

Tikkun

WINTER 2019

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

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

WRAPPED IN
THE FLAG OF ISRAEL:
MIZRAHI MOTHERS
& BUREAUCRATIC
TORTURE

Page 127

BEYOND PATRIARCHY



Partnerships Instead: Deconstructing the Domination by Riane Eisler | Merger by Judy Chicago
| What to Do with the Legacy of Trauma and Fear by Rabbi Tirzah Firestone | Beyond Patriarchy
by Joy Ladin | God as Virtuality by Ana Levy-Lyons | If Wishes Were Today by Marge Piercy

4 Letters

EDITORIAL

- 6 The State of the Spirit 2019
Rabbi Michael Lerner

SPECIAL: BEYOND PATRIARCHY

- 10 Introduction to Beyond Patriarchy
Cat Zavis and Martha Sonnenberg, MD
- 12 Enwombedness: A World Beyond Patriarchy
Cat Zavis
- 26 What to Do with the Legacy of Trauma and Fear
Rabbi Tirzah Firestone
- 30 Lisa Simpson: The *Tikkun* Interview - A Feminist Fan Fiction Fantasy
Martha Sonnenberg, MD
- 40 Partnerships Instead: Deconstructing the Domination
Riane Eisler
- 46 Parenting without Obedience
Miki and Arnina Kashtan
- 65 Far Beyond Patriarchy: A Gender Fluid View
Maggid Jhos Singer
- 73 Moving Beyond Patriarchal Trauma
Yasmeen Mjalli
- 78 Compassion in Action
Chevara Orrin
- 82 Beyond Patriarchy: An Unexpected Encounter
Jihan McDonald
- 85 From Status-Quo Stories to Post-Operational Transformation
AnaLouise Keating
- 92 The Case Against Patriarchy in Islam
Maha Elgenaidi
- 96 Using Progressive Muslim Thought to Take Down Patriarchy
Adis Duderija
- 103 Raising Jewish Boys
Paul Kivel

FRONT COVER ART

"A Monument For Survivors"
By Jess X. Snow and
Layqa Nuna Yawar

"healing is not a destination
but a practice and an
understanding."
— @amitaswadhin

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BEYOND PATRIARCHY POETRY

- 25 If Wishes Were Today
Marge Piercy
- 57 Merger
Judy Chicago
- 60 Beyond Patriarchy
Joy Ladin

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

- 107 God as Virtuality
Ana Levy-Lyons
- 112 Global Healing is Possible
Emma Sham-Ba Ayalon

ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

- 117 Animal Allies: Healing and Empowering Children
Brenda Peterson
- 122 We Need an Ecological Civilization Before It's Too Late
Jeremy Lent

REVIEWS

- 127 *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel:
Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture*
Keith P. Feldman
- 131 50 Years of Feminist Poetry: Alicia Suskin Ostriker and Elaine Feinstein
Julie R. Enszer



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Tikkun (Vol. 34, No. 1, ISSN 0887-9982) is published quarterly by the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, 2342 Shattuck Ave., #1200, Berkeley, CA 94704, a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. © 2019 Tikkun magazine. All Rights Reserved. Tikkun® is a registered trademark of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health.

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For individual subscriptions, visit tikkun.org/subscribe. Individual subscription price for 4 issues: \$29.99. Institutional subscription prices: \$102.99. Payment in US dollars required. Print copies of the magazine can be ordered directly from Joomag. If you have questions, please contact Chris - chris@tikkun.org, 510-644-1200.

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Tikkun's positions are presented in our editorials. To submit a manuscript, visit <http://www.tikkun.org/submission-guidelines>.

Readers Respond

Dear Michael Lerner,

We have never met, yet you played an indirect role in my life through a meeting you may not even remember. I'm the daughter of the FBI agent who questioned you after you were involved in a student protest at the University of Washington in the early days of 1971. Until recently I didn't know your name; in the past month, it has come to my attention in three distinct contexts. Allow me to explain.

My brother Craig and I grew up in Laurelhurst in Seattle in the 50s and 60s, children of a lawyer who had joined the FBI during World War II and his homemaker wife, both born and raised in Iowa. My father hated many things about working for the Bureau under Hoover, but had cut a deal with them to take over their division of bank robbery and extortion for the Pacific Northwest in exchange for not being transferred to a new field office every couple of years. His motivation was to provide stability for my brother, who was born in 1943 and struggling in school due to undiagnosed learning disabilities. As a Christian who played an active role in the University Congregational Church (a hotbed of liberalism then and now), my dad had a strong moral compass, a deep love of history and classical music, and a remarkably gentle nature for a man of 6 feet, 2 inches with a 50-inch chest. He was intelligent, loyal, principled, and compassionate: still my role model though he's been dead since 2000.

Last month my brother and I were visiting an old family friend in Rancho Santa Fe, reminiscing about our shared childhoods, when she reminded us of the time my father quit the Bureau suddenly and unexpectedly. I still remember Dad telling me about it afterwards—how he had been assigned one day to question a young man who had been detained during a protest at the UW while they drove from campus down to the federal building in Seattle. He described the young man as intelligent and well-educated, respectful, articulate and sincere. They discussed the Vietnam war, which Dad opposed, the Nixon government and the student protest movement. During their conversation, my dad began to question not only what his passenger was doing in that car, but what he was doing there as well. To this day I can still hear the emotion in his voice when he would recall that encounter, saying “That young man could have been my son.”

My dad, Dean Conrad Rolston, handed in his retirement from the FBI within a week of that meeting. He had been with the Bureau for 29 years, holding on during the last few in order to gain the pension boost he would have earned at 30 years of service. Despite loathing to go to work every morning in a repressive and punitive environment, he was determined to get his kids through college and provide for his family.

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.

Though he was only 51 when he quit, he never took another job, but spent years helping my brother, a beekeeper, truck hundreds of hives back and forth to the California almond orchards. He immersed himself in music and reading, traveled some with my mother, and became a cherished presence in the life of my son Lev and my brother's daughter Eve.

Our childhood friend precipitated this letter by saying, "You should find out who that guy was and write to tell him how he changed your dad's life." As I was nodding in agreement, my brother surprised us both by saying, "I know who he was. His name was Michael Lerner." I then googled you, of course, to verify your existence, and learned you are alive and (I hope) well and living in Berkeley.

Three weeks later, I was back home in New York scrolling through my inbox when your name appeared asking for my signature on a MoveOn petition. My first thought was, "Wow, the universe is reminding me to write that letter!" But another two weeks went by. Last Saturday, my husband Peter and I were spending the evening with old friends visiting from L.A. Over dinner they told us about a major injury the husband had sustained being run over by a car in the parking lot of a book store where he'd gone to buy a book for his wife. These friends, Al and Julie, are observant Jews, so later in the conversation I thought to ask them if they had heard of a rabbi named Michael Lerner and a publication called *Tikkun*. They put down their forks and looked at each other. Al replied, "It was Michael Lerner's book, *The Left Hand of God*, I had just bought for Julie when the car hit me." Serendipity indeed...

I wonder if you remember that long-ago day in Seattle and the FBI agent you spoke with. If so, I would love to hear the story from your point of view. Meanwhile, I am going to do some research on The Seattle Seven, especially to answer the question of why (and how) the FBI was involved.

