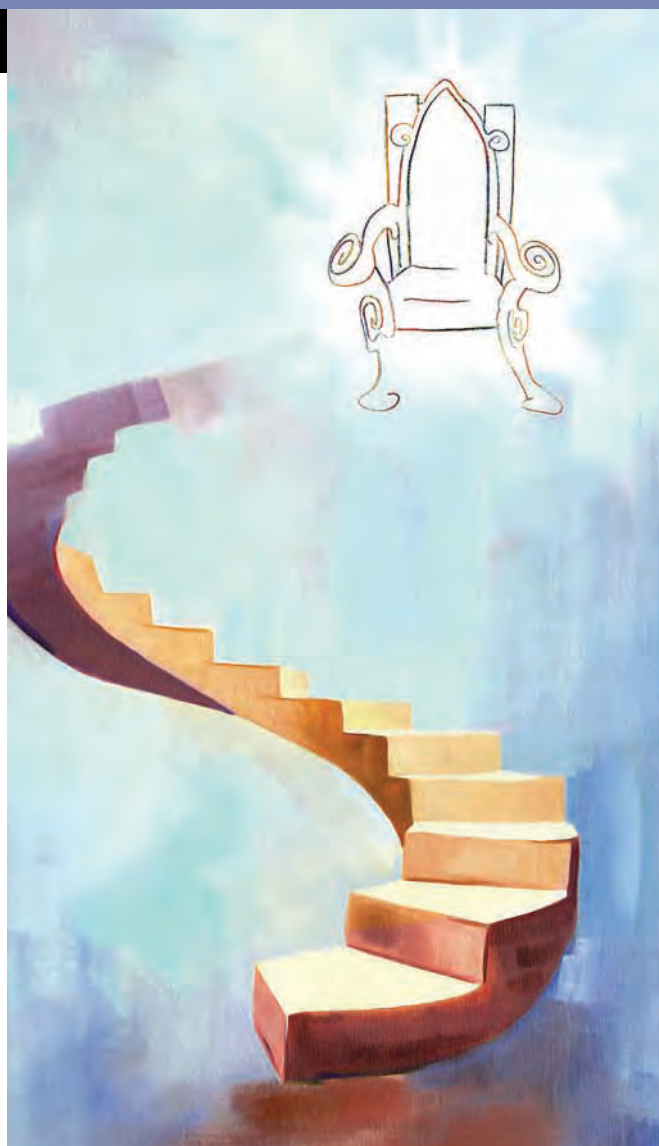
BY ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

MANY PEOPLE ARE ambivalent or negative when asked if they believe in God. Part of this reaction has to do with what they assume the questioner means by the term “God.” The image many in the Jewish and Christian traditions see when God is mentioned is of an old man with a beard sitting on a throne in the sky and ruling over the world. Understandably, many doubt the existence of such a figure.

My own reimagining of the figure of God found expression in a dramatic experience many years ago, and this experience has shaped my assumptions ever since that time. This experience happened when I was in my late teens or early twenties, about fifty-five years ago. I had been cogitating for some time about whether God existed. One day I had what I would call a “waking vision.” This was not a dream, for I was awake, but it was like a dream in that I experienced myself entering into a visual drama.

In this drama I experienced myself standing in a great hall, looking at great double doors at the end of the hall. I opened the doors and found a winding staircase leading upward. I began to climb the stairs, and at the top of each landing I found a new staircase. I continued climbing and climbing, until finally I found myself on the outside of another set of doors. I knew that these were the doors to the throne room of God. I would finally know the answer to the question I had been asking myself about whether God existed. With some trepidation I threw open the doors and saw within a great throne with its back to me. I peeked about the throne to see who was in it and saw that it was empty. There was no one on the throne!

I realized immediately that my former idea of God as an old man sitting on a throne in the sky was meaningless. Such a “person” does not exist. But that does not mean that God does not exist. One has to have a different understanding of what kind of God does exist. God is not an old man outside the earth living in the sky, but rather a creative energy that is in and through the whole earth. This creative energy isn’t a



The Empty Throne by Olivia Wise.

human being, male or female—rather, it is within and underlying all beings (animals and plants), earth, air, and water. It is personal and transpersonal. It is the energy of renewal and transformation that was the basis of all creation. This is the divinity that I had experienced every day. This is the God to which I could relate, had been relating, and could continue to relate in my daily life.

This experience more than half a century ago has decisively shaped my living reality and my theological reflection since that time. He/she/it (I prefer “she”) is what I feel in myself, in other people, in all things. When I hear preachers or liturgists talking about God, I translate the term into this root experience. And I marvel with delight.

This understanding of the divine as the energy of creativity and renewal also demands a reimagining of the many roles that religions have assigned to God. (*continued on page 65*)

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Two Feminist Views of Goddess and God

BY JUDITH PLASKOW AND CAROL P. CHRIST

LIKE MOST FEMINIST theologians, we have rejected the idea of God as an old white man with a long white beard who reigns over the world from a throne in heaven. The idea that a good and all-powerful God rules the world from outside it has been rendered implausible not only by the Holocaust but also by the long history of women's oppression and the equally long history of slavery. As Nietzsche announced, and as theologians have increasingly recognized, the omnipotent and transcendent God of traditional theologies is dead.

For some, this is the end of the matter, but for those of us for whom spirituality remains important, the task is to reimagine and redefine God. We suggest that the God who is not dead is *in* the world, not beyond it—not totally transcendent of the world but also immanent in it. The power of a God in the world is not the *power over* of a dominating (male) other, but rather must be understood in more relational terms as power with, power within, and power of being.

With other feminist theologians, we have been arguing for many years that God cannot be understood as a dominating, totally transcendent, male other. The two of us agree that symbols matter, and we both seek alternatives to the traditional image of God as an old white man, including symbols of God She or Goddess and images of divinity drawn from nature. While, in our early work, neither of us had fully conceptualized an alternative to the traditional understanding of God, we assumed that as our views developed we would probably come to similar conclusions. To our great surprise (and it must be said, dismay), we did not.

Our conversations about the nature of God intensified when one of us (Carol) began to define Goddess as “the intelligent embodied love that is the power of all being” and the other (Judith) began to recognize that, for her, God is neither personal nor loving. As we argued about our differences and clarified our own positions, we articulated two different views of divinity that we believe will have resonance among feminist theologians and others who have rejected God the Father in Heaven.



“As we argued about our differences . . . we clarified two different views of divinity,” the coauthors write. *Healing Circle* by Janice Fried.

For Carol, divinity is omnipresent, not omnipotent: Goddess is the love and understanding immanent in the joy and suffering of all individuals in the world, calling them to love and understand more deeply and more fully. Judith also rejects the omnipotent God of traditional theologies. For her, God is inclusive of good and evil, the power of creativity that undergirds all life processes; this God is not personal or solely good, but rather is the power undergirding everything. We suspect that many feminists and other reflective individuals who take the problem of evil seriously, yet in some

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See God in Everything by Janice Fried.

sense believe in God, will gravitate toward one or the other of these views.

Over the past decade neither of us has been able to persuade the other to change her view through rational argument. We have concluded that, while rational arguments have an important place in theological discussions, they must be situated in experience—both personal and historical. We are thus currently writing a book together, tentatively titled *Goddess and God in Light of Feminism*, in which we address the question of the nature of God and Goddess in the form of an embodied theological dialogue. In a similar spirit of dialogue, we have chosen to coauthor this contribution to *Tikkun's* special issue on God, working together to present our two plausible—and for us compelling—alternatives to a traditional understanding of God.

Judith's View: God Is the Creative Energy Underlying Everything

My understanding of God has changed dramatically in the course of my adult life. Throughout these changes, God's relationship to evil has remained a central question for me. For many years, I held a traditional view of God as an omnipotent (male) person beyond and outside the world who had the power to intervene in human affairs. My stance toward this God was one of anger for what I saw as his betrayal of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and his wider failure

to stop a host of other evils. When I became a feminist as a graduate student in theology at Yale, I began to question my prior notion of God and watched it gradually crumble in the face of both intellectual critique and new religious insights that came to me through feminism.

My current beliefs about God can be stated very simply: I see God as the creative energy that underlies, animates, and sustains all existence. God is the Ground of Being; the source of all that is; the power of life, death, and regeneration in the universe. God's presence fills all creation, and creation simultaneously dwells in God. In theological language, I am a panentheist: I believe in a God who is present in everything and yet at the same time is not identical with all that is. In my book *Standing Again at Sinai*, I used a part/whole analogy to describe the relationship between God and the world and also communities and the subgroups of which they are composed, and I still find that analogy compelling. Just as many communities are more than the sum of their parts, so God is more than the totality of creation. Indeed, God includes and *unifies* creation. The idea of unity or oneness is particularly central to my understanding of God. Believing in God means affirming that, despite the fractured, scattered, and conflicted nature of our experience of both the world and ourselves, there is a unity that embraces and contains our diversity and that connects all things to each other.

In my concept of God, wholeness or inclusiveness carries more theological weight than goodness. The world as we know it has little use for human plans and aspirations. We can be stunned by the beauty of the raging waters of the sea and, an instant later, find ourselves and the things we love annihilated by them. We can be astounded by the care, altruism, and intricate interdependence found everywhere in nature and also by its predation and violence. When we look at ourselves, we find the same, often ambiguous mixture of motives and effects.

Most people are capable of great kindness and also cruelty. Human beings have imagined remarkable ways to care for the most vulnerable among us and have also used our inventiveness to torture and kill. Moreover, there is not a straightforward relationship between our intentions and their outcomes. Things we mean for the good frequently have unforeseen negative consequences, just as we can mean something for ill and yet good can come from it. To deny God's presence in all this, to see God only in the good, seems to me to leave huge aspects of reality outside God. Where then do they come from? How are they able to continue in existence? How can we not see that the same amazing inventiveness that allows us to establish systems of justice, feed the hungry, and find cures for many diseases is present when we develop new weapons or build crematoria?

It is this issue of the ambiguity of God that is the clearest continuing thread that has marked my perspective from girlhood to the present. On one hand, I can no longer accept the

notion of an omnipotent God who intervenes in the world or remains aloof according to standards utterly beyond our comprehension. Aside from the incoherence of the notion that God has all the power while we have none, why would we worship such an arbitrary tyrant? On the other hand, the words of Isaiah—"I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things"—still resonate for me as a profound metaphor for the ambiguity of the creative energy that pulses through the whole complex web of creation and sustains us in life.

I would maintain, though it may not seem so, that this notion of God provides significant grounding for ethical reflection and action. While the creative energy flowing through the world may have no moral purpose, the notion of *oneness* embodies a profound moral trajectory. To say that God is one, or that the divine presence that animates the universe is one, is to say that we are all bound to each other in the continual unfolding of the adventure of creation. In the human family, for all our differences, we are more alike than we are unlike. All of us are faces of the God who dwells within each of us; the same standards of justice should apply to everyone. When we harm, diminish, or oppress any one of us, we harm ourselves. And this is true not simply of human beings, but of the whole of creation.

We are linked to each other in a remarkably complex, intricate web of life, the individual elements of which are thoroughly interconnected. As one of the characters in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* says about her changing conception of God, "My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. . . . One day it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed." As creatures who have self-consciousness and who, in our better moments, are able to glimpse and appreciate our place in the larger whole, we have a deep ethical obligation to act in the interests of that whole and the individuals and human and biotic communities within it. We are just one species on a small planet in one solar system. Yet we have developed a unique capacity to overwhelm and poison the ecological system of which we are part. In the words of Deuteronomy, we are poised between life and death, blessing and curse (30:19). Our ability to "choose life" requires us to act on behalf of the flourishing of life, to participate in the unfolding of divine creativity as it manifests itself in the myriad forms of creation.

Why call the energy that animates and sustains the universe *God*? I am aware that there are people who call themselves secular who are equally humbled by the vitality and adaptiveness of creation, and who joyously affirm the value of life and human existence. Though my sensibility may not be so far from theirs, there are several reasons that I am unwilling to relinquish the word "God" for the power that brings everything into being and supports it in life.



"In the midst of our ordinary lives, we can at moments glimpse a reality deeper and more fundamental," Judith Plaskow writes. *Swimming Pool* by Janice Fried.

For one thing, the *feelings* evoked by this power and its manifestation in a beautiful and varied world are feelings traditionally associated with being in relation to God: awe, gratitude, vulnerability, smallness, dependence, and also significance in the sense of having a place and a calling in relation to the greater whole. "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars," says Walt Whitman, "and the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of a wren." The reverence before each and every aspect of creation as an expression of God's infinite creativity, the notion that "a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels," seems to me the quintessence of a religious attitude.

Second, the *experience* of being part of something larger than the self—the notion that, in the midst of our ordinary lives, we can at moments glimpse a reality deeper and more fundamental than, yet not separate from, those things we concern ourselves with everyday—is common to many of the world's religious traditions and is certainly central to Judaism.

Third, the idea that Oneness has built into it an ethical imperative—that to know the world as God's unified, ongoing creation is also to know that we are required to tend and care for that creation—coheres with and can make sense of the notion of *commandedness* that is central to Judaism and that finds expression both in specific ethical injunctions and in the sanctification of daily life. There is no commander who

issues orders from outside the web of creation, but there are obligations inherent in the interconnectedness of things that link our own self-interest to the preservation and prospering of all life.

Fourth, as an engaged Jew, when I think of God as the ever-flowing wellspring of life, I am able to say what I mean when I pray, describing who or what I see myself as addressing. Indeed, imagining God in this way *enables* me to pray. To what else shall I speak other than to the reality that brought me and everything else into existence, that is an ever-renewing source of strength when I am troubled or downcast, and that challenges me to bear witness to the oneness of all things in the way I act in the world?

Carol's View: Goddess Is Intelligent, Embodied Love

My theology is rooted in the transformative power of images and symbols of Goddess in a culture that has been dominated by male images of God. I agree with Mary Daly that when God is (exclusively) male, the male is God. The symbol of Goddess is an affirmation of women's power, bodies, will, and relationships with each other: it has the metaphoric power to transform the hold of male images of God in the mind. Further, the image of God as female has the power to transform classical dualism's separation of mind and body, thought and feeling, spirit and nature, and male and female, challenging the absolute categorical distinctions between God, humanity, and nature. Images and symbols of Goddess remind us that the earth is sacred, that the earth is our true home, that we must embrace a finite life that includes death, and that all beings are connected in the web of life. I speak of the divine power as Goddess, as I believe this word has great power, while recognizing that this deity can also be called God. I believe male symbols of God are important too but insist that symbols of God as a dominating male other must be transformed. My view is inclusive monotheism, in which a plurality of symbols—female, male, and those drawn from nature—point to a single divine power.

While experiencing the power of Goddess symbols and rituals, I was unsure whether Goddess is a personal power who cares about the lives of human beings and all other individuals in the world or simply the name for the powers of birth, death, and regeneration found in nature and in all creative processes. The fact that Goddess is addressed in ritual and prayer suggests the former, while images of Goddess as earth, air, fire, and water may suggest the latter. Many in the Goddess movement have felt no need to resolve this question, but I did. The experience I had when my mother died was a turning point.

As my mother died, I felt the room fill with an immense power of love. This did not feel like my mother's love for me or mine for her; rather it seemed to me to be a great power



"The symbol of Goddess is an affirmation of women's power, bodies, will, and relationships with each other," Carol P. Christ writes. This Minoan Snake Goddess figurine from Crete dates back to approximately 1600 BCE.

of love that included us both and everything else. Since that moment I have felt this power of love in everything while going about my daily life. Sometimes I feel it more intensely, and sometimes I need to remind myself of it; nonetheless, from the moment of my mother's death, I have never doubted that a great matrix of love supports and sustains the world. It makes me a happier and more joyful person to feel that love surrounds me and everything else in the world. I define Goddess in terms of this experience.

In my book *Rebirth of the Goddess*, I wrote that Goddess is "the intelligent embodied love that is the ground of all being" and asserted that the world is the body of Goddess. When I defined Goddess as embodied love, I felt it important to add "intelligent" in order to affirm that love is by no means an irrational feeling. Goddess not only loves the world but understands it as well. Her understanding is like that of a compassionate and intelligent therapist or friend who sees us as we are and inspires us to become who we can become. I took the phrase "the ground of being" (to which I added "all") from theologian Paul Tillich. While Tillich had been referring to God or Being as the *metaphysical* whole out of which individual beings arise, I have always heard the English translation of his German words in a *physical* sense as well—as referring to the ground beneath our feet, the earth that supports us. I agree with Mary Daly that both Being and be-ings are not static, as Tillich may have thought, but changing. (continued on page 65)

A Beaked and Feathered God

Rediscovering Christian Animism

BY MARK I. WALLACE

TODAY THE WOOD THRUSH returned to the Crum Woods. I have been waiting for this event for months. I first heard the thrush's strange and wonderful birdcall three years ago, when I moved to a house in the woods outside Philadelphia. My friend Adrienne announced, "That's the thrush! It's back." She explained that the thrush, while wintering in Mexico and Central America, spends the rest of the year in the eastern United States eating grubs, raising its young, and singing its beautiful song.

The Singing Monk of the Crum Woods

The song of the wood thrush is unlike anything else I have ever heard—liquid, flute-like, and perfectly pitched. The thrush vocalizes a kind of duet with itself in which it simultaneously produces two independent musical notes that reverberate with each other. To me it sounds like throat singing, the vocal technique that Tibetan monks use to sing two notes at the same time—a baseline and a melody line in contrapuntal balance—by amplifying their harmonic overtones. So I think of the wood thrush as the singing monk of the forest.

In the spring and summer I wake up, and often go to sleep, to the vocal pleasures of a bird that I cannot see, but I know that—like God's Spirit—the thrush is there. I hear its lilting cadence from dawn to dusk, but I've seen only one wood thrush during the time I've lived in the Crum Woods. I creep around the forest floor looking skyward, hoping for a sighting, but the wood thrush always escapes my gaze. Instead, I keep my window open at night as a vector for the thrush's call. Bathed in its music, I find it hard to distinguish between waking and sleeping, between twilight, midnight, and early morning.

Thrushes prefer just the right habitat blend for sustenance and breeding: running water, dense underbrush, and moist soil full of fruiting plants and insects to eat. Like other neotropical songbirds, it is threatened by habitat loss through



A wood thrush raises its beak in song.

continued development of its home range. It is also endangered by brood parasites, such as brown-headed cowbirds, which lay their own eggs in wood thrush nests, crowding out the host's eggs and hatchlings. The perdurance of the thrush in the face of these obstacles gives me hope in a time of despair about the world's future.

Thoreau wrote in his journal that whoever hears the song of the wood thrush enters a "new world" where the "gates of heaven are not shut against" the listener. For me, the earth comes alive with mystery and wonder when I hear this bird's ethereal song. In my own particular bioregion, the thrush opens to me the beauty of the Crum Woods as a vital habitat—indeed, as a sacred forest—whenever I am graced by its haunting polyphony.

Sacred Nature

To call the Crum Woods a sacred forest may seem odd if one is using traditional religious vocabulary. I will focus on Christianity in this essay, but the other global monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, would also find the ascription of sacredness to particular landscapes out of character. In the case of Christianity, classical theologians avoided ascribing religious value to natural places and living things, restricting terms such as *sacred*, *holy*, and *blessed* to God alone. In general, historic Christian opinion desacralized nature by divesting it of religious significance. While the Bible is suffused with images of sacred nature—God formed Adam and Eve from the dust of the ground; called to Moses through a burning bush; spoke through Balaam's donkey; arrested Job's attention in a whirlwind; used a great whale to send

Jonah a message; and appeared alternately as a man, a lamb, and a dove throughout the New Testament—Christianity evolved into a sky-God religion in which God was seen as an invisible, heavenly being not of the same essence as plants, animals, rivers, and mountains.

But in the earth-centered narrative arc of the biblical stories, this historical evaluation of nature as devoid of sacred worth is entirely absent. In the Bible, God is not an invisible sky-God but a fully incarnated being who walks and talks in human form, sprouts leaves and grows roots in the good soil of creation, and—clothed in bright plumage and airy flesh—takes flight and soars through the updrafts of wind and sky. An astoundingly rich variety of natural phenomena are charged with sacred presence in the biblical accounts, with God appearing alternately in human and plant forms—and in animal form, as I will highlight here.