I'm sure you agree with me that life can be wonderful at times like these when we realize we are all connected. By simply speaking your truth in that Bureau car those many years ago, you inspired my dad to follow his heart. It took courage on both your parts to do what you did. Thank you for the role you played in giving my beloved father an extra year to enjoy life free of distress and sadness, and in giving my brother and me a chance to see Dad demonstrate the integrity he raised us to revere.

With deep respect,

Susan R. Friedes

MORE LETTERS

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



Image by NASA

The State of the Spirit 2019

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER

Welcome to the new online version of *Tikkun* magazine. As you will see, we continue to publish some of the most innovative thinking and writing available anywhere. While every week we put up important articles which can be read online, the articles in the quarterly *Tikkun*, now available only online, have a very special quality to them.

And if, like me, you still want to receive a print version of the magazine, please email Chris at chris@tikkun.org and he can help you.

OUR WORLD IS IN DEEP TROUBLE. BILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE IN PAIN. That pain is partly caused by the unfair distribution of wealth all around the world, most of it in the hands of super-wealthy elites who are protected by national governments, military, police and the media, cultural institutions, and educational institutions that they own or fund.

In the United States:

- The median American family saw their wealth drop 3% between 1983 and 2016, while the richest 0.1% have seen their wealth jump 133%.
- During this same period, the annual increase for White median family wealth was about \$1,000. Latino median family wealth went up by \$66 annually and Black median family wealth dropped \$83 annually. Meanwhile, the average household in the top 1% saw their wealth jump by half a million dollars annually.
- The Forbes 400 richest Americans own more wealth than all Black households plus a quarter of Latino households.
- Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, owns \$160 billion in total wealth. That is 44 million times more wealth than the median Black family and 24 million times more wealth than the median Latino family.

On a positive note, 59% of Americans support raising the marginal tax rate on America's top bracket of income earners to 70% as proposed by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, according to polling from [The Hill—HarrisX](#). Even 45% of Republican voters support a 70% marginal tax on income over \$10 million. In other words, any income earned over \$10 million would be taxed at 70%. All income earned by that person below \$10 million would be taxed at the current marginal tax rate. The current top marginal tax rate is 37%.

The economic suffering in our society is severe and the gap between the rich and everyone else is only widening. Economic pain alone, however, is not the only cause of people's anguish. As I argue in more detail in my newest book *Revolutionary Love*, (forthcoming in Fall 2019 from University of California Press), a very significant section of Americans, and many others in every country whose economic and social arrangements are primarily shaped by the ethos of materialism, selfishness, and "me-firstism" of the competitive marketplace, suffer from a lack of adequate love, kindness, generosity, and meaning to their lives.

To compensate for this lack, almost never addressed in a comprehensive and persuasive way by the liberal and progressive forces, many people get attracted to reactionary forms of religion and nationalism that offer an experience of community and higher purpose. The "my country first" consciousness has been taken to an extreme by the Trumpites; variants of that same "me-firstism" shape the policies and "common sense" not only of the wealthy elites, but even of many who are actually suffering from

“Only by publicly challenging the underlying assumptions of the powerful and their system can we begin to build support for the fundamental changes needed.”

living in societies governed by the distorted policies these ideas yield.

There is some hopefulness generated by the 2018 election which produced a Democratic Party majority in the House of Representatives. Many have pointed to the increased number of women and people of color in the new Congress. Yet there is a delusory quality to that optimism as long as the Democratic Party in Congress and nationally remain dominated by elected officials who believe their task is to show themselves as pragmatic and realistic by pursuing only the most moderate challenges to the super-wealthy, the corporate elites, and the competitive marketplace that is central to all the existing distortions.

For example, while the Democratic Party leadership opposed the building of a wall on the southern border, they instead proposed spending the billions of dollars on other measures to tighten security and even fund a fence, and escalating the repressive policies of our government (many of them originally instituted against undocumented immigrants during the Obama presidency). As a result, they failed to use the public outrage at the Trump Administration for shutting down the government to educate the public that in reality there is no national crisis caused by immigrants. They failed to put forth a positive vision of immigration that includes welcoming immigrants and urging people to invite friends and neighbors together to share their own family histories as immigrants to this country as a way to help us all connect with our immigrant roots.

Democrats might have also suggested implementing a Domestic and Global Marshall Plan that could ensure the well-being, stability, and security of people in the countries in which they grew up. And they could have used this moment to help Americans understand that many seeking asylum in the U.S. and other

Western countries are fleeing from violence and economic hopelessness that were generated by U.S. interventions to weaken or overthrow governments that challenged U.S. corporations seeking to take advantage of those countries' natural resources or as a result of U.S. trade policies that disadvantaged the poor and working poor of many Central and South American countries.

In addition, Democrats should be demanding that the U.S. stop funding ICE, stop detentions, incarcerations, and deportations and instead redirect that money to improve education and health care. At the very least, the Democrats should be proposing a bill to offer all immigrants who have been in this country at least two years a path to full legal citizenship (including, of course, all the children brought here when they were young—the ‘Dreamers’). These are the kinds of demands that should be the starting points, calling on Christians and others to act from the standpoint of the Bible with its insistence that we must “love the stranger/the Other”, and that that is the best basis for homeland security. Start from a vision of a caring society—and then let the Democrats negotiate from these starting points rather than already compromising by accepting that billions of more dollars need be spent on border control.

Despite the creativity of a minority of elected Democrats who seek a new and more spiritually and ethically coherent direction on every issue, the majority of Democrats in Congress have no shared worldview, and hence no ability to articulate ethically coherent positions. We are **not** saying “never make compromises” when working with legislators—that is an inevitable part of the process. What we **are** saying is that it is important to start with and articulate a worldview that sets forth the fundamental principles for which you stand and how they apply to the particular issues at hand,

and to keep repeating that worldview even as you then make tactical compromises. We propose that worldview to be “A New Bottom Line”—namely, love, kindness, generosity, environmental sanity, treating others as embodiments of the sacred rather than seeing them as valuable only to the extent that they can fill our personal agenda, and responding to the Earth and the larger universe of which it is a part not solely as a “resource” but also as something which elicits awe, wonder, and radical amazement. This vision encompasses generosity and caring for others and for the Earth. Every time the Democrats put forth a proposal, position, policy, etc. they should explain that this New Bottom Line is their ultimate goal and this particular policy is a step in that direction.

Without this, the Democrats end up seeming to have nothing positive to offer and that makes it easier for the Right to portray them as nothing more than another self-interest group rather than a force for ethical coherence. By being either afraid or unwilling to articulate the vision of a Caring Society, or privately benefiting from the current arrangements, or wishing for something different but being so certain that no fundamental change is ever really possible because of their depressive certainty that the majority of people they serve really are forever stuck in the allures of materialism and selfishness, they unknowingly reinforce the selfishness and me-first-ism that is at the core of our current policies toward asylum seekers, hence repeating the missteps of European states which have retreated from their own initial instinct to welcome people fleeing for their lives from countries enmeshed in barbaric wars.

Unrealistic? No, what is unrealistic is thinking that we can survive in a world where selfishness and power over others has led to both domestic and global chaos both in regard to the way we treat others and the way we treat planet Earth. Within the old paradigms, we

actually win nothing lasting. Only by publicly challenging the underlying assumptions of the powerful and their system can we begin to build support for the fundamental changes needed.