God's Avian Spirit

The feathered bird God of creation is the central figure in the Bible's inaugural creation story. In the beginning the earth was formless and empty, and God's Spirit swept across the dark waters of the great oceans. The Hebrew verb used by the Genesis authors to describe the Spirit's movement in Genesis 1:1–2 is *merahefet*, alternately translated as to “hover over,” “sweep over,” “move over,” “flutter over,” or “tremble over.” This verb describes the activity of a mother bird in the care of her young in the nest. One grammatical clue to the meaning of this dynamic verb can be found in Deuteronomy 32:11, where God is said to be a protector of Jacob in a manner akin to the way “an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers [*merahefet*] over its young.” Using the same winged imagery deployed by the author of Deuteronomy, the writer of Genesis characterizes the Spirit as a flying, avian being—a bird or something like a bird—to describe its nurturing care over the great expanse—perhaps we should say the great egg?—of creation. Analogous to a mother eagle brooding over her nest, God's avian Spirit hovering over the face of the watery deep is a divine-animal hybrid that challenges the conventional separation of the divine order and the animal kingdom in much of classical Christian thought.

In the story of Jesus's baptism in the four gospels, God as Spirit comes down from heaven as a bird and alights on Jesus's newly baptized body (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; and John 1:31–34), much as in the Genesis account. All four accounts tell of the same gospel memory, namely, that as Jesus presents himself to be baptized by John the Baptist, and is baptized, the Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove from heaven, and then, in the synoptic gospels, a voice from heaven says, “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.” I suspect the people who came to John for baptism were not surprised to see the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. In biblical times, doves—in addition to other divinized flora and fauna—figured prominently in the history of



The Holy Spirit takes the form of a dove in this painting, *Coronación de la Virgen*, by Diego Velázquez.

Israel as archetypes of God's compassion. Noah sends a dove out after the flood to test whether dry land has appeared (Genesis 8:6–12). Abraham sacrifices a dove to God to honor God's covenant with him to make Israel a great nation (Genesis 15). Solomon calls his beloved “my dove,” a heartfelt term of longing and endearment (Song of Solomon 2:14, 4:1, 5:2, and 6:9). And Jeremiah and Ezekiel refer to doves' swift flight, careful nesting, and plaintive cooing as metaphors for human beings' pursuit of nurture and safety in times of turmoil and distress (Ezekiel 7:16; Jeremiah 48:28). As divine emissary and guardian of sacred order, the dove is a living embodiment of God's protection, healing, and love.

Luke's story of Jesus's baptism and concomitant announcement of the God-dove is a thoughtful summary of the gospels' overall narrative of Jesus's ritual immersion. After highlighting Jesus's baptism by John and then the opening of the heavens, Luke says, “and the Holy Spirit descended upon [Jesus] in bodily form [*somatiko eidei*], as a dove [*hos peristeran*]” (Luke 3:22). In this phrase, the Greek adjective *somatikos*, from the noun *soma* (body), signifies the shape or appearance of something in corporeal form. Here the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Christian Godhead, comes into full bodily *animal* existence—in the same manner that the second member of the Godhead, Jesus, bodies forth himself in fully physical *human* form.

In all four of the gospel baptism stories, God as Spirit becomes a very specific type of animated physical body: a

seed-eating, nest-building, flying member of the avian order of things. The particular beak-and-feathers body that Luke's spirit-animal becomes is defined by the phrase *hos peristeran*, which means "as a dove," "even like a dove," or "just as a dove"—that is, the Spirit's body is thoroughly bird-like. Some English translations of the Lukan and other gospel accounts of Jesus's baptism miss this point. While the Revised Standard Version says, "The Holy Spirit descended upon him *as* a dove," the New Revised Standard Version prefers, "The Holy Spirit descended upon him *like* a dove" (emphases mine). But the preposition *hos*—from *hos peristeran* in the original Greek text of Luke 3:22 and elsewhere—does not operate here metaphorically or analogically, but predicatively. The phrase "as a dove (*hos peristeran*)" in this context is not a simile that says that the Spirit descended in bodily form *like* a dove, but rather a depiction of the physical being the Spirit has become. In other words, the Spirit descended in bodily form *as* a dove. In the grammar of predication, the Spirit *is* a dove, not *like* a dove. Luke 3:22, then, is not a figure of speech to connote the temporary bird-like appearance of the Spirit in this one instance, but a literal description of the actual bird-creature God has become.

Christian Animism

The parallelism between the bird God of Genesis and the one in the Gospels makes clear that God is flesh—in this case, animal flesh. God embodying Godself as a cosmic avian being, on the one hand, and as a nest-building dove with bones, beak, and feathers, on the other, contradicts the anthropocentric chauvinism of traditional Christianity. A recovery of these accounts about divine avifauna in Genesis and the Gospels shows that Christianity is rooted in the physical reality of God in all things. In its core essence, Christianity is closer to the spiritual animism of first peoples—the belief that everything is alive with sacred presence—than to the *contemptus mundi* (contempt of the world) bias of some strains of religious life and thought. Could it be, then, that Christianity, ironically, is not an other-worldly faith but a fully embodied form of so-called animist religion?

The term *animism* has its origins in the early academic study of the vernacular belief systems of indigenous peoples worldwide. Sharing resonances with the Latin word *animus*, which means "soul" or "spirit," it was advanced by the nineteenth-century British anthropologist E. B. Tylor, who used it to analyze how indigenous traditions have often attributed "life" or "soul" or "spirit" to all things, living and nonliving. In his book *Primitive Culture* (Gordon Press, 1871), Tylor quotes Finnish ethnologist Matthias Alexander Castrén as saying that in animism "every land, mountain, rock, river, brook, spring, tree, or whatsoever it may be, has a spirit for an inhabitant; the spirits of the trees and stones, of the lakes and brooks, hear with pleasure the wild man's pious prayers and accepts his offerings."

The study of animism emerged out of an occidental, Victorian perspective on the panspiritist practices of first peoples—the ancient belief that all things are bearers of spirit. While the term is tainted by colonial elitism, the concept of animism today carries a certain analytical clarity by illuminating the fact that indigenous communities, then and now, generally envision nonhuman nature as "ensouled" or "inspirited" with living, sacred power. As contemporary religion scholar Graham Harvey writes in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (Continuum, 2005), animism

is typically applied to religions that engage with a wide community of living beings with whom humans share this world or particular locations within it. It might be summed up by the phrase "all that exists lives" and, sometimes, the additional understanding that "all that lives is holy." As such the term *animism* is sometimes applied to particular indigenous religions in comparison to Christianity or Islam, for example.

I question the common assumption, inherent within Harvey's definition of animism, that monotheistic traditions such as Christianity should be regarded as distinct from animism. On the contrary, Christian faith offers its practitioners a profound vision of God's this-worldly identity. Harvey's presumption that Christianity and animism are distinct from each other is at odds with the biblical worldview that all things are bearers of divinity insofar as God signaled God's love for creation (*continued on page 66*)



Noah sends a dove out after the flood in this mosaic from the Basilica di San Marco in Venice.



Hanuman (left), Saraswati (middle), and Ganesha (right) are three of the Hindu deities that collectively represent the unity of Being.

A Progressive Hindu Approach to God

BY J.A. KASTURI, SUNITA VISWANATH, AMINTA KILAWAN, AND ROHAN NARINE

TRUTH IS ONE,” says the Rig Veda, one of the canonical sacred texts of Hinduism, “but the paths to it are many.” This idea that many paths can lead to a single truth finds expression in the democratic riot of local gods and goddesses within Hinduism—and the unity of Being that draws them together.

As founding members of an expressly progressive Hindu activist organization, we look deep within Hinduism’s philosophical and religious traditions to inform our understanding of God. In the scriptures of the Vedas and Upanishads, the line between philosophy and religion has always been faint. Four of the six schools of Hindu philosophy are materialistic (if not outright agnostic) systems, in that they do not strictly require the existence of an omniscient godhead standing over and above creation to validate their arguments. Hindu religious texts share their constellation of Vedic and Upanishadic concepts with the philosophers. In deeply spiritual language, these ancient systems of thought examine the contextual nature of human perception, the limitations of

language, and the humbling eternity of the universe. We live in an infinite and eternal universe, they say—and we inhabit it with always provisional knowledge and always feeble tools.

Another oft-quoted line from the Rig Veda says: “Whence all creation had its origin . . . only He knows. Or, perhaps even He does not know. Who can say?” In this way, it leads us toward a spiritual system that acknowledges human limitations and allows for doubt, rather than a system that offers absolute certainty. Becoming able to imagine a spiritual system that allows for doubt in turn enables us to imagine a universe and a God who can allow for diversity and dialogue.

Within the Hindu system, this takes the shape of a non-hierarchical riot of local gods and goddesses who supplement each other’s blessings. There is rarely a zero-sum game of spiritual authority in the Hindu universe of thought and practice. Ganesha is the remover of obstacles; Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge; Laxmi is the goddess of wealth; Hanuman is Rama’s loyal companion who embodies selflessness; and so on. Each deity has something to teach and a

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domain to rule. The vibrant and complementary stories of these gods and goddesses, we are taught, can shape us into wholesome, well-rounded people.

Cacophonous Unity

The unity of Being—God, if you will—remains the same, our philosophers say, but each Hindu deity represents its local and diverse manifestations. As the Bhagavad Gita says, “When a man sees all the variety of things as existing in one, and all as emanating from that, then he achieves harmony with Brahman.” A similar idea appears in the ancient Indian collection of texts known as the Upanishads. “The world,” an Upanishadic verse reads, “is one family.” And that family, it says, includes even animals and flowers.

The divine light of Being therefore shines through each of us, as well. The traditional Hindu greeting *namaskaar* literally translates as, “I salute your form.” In a universe where people, gods, animals, and flowers inhabit the same existential space and emanate from the same divine source, there is no Other. The character closest to Satan in Hindu mythology—the demon Ravana in the epic Ramayana—is mourned by the gods for his lost potential and praised for his strength at the moment of his defeat. Upon his repentance, he is even welcomed into the heavens. In this way, the Ramayana enables us to imagine demons without demonization!

Nevertheless, Ravana was stopped and decisively defeated. His actionable sin was not disobedience but rather arrogance: the unrestrained pursuit of his ambition at the expense of others’ lives and livelihoods. Incapable of reining in his appetites, blinded by the *maya* (delusion) of his desires, he prevented a multitude from fulfilling their own *dharma*s (their roles, obligations, duties, and ways of life), while disrupting the balance and diversity of society and nature. A coalition army of men and gods brought his monopoly to an end, but they also had to recognize him as part of the same unity of Being.

Many Paths to the Same Truth

There is a well-known story in Indian mythology about six blind men who approach an elephant. “What is an elephant like?” they ask. As the story goes, one grabs the elephant’s leg and describes it as a pillar. Another touches its tail and describes it as a rope. A third feels its trunk and describes it as a hose. This story brings together several aspects of Hindu philosophy and religion. Human knowledge, as the Upanishads describe it, is limited, perspectival, contextual, and therefore best acquired through cooperation and experimentation. This is particularly so where a knowledge of the eternal divine is sought.

Truth may be one, but we will need many paths to it—with diversity, tolerance, and dialogue—if we seek to grasp its entirety. To deny the existence of such conceptions of God, or to deny the legitimacy of doubt and diversity in our

relationship with the divine, is to cede the space of spirituality to dogmatists who would seek to monopolize the diversity of Being for their own narrow purposes. This is the real idolatry—taking one’s immediate perspectival knowledge for the whole.

We named our progressive Hindu group Sadhana because these experiments toward God are as unique and diverse as the experiences of people themselves. The term *sadhana* is an ancient Sanskrit word defined variously as a personal path, a discipline, or a means to an end. In a religious context, it refers to the personal exercises—different for each individual—that the faithful undertake to discipline their mind and body before they can receive an awareness of the eternal divine. But in more common usage it refers simply to personal acts informed by—and disciplined by—an awareness of one’s larger, more global responsibilities. In both senses, it is a concept that connects the individual’s acts to the larger world of which they are an indelible part. As such, performing one’s personal sadhana is simultaneously politics, worship, activism, and pragmatism, depending on one’s perspective, and our work unites both cultural and religious Hindus. (continued on page 67)



“The character closest to Satan in Hindu mythology—the demon Ravana—is mourned by the gods for his lost potential,” the authors write. Here, Ravana fights with the winged demigod Jatayu.

A Buddhist God?

BY DAVID R. LOY



Amitabha Buddha sits at the center of this eighth-century Chinese painting, *The Paradise of Amitabha Buddha*.

IS IT RIGHT to describe Buddhism as atheistic? Many people do, pointing to the fact that Buddhism doesn't refer to a creator God. Yet it's not so simple.

In the earliest Buddhist texts, the Buddha tells some stories that make fun of Brahma, who *thinks* he is the supreme deity. But in some versions of Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha himself eventually became elevated from “a person who is awake” (the literal meaning of *Buddha*) to a more celestial figure. Whereas Shakyamuni (the historical Buddha) emphasized the importance of “being a lamp unto yourself,” it was believed that Amitabha Buddha could intercede at the time of death and take us to his Pure Land in the West, far beyond our world. This led to the development of more devotional types of Buddhism, which still predominate in East Asia. In some ways this Pure Land Buddhism seems more similar to the Abrahamic religions than to the original teachings of the Buddha as preserved in the Pali Canon, the core collection of early Buddhist scriptures.

Moreover, there are plenty of less powerful gods and spirits in the premodern Asian Buddhist traditions. Early Buddhism accepted the existence of these disincarnate beings, even as it emphasized how they are impermanent and subject to laws of cause and effect, including the law of karma.

All this raises questions about whether Buddhism should really be described as “atheistic.” The modern term has connotations that do not really fit Buddhism, especially naturalistic presumptions about the secular nature of this world. It's better to say that Buddhism does not accept the theism vs. atheism dichotomy. It accounts for our experience (and our spiritual potential) in a different way.

Two Perspectives on Nirvana

Apparently the Buddha did not say very much about the nature of *nirvana*, the goal of the Buddhist path. As a result some ambiguity arose as the Buddhist tradition developed. Nirvana certainly involves *transcending* this world of suffering and delusion, but transcendence can be understood in different ways—and has been.

Early Buddhism understood nirvana as the end of rebirth, which has often been understood to imply the attainment of a higher reality no longer subject to the sorrows of this one. In contrast, some forms of Mahayana Buddhism claimed that enlightenment involves simply realizing the true nature of this world. Using more contemporary terms, we could say that our usual ways of experiencing and understanding this world are mental constructs that should be deconstructed and reconstructed, with the implication that we don't need to go anywhere else—we only need to wake up to what's happening right here and now.

The two perspectives are not necessarily all that different, depending on how literally one understands transcendence. Does nirvana refer to another reality (analogous to an afterlife), or another way of perceiving this one?

It's an important issue—maybe the most important issue. I have come to believe that any religion espousing *cosmological dualism* (devaluing this world in favor of a superior reality such as heaven) and *individual salvation* (the idea that what ultimately happens to me is disconnected from what ultimately happens to you) is contributing to our world's problems rather than offering a solution. For too long religious orthodoxies have diverted our attention and concern from what's happening here to “pie in the sky after you die,” thereby making it easy for modern educated people to dismiss religious claims as outdated superstitions. Yet there are other possibilities that have been explored by great mystics in all the world's major religions, many of whose teachings have emphasized our nonduality with the world.

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Overcoming the Delusion of Duality

For Buddhism (literally “Awake-ism”) the important issue is not whether a supreme deity exists but rather the fact that, because of our cravings and delusions, we do not usually experience the world as it really is, nor do we understand who we really are. To become enlightened is to awaken to the true nature of our cravings and delusions, which ends our *dukkha* (dis-ease). This includes seeing through the illusion of a self that is separate from the world it experiences. Each of us normally has a *sense* of self, of course, but (to use contemporary language again) that self is a psycho-social construct composed of conditioned tendencies: mostly habitual ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and reacting. Lacking any discrete reality of its own, such a self is inherently insecure, with a dis-ease that we normally experience as a sense of lack: I’m never good enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, famous enough, powerful enough, etc.

Buddhism emphasizes meditation because that is how we “let go” of ourselves and overcome the delusion of duality: “I” am not behind my eyes or between my ears, looking out at an objective world that is separate from me. Rather, “I” am one of the countless ways that all the causes and conditions of the universe come together, right now. The Advaitic teacher Nisargadatta Maharaj captured this idea eloquently when he said: “When I look inside and see that I am nothing, that’s wisdom. When I look outside and see that I am everything, that’s love. Between these two my life turns.”

The Japanese Zen master Dogen described his own awakening in a similar fashion: “I came to realize clearly that my mind is nothing other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars.”

This way of experiencing one’s true nature challenges common materialist and reductionist understandings of what the world really is. Rather than being a collection of discrete things, our world is a confluence of impermanent and interdependent processes that manifest “something.” “Something” is in scare quotes because it’s not a thing at all in the usual sense: it is a *no-thing* in that it doesn’t have any form or characteristics of its own. The most common Buddhist term for that nothing is *shunyata* (emptiness). Being formless in itself is what enables *shunyata* to assume any form—including you and me.

Shunyata is never perceived in itself, only as an aspect of the way an enlightened person experiences the world: things (including oneself) are *shunya* (empty) because they have no substance of their own. They are how *shunyata* appears—or, better, they are how it *presences*. As Mahayana Buddhism’s *Heart Sutra* puts it, “form is empty, and emptiness is nothing other than form.”

Describing an experience he had, the English poet Thomas Traherne wrote, “Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared.” Later William Blake said something similar: “If the doors



Zen Buddhists such as Chinese abbot Wuzhun Shifan (pictured here in a painting from 1238 CE) have emphasized meditation as a way to overcome the delusion of duality.

of perception were cleans’d, everything would be seen as it really is, infinite.” Calling something “not-finite” (unbounded) is another way to refer to this *something* that has no attributes of its own. Its impermanent forms arise and pass away, according to conditions, but that which they manifest is “unborn” and “deathless.”

Interreligious Synergy

While in some ways these Buddhist teachings may seem distant from the often God-centered inquiries of other traditions, their focus on nonduality is in fact extraordinarily resonant with similar teachings in the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria, the Christian mysticism of Meister Eckhart and *The Cloud of Unknowing* (an anonymous fourteenth-century text), the Sufism of Ibn Arabi and Rumi, the Hindu philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, and the Daoism of Lao-tse and Chang-tzu, to cite some of the most prominent examples.

In other words, fingers from different traditions seem to be pointing at the same moon—which supports the notion that the moon is not simply the fantasy of one tradition. The similarities are very helpful in another way too: if our perpetual problem is that we tend to take the finger for the moon—that we cling to descriptions and miss what is being described—then a variety of different fingers (that is, various teachings and terminologies) can help to free us from identifying with any particular religious orthodoxy.

Globalization has made us more aware of other religions, and it is no exaggeration to say that today the “growing tip” for all of them, if they are to remain (*continued on page 68*)

Allah

BY HAROON MOGHUL

THERE'S NOTHING," as the Qur'an vows, "like the likes of Him" (42:11). This is precisely why Muslims worship Him, but also why we think our relationship to Him so indispensable. For this article, I'll turn to three sources—the Qur'an's 112th chapter, the "verse of the throne," and God's ninety-nine names (well, a few of them)—to help us better understand Islam's photophobic and iconoclastic monotheism and what it enables us to do.

But as any other proper religious primer would do, we had better start with the caveats. First, although many anglophone Muslims prefer the Arabic, I'll be calling "Allah" God, exactly as the contraction translates into English: *Al* ("the") plus *ilah* ("God"). Second, all translations of the Qur'an offered here are my own. And third, I refer to God as "He" because He chooses to use this pronoun in the Qur'an—not because Islam or I believes He has gender. Much like in Spanish, *all* Arabic nouns are assigned a grammatical gender—there's no neutered, neutral "it." (Plus I think the English "it" comes across as disrespectful.) That out of the way, let's proceed.

Who God Is

Because Muslims believe the Qur'an is the verbatim word of God, its 112th chapter, only four verses short, might reasonably be described as God's autobiography. It comes in two parts. The first: *Who God Is*. The second: *Who He's Not*.

The chapter starts: "Say, He is God, the One/Unique" (the word *ahad* may be translated either way—if you're one of a kind, after all, you're necessarily unique). The next verse describes "God": "the Everlasting/Self-Sufficient." Self-sufficiency is the ultimate distinction; unlike everything and everyone else, He's never needed anything or anyone. What better kind of deity to be dependent on? Therefore the third and fourth verses stress difference: "He begat not, nor was He begotten; and there can be none like Him."

Why is a quarter of God's autobiography devoted to ruling out the idea of the Trinity and its idea of Christ as God's "only begotten son"? In the Muslim view, Christianity (like Judaism) descends from Islam, and not any other way around. All prophets preached Islam, which means submitting (to God's



A ceramic wall tile from the seventeenth century depicts the Great Mosque in Mecca and instructs Muslims to travel there.

will); hence prophets like Moses and Jesus and their immediate followers are considered Muslims with whom Muslims therefore closely identify (3:84). Contrary to a common misperception, Muslims don't believe Muhammad brought anything new. His mission was two-fold: to nudge previous monotheisms back on track, and to share their same message of Islam with those who hadn't yet heard the word (21:107).

Though Judaism preserved the monotheism preached by the prophets (again, as a Muslim would see it), Christianity strayed far from Jesus's teachings, which preached fidelity to the law and unitarian monotheism. The final pages of Reza Aslan's *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* and Richard Rubenstein's *When Jesus Became God* confirm this point. That is why the Qur'an's 112th chapter focuses on how God "begat not." But of course that's not the end. How do we square a deity we are supposed to worship with the

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implications of the fourth and final verse, “there can be none like Him”? In other words, if God says He’ll treat us with justice but also compassion, how do we know His concept of justice and compassion comport with our own?

“There is nothing,” not to belabor the point, “like the likes of Him.”

Of course, sometimes God answers our questions.

Because, for example, God preceded the Universe—He refers to Himself as “First” and “Last”—Muslims believe He cannot be said to exist in any time or space. God is not just not everywhere, but He is also not in any physical location. Therefore it would make no sense to say God is near or far except that He also says, “He’s closer to you than your jugular,” or “He is with you wherever you are” (50:16; 57:4). God stresses His difference from us because He really is so different. But that reinforces our worshipping Him, the point of *ayat-al-kursi*, “the verse of the throne”:

God! There is no God but Him, Living, Self-Sufficient. Slumber cannot seize Him, nor sleep. To Him belongs all in the heavens and on the earth . . . His Throne extends over the heavens and earth, which He preserves untiring (2:255).

I have heard more than a few of my peers speak of God’s disinterest in their existential troubles. “Doesn’t He have more important things to do?” they fret. “He’s not going to bother,” they lament, defeated. Prioritization, however, is an anthropomorphism unbecoming of the Divine. We with our mortal frailties and limited lifespans must pick and choose; the God who is omniscient does not have to. Should you need Him, you need only call out, and He’ll answer. That’s how billions of us can each establish individual relationships with the Everlasting. And why billions of us can intuit Him.

God’s Ninety-Nine Names

When a Muslim starts a task, she’ll say, *Bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim* (“With God’s Name, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate”). There are three names in this invocation, and some ninety-nine in total. But *Rahman* and *Rahim* don’t just reference the same deity as God. They *are* Him. God, in the Muslim tradition, is the Loving, the Clement, the Evolver, the First, the Last, the Bringer of Life, the Patient, the Generous, the Giver of Gifts—but also the Destroyer, the Avenger, the Master of the Day of Doom. These names incorporate qualities that have at times been assigned as masculine or feminine, illustrating how God transcends our conceptions of sexuality and sexuality itself. In this way, they become means by which a person can connect to God.

In *Sea Without Shore*, the American scholar Nuh Keller suggests that, because God has created us to worship Him, we must be able to know Him in some fullness. So, Keller goes on to say, God created a world in which we can understand love, but also vengeance; a world in which we can understand life, but also death. To know God completely, to



A calligraphic presentation of one of the ninety-nine names of God: Al-Rahman (the Merciful).

understand that He possesses all and that we possess only through Him, we suffer loss. But we also simultaneously learn that there is One who’ll never leave us, a cause of our adoration of Him.

God as Our Beloved

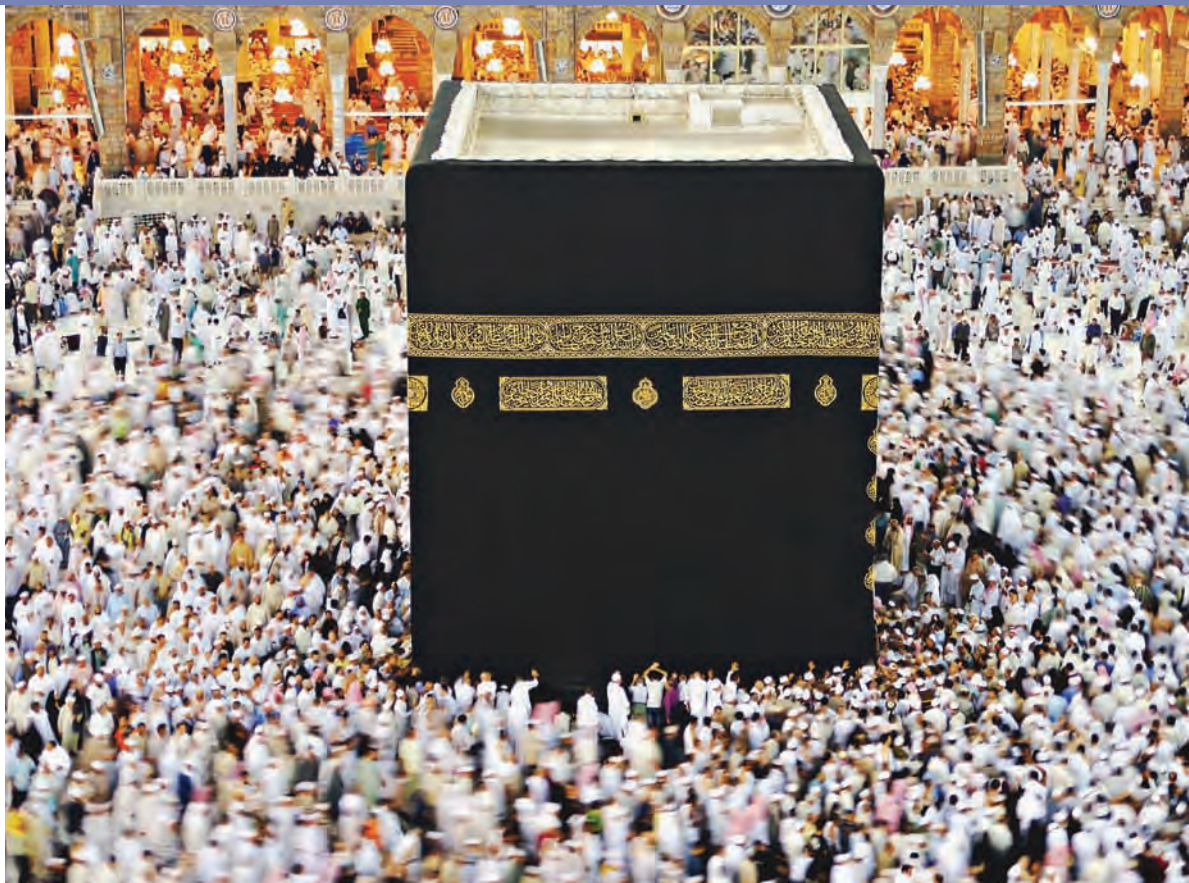
In the Muslim tradition, love has been the language through which scholars, mystics, and poets have tried to describe the relationship between humans and their Creator. The day, for instance, on which a Sufi dies may be called her “wedding”—she’s off to be with her beloved (or his, to be fair).

Through love, many Muslims have understood their religion. The language of love has also been critical to my religious life. I was almost always convinced of God’s existence. But just because you know God is out there doesn’t mean you’re particularly pious, appreciative, or even interested. We’ve all struggled through pain—physical, mental, maybe both. And possibly too many of us can sympathize with those times when the hurt was too much, when we’d have loved nothing more than to forfeit the loneliness of existence or exchange it for something that perdured.

There were times in my life when I wondered whether He was angry with me for my religious inadequacies. I yearned for the intimacy of the Christian divinity, the possibility that He became flesh, living and suffering among us. I wished I had something of the Jewish tradition of “wrestling with God,” for I did not know how else to channel my anger and unease. I wondered if Islam could suffice me. And as is the case in many such spiritual journeys, the way forward came through failure.

I used to dread facing the loneliness of the night and the bitter reality of my separation from God. One particularly gloomy winter night, I closed my door, sat facing Mecca’s

"I closed my door, sat facing Mecca's direction, and unloaded my burdens," Moghul writes. Here, pilgrims swirl around the Ka'aba, the most sacred point within Mecca.



direction, and unloaded my burdens. Years of avoidance had not profited me, and months of loneliness had left too little of me to suffice me. So why not? Did I think the Lord could not handle my furious soul? Soon, though, my imploring became begging, and every night I began to speak the words Muhammad taught me, the means by which we are taught to beseech the Divine. But something unexpected happened. In the daylight hours, I most looked forward to being alone at night. Instead of dreading the nighttime, I wanted the sun to stay down. In this I was only attempting to emulate a man I loved and still love: Muhammad too would rise in the late night hours to pray. I'd done what he did. And I found it changed me. Love for him led me to love for Him.

Hadn't Muhammad said, "God loves the consistent deed, no matter how small"?

True love is made out of the modest gestures we accumulate over time. Anyone who's been with someone for more than a few months knows the truth of this. The first whirlwind of romance must graduate to a deeper, calmer love, or it is no real affection. Nobody could stand living too long head over heels. Faith is not found in extremes, but in constants. A poor man in a modest home, Muhammad would have to nudge his beloved wife's legs out of the way as he made room on the floor to prostrate; so bowed, he—and we after him—could be in closest congress with the Beloved every night.

The Prophet Muhammad went up to the mountain, sure, but he came back down. He loved Him, but he loved us, too.

He told his companions, "God has more love for you than a mother for her child" (not a mother who wants her child to remain a child). "Return to God," God tells the deeply contented self in the Qur'an's eighty-ninth chapter, where the self is unforgettably rendered as "pleased with God" and "pleasing to Him." But not only does God deserve and demand to be worshipped, we *wish* to worship Him; we find our purpose in casting aside false idols and subsidiary powers—the very implications of Islam's testimony of faith, that "there is no god but He."

"There is a void in the heart," wrote the medieval Muslim scholar, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, adding that this void

cannot be removed except with God's company. And in there is a sadness that cannot be lifted except with the happiness of knowing God and being true to Him. And in there is an emptiness that cannot be filled except with love for Him, except by turning to Him and always remembering Him. And if a person were given all of the world and what is in it, it could not fill this emptiness.

If there is a purpose to Islam, it is here, in the right and the need for each person to establish a relationship with God: a God who is so far beyond our imagination, so alien to all our conception, that only He and He alone can suffice us, if even all the world—and even we ourselves—have turned against us. ■

The God of Process Theology

An Interview with John Cobb

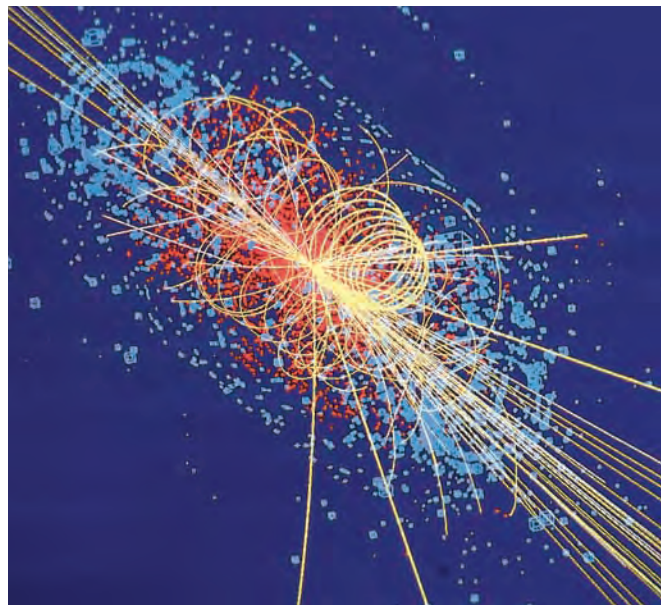
TIKKUN: How did you start your thinking about theology?

COBB: I grew up in a religious Methodist Christian family, and when I started meeting intellectuals I realized that this was considered a rather unusual and somewhat eccentric position. I did my graduate degree at the University of Chicago and wanted to study all the arguments against the existence of God. Growing up, God was a central companion, so discovering that this was not supported by most of the intellectual and academic community was a shock. But at the University of Chicago I came to understand that, for most intellectuals, it wasn't a matter of discussing "the evidence," but the worldview that dominated. For this worldview, anything coming from outside the natural realm was completely unacceptable and outside the dominant universe of discourse. I began to discover, through my teachers at the Chicago Divinity School, to which I transferred, the very impressive intellectual work of Alfred North Whitehead.

Whitehead shifted me from the notion of God as omnipotent to a God who is powerful, and from a God who is immutable to a God who is in genuine interaction with the world and cares about what happens in the world—and hence changes.

TIKKUN: How does process theology understand God? It is clear that process theologians do not believe in a big man in heaven who sends down judgments and rewards and punishes people for their misbehaviors. But is the God of process theology a person? What relationship does this God have to human beings?

COBB: Given the huge amount of human experience with God, my teachers argued that this experience was just as valid as any other aspect of human experience. I follow Whitehead quite closely myself, and for him, God includes the world and is immanent in every event. Some process theologians think that Whitehead's God is too speculative and prefer to define God purely within human experience. Henry Nelson Wieman said, "God is that process in which human values grow." He described that process brilliantly and considered the reality of this God indubitable.



"If we could liberate science from the shackles of an outdated metaphysics, the line between physics and spirituality would be radically blurred," Cobb says. In this simulation from the Large Hadron Collider, the collision of protons produces a quickly decaying Higgs boson.

In both cases, God is a process. In Wieman's case, the process is very personal in the sense that it creates and nurtures persons, but it is in no sense a person. In Whitehead's case, God is similarly personal. God not only brings persons into being and nurtures them but also calls them to fuller, more ethical lives. In addition, God as the cosmic Subject has many of the characteristics of human persons.

Challenging the Cartesian View of Nature

TIKKUN: Why have process theologies gained so little traction in the modern situation?

COBB: The worldview that dominates most universities excludes both subjects and values a priori. In other words, it



"I would say that many animals have conscious experience," Cobb says. "Whiteheadians assume that the experience of chimpanzees is quite like ours."

excludes not only Whitehead's speculations about a cosmic Subject, but also Wieman's effort to describe God in a purely empirical way. Because this exclusion is *a priori*, no argument is needed. It is this metaphysics that still runs the world.

This metaphysics started with Descartes's description of nature. Then, after Darwin showed that human beings are part of nature, this metaphysics attributed the same characteristics also to human beings. In this way it ruled out all that is subjective, any internal reality. And this became the dominant view shaping universities and academic discourse. It led to the marginalizing of people like Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. The hard sciences become the paradigm for all that is true.

TIKKUN: Yes, the Network of Spiritual Progressives runs into this in our campaign for an Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment (ESRA), because people say that we can't allow juries to assess whether a corporation is environmentally and socially responsible without having objective measures, by which they mean metrics that are empirically observable or measurable. They assume that anything real must be subject to measurement or empirical observation, which then leaves out anything from the sphere of ethics or spirit. The Cartesian worldview works very well with capitalism, because it marginalizes the values that could be used to critique capitalism. Where does Whitehead fit into all of this?

COBB: Whitehead understood the physical world in a different way than was dominant in intellectual life at his time and ever since. He came to his views through his study of physics and math. Physicists thought they were talking about an actual world, but in fact they discussed abstractions to which they mistakenly attributed actuality.

He was developing his ideas about the world during the period in which Einstein was developing relativity theory, so I will illustrate the issue there. He was bothered by the fact that Einstein's theory of general relativity described space as if it could either be curved or flat (flat locally but curved over great distance). In order for space to be either flat or curved, it would have to be concrete, and Whitehead thought it did not make sense to speak of space that way. He was a mathematician, and in geometry any space can be treated as Euclidian, hyperbolic, or elliptical.

To get concreteness in physics, you needed to become a radical empiricist, by appealing to the actual experiences of human life. Hume and Kant thought what was given in human experiences was just phenomena or appearances, and these were ordered by the mind. In that case, science can only deal with the abstract. Whitehead agreed with the great majority of physicists that their task was to describe an actual world. For this, a different approach is needed. One must come back to the human experience, which is the only possible starting point.

For Whitehead, the seeing of a color is more actual than the color as such. The color becomes actual only in the visual experience. And the total experience of seeing the color occurs alongside hearing sounds, remembering the past, anticipating the future, etc. It is this total happening, occurrence, or event that is the full actuality. Whitehead calls these "actual occasions," and actual occasions make up the world.

This, obviously, is a deep reversal of the Cartesian view of nature. Descartes held that the world is nothing but "matter." "Matter" exists only "objectively." That is, it is nothing for itself. Of course, Descartes also thought there were human subjects for whom material things existed as objects of experience. Now that humans have come to be viewed only as part of the objective world, they also are seen as nothing for themselves.

Since no one can really believe that there is no subjective experience, we are told that what we are for ourselves, that is, subjectively, plays no role in the objective world. Unfortunately for this whole approach, without subjects, the meaning of "object" collapses. Whitehead proposes that to *be* at all requires subjectivity. To be an actual occasion is to be something for oneself.

We know what it is to be a subject. It is, at any moment, to be experiencing objects of all kinds. Some of what we experience, such as ideas, have actuality only as they are ingredients in experience. But much of what we experience—our bodies, our pasts, and our environments—present themselves to us as having their own actuality whether we, or anyone



“For Whitehead the seeing of a color is more actual than the color as such,” Cobb says. “The color becomes actual only in the visual experience. And the total experience of seeing the color occurs alongside hearing sounds, remembering the past, anticipating the future, etc.” Here, participants in Holi, a spring festival, play with colored water and powder.

else, experience them. That can only mean, in Whiteheadian analysis, that they have (or have had) reality in and for themselves. These objects are, or have been, subjects.

TIKKUN: Then Whitehead is a panpsychist?

COBB: This view is sometimes called “panpsychism.” However, for good reason, Whitehead never uses this term. The word “psyche” refers to the mental or spiritual dimension of reality over against the bodily and physical. To give primacy or exclusive reality to one side of this polarity is not at all Whitehead’s intention. For Whitehead, subjective experience is physical reality. All experience has a mental dimension, but experience is more physical than mental. The task is to rescue the physical from its self-defeating Cartesian identification as “matter” and “object.”

For Whitehead the basic distinction is not “mind” and “matter,” it is “subject” and “object.” And this second pair is by no means to be associated with the first or thought of as a new dualism. An actual occasion is an act of becoming something. In this act it is a subject. The term “subject” means both that it is acted upon (it is subject to external forces) and it acts (it is an agent). A subject is acted upon by all its objects. To a very large extent they determine what it becomes. But it acts in its integration of all these forces that impinge upon it and becomes an object for future subjects. These days, scientists talk about self-organization. For Whitehead, the world is made up of acts of self-organization.

In a moment of human experiencing, usually the objects that impinge most strongly are very recent past moments of experiencing. That is, my experience in this moment is

very much a continuation of what it was a moment ago. This particular object, the previous experience, was of course a subject a moment ago. What is a subject in the moment of its occurring, as soon as it has become, is an object for successor subjects. The distinction between subject and object is the distinction between what is now occurring and what has occurred: present and past.

In the example I have given, it is easy to see that the experiences that are now objects were just as subjective when they happened as the experience that is now occurring. Whitehead proposes that we recognize that the entire past is composed of events of this kind. They are experiences, although most of them are not conscious. Whitehead’s full term for the entities that make up the world is “actual occasions of experience.”

Conscious and Unconscious Experience

TIKKUN: What is experience that is not conscious?

COBB: Well, let’s start with human experience. Reflect on your own experience—perhaps sometime somebody told you that you were angry, and you denied it. On reflection you realize that in fact you had been angry at the time. So your anger was unconscious, but it really was part of your experience. So experience is more inclusive than consciousness, and consciousness is a matter of degree.

TIKKUN: Might one not object and say the unconscious experience is parasitic on conscious experience—that we can only know of the unconscious because of our conscious?

(continued on page 68)

Ideality, Divine Reality, and Realism

BY GARY DORRIEN

IDEALISTIC THEOLOGIES are oriented to the question of truth, realistic theologies are oriented to the question of reality, and I believe that theology is inherently idealistic, where the greater danger lies. I take for granted that my concepts do not correspond univocally to divine reality or any reality. Thus my starting point for thinking about divine reality is Augustine's: Anything that one understands is not God. But I do not spurn metaphysical audacity on that account, for faith is a form of daring. A religion that lacks religious daring, a sense of the Spirit of the whole, or the struggle for social justice does not interest me.