We won't let the light go out! We will continue to provide analyses and programs that reflect a fundamentally different worldview of love, kindness, generosity, and environmental sanity—call it a love and justice movement! And we hope you, our readers, will help us promote those ideas, demand that the New Bottom Line be endorsed by people seeking your political support, and meanwhile renew your subscription to *Tikkun* after reading many of the fabulous articles in this Beyond Patriarchy issue of the magazine. ●



RABBI MICHAEL LERNER is Editor of *Tikkun* and rabbi of *Beyt Tikkun* Synagogue-Without-Walls in Berkeley, California and Executive Director of the Institute for Labor and Mental Health. His newest book, *Revolutionary Love: a political manifesto to heal and transform the world*, will be published in October 2019 by University of

California Press. He welcomes your responses and invites you to join with him by joining the Network of Spiritual Progressives www.spiritualprogressives.org. You can contact him at rabbilerner.tikkun@gmail.com.

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(C) REVOLUTIONARY LOVE

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Introduction to Beyond Patriarchy

MARTHA SONNENBERG & CAT ZAVIS

WHILE THE #METOO MOVEMENT made clear the destructive consequences of patriarchy's hegemony, and what must be resisted, it was less clear about what a non-patriarchal vision might be. And in the months following the burst of the #MeToo movement upon the world's stage, we at *Tikkun* began thinking about how a world "beyond patriarchy" might look, and what strategies might be needed to realize this vision.

We had some of our own thoughts about this: We looked at the way patriarchy dehumanizes both men and women, how it cuts men off from their feelings, making it difficult for them to feel empathy. These dehumanizing gender norms begin in childhood, and so we felt that a closer look at the ways our children are socialized was in order. Further, we felt that men must begin the difficult and uncomfortable process of becoming conscious of their own enabling of a culture of misogyny, and devise strategies for their own healing.

We felt, too, that the intersectional issues of race and class, needed to be brought forward in a vision of "beyond patriarchy"—the challenge being to forge a movement of solidarity at the same time acknowledging race and class differences in the ways women experience patriarchy/misogyny. That solidarity will require a level of trust and empathy that still remains to be developed.

Thus began a search for writers, poets, and artists to address these issues. We posed some of the following questions:

How can a spiritual perspective advance the struggle against patriarchy and develop a vision beyond patriarchy?

How does intersectionality affect a vision beyond patriarchy? How can our differences strengthen us rather than divide us? How do class, race, and gender differences impact a vision of a world beyond patriarchy?

How does patriarchy impact men in negative and oppressive ways, and how can men change this?

What is the role of humor in resisting patriarchy and in moving beyond it?

How has the LGBTQ movement enhanced our vision of what may be possible beyond patriarchy's proscribed gender roles?

What are short-term and long-term goals in the struggle against and beyond patriarchy?

How do we heal the wounds of the legacy of patriarchal trauma and avoid the tendency to fear, blame, and dehumanize others?

We looked for perspectives that explored these questions in ways that advanced the pursuit of tikkun olam—social justice and repair of a broken world—in new, creative, imaginative and thoughtful ways. The issue you have before you represents the responses we got to our questions. The authors were given wide berth in interpreting and addressing the issues as they wished.

Interestingly, while we hoped to receive expansive visions for how we might get there and what it might look like, it was not as easy for some of our authors to envision that future. This is not surprising given how hard it is, when you are so deeply embedded in a system, to lift your head above the waters in which you are treading (or perhaps drowning) and see a possibility beyond that which is. We are excited to share these thought provoking, inspiring pieces. We hope you enjoy them as much as we have.

Finally, this issue is a beginning exploration into a vision “beyond patriarchy.” In a desire to keep this important conversation going, we invite you to send us articles that capture your vision of a world beyond patriarchy. Please be sure to include your full name and email so we can reach out to you if we are interested in posting your piece on our website. You can email your pieces to magazine@tikkun.org, please put in the subject heading—Beyond Patriarchy.



MARTHA SONNENBERG,
guest co-editor of
this issue



CAT ZAVIS,
co-editor of
Tikkun magazine



We must move beyond patriarchy and capitalism and embrace and welcome a new future, one that is unknown but that we can trust will safely hold us.

Enwombedness: A World Beyond Patriarchy

To Heal and Repair the World
Through Nurturing Love

CAT ZAVIS

IN THE WOMB, YOU ARE HELD IN A WARM embrace, water swirling around you, you hear faint sounds but you don't understand what is being said. You just know you are safe. The water soothes and comforts you. You are enwombed. You are one with all that is. Then suddenly and with a huge burst that is a combination of an inner yearning and an outer yearning from that which holds you, you are birthed into this world.

Ahhh . . . you stretch, move, and call out from your tiny lungs. You are here. For a brief moment, you just are.

And then, almost immediately after that very tender, serene moment, you are defined, assessed, and measured—are you a boy, girl, intersex, indeterminate? Do you have ten fingers and toes? What size is your head? What length your body? Are you big or small? Or just average? These assessments are not based on what is in your heart and soul, are not a reflection of the God/Goddess that you are, but rather what

your physical manifestations represent. Nonetheless, these calculations and definitions will shape and form you for the rest of your life in ways big and small.

These different physical traits take on greater or lesser significance and importance for your survival (this is true both for you and for the mother in whose womb you resided) depending on other factors such as your race, gender, class, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. But the qualities that are consistently needed for survival of all species and the planet itself, such as, love, kindness, generosity, care, nurturance, and compassion, are unmeasurable and undefinable. And, in spite of their life-giving and life-generating capacities, they are often not what are valued in our society. They are, however, the stuff of awe and wonder. They are

what make us human; what makes life worth living. And without these qualities, human beings, animals, and the planet itself cannot and will not survive, let alone thrive.



In the moment of our birth, patriarchy imposes itself on us before we are even aware of a “me” separate from the mother that birthed us. This is true whether or not your parents or caretakers are intimately familiar with and challenging the influences of patriarchy in their lives or yours. Why? Because patriarchy is not something that is enacted and performed solely on an individual level but also on a societal level. It is a system and structure of power, dominance, and control that manifests throughout all facets of our society and the world. Added onto the layers of patriarchy is capitalism with its systems and structures that are buttressed by and built upon the foundation of patriarchy but with additional forms of oppression and alienation that are not inherent to patriarchy itself.

There are many efforts to challenge patriarchy and capitalism. One common approach is to fight for a place at the proverbial ‘table.’ The argument goes: if women, people of color, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized groups are given a place at the table (i.e., a seat of power), then our society (and the world) would fundamentally change. Yet we know this simply is not true—while it is a necessary condition for transformation, it is by no means a sufficient condition. There are women, people of color, LGBTQ people and others from marginalized groups sitting on boards of large companies, in seats of government, including the presidency of the U.S. and in other countries as well, and still patriarchy and capitalism thrive. That is because simply having diverse people at the table is not enough. We must ask more fundamental questions to be able to truly reshape, reform, recreate, and rebuild our society.

The first question I want to ask is: why a table?!! In other words, what is it about this

particular shape and form that is deeply problematic, regardless of who holds seats of power. There are some things that limit the capacity of transformation and one of those is how systems and structures are created in the first place. So, when using a table as the metaphor, we must ask, who created the table? How does it confine what is possible and determine the possibilities for our future? The table is constricted by its shape. If it’s square or rectangle, it has sharp edges. The only way to include more people is by increasing its size, but that results in people around the table being more separated from others at the table, except for those sitting immediately on their right or left.

“We must ask more fundamental questions to be able to truly reshape, reform, recreate, and rebuild our society.”

A table, regardless of its shape, is hard and rigid, it does not fluctuate and move easily to meet the needs of those around the table. It is also not a living, breathing organism but rather a dead tree or artificial product.

Instead of fighting for a place at a table that was created by others to fit their understandings and comfort zone of their times, we need to metaphorically smash the table and create a new metaphor in its place. The metaphor that I like to use is that of a womb—to nurture the world to wholeness/holiness. I draw on the image of a womb because the womb is the source of all life. It is not created by human beings and thus is not limited by human imagination and capabilities. It holds within it the possibility of life and the unfolding of life itself. It is expansive. It holds conflicting needs and joins them together to help ensure the well-being of all. It is full of life’s energy and blood. It is simultaneously compassionate and strong. It expands to meet the needs of those it holds. As it expands, there is room for those within it to connect to one another because there is nothing separating one from the other. It recognizes

and holds within and beyond it the oneness of all life. Wombs connect across time—every person is born from a womb. When it's time for those within it to break forth and venture out on their own, it contracts and frees them.

For me, a world beyond patriarchy reflects the womb. It is welcoming, warm, and expansive. It seeks justice, and is compassionate, loving, and life-giving. It encompasses a freeing force that embraces difference and transforms to meet the changing needs of those within its embrace. To be that powerful force of love and light, we must continue, as we have in the past, to open our arms and our hearts to changes and differences even as they challenge and push us beyond our comfort zone.

When we were in our birth-mother's womb, there was a time when we stretched beyond the comfortable and safe confines of that more restricted place and sought and pushed for our freedom. There was something outside of that place that we, perhaps reluctantly and yet bravely, welcomed. As we grew up, rather than build on the trust we had at birth that we would be held in safety, even as we stretched beyond our restricted comfort zones, many of us learned instead that stretching beyond our comfort zones was in fact not safe. So we turned inward to keep ourselves safe. We learned to fear the other and to hoard in order to keep ourselves and our family members safe. These are lessons we were taught by our

parents, teachers, media, etc. This is our inheritance not because there is something fundamentally wrong with any one of us, there isn't; not because any individual is to blame, they aren't; but rather because we swim in the poisons of patriarchy and capitalism every day. Yet, in truth, we all seek to return to the womb. To be embraced in loving kindness. Still we can't seem to get there. We live in fear and separation and do not know how to bridge the gulf that we so desperately yearn to overcome. To move beyond patriarchy and capitalism and embrace and welcome a new future, one that is unknown but that we can trust will hold us and is safe, we need to do three fundamental things as part of our effort to overthrow patriarchy and capitalism. These are necessary components of any larger movement; a movement that also must include fundamental programs and an overarching structural approach to help ignite long-term systemic change.



Image by Chaia Heller, "Tree of Life, Awakening to Shaddai"



I. GRIEVE

First, we need to grieve. We must understand where we are and fully grieve and celebrate that reality. We actually are in a moment of history in which fascism is rising, both here and abroad. And at the same time, people are rising up, challenging injustices, and seeking a more loving and just world. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern [said recently](#) that “New Zealand wants to transform our politics to focus on kindness, empathy and well-being because reporting on economic growth alone doesn’t show the full picture.” The climate is being destroyed at unprecedented rates. Yet, young people like Greta Thunberg in Sweden or the Sunrise Movement here and many others around the world are challenging those in power to take responsibility and reverse course.

Everyday more and more species are going extinct and we do not fully know the impact of those losses on the larger ecological systems in which we live. We do know that as more and more bees die, our planet will not be able to produce the conditions needed for us to grow our food. Environmental collapse impacts the poorest amongst us most severely even as the economic gap between the rich and poor expands, only exacerbating this situation. Entire islands and communities are fleeing this environmental devastation and destruction as

homelessness is rising in the U.S. Under the current administration, hate crimes are on the rise and the ability to communicate across and navigate our differences is dwindling. Mental distress is increasing amongst people as a result of all of the above and more. And still, the sun miraculously rises every day. There are more women and progressives in Congress than at any previous time in our history. People are building movements and striving to build a future that is sustainable and caring.

Yet, before we can begin to transform things and move forward, we first need to grieve and mourn where we are, while also rejoicing and celebrating the complete mystery and magic of life itself. I do not mean grieve as individuals, for our individual missteps (although that too is important), but rather grieve in community for the collective harm of which we are apart.

Grieving is not the same as blaming! If we want to move beyond where we are, blaming and shaming is a completely ineffective strategy (even if it temporarily makes us feel better). Why? Because when people are blamed, they tend to repeat patterns that we all learned as children, namely, to go into self-protection. Rather than be open to listening and learning, when blamed we tend to defend ourselves and often dig our heels in even deeper.

It is extremely difficult to take responsibility for our actions and hold ourselves accountable because our ego wants to protect us from the self-judgment and criticism that is the precursor to healing. If we approach ourselves or others from a place of judgment for past wrongs, the inevitable response is one of defensiveness. This also happens when we are confronted with an opportunity to reassess our past, the stories we were told about our family, our community, our country, etc. It can be extremely difficult to learn new information about others or ourselves because really allowing ourselves to examine our past on some level forces us to re-examine our very understanding of who we are and believe ourselves to be (both as individuals and as a society). This is painful and difficult because when this happens we end up feeling as if the rug is pulled out from under us. If what I understood to be true generally or what I knew to be true about myself or the world is actually different than what I thought, life feels a bit ungrounded, uncertain, and scary. For this reason, it is important to be gentle with ourselves, to acknowledge that this journey is challenging and that we need to hold our hearts with tenderness. And not only to hold our own hearts with tenderness, but also the hearts of those with whom we disagree, whom we judge and blame for doing bad things in our world. Grieving is important because it can help us move beyond judgment and into compassion, which is a much more tender place to hold oneself and others, and ultimately a much more effective place. The goal is not to be right but to provide the conditions for healing and transformation. This is possible when we hold ourselves and others accountable with compassion rather than with judgment.

There are numerous ways to partake in collective grieving. In the training I conduct for [Spiritual Activists](#) I guide participants through a grieving process. The idea of the grieving

process is to first acknowledge the horrors of the reality in which we live and then to allow participants to freely express their reactions, sorrows, and grief. After some time, participants are then guided through a visualization in which they imagine a future world beyond patriarchy and capitalism in which love, care, compassion, justice, and sustainability thrive and to both share what they see in that world (in concrete, detailed ways) and to freely express their reactions. The contrast between the two is profound and quite exhilarating. The energy is palpable and contagious. But we cannot stop here because doing so would simply leave people with the experience but without any sense of being part of something that can actually create the kind of transformation needed in the larger society. So we end with another visualization where participants envision the energy generated from this exercise spreading from the particular group participants to larger and larger circles of people across the planet touching the consciousness of all beings so people begin to actually feel both the possibility of transformation and begin to participate in mass numbers in a movement for social change.

I am sharing this with you so you can do this in your social change communities, movements, activist groups, listening circles, etc. This exercise alone is not sufficient to move us beyond where we are, and at the same time, it is an important step in the transformative process. Until we grieve where we are, we cannot begin to move to where we want to be. Grieving is the foundation for healing and repair (*tikkun*), both on an individual and societal level. Once we fully engage in grieving and mourning, as well as celebrating and rejoicing in the majesty of what is, we can then begin to heal from the past and repair the world to build a better future for all. You can listen to me do this exercise [by clicking here](#).