The great "I AM" of Exodus 3:14, God telling Moses, "I AM WHO I AM . . . tell the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me,'" is a sign of the identity of thought and being, the keynote of idealistic thought. All knowledge participates in divine self-knowledge. Reality is ultimately self-directed will, which has its primordial ground in God, and reason develops as the self-revelation of God. On the level of Spirit, subject and object are identical, each involving the other. A subject becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself. But a subject is not an object except for itself. Spirit realizes itself as a perpetual self-duplication of one power of life as subject and object, each presupposing the other despite contrasting with the other.

Idealistic theologies theorize this self-reflection of Spirit overcoming the dualism of subject and object. In subjective idealism, "the ideal" refers to spiritual or mental ideality: There is no reality without self-conscious subjectivity. There is nothing in matter that does not imply mind. Space is composed of relations, a meaningless notion without a mind that relates one thing to another *and* for which things are related—holding together both terms of a relation. Idealistic theologies, especially of the subjective type, reason that because matter is unintelligible without mind, matter must never have existed without mind. But since matter as a whole does not exist for our minds, which know only a tiny bit of the universe, there must be a divine mind that knows the whole.

By beginning with the only thing we know directly—our own experience, "I know myself"—we are led to the absolute "I AM." The logic of subjective idealism, however, presses toward Berkeley's denial of matter, or its objective idealistic flipside that everything is a manifestation of the ideal, an unfolding of reason. In objective idealism the ideal is normative, as it is in the theories of Plato, Leibniz, and a long line of neo-Platonist theologians: all reality conforms to the archetypes of an intelligible structure. Most of the Greek Orthodox and Anglican traditions of *logos* theology drew on the ideas of Plato, who constructed the world out of abstract universals, and Aristotle, who taught that the knower and the known come together in the thinker and the thinker's thought.

Postmodernity and Hegelian Idealism

The apostles of postmodern anti-theology famously countered that logocentrism is the fatal disease of Western thought. Nietzsche said God is an enemy of freedom and subjectivity. Heidegger sought to liberate being from Western theism, which wrongly took being for God. Levinas said Western theism wrongly took God for being and that God should be conceived as the "other" of being. All repudiated the God of static being. Hegel and Schelling are important to me because they anticipated these critiques in the very process of epitomizing logocentric rationality, refashioning objective idealism as the logic of becoming.

Schelling and Hegel developed their alternative to Kantian idealism in the late 1790s, seeking to transcend subjectivity versus objectivity by leaning on Spinoza's concept of substance. Absolute idealism was about the "unconditioned" or the "in-itself." Kant had made a good start in theorizing that powers of mind produce experience, but he did not go far enough in reconstructing the principle of subject-object identity. Schelling and Hegel argued that this principle is not about the self-knowledge of a finite subject. It is about the self-knowledge of the absolute within a finite subject. Instead of trapping subject-object identity inside the circle of its own representations, Schelling and Hegel lifted it outside

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the circle by equating the self-knowledge of a knowing subject with the self-knowledge of the absolute.

If God is the absolute “I AM” and ground of truth, reality is the self-thinking of Spirit. In that case, we do not know the divine; rather, the divine knows itself through us. Schelling, and especially Hegel, conceptualized God as spiraling relationality that embraces otherness and difference. God’s infinite subjectivity is an infinite inter-subjectivity of holding differences together in a play of creative relationships not dissolving into sameness. God is the inter-subjective whole of wholes, irreducibly dynamic and relational. Spirit becomes self-conscious in religion. Religions select the shapes that fit their Spirit, and Christianity is a picture story about the incarnation and redemption of Spirit—Spirit abandoning its absolute being to embrace the suffering of the world and return to itself.

This proposal, which Hegel conceived as a rationale for a universal religion of Spirit, unified the ambitions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought like no other philosophy. Hegel put dynamic pantheism into play in modern theology, and he inspired nearly every great philosophical movement of the past two centuries. One cannot understand the philosophies of Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bradley, Troeltsch, James, Bergson, Whitehead, Heidegger, Sartre, Foucault, or Derrida, or the schools associated with these thinkers, without grasping their relationships to Hegel.

But Hegel, the most powerful of all idealistic thinkers, was also the most problematic, because he threw away the two greatest strengths of the idealistic tradition—its emphasis on ethical subjectivity and its insistence that all thinking about God is inadequate, a mere pointer to transcendent mystery. Hegel was relentlessly abstract. He sublimated God and selves into a logical concept, and he ridiculed Friedrich Schleiermacher for theologizing about mere feeling. Hegel’s absolute idealism treated notions as ultimate reality and real things as exemplifications of notions. The world process, for Hegel, was always about the realization of Spirit as self-conscious reason. He famously lacked intellectual humility about his ideas and his Eurocentric purview, exalting Prussian chauvinism. Hegel’s intellectualism spurned the emphasis on feeling, willing, and ethical struggles for social justice that define and fuel religious idealism at its best.

The Danger of a Proud Theology

Theology is inherently idealistic. Every theology, to some degree, seeks deliverance from normal actuality and harm. A realistic theology that completely accommodated existing circumstances, mediocrity, and injustice would be grotesque. Every realistic theology, however, is an antidote to the dangers of idealistic hubris and illusion.

Realistic theologies read off knowledge of God from that which is given, as in the Thomist doctrine that God is being itself, or the Whiteheadian doctrine that God is an actual



“Theology is inherently idealistic,” Dorrien writes. “Every theology, to some degree, seeks deliverance from normal actuality and harm.” *Freedom* by Rafael Lopez.

entity, an order in the process of creativity. Any God that is read off from the given world, however, is less than the God of grace and glory that dwells in light unapproachable. The God of grace and glory comes as light into darkness, revealing something new. Realistic theologies, as Karl Barth famously protested against the analogy of being, reduce God to fate or a hidden aspect of the world. Even if one begins with the given reality of God, the truth about God’s reality is not given.

Idealistic theologies rightly emphasize God’s non-objectivity. They protect the divine mystery from being identified with other objects. This very virtue, however, makes idealism prone to destructive pride. “God is truth” is a more dangerous notion than “God is reality.” Idealists, by serving as witness to a divine truth that shines within and beyond the real, tend to brush aside the merely particular and historical. Barth and Paul Tillich, for all the vast differences between them, rightly charged that this weakness is prone to something monstrous—a proud theology. Any theology that trusts in the power of its rationality is demonic, a species of idolatry.

Idealism ensured its own fall by starting with its own ideas about mind and denigrating the external world of existing things. It took a mighty fall after the natural sciences took over the academy, philosophy turned positivistic, and theology fell back on varieties of neo-orthodoxy, writing off the puzzles of idealistic subjectivity. Today, however, the debate that cuts across the sciences and humanities is an echo of the very arguments that post-Kantian idealists, especially religious idealists, pressed in the late nineteenth century. In the language of today, it is the debate between dead matter materialists and proponents of relationality, holism, and emergence.

Battling Against Reductionism

Religious and philosophical thinkers in the tradition of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead have played a leading role in battling against a powerful reductionist tide in the academy and popular culture. In the Whiteheadian scheme, events are the fundamental things, the immanent movement of creativity itself; minds are real but thoroughly natural; and God is the lure of divine love for creative transformation and the flourishing of life. Process-relational theories within and beyond the Whiteheadian school emphasize that higher-level wholes possess irreducible properties. Two-way interactions of wholes and parts occur at many levels of the natural world. Every entity exists within a hierarchy of more inclusive wholes. And evolution brings about the emergence of novel and unpredictable forms of order and activity.

Dualistic theories of mind (such as those of Karl Popper, John Eccles, Geoffrey Madell) violate the principle of continuity, failing to explain how a new kind of actuality sprang into existence, and they do not explain how such radically different things as mind and matter causally influence each other. Materialistic theories (such as those of Daniel Dennett, Paul Churchland, Colin McGinn) fail to account for the existence of mind, the unity of experience, and the reality of freedom. Dogmatic materialists like Dennett and Churchland deny the reality of mind or consciousness, while emergence materialists such as McGinn and John Searle stick with materialism while acknowledging that states of consciousness do not reduce to brain processes. Process-relational theorists such as Christian de Quincey, David Ray Griffin, Charles Siewert, and Catherine Keller counter that something is wrong with dominant theories that leave unexplained the crucial things at issue. Whiteheadians point to the early-Enlightenment view that the basic units of nature lack experiential features while others develop theories of phenomenal consciousness involving intentionality in sense experience and imagery. Most point to the production of emergent wholes that are more than the sum of their parts.

A good deal of process-relational theory has been forced to grapple with problems that are peculiar to Whiteheadian metaphysics. According to Whitehead, divine knowledge



“My starting point for thinking about divine reality is Augustine’s: anything that one understands is not God,” Dorrien writes. *Saint Augustine in His Study* by Sandro Botticelli.

grows simultaneously with the growth of the universe, but according to Einstein’s special theory of relativity, absolute simultaneity is impossible. Any meaning that might be ascribed to “simultaneity” is necessarily relative to some particular space-time system. Moreover, the second law of thermodynamics holds that energy differentials average out in a closed system. If that is right, evolution is moving toward entropy, not Whiteheadian creative complexity.

No cosmology, however, fits with everything we know, which is vastly exceeded by everything we don’t know. The Whiteheadian school deserves credit for grappling creatively with big questions and showing concern for the common good. Whiteheadian theory and other forms of process-relational thought are consistent with the modern understanding of evolution as a long, slow, gradual process of layered stages in which complex forms of life build upon simple ones. Process thought is consistent, for the most part, with relativity theory, in which the universe is dynamic and interconnected, space and time are inseparable, and gravity and acceleration are indistinguishable. Modern physics presents a Whiteheadian-like world of interacting events. Matter and the form of space have a dialectical interplay, as do temporal process and spatial geometry, and mass is a form of energy.

Whiteheadian theory has much at stake in Whitehead’s idea that consciousness arose as an awareness of feeling within an environment and a responsive feeling thereby evoked. Experiences are actual things, and all actualities have experience. If some version of this idea—naturalizing a really existing mind—is true, mind and matter go all the way down. The Whiteheadian picture of the world giving rise to minds that apprehend the world suggests a deep kinship between mind and the world—one that deepens the idealistic emphasis on will, purpose, and feeling. (*continued on page 71*)

Embracing and/or Refusing God-Talk

BY WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

THE TERM “GOD” evokes rich variegated responses, each of which is surely filtered through lived experience, whether acknowledged or not. Indeed, God-talk permits as many variations in exposition as does the anti-God talk of atheism. From the outset, however, it is unhelpful to come at the God question generically or in the abstract, it being necessary to talk about quite particularistic claims that are incommensurate to each other. Here I will consider the God-talk that is generated by the biblical traditions that are variously lined out in the many forms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. My own particularity, moreover, is in the Christian tradition.

The God of biblical faith is inescapably embedded in a narrative account of reality that yields many dimensions and nuances. In large sweep we may say that this God is *an agent of judgment and restoration* that are reperformed many times in the tradition. The theme of *judgment* is an attempt to speak of ultimate accountability that is structured into lived reality and that precludes us from being free to do whatever we want with impunity. The theme of *restoration* speaks of the surprise of new emergents in history and creation. In biblical narrative, it is this God who emancipated the slaves from Pharaoh's Egypt, who brought the Jews home from Babylonian exile, who raised Jesus from the dead at Easter. Such typical and recurring happenings feature a concern for well-being and Shalom in the common good that is marked by mercy, compassion, justice, righteousness, and peace. Such *ultimate accountability* and such *emergence of relational (covenantal) good* in biblical tradition are credited to an active, willful agency who is known by name, whose name attests to the personal, relational dimension of ultimate reality. The insistence upon God as agent is a recognition that the reality of our life is at bottom relational and concerns the prospect of fidelity. The contest for faithfulness (with God and with neighbor) issues variously in forgiveness, hospitality, and neighborly generosity. This agency, in the narrative of faith, cannot be reduced to an idea, a proposition,



The Garden of Gethsemane by Giorgio Vasari.

a syllogism, or an indifferent force, but is known to be an agent capable of emotional engagement and effective resolve. The process of faith is a) to acknowledge the odd inexplicable *rigor and openness* of life that cannot be contained in the explanatory categories of Enlightenment rationality and b) to link such realities to a hidden but known agency.

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Dove of Peace, a mosaic presented by Pope John Paul II to the United Nations in 1979.



That sweep of narrative of accountability and surprise (“the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor rejoice”) is deeply impinged upon by violence legitimated and enacted by this God, which is experienced in the tradition as divine neglect and named as divine abuse. The tradition itself has always known that and struggled with it, long before the atheists came to the issue. The critiques made against this theological narrative are best known by its adherents and long known before the present challenge. Serious faith recognizes that the fidelity of God as agent of judgment and restoration is marked by a wildness that cannot be denied or explained away. For those who accept that narrative and its in-dwelling agent (as do I), this abrasive dimension of the character of God does not veto the claim of holiness beyond our comfort zone or the continuing struggle with and for divine fidelity. Thus faith that is most mature is not “sweetness and light,” but is a grappling with holiness that will not conform to our best categories.

Eventually faith is a claim that our lives and the life of the world are situated in a mystery that makes us penultimate and that wants to resist the twinned extremities of idolatry of a) imagining ourselves as ultimate or b) of making convenient gods for ourselves in our preferred image (of gender, race, class, nation or ideology—including the ideology of reasonable mastery). This mystery, named as agent, is the source for our life and the life of the world, a life given on terms other than our own. That struggle for fidelity in the presence of this agent is the ultimate subject of this faith, a struggle voiced, for example, in the poetry of Job who frontally challenges God’s neglect of justice. It shows up in the episode of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was arrested by the Roman Empire as he embraced the “cup” of his destiny.

It is a happy reality that proponents of this faith, which is characterized by the struggle to stay in right relation with a God of judgment and restoration, are at their best both

willing and able to find allies and companions in the struggle for the common good. Such allies may stand apart from or in opposition to this narrative claim of judgment and restoration. In quite practical and realistic ways, allies across confessional lines (confession of this narrative, confession of another narrative, or confession of “no narrative” at all) may engage in common efforts for peace and justice, and in common hopes of a pragmatic kind. Thus we have many examples in contemporary life that adherents to this faith in its variant forms—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—are eager to work with others in the struggle for justice and peace. These proponents of biblically grounded faith occupy no high moral ground on these issues, but are glad for partnership with those who are grounded in other narratives or in no narrative at all in these urgent efforts toward the common good. There is no litmus test of faith (or of unfaith) when it comes to these deeply human questions that now press upon us. I have no doubt that *Tikkun* is exactly such an invitation for those variously grounded to face into these urgent issues now before us. The prophet Micah had this vision of disarmament:

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.

And then Micah adds a verse that is not often enough noticed:

For all peoples will walk
each in the name of its god,
but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God
forever and ever.

This zealous prophet of the God of Israel acknowledged that others walk by other gods, but all may walk together in the ways of justice and peace. ■

Culture

BOOKS

Can a Spiritual Outlook Regenerate Our Social Institutions?

*Another Way of Seeing:
Essays on Transforming
Law, Politics, and Culture*

by Peter Gabel

Quid Pro Books, 2013

REVIEW BY KIM CHERNIN

FALSE HOPE CAN BE dangerous, personally and politically. After centuries of utopian dreams and “scientific” understandings, I find it hard to believe that we can transform the world. I approached Peter Gabel’s important book with some skepticism. Show me that we can change the world. Persuade me that a spiritual outlook, “another way of seeing,” can be powerful enough to regenerate our social institutions.

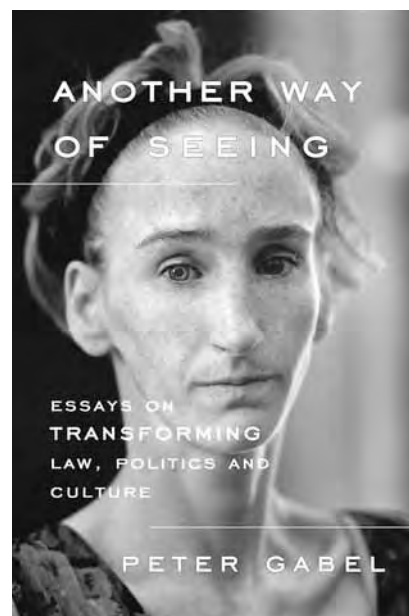
Gabel’s intent in this collection of essays and occasional pieces is to shift our attention from the material world to the spiritual dimension of social life. He hopes to show that this spiritual engagement can be a main shaping influence on society. It is a big claim, and he pursues it with zeal and conviction: “Human beings actually exist in a psycho-spiritual world in which they seek not primarily food, shelter, or the satisfaction of material needs, but rather the love and recognition of other human beings, and the sense of elevated meaning and purpose that comes from bringing the

world of inter-subjective connection into being.”

Love as a Historical Force

It is quite a step to see the longing for love and recognition as a key historical force. Yes, it inspired the movements of the 1960s, and Gabel is wonderful at describing how it felt to be lifted up out of alienation and isolation into the shared optimism of that time. But those very movements, although they have made a serious impact on the world, have not achieved the sweeping transformations their participants hoped for. Their aftermath tends to be a pronounced weariness, withdrawal, and rage, out of which their adherents must begin all over again to “come into existence as an idealistic, hopeful, potentially loving community.” No wonder the seasoned warriors of this struggle are inclined to leave the remaining work to the next generation. Is this despair? Perhaps not. It may be, rather, a realization that we activists should keep our endeavors focused, local, and particular, as the ecology movement and the real-food movement seem to be doing, perhaps because they have learned something from those of us given to totalizing expectations.

Gabel is not carried away by the power of theory; this is one reason his



book is so readable. A reader will never feel beaten over the head by Gabel’s effort to prove his theory correct. To the contrary. “All phenomenological or descriptive theory depends not upon a theory’s ability to explain facts from premises or theoretical postulates, but rather upon its self-evidence, upon its capacity to produce an experience of recognition in the reader,” he writes. Few theoreticians (Marx, Freud, or theorists of liberalism), would endorse this limiting view of theory, but for Gabel it is crucial. Theory is not a declaration of truth, or a definitive

account of how things are. It is an organizing principle, a lens through which we are invited to view the world, whose force depends on resonance, the reader's response. Gabel is inviting his readers to measure his other way of seeing by their response to it. This is a rare and thrilling invitation.

Gabel writes what Timothy Garton Ash (quoting George Kennan) called "the history of the present." He is an eyewitness and participant in the events he analyses, creating a record of significant events as they are unfolding. In this, he is writing against the grain of the commonly held view that distance confers objectivity and that our collective understanding of what has happened is enhanced by being far away from it. One evident disadvantage of this distancing approach is the later historian's inability to report what could not be known at the time the historian is studying: Who could know for certain that Barack Obama would turn out to be not at all what he seemed? Or that the failure of the high hopes he inspired would once again alienate the disengaged citizens he had drawn into political participation. Whatever later historians may come to think of the Obama presidency, they will never know the euphoria of Obama's election night, the tears, the shouts of joy made possible only by what could not be known of what would come.

Recovering from Disillusion

Gabel's three memos to Obama courageously chronicle the falling trajectory of these high expectations, in which he shared. Gabel calls his three memos to Obama "The Moment of Hope," "Disappointment," and "Resolution and Independence." He offers a convincing analysis of the reasons for this disillusionment, inviting his reader to understand that a reliance on Obama as an inspiring figure was fatal for the movement he inspired: "There was a major weakness in that 2008 moment—namely, that it was

constituted . . . by an over-reliance by each of us in our separate space on watching that remarkable smile and listening to that sometimes transcendent oratory."

Obama was the carrier of a dangerous, false hope and this is precisely what worried me, from the beginning, about the heady enthusiasm for him. How could seasoned activists believe that this lone figure, with so little political experience, would be able to fulfill the promises he made as a campaigner? Here is Gabel, carried away by an almost messianic hope, addressing Obama:

The transformative meaning of your election is rather that you are the carrier of the great egalitarian social movements that have preceded you, movements that aspire to a world in which we can recognize each other's whole humanity. . . . in which a new ethos of social justice and beloved community can replace the selfish world of individualism and fear of the other that has led to the proliferation of wars and . . . death by starvation and that . . . consigns us all to a lifetime of spiritual isolation and passive social meaninglessness.

And here he is again, two years later: "The 38 percent turnout of registered voters in 2010 declares that many of us were too humiliated after extending ourselves in 2008 to get out and vote, to get out and hope." The painful and hard-won perspective of the participant observer would not be available to those who write history at a distance if Peter Gabel and others like him had not recorded it autobiographically as history's first drafts.

At his best, Gabel is a visionary, a public-sphere mystic, a razor-sharp analyst of political and legal events and that dangerous place where the two meet, each pretending to be the other. Reading his account of Gore's response to the Supreme Court's two decisions that cost him his legitimate election was like looking through a

glass darkly and having that darkness swept away. Why didn't he fight? Why didn't he appeal to the voters who had elected him and mobilize them to insist on their voting rights? Gabel has answers, a trenchant and even cunning analysis of what went wrong.