II. MOVING FROM FEAR TO LOVE

A second step that needs to be part of our work for transformative change is for us to move from fear of the other, from ridiculing those not yet with us, to empathy and learning to love the other, the stranger. We need to become deeply curious rather than vigilant critics of people (we can and must criticize their policies, positions, and actions, but not their humanity—that is an im-

portant distinction). I want to share with you an example of what I mean. On July 25, 2018, [Stephen Colbert](#) did a segment about a Republican reporter who attended an event featuring Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, now an elected member of Con-

gress. According to Colbert, after the event, this reporter said, “I saw something truly terrifying. I saw just how easy it would be. . . to fall for the populist lines they were shouting from that stage. I saw how easy it would be as a parent, to accept the idea that my children deserve healthcare and education.” The audience broke out in laughter and Colbert responded, as most liberal media do, by mocking and ridiculing the reporter. Colbert missed an important opportunity to model compassion and empathy.

Rather than simply dismiss the reporter as an idiot, we may instead be invited to imagine what the reporter might have been experiencing. I imagine that the reporter felt for a moment the hope that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

provides—the possibility for a different world. For a brief time, she was moved from the worldview of fear and independence, to the worldview of love and interdependence. But, as happens to all of us, she was unable to fully allow herself to go there due to her conditioning, her beliefs, her needs for financial security, and out of her fear of opening to the possibility of a different world because if she allowed herself to go there, then she’d have to re-evaluate so

much about her life. For a moment, she could feel the warmth and the safety of the womb—where there is enough, where the world can expand to meet the needs of all. But then she lost touch with that expansive part of herself and was drawn back into the more restric-

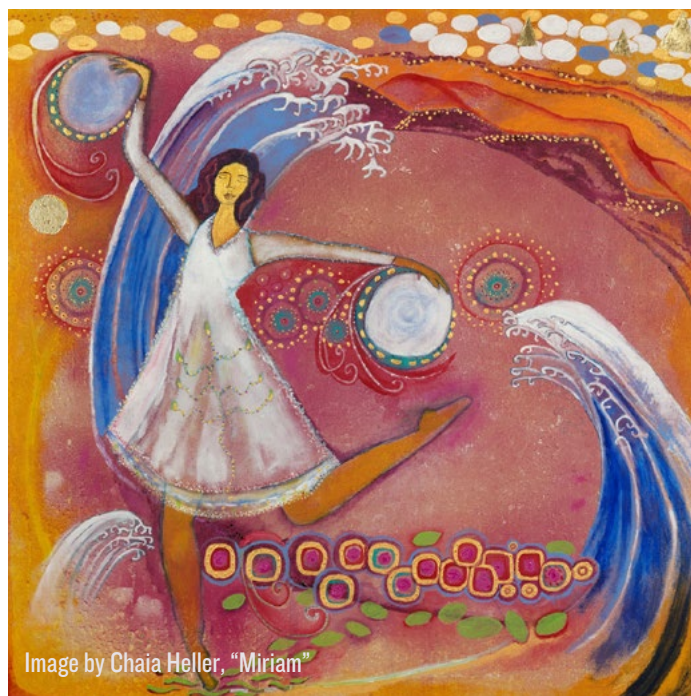
tive, fearful self to which she has been conditioned.

I am familiar with this place—I have been there before myself—when I began to learn about the occupation of the West Bank in Israel and the earlier history of the forced expulsion of many Palestinians during the war that accompanied the establishment of the State of Israel. At first I didn’t want to read and hear these stories because doing so would mean I would have to fundamentally re-evaluate many aspects of my life and upbringing. I would have to question lessons and values that my parents (whom I love deeply) taught me and that could mean I might experience separation from them. Until that time in my life, they were the



Image by Cat Zavis

womb to which I returned in times of distress and need. They were always there for me (even when we disagreed—which we did and still do!). They embraced me even when they did not always approve of my choices. And still, I knew that opening this can of worms would be rather challenging for us all. Nonetheless, I decided knowing the fuller story was critical. I was willing to re-evaluate the stories I had been told my whole life and to open to the possibility of a different reality. It was not easy. Yet, I'm so grateful I did. But I couldn't have done it unless I had both the inner and outer resources to allow myself to go there and know I would be ok—meaning, knowing that fundamentally I am still lovable and would still be loved and accepted. I'd still have a place where I experienced a sense of belonging and community. I would still have a womb that would embrace and welcome me, even as I pushed beyond its boundaries. I am extremely privileged to have an abiding trust that I am ok and will be ok and that I don't need to hold onto stories that no longer serve me or society. I am so lucky that I can reflect upon the small truths I have been taught and come to learn more complex and deeper truths. This is not something to be taken for granted. Many people don't have the kind of support system that enables them to feel safe, while breaking with what



“Nurturing love—*l’takeyn
olam b’malchut Shaddai—
to heal the world through
nurturing love.*”

they’ve been taught (and perhaps even with their family and friends).

If we want to reach people like this conservative reporter, who momentarily can taste and feel the lure of a loving, kind, and generous world (and thus was so close to being brought to our side), then we need to let them know that we see their humanity and that we would welcome and accept

them into our movement. We need to hold them when they get scared and doubt their capacity to be accepted. We need to provide a safety net, a place for them to fall and land when they get scared—a warm and welcoming womb. And we need to do this again and again

and again. (I am not speaking about the perhaps 25-30% of Trump supporters that are deeply embedded in racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, or anti-Semitic groups, movements, and belief systems but rather the much larger percentage

that are hurting, and heard in Trump’s rhetoric someone who actually speaks to their pain and angst and are lured by his message.)

If you are just too angry or traumatized (understandably so) about what is happening in our country and the complicity by some, then by all means, take care of yourself, love yourself, get support for yourself first and foremost. These are horrifying times. Tend to yourself

first. There are a lot of us in this movement and we will engage in different ways, each of which is important and valuable. The only way of engaging I think is not helpful and in fact, perpetuates what we don't want, is to demonize and ridicule those who are not yet with us.

III. PROPHETIC EMPATHY

The third necessary component of any social change movement is to engage in prophetic empathy. In the fall 2018 issue of *Tikkun* I wrote an entire article about [prophetic empathy](#) and rather than repeat here what I wrote, I will simply share some highlights and an example.

The *New York Times* reported on December 15, 2018, how Johnson and Johnson suppressed credible studies and evidence that there were dangerous levels of arsenic in their baby powder—a product that was very profitable for them. Many of us understandably and rightly want to hold those who lie and deceive the public, causing harm to many, accountable and liable. There is nothing inherent in prophetic empathy that would prohibit such a response. At the same time, if we want to transform the system, then it behooves us to look beyond individual actors and provide an analysis and understanding that we live in a spiritually and ethically bankrupt social system and that these actors are trapped in this system as well. That does not excuse their behavior. Absolutely not. Not everyone would do what they did, but surprisingly few, in a similar position, actually choose to respond differently. So if that's the case, we need to challenge the system. One way to do this is to help people connect with their highest values and

wishes. In reality, the majority of people really do want to live in a society that is more caring, where the economic wealth of our country is shared, where we have clean water and air and universal healthcare. One thing that drives people to support candidates that promote the well-being of the capitalist marketplace and ruling elite on the backs of the rest of us is that we fail to speak to people's highest values. As explained above, we tend to attack and ridicule people who are not yet with us rather than invite them into our movement through compassion.

In a world beyond patriarchy, rather than focus on right and wrong, and power and money, we need to focus on healing, reparations, and restoration. I want to live in a world where we are able to see the humanity of all people and hold them accountable. No one is perfect. We all miss the mark. The questions more interesting to me than how do we punish, point fingers, and demean, are what can we learn, how can we heal, and how can we repair the massive breakdown in our society (and in our families and communities) so everyone feels



valued and appreciated without that being at the expense of anyone else. Rather than beat ourselves and others up for the past, how do we move forward? How can we build wombs that are expansive, warm, loving, and welcoming.

Nurturing love—*l'takeyn olam b'malchut Shaddai*—to heal the world through the majesty of nurturance or enoughness. In other words, when our needs for nurturance, connection, and belonging are met, we know we are enough and there is enough. Then we won't hoard after what others need.

CONCRETE STEPS TO GET US THERE

The above are the psychological and spiritual foundation needed to dismantle patriarchy and capitalism. Alone, however, they are not enough. We also need concrete embodied actions that begin to create the foundation for a caring society. Our movements must become welcoming places that uplift our spirits. We need to become as sophisticated in our loving capacities as we are in our righteous indigna-

tion! We must find ways to keep our hearts open. (There are powerful examples of this in some of the articles in this section.) Before people who are not yet with us will feel safe to open their hearts to our economic, social, and environmental policies and positions, we need to show them we care about them, not by trying to convince them that our policies will improve their lives, but rather by actual subjective caring about them—about their pains and sorrows, their fears and anger, their heartaches. In a patriarchal and capitalism system, everyone is suffering and struggling, many economically, and everyone spiritually and psychologically. We must tend to those wounds as well.

To do this we must build a movement in which we can grieve our individual and collective mistakes that occur within our movements and within our society, learn to love the stranger/other, see their humanity and refuse to ridicule them, even as we passionately disagree with their positions, and speak with prophetic empathy. In addition, we need to put forth a positive vision of the world we want. It is not inspiring to vote for candidates or join move-

ments that focus largely, if not solely, on what we are against. We need to articulate an alternative worldview to that of patriarchy and capitalism. When we fail to provide an alternative to what is already there, then we remain limited by what is. In other words, to overcome patriarchy, we need to offer something in its place and that something cannot be patriarchy on its head. Hence why I speak about the image of the womb as an alternative to the table. Patriarchy and capitalism assess, measure, and quantify all aspects of life (nature, businesses, schools, health care, legal systems, etc.). Only those that increase our wealth, status,



or power are deemed valuable and worthy. A world beyond patriarchy and capitalism will place value on our essence, our psychological and spiritual health, on the well-being of our planet, and on our capacity to be loving, kind, generous, compassionate, and caring. It will place value on the absolute miracle of life itself—human, plant, animal, Earth, the universe itself.

In a world beyond patriarchy, when assessing whether products should be produced, services provided, or jobs performed, rather than ask how much money we can make, we will ask instead, will this contribute to healing people or the planet? Will it enhance our capacity to be more loving, kind, generous, and compassionate? Will it help us connect with and celebrate true awe of each other, the planet, or the universe? If the answer is no, then why do we need it? Simply because we can produce it—that kind of thinking has gotten us in the mess we are in.

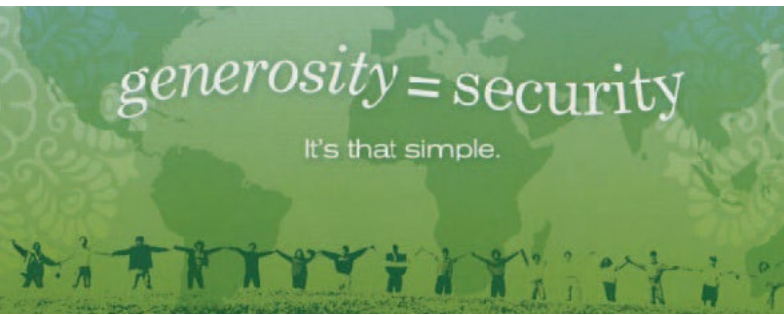
Rather than seeking judgment, meting out punishments, or giving rewards, we will ask, how can we repair the damage that has been created? How can we honor people for their contributions without placing a monetary value on those contributions? Rather than assess people based on their income or possessions, we will strive to see their humanity and explore what it is that inspires them, what they are passionate about, and what gives them meaning in life and help them engage in activities that enhance their capacity to do those things.

To get there, we need some concrete proposals. In our [Path to a World of Love and Justice](#), we set forth a vision of the world we want and how we can get there in 10 different areas: support for families and building a caring economy; personal responsibility; environmental responsibility; a love and justice oriented education system; a loving and just health care system;

global peace and homeland security through generosity; separation of church, state, and science; a cooperative and caring legal system; ending racism; and balancing identity group struggles and universal solidarity.

In each one of these areas, we set forth actual policies that we will work to achieve, such as a basic income for everyone, mandatory living wage, and work place policies that nurture and support time for personal well-being. Immediate bans on fracking, prohibitions on drilling on public and native lands, keeping fossil fuels in the ground, and an [Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment](#) to the U.S. Constitution. An education system that values the whole child/student and sees each student as an embodiment of the sacred, thus nurturing the student's spiritual and psychological development. A health care system that includes comprehensive "Medicare for All", holistic healthcare, and government controlled pricing of pharmaceuticals. A foreign and domestic policy based on a recognition that homeland security will only be achieved through generosity, not domination. Thus we support a [Global and Domestic Marshall Plan](#) that provides reparations for the damage we have caused nationally and globally by unbridled support of corporations and governments that further U.S. economic and political interests at the expense of the people around the world. A legal system that utilizes restorative justice processes. An end to racism that includes mass education about the history of slavery and the genocide of Native Americans, reparations for both, and guaranteed full and equal funding for all public schools (at all grade levels).

All of these fall within the larger vision, of which we have spoken about in *Tikkun* over our 33 year history, a New Bottom Line in which rather than measure success based on money and power, we instead measure success based on the extent to which it enhances social,



generosity = security

It's that simple.

economic, environmental justice, and ecological sensitivity, enhances our capacity to be loving, care, kind, and generous, and instills in us a deeper appreciation of the awe and wonder of the universe. Every single one of the more specific proposals in our Path to a World of Love and Justice arise out of this New Bottom Line. So that every time we advocate for a particular policy, proposal, piece of legislation, etc. we can demonstrate the connection between the particular strategy that is the focus for the moment and the larger vision of an enwombed world beyond patriarchy and capitalism. A world that nourishes and sustains, rather than one that drains and destroys.

If we simply focus on a particular piece of legislation without drawing the connection to the larger systems and structures in which they are embedded, if we do not simultaneously explain how patriarchy and capitalism drive the ship, then we will simply be moving things around on the table. Perhaps we will be enlarging the table, but we will not be smashing it and building something fundamentally new and transformative. To build an enwombed society that embraces difference, that pulses with the life force of universe, that is loving and compassionate and expansive, that is beyond the limitations of our current systems and structures, we must both speak about the poisonous waters in which we are swimming (and thus often remain invisible and acceptable) and put forth an alternative vision that actually is embracing, warm, safe, and enwombed.

A VISION OF A WORLD BEYOND PATRIARCHY

Let's imagine for a moment we have actually transformed our society and we are living in a world beyond patriarchy. Here are some things I see in that world. After reading this list, I invite you to create your own list. Doing so will help sustain you through these dark times, will help you create policies and concrete proposals that are beyond patriarchy, and will remind you that just as we created the current social systems and structures, so too can we create new ones that truly are nurturing, life-giving, joyful, safe, and meaningful.