Did Gabel convince me that our longing for reciprocity and recognition, organized as a spiritual-political movement, will inaugurate a new ethos of social justice and beloved community? Did he convince me to hope more than I can when I watch so much of our world dallying with profound disregard at the brink of disaster? That would have been a tall order and it has not been fulfilled. I have, however, come to a new and deeper understanding of both law and politics and to a reluctant hope that it may be worthwhile to try again, without hoping for too much, to scratch away at the layers of alienation and indifference that smother our collective ability to believe in almost anything. ■

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Visionary Hope

Another Way of Seeing: Essays on Transforming Law, Politics and Culture

by Peter Gabel

Quid Pro Books, 2013

REVIEW BY ROGER S. GOTTLIEB

THIS IS THE second collection of essays from Peter Gabel, law professor and long-time associate of *Tikkun*. The essays range over law, domestic U.S. politics, foreign policy, and a variety of cultural themes including the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, sports, evolutionary theory, and the lessons of illness. While the topics are disparate, an underlying unity can be found in what might be called a “spiritual social theory.”

Social theory, roughly speaking, is an attempt to comprehend the most basic and essential features of collective human existence and to normatively evaluate them in terms of concepts like rationality, freedom, justice, and human fulfillment. It is neither a purely descriptive sociology nor purely an ethics or political philosophy; rather, it is a fusion of the explanatory and the prescriptive, an account of why things are the way they are and how and why they could become better.

Gabel’s version of social theory recognizes the realities of historical change, class and ethnic struggle, gender oppression, and collective suffering (such as avoidable mass starvation) but takes them as secondary phenomena. But where Marxism gives primacy to class struggle and economic development, or where certain forms of radical feminism give primacy to gender relations, Gabel’s theory

gives primacy to concerns about the expression—or suppression—of human beings’ essential and primary spiritual identity.

This spiritual identity, Gabel contends, resides in the fact that “we are each expressions of a loving energy and are animated by the desire for mutual recognition and affirmation of that loving energy—that we each long for recognition of our inherent worthiness and sacredness.” This loving energy, in turn, is the core reality not just of our personal lives but also of the universe as a whole. Thus to the familiar view that our essential identity is not social or physical but spiritual—a soul, a spark of the divine, a child of God—Gabel adds a relational dimension. We desperately need to be recognized, and we desperately fear rejection. Isolation, alienation, passivity before superior social elites, attachment to empty social roles, aggression, and oppression result when we allow ourselves to be ruled by the fear. Progressive social movements for democracy, ethnic or gender rights, economic fairness, and vibrant interpersonal care come when we allow ourselves to recognize and be recognized. Overall, for Gabel “the spiritual dimension of social existence [is] at the center of our understanding of social phenomena and at the center of our effort to transcend the problems that continue to limit and constrain us.”

A Spiritual Approach to Law and Foreign Policy

Gabel’s application of this perspective to law begins with his observation that our legal system is shaped by presuppositions directly at odds with our spiritual nature. People are viewed as

antagonistic individuals involved in zero-sum conflicts, mediated by seemingly universalistic and rational (but in reality limited and slanted) rules designed to protect the monetary and ego needs of separate individuals with no stake in loving communities of mutual recognition. This perpetuates and unreflectively endorses the social antagonism that creates an unhappy, lonely population that is hungry for meaning but unable to find it.

Gabel’s alternative vision of law (though why it would still be called “law” is a question) is a systematic attempt to meet our spiritual hunger for recognition, to allow us to speak and be heard, and to have that speaking and hearing unfold in a context in which our personal needs are recognized as crucially important, as are those of other individuals and of the community as a whole. We need to have our hurts and losses acknowledged, to empathize with our fellows, and to bind up all our wounds through a recognition of our spiritual bonds. To do this, Gabel cautions, lawyers and judges will need a lot more wisdom and fewer rules.

Gabel’s attempt to “spiritualize foreign policy” is similar. Taking the United Nations as a hopeful attempt to realize our ties as global citizens, he suggests that we respond to potential threats of military aggression by publicly acknowledging the experiences of loss and justified anger on the part of the citizens of the aggressive nation; hold serious and open-ended meetings to find common ground that would defuse the fears that often underlie the attraction of aggression (think Iraq under Hussein, contemporary Iran, Israel, the PLO, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, etc.); and encourage

direct human connection among leaders of “enemy” states. With recognition, personal contact, and a broader vision of global good, Gabel asserts, the relentless march to yet another war would be halted. Even if the leaders remained aggressive, public recognition of the suffering of the broad masses under those leaders would lessen their support for the leaders’ military aims.

In other contexts Gabel tells us that Obama should have seen beyond conventional interest-group politics to consistently argue for his policies as an expression of the best of democracy: a community of loving and caring people who seek and can find recognition. Al Gore, he writes, should have argued for continuing the Florida vote, not on the narrow basis of states’ rights, but because voting rights enshrine a hard-won recognition that each of us matters. Evolutionary biologists who describe life as simply a manifestation of mechanical biochemical processes should, rather, “lean in” toward living beings and “anchor [themselves] in the self-evident knowledge that Being has of its own presence and intentionality, and engage in empathic apprehension of the other forms of life that surround us in our own time.”

A Powerful Critique of Detached Rationality

As someone who has written extensively on how politics and religion/spirituality need each other’s insights, I very much appreciate Gabel’s wonderful theoretical chutzpah. It is one thing to recommend Buddhist compassion when someone insults you; it is another to imagine a spiritual overhaul of the legal system—an arena as anti-spiritual as the military or Wall Street. There is a visionary hopefulness in advocating for compassion and recognition in contexts overwhelmingly defined by opposition, competition, and violence. It makes sense that Gabel’s most cited moral inspiration

is Martin Luther King Jr., who believed that nonviolent protest and an underlying attitude of love even for those who committed terrible violence against African Americans was the only possible way forward.

As well, I find some of Gabel’s historical analyses particularly instructive. In a few clear and intelligent pages he summarizes the conservative ideological and legal assault on the New Left during the 1970s and 1980s through doctrines such as “original intent” (the call to shape our law according to what we imagine a few people thought was right 250 years ago), “law and economics” (the idea that people are essentially isolated economic agents), and “the new federalism” (states’ rights). Here Gabel the long-time law professor shows his expertise.

In several places Gabel makes excellent use of Sartre, whose psychological and social insights continue to be valuable but neglected. To describe the contrast between social life with and without spiritually oriented recognition, Gabel employs Sartre’s illuminating contrast between the “serial group” (people isolated and alienated, each subject as an individual to social patterns and elite power) and the “fused group” (revolutionary situations in which we come together for recognition and support). This idea of the fused group captures my own experience of political action, collective spiritual connection, or even the rare and beautiful times when students and teacher forget their social roles and share in the pursuit of knowledge and the appreciation of wisdom.

Finally, I think there is much value in Gabel’s consistent critique of the false universalism of detached rationality in law, politics, and science. While he utilizes critical legal studies’ critique of illusory objectivity in mainstream legal theory, he correctly points out that the movement failed to see that without some vision—be it that of capitalist individualism or of spiritual

connection—law is simply not possible. Gabel consistently argues that views of people as fundamentally self-interested, states as inherently aggressive, or matter as essentially without spiritual meaning are no more than highly contestable interpretations.

Are Humans “Essentially Loving”?

The book’s greatest drawback is that Gabel’s own belief in the cosmic and human primacy of “loving spiritual energy” is at best simply another interpretation.

This would not be a problem if Gabel did not frequently write as if it were, rather, a “fact” of life. (A similar problem attends his unjustified certainty about how well his policy proposals would work in real life.) Gabel’s belief in the essentially spiritual nature of human and cosmic existence is at best a *belief* that may be more properly described as a hope or faith. Yet throughout the book he uses words like *real*, *true*, *actual*, and *fundamental* to present this spiritual nature as an essential fact.

Gabel offers precious little argument for his point of view, telling us instead that the truth of his position “depends upon whether you can recognize it as true”—whether it produces “an experience of recognition.” But because in a pluralistic society we are subject to a wide variety of intuitions about what is true, theory requires reasons. Reasons are what enable us to reach people of fundamentally different intuitions, habits, prejudices, and cultures.

There is an enormous, almost crushing number of arguments against Gabel’s claim that humans seek “not primarily food, shelter, or the satisfaction of material needs, but rather the love and recognition of other human beings.” For every Mandela and Bishop Tutu (two of his other inspirations) who preach forgiveness and reconciliation, there are their neighbors in South Africa whose actions have given that

nation the world's thirteenth highest homicide rate and one of the highest incidences of rape, with one local survey reporting that one in every four men admitted to raping a woman or girl. For every New Deal effort that sought broad economic respect for workers, there is the long-term grind of capitalists undoing it. And for every labor victory, there is working-class abandonment of the positive work of communist organizers in exchange (temporarily, it turned out) for a higher standard of living.

Virtually all the social movements that Gabel touts as expressions of universal love were marked by partiality: the U.S. Socialist Party failed to stand with immigrants, the New Left was rife with contempt for the politically conservative working class, serious conservationists have often been ignorant of environmental racism, etc. Was it a particular social group's self-interest or universal love that motivated these movements? Was it both? How would we know? What would make one more real or essential than the other?

If Gabel is right that "the social-spiritual longing for love and mutual recognition is 'fundamental' while fear and paranoia are not," why is fear (as well as the violence and oppression it supposedly produces) so prevalent? Why is the less significant, less central phenomenon the dominant social force? If human beings are essentially loving, why do they cause so much unnecessary suffering?

In the face of such concerns Gabel is simply unjustified in writing as if he can be certain that humans and the cosmos are *essentially* spiritual and that those who deny it are misled by fear, alienation, ruling-class ideology, etc. Using psychological interpretation to dismiss those who disagree manifests an authoritarian and fundamentalist tendency completely at odds with the rest of Gabel's thinking. As well, psychology, to quote Dostoyevsky, is a knife that cuts both ways. Perhaps

not seeing human beings as essentially violent, self-interested, and irrational (consider what we're doing to the world's climate!) stems from unacknowledged fear and grief. Perhaps people believe in the metaphysical guarantees of God, a universal force of love, or an "essential spiritual nature" just to deal with their suppressed despair about how awful things are.

Don't Trade the Outer for the Inner

It is common for theorists to turn to psychology and/or spirituality when mass movements fail. Such was Wilhelm Reich's attempt to combine Marx with Freud after the German Left's loss to Nazism; feminism's romance with the theories of Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, who claimed that psychological development conditioned by exclusively female mothering was the "real" reason for feminism's very limited successes; and Gabel's, *Tikkun's*, and my own theoretical turn to spirituality after the collapse of the New Left. The very problems of subjectivity, meaning, and psychology that are so important to Gabel were central to Western Marxism—anti-communist *and* anti-capitalist thinkers like Antonio Gramsci, Robert Reich, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. Gabel's casual dismissal of Marxism as locked into economic determinism is simply blind to this tradition, as well as to its more distant (but still related) second cousin of socialist feminism (e.g., the groundbreaking work of Sheila Rowbotham).

But we can include psychology and spirituality in social theory without claiming that "*the cause*" (emphasis added) of material suffering and injustice "is to be found in the socio-spiritual separation expressive of an underlying failure of mutual recognition that expresses itself existentially as Fear of the Other." Why replace a

one-sided emphasis on the institutional, social, external, or measurable with one on the psychological and spiritual? Why the same old search for the "one true thing on which all else depends" instead of a holistic account of interdependence? And why would Gabel want to suggest that we can know the truth of his theory just by an examination of our own interior experience? If what is outside us is sustained by what is inside, doesn't what is "inside us" also come from what is outside? Babies (a group Gabel frequently invokes to make his points) may have the capacity and need for love, but if they do not experience any actual loving, that capacity dries up. In a book so relentlessly (and correctly) critical of bourgeois images of the atomized, isolated self, why describe spirituality as something we "just have" (a metaphysical DNA?) as individuals, distinct from the social relations of material support and education that make it possible?

"Recognition" Necessarily Occurs in the Context of Social Relations

Gabel's concept of "recognition" is central (a concept, interestingly, that entered Western philosophy with Hegel, who like Gabel believed that all life was ultimately united in a universal force of connection and wisdom). Yet when Gabel says that people seek above all to be recognized, I want to ask: "Recognized as *what*?" He answers: as the spiritual, worthwhile, loving beings we essentially are. Think, he suggests, of how babies spontaneously cry for affection or how people at a religious service share joyfully in eye contact.

I have my doubts, for in my experience people want to be known by the joys and sorrows of their own particular lives, by the work to which they give their hearts, and by the social groups that forge and sustain their identities. My own life as an American

Jew, a political and cultural radical, an author, the father of disabled child, a teacher. . . all these and more are essential to recognizing me. Could Gabel himself feel truly recognized by people who had no understanding of his struggles, delights, and regrets as a father, writer, professor, and spiritual believer? Infants can be loved just as they are. But if they *are* loved they develop into adults with social and historical identities as well as spiritual ones. To recognize them means not just a passing glance or a hug, but a full engagement in their jointly personal and social existence. A vague, generic gesture of “spiritual recognition” is not enough.

We require social relations to make real recognition possible, and in that way spirituality is a social product. From other people we learn how to be compassionate, loving, and skillful enough to respond to what this particular person in front of us needs, and we learn what it means to experience life as a social being. We also learn how to manage our own emotions so that we can bear with another's suffering or hear another's anger. The social roles (profession, nationality, culture, politics) that Gabel so frequently condemns as antithetical to spiritual connection are, paradoxically, *also* connections and cultural forms that make recognition possible.

If justice is, as Gabel says, “self-evident,” how are we to resolve the abortion debate? Or mediate between those who do and those who do not believe that animals—or forests—deserve moral consideration? Further,

what is it to “recognize” the slave-owner who is committed by everything he “knows” to the naturalness of slavery? We may be polite and compassionate as we free his slaves, eliminate all his wealth, and destroy his manner of living. But will he feel “seen” by us?

These are political or moral differences that cannot be obviated by intuitive appeals to a faith-based, universal spiritual energy. Even if such an energy exists, it still needs the insights and intelligence of purely political theory to respond to conflicts over, for example, gay marriage, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or veganism. Thus as much as politics needs spirituality, the converse is also true. How would spiritual teachers have learned about the spiritually deadening and immoral effects of patriarchal privilege or the ways in which advanced capitalism poisons ecosystems if secular political movements hadn't taught them?

Avoiding a False Certainty of Spirit

Taken as faith, I have no problem with Gabel's belief in the essentially spiritual nature of humans and the cosmos—or with anyone else's belief that Jesus is the son of God, that God spoke to Moses, or that we are all part of Brahma. Until we have a vastly more loving society, there will always be reason to believe, as Marx put it, in something that is the “heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.”

Yet for me the original Marxist faith in the inevitable dialectic of history,

the liberal faith in human reason, *and* faith in an inherently, metaphysically guaranteed spiritual reality are just that—faith. One can be a Marxist—critiquing capitalism and dreaming of socialism—without believing that proletarian victory is inevitable. One can be a liberal—celebrating the progress of science and individual rights—and still accept that in the end rationality may succumb to its opposite.

Similarly, one can choose a life infused by spirituality—believing that awareness, acceptance, gratitude, compassion, and love make you a happier person and a lot more fun to be around—without thinking that spirituality is “in truth” inherent in the nature of the universe or that love is more basic than fear.

I'll take my spirituality straight, without faith, guarantees, or certainty. I wouldn't say this position is truer than Gabel's, only that it fits my spiritual personality. As his version no doubt fits his.

Given how much we agree on, perhaps we should just leave it at that. If not, we replace the false Objectivity of Science or the false Neutrality of Law with a false Certainty of Spirit. And why would we want to do that? ■

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JOIN OUR MOVEMENT

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

Join us at spiritualprogressives.org.

Peter Gabel Responds

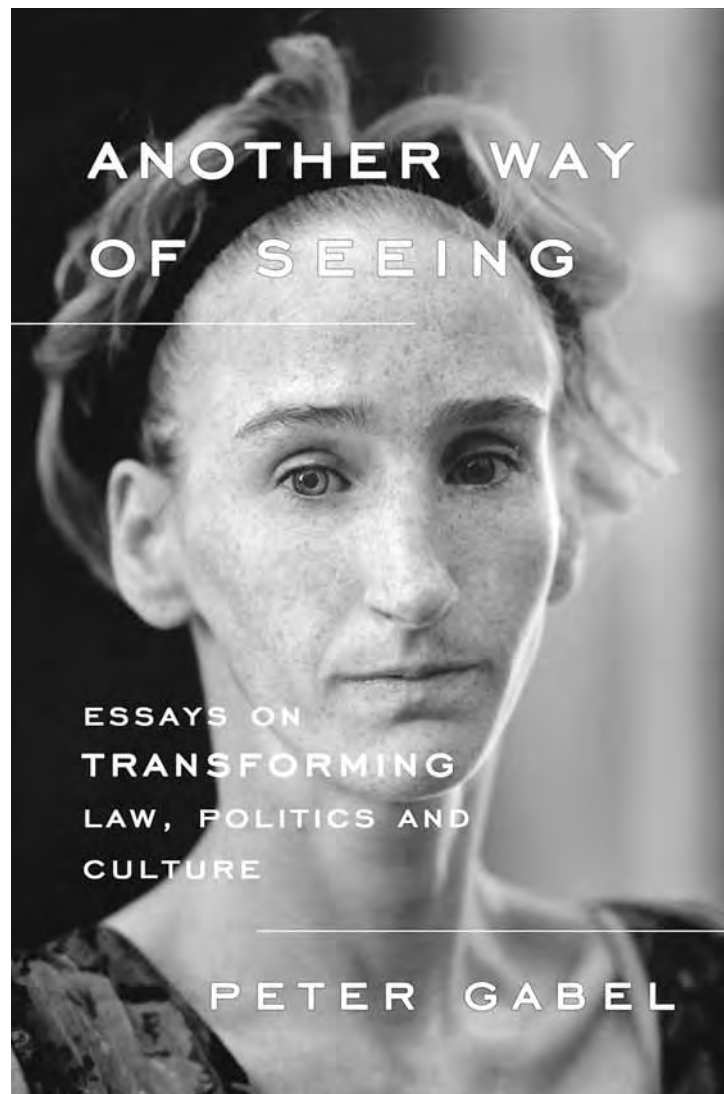
WHILE I APPRECIATE these serious, thoughtful responses to my book from Roger Gottlieb and Kim Chernin, I do not quite see myself reflected in their respective descriptions of the role of *spirit* (Gottlieb), or the role of *hope* (Chernin). My claim is that these are not abstract ideas that I attribute to human reality, but that they are concretely revealed by that human reality if we will but embrace “another way of seeing” that makes the presence of both spirit and hope visible in that human reality.

The central idea of my book is that human beings are not actually “individuals” in the liberal sense of our existing in separate spheres as disconnected monads, but are rather inherently united by a social bond, a “fraternity” as the present pope calls it, that seeks to make itself manifest in the world through the experience of “mutual recognition.” Because of the legacy of the Fear of the Other that has shaped our cultural conditioning throughout history thus far—a fear reflected in our own individual lives through the social formation of our individual egos—our cultural memory inclines us to see the other as a threat. But coexisting with this fearful impulse in every human interaction and at every moment *transcending* the fearful impulse, is an unconditioned, wholly original, spontaneous movement toward a new and sudden recognition of one another in which we would become fully present to each other, and in which we would more fully realize ourselves as the source of each other’s completion.

If you look at the portrait on my book’s cover as it appears on this page of *Tikkun*, taken by the great

photographic artist Robert Bergman (whose work has shown at the National Gallery and about whom I have an essay in the book), you can see this double dimension of the human encounter made present. On the one hand, you may at first simply see a woman, who may appear to you sad or wary, perhaps also resilient, but in any case in some way shadowed by her

life history. On the other hand, if you allow yourself to look at her portrait for at least fifteen seconds, you may suddenly *encounter* the person that she is, because her interior—her indwelling presence—suddenly makes contact with yours in a way that involuntarily pulls you out of being a detached “viewer of a woman on the cover” and into relation with *her*.



Please visit tikkun.org/bergman to see a full-color version of this cover photo by Robert Bergman.