- Everyone has a basic income, social services, adequate food, shelter, quality and affordable healthcare and education, meaningful work that pays a living wage, and clean air to breathe.
- Our planet has the capacity to rejuvenate, recover, and sustain life because we have transitioned to renewable energies and reduced needless consumption and production.
- Children are playing in the fields, laughing, sitting in classrooms with compassionate teachers who are well paid and have the skills and resources (books, papers, pens, support, etc.) needed to provide a supportive, loving, safe and nurturing environment for kids to explore their world, learn new skills, expand and grow spiritually and psychologically, and have an opportunity to play and grow into adults free from daily traumas.
- You are met at your doctor's office, hospital, or an integrative healing and wellness center with a warm greeting. Your integrative health care team spends plenty of time with you and gets to know you, hears your story, listens to your struggles, and supports you to be healthy and whole

(spiritually, physically, intellectually, and emotionally). There is universal health care coverage for this comprehensive care.

- Because you receive a living wage or basic income you know that your basic needs will be met and you have time to spend with family and friends. Your food is grown in healthy soil without pesticides or chemicals that are dangerous to your health and the health of the planet.
- You can attend college or a trade school debt-free.
- Every person, regardless of race, gender, sexual identity, creed, or religion is treated with dignity and respect and is deeply valued simply for being alive. You are valued simply for who you are rather than what you can do for someone else or how much money you make or can generate or save for some company. All jobs are valued because without street cleaners, janitors, doctors, teachers, nurses, cab drivers, bus drivers, farmers, repairmen/women, etc. the world would not work. Any work that does not serve a meaningful purpose, but is rather there to make others feel important or the like, is eliminated.
- We collectively decide what and how to produce based on whether and how the production and products serve the well-being of the people, animals, and the planet, rather than on how much profit they generate.
- Our inner turmoil, loneliness, and isolation is significantly diminished, if not completely eliminated because we are connecting with others in community in ways that are joyful and nourishing. Instead of being pulled to buy the next gadget, you slow down so you can appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the universe, spend more time playing, laughing, singing, dancing, and just being with the people you most

love. Your spirit and soul are nourished. Because you feel so supported and held by your community, you feel a deep desire to contribute back to your community and the world.

If you are interested in building this movement and this world, please email me at cat@spiritualprogressives.org to learn how to join our movement. We are spinning on this miraculous, glorious, amazing planet together—we might as well join together and enjoy the ride! The struggle against patriarchy presented here is obviously not just a struggle for women; an allied account is presented in Rabbi Lerner's new book *Revolutionary Love* which will be published in October 2019 by the University of California Press. ●



CAT ZAVIS is the executive director of the Network of Spiritual Progressives and co-editor with Rabbi Michael Lerner of *Tikkun* magazine.

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If Wishes Were Today

MARGE PIERCY

What would it be like if I could
saunter along any city street
at two a.m without scouting
places to run, without a clutch

of fear in my chest when I see
a man coming toward me, could
watch TV ads and women on shows
without feeling fat and poor?

How would it be if a woman could
freely decide whether she can
take on a child or not for the next
twenty-five years minimum?

What would it be like if every
mother had free good childcare,
got paid the same amount for
the same work, with benefits?

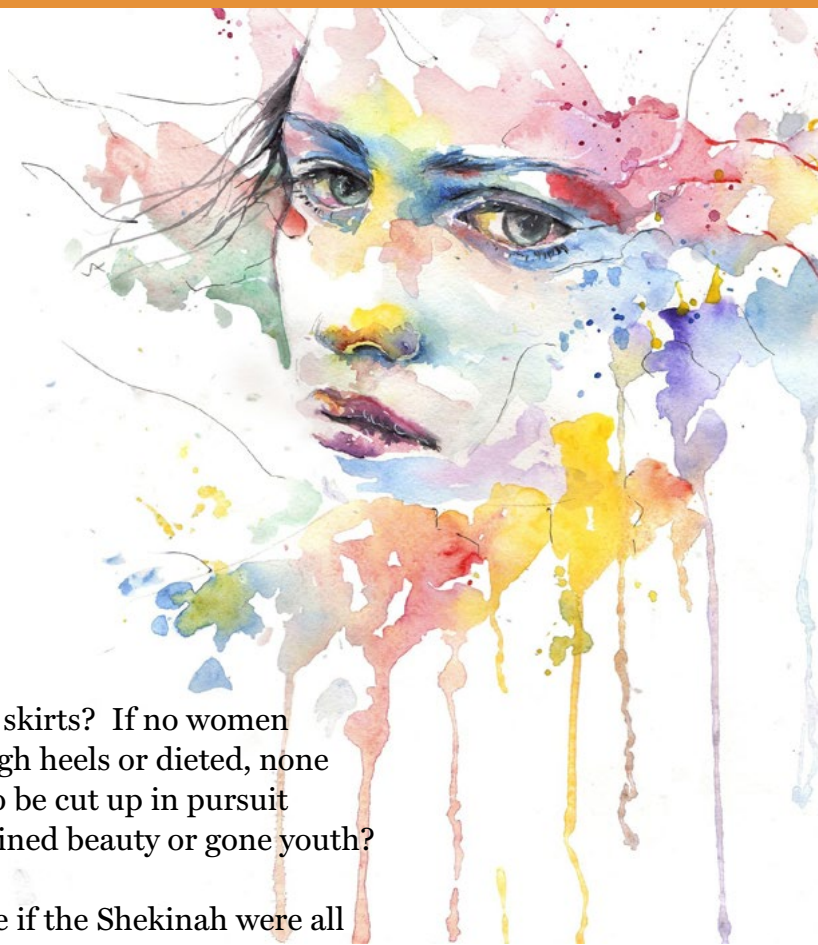
How would it be if generals,
priests, governors and mayors
were women and only women
owned guns and police had

to wear skirts? If no women
wore high heels or dieted, none
chose to be cut up in pursuit
of imagined beauty or gone youth?

Imagine if the Shekinah were all
the g-ds and every child were safe
wellfed, welltaught, wellhoused
and we did not fear each other.

If women were not incidental
damage in war, not trafficked
for sex or cheap labor, not
forced into childhood marriage.

We could make all happen now
if we did not worship greed, power
winning, if rape were unimaginable
if we loved each other's otherness.



MARGE PIERCY has written 17 novels including The New York Times Bestseller *Gone To Soldiers*; the National Bestsellers *Braided Lives* and *The Longings of Women*; the classics *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She and It*; and most recently *Sex Wars*. Among her 19 volumes of poetry the most recently published include *The Hunger Moon: New & Selected Poems 1980-2010*, and *Made in Detroit*. Her critically acclaimed memoir is *Sleeping with Cats*. Born in center city Detroit, educated at the University of Michigan and Northwestern, the recipient of four honorary doctorates, she is active in antiwar, feminist, and environmental causes.



What to Do with the Legacy of Trauma and Fear

RABBI TIRZAH FIRESTONE

I. WHAT IS PATRIARCHY

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK about the Patriarchy? Today more than ever, women around the world feel the meaning of this term in our very bones. We are talking about the control by men of a disproportionate share of power, and legal and social subordination of women and our bodies. And in a hierarchical structure that privileges transcendence over imminence, logos over eros, patriarchy becomes an arrogant dominion over our subjective sensual existence.