That movement toward contact between two beings transcends all conditioning; the desire to see and be seen and to become fully present to each other in such a mutual recognition pulses through us in every moment; and the ineluctable power and beauty of that longing in every human encounter is itself the manifestation of a spiritual bond that unites all of us and assures, in every moment, that transformation of the received reality, with its legacy of pain and suffering and enforced reciprocal solitude, is possible. To link my ideas with Michael Lerner's, if God is the force of healing and transformation in the universe, then the transcendent movement toward mutual recognition is the manifestation of that divine force within our social being, in human social life.

My book demonstrates as best it can that, in its political dimension, this spiritual impulse is most fully realized in social movements—that it is actually what makes movements “move,” as we all surpass (not entirely, not yet) the constraints of our fear-saturated conditioning and begin to become present to each other so that we can at last

(suddenly but not yet securely) each recognize the other as a Thou, to use the beautiful word Martin Buber gave to this experience of recognition.

And in this book, taken together with my prior book *The Bank Teller and Other Essays on the Politics of Meaning*, I present many examples of ways that the desire for mutual recognition in struggle with our fearful denial of that desire can help us to understand the meaning of historical events (such as the social trauma of the Kennedy assassination, the catastrophe of the Holocaust, the utopian breakthrough of the sixties), as well as electoral politics (John Kerry's failure to manifest authentic presence leading to his loss in 2004, the hope fueling the election of Barack Obama in 2008 and the reasons for the waning of “Yes, We Can” in the years following), in law (the reasons for Al Gore's defeat before the Supreme Court in the 2000 case of *Bush v. Gore*, the emergence of the restorative justice movement and the possibility of building a new legal culture fostering empathy and compassion), as well as in culture (the fear of gay marriage, the denial of spiritual

presence in Darwin's theory of evolution as a reflection of the limits of the traditional scientific method).

So I would say to Roger Gottlieb and Kim Chernin, the source of my conviction about the power of spirit and of my optimism about a positive social transformation comes not from my ideas or beliefs “about” the world, but from how the longing in each of us and all of us for a loving world is itself present right here at the surface of the world if we will see it. This longing can be temporarily denied, distorted, masked, cabined, and buried in racial, gender, or class hierarchies, but it cannot be extinguished and, thankfully, its vital presence will and must keep transcending the alienation that contains it. ■

PETER GABEL is editor-at-large of *Tikkun*. His new book, *Another Way of Seeing: Essays on Transforming Law, Politics, and Culture* (published by Quid Pro Books) is available from Reach and Teach and Amazon.

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FIRESTONE (continued from page 8)

Perhaps this is why the benevolent treatment of the “other” requires so much repetition—this edict occurs no less than thirty-six times in the Five Books of Moses.

Speaking on Trauma in Amman

By the time I made my presentation at the psychology conference in Amman—late on the second of four days together—I had warmed to this earnest group of young doctors and trauma workers. In the evenings we had gone out together to a café for tea, dessert, and shisha tobacco, and the camaraderie I felt with them transcended our differences. Careful to craft a presentation that would be useful to them,

I began by discussing the overwhelming nature of the Syrian war and how to approach the hundreds of thousands of refugees entering Jordan without incurring secondary trauma.

The conversation began to slip in the direction of group psychology and the subtle choices that groups, like individuals, have to make after emerging from profound suffering. Will a population come through self-identified as scapegoats and victims or humbled yet determined? Will they emerge vengeful and entitled or as compassionate agents of their own future? Will we act on our parents' and grandparents' messages or choose for ourselves?

While my words were being translated into Arabic, I gauged the roomful of participants. Their attention was

rapt. I touched on America's haste into war after the Twin Tower attacks in 2001, contrasting post-trauma precipitousness with the more subtle choice that Nelson Mandela made after emerging from twenty-seven years of imprisonment.

Then it got personal.

“In my own life and that of my people—we are Jews—there is a heavy legacy from what happened to us in World War II, with very different messages and outcomes,” I said. “There are those of us who came out of the atrocities of World War II with a sense of bitter alienation, that nothing would ever matter again but our own survival and security.”

“What messages were you personally given?” a young doctor called out.

"To take care of my own people, to be afraid, and to never trust the world," I said. "These things were never spoken, but they came through anyway, in my mother's milk and my father's voice."

"Hey, we know all about that. It's just like us in the Arab world!" another voice rang out loudly. "We Arabs are taught to mistrust the world, especially the West—that you are against us, and we must defend ourselves against you."

A strange sense of levity was rippling through the room now, along with the kind of laughter that accompanies recognition and relief.

"But there were other messages and other choices," I continued. "What you may not know is that there are many others, even in Israel, who are choosing another road. Not what you hear on the news about Bibi or the settlements in the West Bank. There are lots of Jews struggling to defend the right of Palestinians to have their own country—their dignity and sovereignty. And there are Jews who work in disaster areas around the world helping those whose lives have been broken. These are Jews whose suffering has become a kind of lens through which they see and reach out to the suffering of others."

It all came out. I went on to talk about how I am a Jew and a rabbi, how I work in Israel for human rights, and that I have worked to found a group in the United States that, like many others, opposes oppressive policies in Israel, wants peace above all, and is committed to discontinuing the negative results of our fearful historical trauma.

For the rest of the conference, Arab participants approached me to thank me for "coming out" and for telling them "the truth about Jews." Several of them shared in low voices that they had been taught from a young age to hate Jews because of Israel or Zionism or their family history, but that I had given them the chance to reevaluate this message. And many told me that I was the first Jew they had ever seen or met, that they were happy to know me, that they considered me their friend, and that they would look me up when they came to the United States.

My own worldview had shifted, too. These Jordanians, Syrians, and Lebanese people—the Jews' "sworn enemies" who, I had been taught, were bent on our destruction—were deeply kind, openhearted people who wanted to grow, change, and serve those suffering

in the world, just like I did. Was there still hatred and prejudice among their people for mine? Of course there was. I am not naive about Arab hatred for our people. But I felt that in some small way this conference served to humanize "the other" for all of us.

The phenomenon of massive psychic trauma is not going away any time soon. Wars, environmental disasters, and uprooted populations are on the rise, and with them the danger that the "wounds of the fathers will last for three and even four generations" (Exod. 20:5), and that trauma's psycho-emotional fallout will continue to perpetuate itself.

But the ability to work with one's dark history—to claim it, name it, and mourn it deeply—is available to us. To meet this challenge, we must find a way to process the trauma images and tasks that we have received from earlier generations and that keep us disempowered, anxious, and angry. While it takes enormous strength of will to break from these intergenerational legacies, to heal, and to stop acting on the cellular memories that we have inherited, we must remember that the future of our children depends upon it. And the possibility of peace with our Arab cousins depends on it. ■

GIROUX *(continued from page 12)*

politics must involve not only the struggle over power and economics, but also the struggle over particular modes of subjectivity and agency.

Resisting the neoliberal assault on politics, education, and culture means developing forms of subjectivity capable of challenging casino capitalism and other anti-democratic forces, including the growing trend simply to criminalize social problems such as homelessness. What is needed is a radical democratic project that provides the basis for imagining a life beyond the "dream world" of capitalism, beyond the socioeconomic institutions that produce

ever-widening circles of misery, suffering, and immiseration. In opposition to the conservative assaults on critical thinking and the power of the imagination, it is crucial for educators, intellectuals, young people, artists, and others to resurrect the formative cultures necessary to challenge the various threats being mobilized against the very ideas of justice and democracy, while also fighting for those public spheres, ideals, values, and policies that offer alternative modes of identity, social relations, and politics. At stake here is the educative nature of politics itself, and the development and protection of those institutions that make such a politics possible.

In both conservative and progressive discourses today, education is often narrowed to the teaching of pre-specified subject matter and stripped-down skills that can be assessed through standardized testing. The administration of education is similarly confined to a set of corporate strategies rooted in an approach that views schooling as merely a private act of consumption. In opposition to the instrumental reduction of education to an adjunct of corporate and neoliberal interests—which have no language for relating the self to public life, social responsibility, or the demands of citizenship—a critical approach to education illuminates the relationships among knowledge,

authority, and power. Critical forms of pedagogy raise questions regarding who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge. Is the production of knowledge and curricula in the hands of teachers, textbook companies, corporate interests, the elite, or other forces? Central to the perspective informing critical pedagogy is the recognition that education is always implicated in power relations because it offers particular versions and visions of civic life, community, the future, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment. Critical pedagogy matters because it questions everything and complicates one's relationship to oneself, others, and the larger world. This unsettling process is what English professor Kristen Case has called "moments of classroom grace." In her *Chronicle of Higher Education* article "The Other Public Humanities," she writes,

There is difficulty, discomfort, even fear in such moments, which involve confrontations with what we thought we knew, like why people have mortgages and what "things" are. These moments do not reflect a linear progress from ignorance to knowledge; instead they describe a step away from a complacent knowing into a new world in which, at least at first, everything is cloudy, nothing is quite clear. . . . We cannot be a democracy if this power to reimagine, doubt, and think critically is allowed to become a luxury commodity.

Education has always been part of a broader political, social, and cultural struggle over knowledge, subjectivities, values, and the future. Sites of public and higher education are currently under a massive assault in a growing number of countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, because they represent some of the few places left that are capable of teaching young people to be critical, thoughtful, and engaged citizens who are willing to take risks, stretch their imaginations, and, most importantly, hold power accountable. The consequence of turning universities into sites that commodify both knowledge and people is a broader social order that embraces neoliberalism's methodical ruthlessness toward others, its hatred of democracy, and its fear of young people, who will increasingly lack the self-awareness and social consciousness to realize how they have been shut out of the language of democracy, justice, and hope.

One of the most serious challenges facing teachers, artists, journalists, writers, youth, and other cultural workers is the challenge of developing a discourse of both critique and possibility. This means insisting that democracy begins to fail and political life becomes impoverished in the absence of vital public spheres such as higher education, where civic values, public scholarship, and social engagement allow for a more imaginative grasp of a future that takes seriously the demands of justice, equity, and civic courage. Democratic processes should always involve thinking about education—a kind of

education that thrives on connecting equity to excellence, learning to ethics, and agency to the imperatives of social responsibility and the public good. Democracy, as Michael Lerner has argued in another context, needs a Marshall Plan in which funding is sufficient to make all levels of education free, while also providing enough social support to eliminate poverty, hunger, inadequate health care, and the destruction of the environment. Democracy needs a politics that not just restores hope, but also envisions a different future—one in which the struggle for justice is never finished and the highest of values is caring for and being responsible to others.

Neoliberalism is a toxin that is generating a class of predatory zombies who are producing what might be called dead zones of the imagination. These cannibalistic walking dead are waging a fierce battle against the possibility of a world in which the promise of justice and democracy is worth fighting for. We may live in the shadow of the authoritarian corporate state, but the future is still open. The time has come to develop a political language in which civic values and social responsibility—and the institutions, tactics, and long-term commitments that support them—become central to invigorating and fortifying a new era of civic engagement, a renewed sense of social agency, and an impassioned international social movement with the vision, organization, and set of strategies capable of challenging the neoliberal nightmare that now haunts the globe and empties out the meaning of politics and democracy. ■

SOMERSON (continued from page 20)

Although I purposefully scheduled a somatic practice session with my friends Nathan and Elizabeth to begin right before the High Holy days, I did not realize that the three of us would enact a Rosh Hashanah ritual. The

intention of an "ally practice" is to bring the present to bear on the past. In this session, my friends ally with me to help me experience safety and protection in a situation—the trauma represented by the nightmare—where I originally felt neither. Our ritual has three essential elements of Rosh Hashanah: We stand

together before G-d or spirit by creating a sacred space. We reconcile to the past by opening our hearts. We perform a ritual of transformation.

I cry for an hour and a half—the entire length of our session.

We try out different positions: Elizabeth stands in front of me, behind me,

to my left, and to my right. It feels most calming for her to stand on my right. Nathan asks me to check in with my body. Movement is stirring; my chest is burning and tight with anxiety. My legs are starting to twitch, and I can feel the space around my fingers buzzing. My hands don't know what to do with themselves. Nathan asks, "Is there anything she can say right now?"

"Leave her alone," Elizabeth says.

I internally address the man in my nightmare by echoing Elizabeth silently: "Yeah, leave me alone."

Crying and shaking, I fall into the feeling of terror immediately. I am afraid of dragging my friends into an undercurrent of plummeting revelations where we will be tossed about until the end of time. But that is why we are here, so I keep heading further down.

I try lying on the floor, but it feels unsettling because I need to be able to see more of the room. Instead, the three of us sit on the floor facing my front window, and I am cross-legged in the middle. My knees touch the outside of their thighs, and I place one hand on each friend's leg. I feel their attentive presence as I sink into the past. My legs tremble, my shoulders convulse, and I feel energy streaming up and down my spine. There is movement, but there is no connection between the upper and lower halves of my body. They feel like they are in two separate compartments, as if a magician had sliced through my torso and pried the two halves apart to show to the waiting crowd.

"We see this," my friends say, in several rounds.

"They see you. You can't hide from them."

My friends also see me. Their presence highlights how alone I have felt with this terror for so long. Bringing my friends into the nightmare with me is both deeply satisfying and deeply vulnerable. I weep with gratitude that they are bearing witness for me. I weep with sadness about how lonely I have felt. I weep because relief and shame

about this revelation are competing to capture this moment.

My legs start twitching faster, bringing more movement and energy through them. My shoulders move up and down, while warmth spreads from my heart out through my arms and down to the tips of my fingers.

Henry, my Siamese cat, is fascinated by what we're doing on the floor; he fixes us in his cross-eyed stare and comes over to rub his cheek against our legs.

My friends each hold up one hand to prevent the man from coming near my neck. They each put one hand on my sacrum, and it responds with pulsating movement. Energy that was stuck in my sacrum spreads out to meet each of their hands and allows me to feel open and deeply held.

"Go away," they say in rounds. "Go away."

"We won't tolerate your presence."

The energy in my body speeds up and widens outward as my gaze encompasses the width of my living room.

I watch as the man's shadowy figure retreats into the corner.

Henry chases after him. The man's figure evaporates.

"Don't come back. You don't belong here."

The two halves of my body click back together, making room for powerful tides to rush up and down through the widening canal of my pelvis. I can feel my whole body vibrating powerfully, pulling in strength and connection from touching Nathan and Elizabeth. Alive with this movement, I feel a sudden flush of heat and wholeness. Three pelicans stretch their wings over our heads, opening the gate between this world and the one to come. A cream-colored egg bobs amidst the waves of the ocean.

"He went away," they each say once, but I put an end to that. It feels too bold, like tempting fate. He may sneak back in if we're too obvious with our triumph.

Instead, I ask them to say, "We got this," which they do in rounds.

I am soothed by the feeling that they are taking care of it. I don't have to do anything. The energy slows as it continues to rock rhythmically through my body.

"I think we're done," I announce.

Sitting on the couch after the session, Nathan asks me what this self, still humming with my own power, would tell the self who can't sleep at night. "You are not alone," I say. "You are not alone," he repeats slowly.

Release

On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which is the last of the ten High Holy days and the holiest day of the year, we rehearse for our death by refusing our regular routine of life-affirming activities for our bodies: we avoid eating, bathing, and having sex. By making our bodies uncomfortable, we experience the physical parallel to the discomfort in our souls as we ask for forgiveness from G-d. Remembering the sacrificial offerings from the days of the Second Temple, we are reminded that we must still make an offering; we have to release something old in order to make room for something new.

For several days after our ritual, I can't sleep, yet I am not afraid at night. During the day, I can't digest my food. It goes right through me as if there were nowhere solid for the nutrients to land. My body is neither relaxed nor tense; it mostly feels unfamiliar, as if it were someone else's.

Having just relived my trauma, I go through the motions of life, feeling very close to the nothingness of death. Our ritual has taken me on a journey from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, from rebirth to death, from connecting to holiness to connecting with emptiness. This emptiness demands that we consider what will remain when we are on our death bed—what do we most care about in this world? In this stripped-down state, I feel disoriented.

I have let go of my familiar trappings, but I can't see what is coming next. I wade through the thickness of this time slowly, sensing the outline of a nearby body of water filled with something previously untasted.

Letting the Light In

After the High Holy days, during Sukkot, we sit in the temporary sukkah, which is open to the sky. We pay respect to our ancestors, who inhabited fragile dwellings during their forty years of travel in the desert after having escaped the slavery of *mitzrayim*, a narrow place. Having completed one round of our own journey from a place of constriction to a wider, more spacious world, we let go of the illusion that our walls can protect us from pain, disconnection, and death. We turn toward these difficult experiences—previously pushed away—and let them into our homes to claim them as part of who we are.

In this return to my body as a home, I, too, feel more open to the world. I have been unable to keep the walls of my house intact. As I felt them falling apart around me, I was terrified of losing myself, but their collapse has allowed me to make a more conscious return to a past that has been challenging to face and a body that has been difficult to inhabit. And while new temporary walls have been erected, they are more porous and spacious, allowing more air and light to come streaming in. I finally find the room to turn and stretch my wings. I reach toward a different relationship to my past with the knowledge that I am not facing this return alone. ■

McFAGUE (continued from page 22)

for the world and a passion for God and could not imagine giving up either one. I love that insight, and it expresses my own spiritual journey very accurately: when I was also seven years old, I realized that someday I would not “be here” any longer—not just that I would die, but that I would lose the world, especially the world of our one-room cabin on Cape Cod, where I could run barefoot through pine needles. With something like an electric shock I experienced both the ecstasy and the horror of human existence, the awareness of living within a world that one loves but will lose.

Expressing Love for God and the World

If this love for both God and the world is typical of many contemporary persons' experience, then I suggest we look at which model expresses this experience better. The first model says that God and the world are only distantly related; pantheism says they are identical; and panentheism says the world exists within God. This last model insists that, in some fashion, both God and the world are central. A passion for God and a passion for the world are not identical, but they are inextricably interrelated and interdependent in many, many ways. Being a panentheist means one cannot have God without the world or the world without God, though it doesn't tell you *how* they are related. What this model does do is “complicate the question” and insist that conversations about God not be dismissive of either God or the world.

Rather, the panentheist model insists that such conversations must take seriously the best, deepest, most informed thinking, feeling, and acting about both God and the world. It is not sufficient to deal simply with one stereotype of God or with outmoded science concerning the world. Both partners in the conversation deserve our very best attention, wisdom, and energy.

Hence, my modest suggestion for contemporary God-talk is that the model of God and the world we assume will take seriously the human passion both for God *and* for the world. This is the strategy accredited to Paul in Acts 17, where he discusses the God question with Gentiles. He suggests that those who “would search and perhaps grope” for God recall that even their own poets have done so when they write that within God “we live and move and have our being.” I believe that such panentheism, understanding the world *within* God, is more likely to encourage the most fruitful conversation concerning how we can indeed love both in our complicated, frightening twenty-first century. The assumption here is that God “is not far from each one of us” but is also the One “who made the world and everything in it.”

If we were to follow Paul's example in his discussion of the “unknown God,” we would not assume that everyone means the same thing by “God”; rather, we would assume that serious conversations about “God” must also include up-to-date, informed discussions of the nature of the world to which we are relating God. So two central initial questions are, who is the God we are talking about, and what is the world like to which God is related? ■

LERNER (continued from page 27)

We are not separate from this process of God's evolution; God is everything that ever was, is, and will be. We are in God, though God is in us too, as God is in all being.

A Cellular Analogy for Our Relation to God

God is in constant contact with us. Perhaps it would be helpful to imagine our relation to God through the analogy of a liver cell's relation to a human's

conscious mind. Let's talk about the liver first. Liver cells, when isolated and put under a microscope and attended to from the standpoint of empirical science, function according to certain biochemical “laws.” Yet they are also alive in a very different way than science can

describe—they, like all cells in our bodies, are constituent elements of a living, conscious entity and thereby have consciousness, albeit the consciousness of a liver cell. They receive and emit messages that are processed by the central nervous system and the brain, and ultimately their messages reach our conscious minds. Normally we don't pay much attention to our liver cells, but when there is deep trouble there (e.g., pain caused by cancer), we become aware of this part of our bodies. Once aware, we can send different messages to the liver. We can, for example, visualize the liver as healthy and functioning, or visualize ourselves as sending healing energy to the liver. Sometimes we can even get empirical proof that this visualization has had a healing impact on the liver—some scientists say that the exact biochemical changes that are caused by such visualization will eventually be discovered.

The liver cell is part of the liver, which is part of the entire body. It is conscious of the totality of which it is part, but only in the limited way that a liver cell can be conscious. It is part of something larger, it “knows” and responds to that larger something, and it is absolutely dependent on that larger totality. Eventually, like every cell of the body, it will die and be replaced by other cells that have similar functions in relationship with the larger body.

Human beings stand in similar relationship with God. God is the totality of all Being and all existence that ever was, is, or will be, and more. At any given moment we are part of God, and God is part of us. But we are not all there is to God, nor is God simply the sum of all physically existing things in the infinite universe. That is also part of God, just as a given moment of our conscious experience is a part of who we are at that moment, though not *all* of who we are at that moment and certainly not *all* of who we are in our totality. When the totality of all that was, is, and will be pulsates through our being and constitutes our being, we receive

messages from it. But we only notice those messages that we can process given our receptors and our particular level of consciousness.

Just like the liver cell, we intuit and “know” that we are part of some larger totality, that we are serving a purpose in a larger story. But just like the liver cell, we have only a very limited vocabulary for describing what the larger story is, even though we can feel it in every ounce of our being, at least when we are not deflected from knowing so by certain poisons within our system.

A World of Living Matter

So we are alive in a world that is alive, and so too is all of being. The notion of matter as something dead and acted on by other dead objects misses too much of the reality of the universe. In the past hundred years we have learned that at the very heart of what we once had thought to be inanimate matter there lies a set of atoms made up of tiny electrons that move around a nucleus held together by its own energy. Yet when the smaller particles in the nucleus were examined, it became increasingly difficult to talk of particles as anything more than energy fields in which energy “events” seem to happen and in which particles emerge and disappear back into energy (see my interview with John Cobb in this issue of *Tikkun* for more about this). Everything that once seemed dead, quiescent, or dormant is in fact in some sense alive. The whole way we view the universe, in terms of objects, is a function of the level of complexity of our receptors, which are unable to see at the microscopic level and to reveal the way in which these so-called objects are themselves complex arrangements of energy fields.

We get a fuller picture of reality when we see ourselves as composed of millions of these complex energy fields that are coming into existence and dying, and standing in relationship with trillions of other such energy fields. When the mystics talk about God breathing

us and the breath of God traveling through our every pore, we hear language that tries to say there is no radical division between the dancer and the dance, between the outer and the inner, between that which is object and that which apprehends and categorizes objects. The solidity of objects is merely a particular way for a particular being, us, with our limited sensory apparatus, to arrange the flux of energies for the sake of certain survival tasks.

“Wait a second,” you may object. “Energy fields themselves are categories of physical science. So if that's what consciousness is, then it is still wholly physical and within the scientific paradigm.” Unfortunately, this kind of analysis, no matter how frequently repeated, cannot account for our subjectivity and the inner experience that we have, which is not reducible to energy fields.

What many human beings have discovered but have been unable to fully articulate using a language developed to describe the empirically observable, is that the universe is pulsating with a spiritual energy as well, and that every ounce of Being is an extension of that spiritual energy. Just as our sensory apparatus is inadequate for capturing the energy forces at play in the nuclei of the cells that constitute the visually observable objects of the world, so too our conceptual apparatus provides us with inadequate tools or means to apprehend the rich web of spiritual reality in which we and all of Being are embodied.

Yet we have hints that most human beings through most of history have been aware of this dimension of reality and have sought to respond to it. We respond through awe, wonder, radical amazement, and celebration—even as we may bemoan our inability to describe it adequately or persuasively to those whose spiritual sensors have been shut off in some way (often because of the crude or coercive ways that spirituality or religion has been introduced to them by parents or oppressive religious practices).

God's Personality

Now let us for a moment imagine that the entirety of all that has been, all that is, and all that will be is filled with a spiritual energy and consciousness of which our own consciousness and our own experience of spirituality are but bare hints, like the intuition or “knowing” that a liver cell might have about the totality of the being from which it receives its tasks and messages and of which it is a constituent part. When we know in this way, Jews are inclined to respond to what we know by addressing a “Thou.” And this “Thou” has feelings, upsets, and needs.

Is it anything more than a peculiarly human presumption to address that larger totality as a Thou, to imagine it as having personality and emotions?

For a Greek imperialist or a male chauvinist, a god with feelings and needs must be a lesser god. Greek and Roman imperialism may have felt the need to develop a conception of perfection in which the *full* being was one that had no needs or emotions, and the Roman centurion may have been trained to distance himself from feelings and needs in order to become the perfect mechanism for world conquest. But why should that influence *my* concept of God, inspired as it is in part by El Shaddai, the female energy of the universe, which understands humans' relational needs as part of the dignity and magnificence of what it is to be a human being?

From the standpoint of the Bible, to be human is both to be created in the image of God and to be in relationship with God, yearning for and needing God. And for Jewish mysticism, it is also true that God is in relationship with human beings—God needs us, cares about us, and is in a not yet completed process in which human beings have a partnership role. We are not equal partners, but we are needed partners nevertheless. So being in loving, conscious, freely chosen, joyous relationship and needing to be recognized

and responded to is a fundamental ontological reality of the universe, and God is, among other things, that aspect of the universe. Why? No reason. That's just how it is. Had we been around at the time of the Big Bang, we probably wouldn't have been aware of this aspect of reality, but the universe that evolved us as conscious, loving, freely choosing beings who wish to be in relationship with the ultimate God of the universe is neither a cosmic blunder nor a random act of chance. Rather, this is the outcome of the process of the evolution of a universe that has always had this potential in it.

From the standpoint of contemporary capitalist mentality (the continuation of Hellenistic thought in the modern period), this relational idea of God is heretical. To be whole and to be healthy is to be able to stand alone. So certainly the spiritual Force that governs, shapes, and creates the universe cannot be a force that stands in need of something else or somebody else!

But what if the fundamental Force shaping the universe, the Force that makes for the possibility of transformation from *that which is* to *that which ought to be*, not only makes such transformation possible but also needs it and feels pain of a sort when that transformation is not accomplished? What if this Force sheds tears for the universe that is still in pain and feels anger at the ways in which unnecessary pain persists? What if this Force feels outrage at the ways in which pain and oppression are ontologized and blamed on God, and compassion for those parts of creation that cannot yet heal themselves?

I understand full well that in talking about spiritual reality in this way I may be seen as merely imposing a particular, limited human reality on the universe and God. “The human hunger for family and parenting,” you might argue, “is shaping religious people's desire to inscribe into the structure of necessity our sad human condition and neediness.” Perhaps you pity those of us who have such a need rather than the ability

to “look reality coldly in the face, recognize its silence, and cope with that.” I understand this response.

But seeing the universe as cold and unresponsive, or seeing the world as a mechanistic place governed by impersonal energy systems that have no particular knowledge or caring for us—these too are just human constructs, ways of cutting up reality based on one orientation and one set of desires and values. They do not contain an “objectively” more compelling argument, although they correspond more closely to the ruling paradigms of our historical epoch.

Here is another way to put it: the richness of human emotions, the wealth of nuance and excitement that can be generated by human neediness, and the depth of love that can be generated by human relationships—these magnificent aspects of reality are likely to be aspects of God as well. Why should God be any less wonderful than human beings?

If one rejects the notions of perfection that come from Hellenistic (and now contemporary patriarchal) thought and affirms the loving, caring, and compassionate energy (often essentialized as “feminine”), then one can easily see that attributing emotions, personality, feelings, and caring to the spiritual Being that permeates all reality is not a put-down or a belittling but rather a celebration in God of what we can and ought to honor in human beings. Here, feminist theory and biblical insight dovetail nicely.

So although talking about a consciousness of the universe or the consciousness of human beings as existing in God may make it sound as if I'm embracing a rather rationalist version of panentheism, in some respects akin to the ideas of Jewish theologian Mordecai Kaplan, I'm simultaneously affirming the mystical and love-filled dimension of God that I learned from Abraham Joshua Heschel: God as the caring, loving being who needs and stands in relationship with all that is

and who contracted in order to give space to our freedom. And while the language I use seems to suggest that God had a preexisting plan that was being followed, I actually think that God has been developing and evolving with us and with whatever other self-conscious beings God has also created in other galaxies, since they too are part of God. And if this is only one of a zillion universes, then God has been developing along with all of them too, and they are also inside God and made possible

by the same loving Force that needed to contract in order to give creation the freedom to develop in unpredictable ways. This contraction by God to give space to humans to develop freely, even while going astray and developing in unpredictable ways, is possible because this God is a Goddess of womb-like rachamim—compassion and mercy. Thus the second revelation of God in Torah: “YHVH, YHVH, God of compassion and mercy, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and

truth, carrying mercy to the thousands.” The idea that compassion is a fundamental aspect of the spiritual energy pervading the universe makes the God we are talking about also the God of the Jews and the other Abrahamic religions as well. And since here I’m reclaiming El Shaddai and merging her with YHVH, it’s time for affirmative action in theology, which would require that we also refer to God from now on as the Goddess! ■

RUETHER (continued from page 28)

What about God as the creator of the world? What about God as the giver of the teachings of the Torah or the New Testament or the Qur’an? What about God as the one who will bring the triumph of goodness in human history and environmental harmony? What needs to be given up is the idea of the divine as a personified agent who acts in history over against (and disconnected from) humans and other beings,

creating and redeeming us and dictating truths in the languages of our scriptures.

Rather, it is humans, who interact with this renewing energy of the divine in all things, who are inspired to write the teachings of the scriptures in our various languages. This energy of creativity and renewal underlies the coming to be of all things. Through our interrelation with it, we seek to bring about the renewal of society and the harmony of humanity with the energies

of the rest of creation. This does not mean the divine is purely “immanent” in the sense of being reduced to what is and has been, because creativity and renewal both underlie the being of all things and open up new possibilities. This is the eschatological side of creativity, not as something unrelated to what is but as its ongoing newness. The divine power of creativity and renewal underlies what is and gives it continual new potential. ■

PLASKOW/CHRIST (continued from page 32)

The notion that the world is the body of the Goddess stems from the ancient and modern idea of Goddess as earth. Process philosopher Charles Hartshorne develops the idea of the world as the body of God, philosophically using the model of the human body. In Hartshorne’s model, the individual cells of a body are independent “individuals”—not under the full control of the mind, yet connected as parts of a single body and influenced by the mind. So, too, individuals in the world—human and other than human—are independent, yet connected in the body of God, influenced by and capable of being inspired by the divine wisdom. In this view, God’s body is the earth-body, but also the body of our universe and all other

universes. Hartshorne’s model of the world as the divine body affirms the close connection of Goddess with the world while not collapsing Goddess into traditional definitions of immanence.

Does the idea that Goddess is intelligent embodied love reintroduce the problem of evil, the question of how a loving Goddess could create and rule a world that includes so much evil and suffering? This problem arises only if we assume that Goddess is omnipotent and rules the world from outside it. But this is a view I reject. In a relational world, the power of Goddess should not be understood as the sole power that determines everything—nor as the power to dominate others. The power of Goddess must be understood not as power over but as power with and power within. The world is not

controlled by a single individual we call Goddess.

If the world truly is relational and interdependent, then no one individual, not even the divine individual, can control everything. The notion that the world is relational and that God must be understood through the power of relationship is expressed in Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* and developed philosophically in Hartshorne’s *The Divine Relativity*. For Hartshorne, God is the most relational of all relational beings and the most sympathetic of all sympathetic individuals. (Sympathy is the ability to feel the feelings of others and to respond with love, understanding, empathy, and insight.) Goddess feels the feelings of the world, suffering when the world suffers, rejoicing when the world rejoices, and inspiring individuals to

love and understand more deeply and widely. The power of Goddess is omnipresence, not omnipotence.

Hartshorne explains the nature of divine power using the concept of panentheism, which means that Goddess is *in* the world yet more than the world. In contrast to traditional theism, panentheism understands Goddess to be in the world, not beyond or outside it. In contrast to traditional understandings of pantheism, Goddess is not identified with or swallowed up by the world. In contrast to monism, the world is not identified with or swallowed up in Goddess. Goddess and the individuals in the world are real. Individuals—including human beings, animals, cells, atoms, and the particles of atoms—have the power to affect each other and Goddess. The world is a relational world, and what happens in the world is the result of a multiplicity of wills.

I believe that Goddess is transcendent of the world in one and only one respect: Goddess is the one individual who is always loving and understanding. Why do I assert this? At the most fundamental level, this is my experience, shared by many others, though clearly not by all. I am convinced that this view is not irrational by Hartshorne's version of the ontological argument, which states that "the highest being imaginable" is a relational being that cares about the world. However, the power of Goddess in a relational world is persuasive rather than coercive. The divine power is always a power of love and understanding, but this power is the power to persuade or inspire, not the power to control.

The evil and suffering in the world are not "caused" by Goddess. Some suffering is an inevitable result of a world in which more than one individual exists and in which all individuals other than Goddess are finite. Death, disease, and natural phenomena such as earthquakes, volcanoes, and floods (excluding those caused by human intervention) are part of life in a relational world on our planet. However,

a great proportion of the "evil" in the world is not the result of inevitable conflicts in a world in which more than one individual exists. Much of what we know as evil in our world has been created by human beings who fail to respect other individuals and the interdependence of life. Understanding the power of Goddess as power with, not power over, places the responsibility to change the world firmly in human hands. We can choose to repair the world or to continue to destroy it. At the same time, Goddess is always with us, encouraging and inspiring us to love and understand each other and the world more fully. This for me makes all the difference.

Finding Common Feminist Ground

Despite the differences in our views of Goddess and God, there are many theological convictions that the two of us share. We reject the transcendent God of traditional theologies who exists apart from the world and whose power is defined as omnipotence. Both of us affirm that Goddess or God is in the world, not beyond it. Both of us have rejected the classical dualisms that separate divinity from nature, mind from body, and male from female. For both of us bodies matter, including the body of God or Goddess. We have both used panentheism to describe our understanding that God is in the world. We both believe that we need new images for divinity and divine power that can supplement, transform, or replace traditional images of God as a dominating male other. We agree that some of these images must be female, while others will be drawn from nature. We have found—though this is a subject for another discussion—that our differing views of Goddess and God lead to similar ethical conclusions.

Our views diverge on the question of whether Goddess or God is a personal power of love and understanding that is good, or whether God or Goddess

is an impersonal power that is inclusive of good and evil. We continue to debate these questions. Is love more fundamental than hate? Is it mistaking fantasy for reality to think it is? Does the notion that Goddess is love provide a firmer foundation for an ethics of care than the notion that God includes both good and evil? Or is the inclusive whole the place to ground ethical decision-making?

Though we continue to argue, we also recognize that each of our views is shared by others and that both personal and impersonal understandings of God and Goddess are found within many of the world's religious traditions. While we have learned to accept our differences, we remain convinced that images and understandings of Goddess or God do matter. Traditional images of God as a transcendent and dominating male other have harmed women and the world. We hope that the two alternatives that we have offered here will help others make sense of this world and find a language to affirm the interdependence of life and our responsibility to ensure its flourishing. ■

WALLACE (continued from page 35)

by incarnating Godself in Jesus and setting free the Holy Spirit to indwell everything that exists on the planet. The miracle of Jesus as the living enfleshment of God in all things—a miracle that is alongside the gift of the Spirit to the world since time immemorial—signals the ongoing vitality of God's sustaining presence within the natural order. God is not a discarnate heavenly being divorced from the material world. Ironically, in light of its misunderstood history, Christianity is a religion of subsistence, not transcendence. Now nothing is held back as God overflows Godself into the bounty of the natural world. Now all things are bearers of the sacred; each and every creature is a portrait of God; and everything that is, is holy.

Return to the Crum Woods

My point in this essay has been to argue that Christianity is an animist religion that celebrates the enfleshment of God in many forms and, in particular, in an avian form. My aim in this regard is to reawaken in each of us an emotionally felt and primordial sense of spiritual belonging within the wider natural world. In turn, my hope is that this deep sense of belonging to the earth—to God's body, as it were—will enflame our hearts and empower our wills to commit us to healing and saving the earth—or creation, as Christians, Jews, and others understand it. My point is simple: if God is the creator Spirit-Bird and baptismal Dove—and if all the things that God made, including birds and all other beings, are God-in-the-flesh—then it behooves each of us to care for the natural world insofar as this world *is* God in bone, feathers, soil, air, water, leaf, and flower.

In *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History* (Norton, 1993), evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould writes beautifully:

We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love. . . . We really must make room for nature in our hearts.

Gould is right: the environmental crisis we now face, at its core, is less a scientific or technological problem and more a spiritual problem, because it is human beings' deep ecocidal dispositions toward nature that are the cause of the earth's continued degradation. The crisis is a matter of the heart, not the head: market values have overtaken community values, and there are no massive geo-engineering projects on the books that can save us from the dystopian future that awaits us. Regarding the environmental crisis as a spiritual crisis, my hope has been to recover the biophilic affection for God as flesh and

feathers in the Bible in order to counter the utilitarian attitudes toward nature and toward ourselves that now dominate the global marketplace.

Because I yearn to see and hear God in my time and place—to revive my feeling of kinship to all of my relations in creation—I spend many summer hours sitting in a big chair perched at the edge of the Crum forest, waiting to hear the wood thrush sing its song of intoxicating polyphony. When I hear the thrush, I rock in my chair to its supernal rhythms and take a break from my mad quest for profit and productivity, soulfully drifting into a sequence of notes that stills my spirit, calms my body, and fills my heart with joy and wonder at the beauty of creation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Consider the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26). To rekindle my desire to nurture the sacred earth, I take refuge in the thrush, often repeating to myself "The Peace of Wild Things," a poem that farmer-philosopher Wendell Berry wrote about the refuge he finds among his own feathered friends in Kentucky:

When despair for the world grows
in me
and I wake in the night at the least
sound
in fear of what my life and my children's
lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood
drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and
the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with
forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of
still water
and I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. And for a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and
am free.

Like Berry, especially when I am distraught and feeling hopeless about so

many things—my family, my finances, my work, my students, the earth's future, and much more—I take refuge in the birds whom God feeds to remind myself that God seeks to care for all of us, bird-like as well as human, and that this is the ground of our hope in a depredated world. So I ask myself, if God was once the nesting, brooding bird God of biblical antiquity, could not God today be the ethereal thrush who lives in the Crum Woods? In a world on fire—in our time of global warming, or better, global dying—I wager everything on this hope. ■

KASTURI et al. (continued from page 37)

Putting Spiritual Politics into Practice

As a progressive Hindu organization, we value peace, tolerance, diversity, and dialogue. We strive to work for the environment, economic and social justice, civil rights, and democracy. We make common cause with philosophers and with atheists on these issues. We build united fronts with like-minded faithful from other religious traditions. We believe that a focus on diversity and coexistence is not a compromise of our core religious tenets—but rather is the tenet that matters most.

We do these things not only because of our personal values as progressives, but also because our experiences with our Hindu religious and philosophical traditions have reinforced these same liberal values, and we strive to once again return a liberal Hindu voice to the town square.

To suggest that to be spiritual is to be conservative is to be a poor student of religious history. Pope Francis's recent ecumenical outreach and his call to serve the marginalized members of society have been a surprise to many. But the Pope has merely brought forward a sense of liberal Christian spirituality that has not occupied the public arena since the 1960s. That was perhaps the

last time that churches were so visibly at the forefront of the movements for civil rights, social justice, ecological sustainability, and peace.

In a long line of great modernizers and reformers of Hinduism, Gandhi too brought a clear sense of human agency, humility, and tolerance to his politics, forcefully resisting the British but recognizing their humanity and refusing to “other” them. His was a spiritual vision compatible with the values

of liberal-minded socialists, atheists, and agnostics (many of whom joined his cause). At the same time, Gandhi’s spiritual vision was also compatible with the needs of a multicultural, democratic, and secular Indian state. His vision succeeded in keeping the Hindu right wing out of the public square for nearly fifty years.

The ongoing social power of religion is perhaps the most important reason for the liberal-minded activist

today to enter into the spiritual and religious dialogue. Religion continues to be perhaps the most important language through which our most pressing concerns are negotiated and through which some of our most hard-fought truths and values are told. To abandon its language is to cede its territory. And if we did that, we would also condemn ourselves, then, to imagine less fair-minded gods. ■

LOY (continued from page 39)

alive and relevant, is what they can learn from each other. The growth of fundamentalism in almost all traditions (including Buddhism) reveals how difficult and threatening such a conversation is. It’s much easier to adhere to the old ways, believing and practicing as our ancestors did. In the long run, however, any religion that ignores what the modern world has discovered will become irrelevant.

The metaphor that comes to mind is a tumbling jar, full of different types of stones. As the jar revolves, the stones keep rubbing against each other and end up polishing each other. In the same way, diverse religious traditions can help each other distinguish between what is truly important about

what they offer, and what can and should be revised today because it is no longer so helpful in our modern world.

Needless to say, this is not an easy task, but do we really have a choice? If religion is what teaches us what is really important about the world and how to live in it, then we can see that secular modernity has developed its own religious worldview: consumerism, which has already become the most popular religion of all time, winning more converts more quickly than any conventional religion ever has. From a more traditional perspective, however, the basic problem with consumerism as a way of life is that it promises a commodified salvation: the idea that the happiness we seek will be provided by the next thing (it’s always the *next* thing) we buy. And, as we know, it’s

possible to go to a church on Sunday or meditate a couple times a week and still be caught up in a consumerist lifestyle during the rest of one’s life.

What role will twenty-first-century religions play in addressing this new competitor, which is secular but nonetheless religious insofar as it promises a happiness that it never quite delivers? For contemporary religions to succeed in challenging commodified salvation and the consumerist lifestyle, they will need to offer genuine alternatives. I believe that they have the best chance of doing so if they stop emphasizing the hereafter and focus instead on how to overcome the illusion that we are separate from this precious, endangered earth. ■

COBB (continued from page 45)

COBB: You may be right that our knowledge of our unconscious experience depends on our conscious experience. Certainly the elaborate theories about unconscious experience developed by Freud and Jung are products of conscious reflection. This may be true of everything we usually call knowledge. We would not know about atoms and subatomic entities or about distant galaxies except through conscious experience. But I would not have thought of calling all this “parasitic on conscious experience.”

However, I think there is also “knowledge” that functions before we are conscious of it. In one sense, I knew about gravity before I was conscious of it. Often we hear something that rings true, and in the hearing it becomes conscious. There are experiments that show that our behavior can be affected by subliminal advertising. In any case, the boundary line between what is conscious and what is not is hard to draw.

TIKKUN: Some nonhuman animals may have conscious experiences because they have some kind of nervous system.

COBB: Surely you are right that some animals, I would say many animals, have conscious experience. With Darwin, I assume, the days when human beings considered themselves the only subjects ended. Whiteheadians assume that the experience of chimpanzees is quite like ours. Of course, our language is far more complex than theirs, and this makes a great difference, but I believe that human infants are conscious long before they achieve a language more complex than that of chimpanzees.

Your comment seems to assume that apart from a central nervous system there is unlikely to be any conscious

experience. This is a factual question. Whiteheadians in general are likely to agree that this is the most plausible hypothesis.

But, of course, if you mean that without a central nervous system there can be no experience at all, then we strongly disagree. For us, consciousness is a small part of human experience and is totally lacking in most experience. One-cell organisms are really quite remarkable. For example, they can learn (we would say “from experience”). Also quantum events are quite remarkable. They are much more like momentary unconscious experiences than like little lumps of matter.

Perhaps the feature of experience that can be most easily generalized is emotion. I have commented that we all know that we can have emotions before we are conscious of them, so it is not so hard to think of unconscious emotions. To a large extent, we think, the world consists of pulses of unconscious emotion. These pulsations occurred for millions of years before consciousness emerged. Physicists speak of this “objectively” as energy.

An Expanded Physics

TIKKUN: Is there a place in Whitehead for the possibility of spiritual laws in the universe that act on the basis of love, attraction, or some other basis beyond what physics could in principle describe?

COBB: We think there is a great deal in the universe that the self-limitations of contemporary physics prevent it from considering. We call for an expanded physics, or at least an expanded science. Already, much that is said by quantum physicists stretches the boundaries of science.

At present evolutionary theorists are required to avoid any notion that there is a meaningful direction in the process. Yet it is very difficult to avoid the sense that living things strive to continue to exist and even to better their situation. We know such urges within ourselves,

and we are an important part of the evolutionary process. The exclusion of all this aiming to live and to live well is forced on scientists by their metaphysics, not by evidence.

Whitehead proposes that not only the things we normally consider alive, such as unicellular organisms, but also electronic occasions and quanta aim to realize some value. We find this deep aim—the desire to be of value for oneself and others—in ourselves. Its universal presence is consistent with all the evidence.

We believe that once the metaphysical prohibition of including purpose in the world of physics is given up, it will be possible to understand all things as purposive. The purpose of each is to attain value. This purpose, we think, is derivative from the cosmic purpose of attaining value.

TIKKUN: Are there other ways in which Whitehead supports the spiritual view of reality?

COBB: In Whitehead’s view, compassion is the glue that holds things together. A physical feeling is a feeling of another’s feeling. It is feeling with, that is, *compassion*. The most fundamental feature of all things is their feeling of the feelings of others. This is true of human beings. Our hardness of heart is learned. There are now centers of research and action that teach compassion by freeing people from these distortions. Most of them are Buddhist. Whitehead’s metaphysics is quite similar to Buddhism. But Jews and Christians are also engaged in this kind of teaching.

TIKKUN: Are there still other ways in which Whitehead would expand science?

COBB: Indeed there are. There is much testimony to the occurrence of events that contradict the dominant metaphysics to which scientists cling. Whitehead opens the door to their unbiased investigation.

In our view, every unitary event or actual occasion has both a physical pole and a conceptual pole. The Whiteheadian notion of the conceptual pole

leads us to believe that it may be possible to feel another’s thoughts—even the thoughts of distant entities—in an immediate and direct way. This opens the door to wide-ranging inquiries of a sort that do not fit in Cartesian physics and so are discouraged by mainstream scientists.

I recommend, in this respect, the work of Rupert Sheldrake. He may make mistakes, but he pioneers in important directions neglected by Cartesian science. If scientists accepted his challenge to engage in different experiments, Cartesianism would collapse quickly, and physics would be able to deal with much that it now excludes.

TIKKUN: How about in the cosmos as a whole?

COBB: The findings of contemporary cosmology point to divine laws without acknowledging them. It is recognized that the cosmos could not have developed as it did if the basic laws had not been just what they were. Life could not have appeared if other specific laws had not held. If scientists were not forbidden to speak of cosmic purpose, they would certainly be doing so. If we remove the metaphysical prohibition, we will recognize the enormous evidence that the universe testifies to a cosmic aim at the creation of value. Each moment of our experience also aims at the realization of value. This aim is derived from the cosmic aim.

If we could liberate science from the shackles of an outdated metaphysics, the line between physics and spirituality would be radically blurred. There is only one world. It is physical throughout. It is also pervaded throughout by Spirit. If our cultural and intellectual life recognizes this, it will become much healthier.

Spiritual and Religious Effects of Process Theology

TIKKUN: How would adopting Whitehead’s process theology affect religious traditions?

COBB: In much of this conversation I have been talking about metaphysics. We have been taught that this is abstruse and irrelevant, if not meaningless. In the modern value-free research university, it is likely not to be studied at all. At best it is explicit in a very few courses at the extreme margin. Thereby the modern value-free research university succeeds in continuing to operate on the basis of a metaphysics that would collapse on serious examination.

In fact, our lives are continuously affected by the metaphysics that dominates our culture. Our “religious” traditions have ceased to bind things together. At most they ask to be given a little space somewhere. Today the university agrees that religious traditions can be studied as long as believers make no truth claims on their behalf. That the only flourishing religious groups are those that separate themselves entirely from the modern intellectual culture is understandable. It is also deeply troubling.

If Whiteheadian metaphysics replaced the Cartesian view of nature, all this would change dramatically. The worldviews of the great traditions would be taken seriously, and their critical examination would not be objective or reductive. The study of nature and society would be for the sake of mending the world. Wisdom would be welcome wherever it could be found. The imperial dominance of money would cease.

TIKKUN: What about personal spirituality?

COBB: Whitehead enables us to see that there are many disciplines and practices that make sense and have positive effects. There is not one system for ordering life that should be imposed on all. However, he would favor systems that take the nonhuman world seriously and call for ordering our individual lives in ways that allow the nonhuman world to flourish.

Since Whitehead’s metaphysics places a strong emphasis on compassion, practices that help to deepen and expand

compassion would be encouraged. It is especially important to overcome boundaries to compassion that harden the heart to the “enemy” or to those who pose threats.

Perhaps the most distinctive teaching is that in each moment God is calling for the realization of what value is possible then, along with the greatest possible contribution to the future. Examining ourselves so as to reduce the obstacles to hearing that call is a spiritual practice that seems especially important.

God and the Universe

TIKKUN: You have talked about some of the things that God does. Can you say more about how we may think of what God is like? Is God anything more than the tendency of the universe to move to a higher state of consciousness or purpose?

COBB: God is the cause of the tendency.

TIKKUN: But is God anything more than the tendency?

COBB: After Hume, cause disappeared, but Whitehead renews the idea. He understands *cause* as how one actual entity participates in and thus informs another. To understand this, you have to attend to different aspects of experience from those dealt with by Hume. If you only attend to your visual experience, for example, you will never understand how Whitehead understands God. Visual data seem to be external to us. And in that external world a causal relation cannot be found.

To be a cause must be to be immanent in the effect without ceasing to transcend it. Our present experience is informed by the past. By informing the present, the past functions causally in the present. So if God is the cause of a tendency, God is distinct from the tendency God causes. It is God’s immanence in all the individual occasions that brings about the common tendency in all of them.

TIKKUN: Did God create this world?

COBB: I prefer not to use the word “create.” God participates in every moment of creating, but the past participates and the occasion that is coming into being participates as well. The occasion has a creative role in relationship to itself. To think of God as the sole creator is a mistake—without God there would be no creation, but without the past and without the becoming occasion there would be no creation.

TIKKUN: Was there ever a creation?

COBB: Whiteheadians have a great deal of skepticism about the Big Bang and think it to be not so well established as is often supposed. But it is certainly an interesting hypothesis.

TIKKUN: But was there a past to the Big Bang?

COBB: We tend to assume that, if there was a Big Bang, there were events prior to that singularity. But we don’t speculate about those things. It is very difficult for a Whiteheadian to think that there was ever a time when there was nothing. Kant had it right: we cannot think of a beginning and we can’t think of the lack of a beginning. I do not find speculation on this question very fruitful. The important question is what God is doing now and to what God calls us now.

TIKKUN: Does this differ from the notion that God and Nature are one—that there is no distinction between the universe and God?

COBB: God is not the universe, but God contains the universe. I think the important question on which you are pressing me is whether God is a subject different than and distinct from all other subjects. For Whiteheadian process theologians, the answer is an emphatic *yes*. The universe, apart from God, is made up of many subjects. God is the one subject that contains all other subjects. Although Whitehead did not use the word, I think the label “panentheism” is appropriate.

I consider panentheism a form of theism. The danger of theism is that it may locate God alongside other entities, even assigning a separate location to God, such as heaven. Obviously there is language in the Bible that images God in that way, and obviously no major theologian has taken that view. But some have not clarified an alternative. We think God is that subject who is equally everywhere, participating in all things. We think that the divine experience is also continuously including all other occasions of experience. We think there are passages in the Bible that point in this direction.

TIKKUN: Does God have a message about how we should live?

COBB: There is no one such message at all times for all persons. For each person, the message may be different in how best to actualize the potential of that person in the next moments of her life.

TIKKUN: And if I said God wants everyone to love their neighbor and the stranger, and this is universally true for all people?

COBB: I would say this is a good generalization. In a broad sense I think that is part of God's goal for the world. But I cannot say that this is God's call to every individual in every moment of life. At some stage of growth it may be more important that a young girl love and assert herself. Or there may be moments when God calls on one to defend one's family against an attacker, and the available motive that is most germane might be anger. That does not mean that God will not later call the girl who loves herself to start loving others as she loves herself, or the one who angrily defends his family to forgive and show loving-kindness to the attacker. But because we think of God as giving us a distinct aim moment by moment, and we think that situations are infinitely varied, we are uncomfortable with universal statements. ■

DORRIEN (continued from page 48)

God and the World

Mind and matter are related dialectically. The world of matter, always a relative flux of forms, lacks a self-explanatory principle, while mind has the principle of purpose. Kant had a role for the power of will in practical reason and aesthetic judgment, but when he described theoretical reason, he had room only for rules of mind through which the mind intuitively objects of sense data. That did not go far enough for post-Kantians, especially religious idealists like Schleiermacher and Isaak Dorner. Some conceived will or purpose as a category of thought on the same plane as causality, negation, existence, or necessity. All insisted that will is indispensable to reflection and constitutive of it. Some added, following Schleiermacher, that feeling is a deeper aspect of human experience than Kantian theoretical reason or practical reason.

The world is the totality of being, to which all judgments ultimately refer, and God is the idea of the unity of being, to which all concepts ultimately refer. Thus, the idea of God is inherent in that of the world, but the two ideas are not the same. Both are transcendental terms marking the limits of thought. Each is the terminus of the other. They meet at the common border of God and the world—the unity of God and the world in feeling.

Experience comes into being by feeling the feelings of one's world, and religion is about relating to everything. Liberal theology, with all its faults, began there, with Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher based his theology on the feeling of dependence on God and the experience of Christ as redeemer, and he got many things wrong. He expounded a Romantic concept of experience and claimed that the Jewish aspects of Christianity were the least valuable parts. He made the usual post-Enlightenment claim that Christianity surpassed all other religions in

its collective true religiousness, a legacy we are still struggling to overcome. His theology worked better as a theory of religion than as an argument about the superiority of Christianity.

But Schleiermacher stood out by making idealism work for him *and* preventing it from taking over his theology. He placed being and thought in opposition, uniting them objectively only in the idea of God. Objectively, God is the idea of the unity of thought and being. Subjectively, however, thought and being come together only through the *feeling* that correlates to the idea of God. This feeling accompanies all thought and action.

Some liberal theologies conceive the immanent reason of the world as impersonal, an ordering principle. Some dare to conceive it as personal, and thus purposive and moral. Most theologies of the latter sort define the spiritual in terms of the personal and moral, but I believe that theology works better the other way around, defining the personal and moral in terms of spiritual aliveness. Here the always fallible and unrealized idea is a theology of universal spirit and love. The immanent reason of the world is a principle of variation, for personality, whether human or divine, is immersed in the world process. God immanent is the divine self-expressed. God transcendent is the eternally self-identical, the absolute "I AM." This dialectic is at the heart of all things.

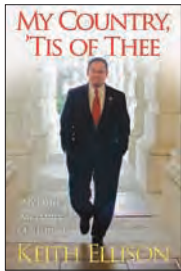
Instead of privileging the category of being, which smacks of Platonist glue, or process, where everything passes away, one might privilege the fluid, dynamic, and yet ultimate concept of spirit, interpreting experiences of the Holy as expressions of universal Spirit. God is creative Spirit, the inter-subjective whole of wholes and ineffable mystery of love divine. Love divine is the final meaning of Spirit. Evil is the lack and negation of the flourishing of life. Theology begins with the experience of the Holy, moves to the critique of idolatry, and presses to the prophetic demand for justice and the good. ■

Black Hat

The black hat. The wig. The shawl. The thick stockings. The kerchief. The skullcap. The hidden fringes. The posted decrees. Neighbors spitting with suspicion. Roaring hooves. Thwack of sabers. The night escape. The ship. Stacked bunks in steerage. The stench. The elderly. Time peeling. The deck. The railing. The jolt of docking. Gulps of fresh air. Shoving. The brick buildings. Family clusters. The names noted: last, first. Lost syllables. Truncated. Neutered. New name assigned. Whispers down the shuffling line. Questions dangling in stagnant air. Men with clipboards. Lifted shirts. Stethoscope on bare skin. Prodding for fever, rashes. Pinpoint of light in the eyes. Men in uniform. A limp. Stifled coughs. Girl yanked out of line. The shiny badge. The rejected. The separation. The chain-linked fence. The black hat.

—Carol V. Davis

Tikkun RECOMMENDS



My Country, 'Tis of Thee

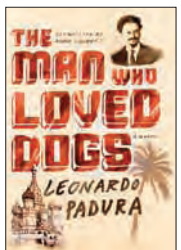
Keith Ellison
Gallery Books/
Karen Hunter
Publishing, 2014

Congressman Keith Ellison is the first Muslim to have been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and he has played a powerful role in introducing the *Tikkun* perspective into public policy debates by asserting that homeland security is best achieved through generosity rather than domination, and that our well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet.

Ellison subtitles his book *My Faith, My Family, Our Future*. With characteristic modesty and clarity, Ellison lets us into his own development, the struggles he faced as a child and teenager, and his conversion to Islam, which completely shocked his Christian family. He takes us into his campaigns, showing us where he stumbled and how he recovered. He also offers a window into the inside maneuvering that occurs in Congress. As he

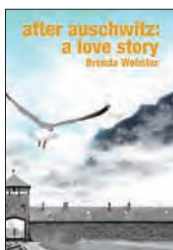
describes how he has dealt with the anti-Muslim hysteria he has encountered, he manages to teach us a great deal about American politics. He talks of his visits to Mecca, Medina, the West Bank, and Gaza, and he explains his opposition to the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Though he doesn't label himself a spiritual progressive, his perspective is certainly that, as he has made clear when addressing the Network of Spiritual Progressives conferences in Washington.

Reading this book will give you new faith in the possibility of honest, decent, and principled spiritual progressives actually finding a way into American politics despite all the huge obstacles.



The Man Who Loved Dogs

Leonardo Padura
Farrar, Straus &
Giroux, 2014



After Auschwitz: A Love Story

Brenda Webster
Wings Press, 2014



Lovers at the Chameleon Club, Paris 1932

Francine Prose
Harper, 2014



Suddenly, Love

Aharon Appelfeld
Schocken Books,
2014



The Ninth Day

Ruth Tenzer Feldman
Ooligan Press, 2013

provides what Robert Alter calls "a haunting love story" about a Holocaust survivor and a filmmaker suffering from the onset of dementia. Francine Prose, a former literary editor for *Tikkun*, takes us into the intensity of a counterculture that turns perversely pro-fascist in the France of the 1920s and 1930s, providing a variety of new perspectives on a history we thought we knew. Aharon Appelfeld, one of Israel's most respected novelists, tells the tale of a seventy-year-old Red Army veteran from Ukraine. Many years after the

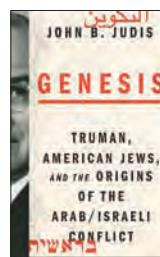
Nazis murdered his first wife and baby, and following his divorce from his second wife, the veteran falls in love with the thirty-six-year-old daughter of Holocaust survivors who miraculously falls in love with him.

And talking about fantasies, Ruth Tenzer's *The Ninth Day* brings us a Berkeley teenage heroine who first gets involved with Berkeley's Free Speech Movement and then is transported to eleventh-century Paris, where she plays a role in saving the life of an innocent child. If you are looking for fiction that is at once engaging and instructive, try these five!



The Idea of Israel

Ilan Pappe
Verso, 2014



Genesis

John B. Judis
Farrar, Straus &
Giroux, 2014



Menachem Begin

Daniel Gordis
Nextbook/Schocken,
2014

Oy, Israel. One can't address its existence without immersing in controversies and facing denunciations. Serious authors are likely to be dismissed as propagandists or even as anti-Semites, no matter how pro-Israel they are, should they have even slight criticisms of Israeli policy. Ilan Pappe's book, subtitled *A History of Power and Knowledge*, continues Pappe's courageous attempt to force Israelis to confront the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 and Israel's intransigence in refusing to deal with the consequences of that Palestinian catastrophe. Pappe describes the way experts at *hasbara* (Israeli propaganda) have dealt with this history, highlighting the powerful pushback that gets directed against anyone who raises criticisms of Israel. Unfortunately, however, Pappe does not share *Tikkun's* view that a focus on healing the PTSD in both Israelis and Palestinians, and developing the ability to tell the stories of *both sides* in a compassionate and openhearted way, is necessary in order to move the region toward peace.

John Judis's *Genesis*, subtitled *Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict*, has already created a firestorm, though with little reason. Judis is a balanced and thoughtful author whose solid research presents a sophisticated picture of the forces operating on Truman during the era when American Jews—having survived the threat of mass extermination—mobilized effectively to push the American government to support the creation of the State of Israel. Judis also shows how Israel resisted pressures to repatriate the Palestinians who had been displaced by the 1948 war.

Meanwhile, *Menachem Begin* is by Daniel Gordis, the Israeli Right's most effective propagandist. His book profiles Begin—the terrorist extremist who became Israel's prime minister in 1976 and agreed to withdraw Israeli troops from Sinai as part of a peace treaty that has brought security to both sides. Begin went on to preside over a government that invaded Lebanon and expanded Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Gordis's book shows us a Begin whose vision of Jewish suffering through history determined his inability to see Israeli expansionism and wars as anything more than a survivalist struggle against a hostile world. Gordis pointedly challenges Begin's detractors: "Why should Jews imagine that they could not once again become victims, when others were clearly plotting their destruction?" Gordis is a must-read for anyone who has never seen what the world looks like through the framework of Zionist triumphalism that this magazine rejects.



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