Even with all of the outward gains made in the West over the past century—women's voting rights, four waves of feminism, Roe v. Wade,

RBG, #MeToo, and a global environmental movement—it has become alarmingly clear that a rancorous counter-tide is building, attempting to redirect history away from what has been forward progress. Indeed we still have far, very far, to go before male dominance, with its extraordinary hubris, is brought into balance—not to mention the pernicious intergenerational effects of patriarchy.

Consider the sobering truth that today most of the world's populations, governments, and religions are still governed by unrelenting patriarchal structures. Implicit within these structures is a worldview that would divide spirit and matter, heaven and earth, into un-nuanced binaries. The lives of men are unapologetically

privileged, just as the world of ideas is favored over the physical body—and all that pertains to the “messy” earthly realms.

The denigration and repression of the embodied, sensual side of life do of course come back to bite. We see the return of the repressed today in a multitude of forms—Catholic priests charged with pedophilia, rabbis and gurus exposed in seducing their students, sexual assaults occurring in every workplace, and of course, Mother Nature reeling from the imbalances that humankind has wrought upon her. With every whistle blow, we pray that finally the rules of the game may be changing. And then we witness the backlash: the indignant (self-righteous?) defense of Kavanaugh, #Him-Too, and further denials of female voices. Nevertheless, women persist.

II. UNDERSTANDING THE LEGACY OF FEAR

After decades of inquiry, I finally understand my own patriarchal upbringing in terms of the fear that fueled it. In those first decades after World War II, we Jews were far from knowing just how traumatized we were, and farther yet from understanding the far-reaching consequences of what we had gone through. At some fundamental level, we were still in shock, still running for our lives. Stopping to feel the pain of what had befallen us was out of the question; the pain was too great. It seemed that even the simplest conversation was breathless, the tenor and tempo of every interaction bristled with a frenzy that I now understand as hyperarousal, one of the residues of extreme trauma.

Perhaps that hyperarousal paid off. In the Midwest where I grew up, my Orthodox parents and their friends built an entire Jewish world in a matter of years—Hebrew schools, synagogues, yeshivas, Jewish community centers,



We can uncover wisdom by viewing the body as a map of the interior psyche.

free loan funds, hospitals, and old-folks homes, as we called them back then. Breakneck speed was normal. (Bodies? They were more like lampposts that supported and teleported our brains.) All that frenzied activity can be seen as a positive byproduct of our trauma.

But every coin has its flipside. The urgent productivity and do-or-die stance of post-Holocaust Jewry in both the diaspora and in Israel, evolved into a rigid, almost fanatic absorption into a Jewish identity that might best be understood as hyper-nationalism. Rough and uncompromising, tribal security became the *uber alles* value. And in such a trenchant mental space, messy feelings had no place. Empathy? That was for weaklings who would surely lose the ongoing war of our survival.

I now understand the loss of compassion for the other as another byproduct of trauma: emotional numbing, also called dissociation.

The instinct to numb our feelings can be a shield from feelings that might otherwise shatter us. But it also demands a high price. What we split off will one day demand a way back into our consciousness. More to the point: when we shield ourselves from our feelings, we cut ourselves off not only from others but from our own selves. This schism is one of the greatest tolls of patriarchal trauma.

III. HEALING THE LEGACY OF FEAR AND TRAUMA

I fled my own Jewish patriarchal home early on, taking refuge in my physical body. There in my still uncolonized sensual self, I found endless secret pleasures. I discovered the many aromas of nature, the glistening eyes of animals, and a new kind of intelligence that was deliciously free of the cerebral orientation and frenetic pace to which I was accustomed.

By 25, I had left the Jewish world far behind, drawn to the newly emerging field of body-mind healing and the work of Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen, Marion Woodman, and others who approached the body as a living map of the interior psyche. Studying the intricate wedding of mind and body, I found a miraculous form of wisdom revealing itself.

One rather shocking event stands out. Midway through my training in the healing arts,

I volunteered to be a model in a deep tissue massage class. As the instructor demonstrated the technique on the intercostal tissue between my ribs, I felt a strangely evocative pain. Before I knew what was occurring, my breath took me on a journey. I was transported into a place of sheer agony, a darkened chamber where I experienced the screams and moans of masses of people; then the terror of suffocation, accompanied by clawing gestures and desperate pleas for help.



I seemed to have tapped a reservoir of pain that went far beyond anything I had personal knowledge of. It had its own life, its own origins, and it was far greater than mine alone. A powerful timeless field was constellated that day. **By some unnamable osmosis, some twenty classmates watching the demonstration witnessed it too, later describing the scene of inescapable suffering in full detail.**

This was the beginning of a profound unraveling that has continued to this day: the healing

of a collective trauma that is also, simultaneously, my own personal wound. **The intersection of collective and individual myths is a mystery of great relevance in our times. It underscores the importance of each of us doing our own personal healing work for the sake of the whole.**

IV. TAPPING OUR COLLECTIVE WISDOM

We each have reservoirs of pain like this, caches of collective wisdom hidden away in our cellular memory. This is because family patterns exert their influence in ways that are largely unconscious. So do the deep inscriptions of our tribal histories within our bodies.

As a rabbi and depth psychologist, I have long been intrigued by the powers that lie beneath the surface of our lives. I have learned that our connection to our forebears and the Jewish concept of *Dor l'Dor*—from generation to generation—is more than just a sentimental idea. Whether our grandparents suffered from racial discrimination in the Middle East, scarcity in the Depression, or atrocities in the Holocaust, their extreme experiences can be stored and transmitted for generations.

Now new research in neuroscience and clinical psychology demonstrates that even when they are hidden, our ancestors' traumas leave their evidence in the minds and bodies of future generations. The field of epigenetics provides growing evidence that traumatic events can create a kind of "biological memory" that emerges under stress. One landmark study carried out in Jerusalem found that the descendants of parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents who endured persecution, war, and other extreme stresses were prone to

depression, anxiety, and other stress responses remarkably similar to those of their ancestors.

But the new research also intimates that our historical legacies can be transformed. First, we must reclaim our connection to our physical selves, this wise earth plane, and our instinctual sense of knowing. By reconnecting with the intelligence of our bodies, opening to the heartbreak all around us, and bringing awareness to the fact that we are connected across time, space, and generations, we can awaken a multi-dimensional perspective, one that balances the patriarchy's ceaseless forward momentum with the wisdom of the ages. The wounds and the wounding of the fathers may have their indelible imprints, but they can and

must be healed if we are to stand up to and transform the patriarchy.

Patriarchy is not just the subjugation of women and their bodies but an entire worldview that would deny the intricate

fabric that connects our primal body-knowing with cerebral understanding, our individual selves with the life of community, our personal memory with the guiding wisdom of our ancestors. Reclaiming and healing these connections spells the true end of the patriarchy and moves us decidedly beyond it. ●

“This was the beginning of a profound unraveling that has continued to this day.”



RABBI TIRZAH FIRESTONE, PhD, is an author, Jungian psychotherapist, and founding rabbi of Congregation Nevei Kodesh in Boulder, Colorado. Ordained by Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi in 1992, she is a leader in the international Jewish Renewal Movement and a renowned Jewish scholar and teacher.

Lisa Simpson: The Tikkun Interview - A Feminist Fan Fiction Fantasy

MARTHA SONNENBERG, MD

How the Interview Came About:

AS AN UNAPOLOGETIC FAN OF *The Simpsons* since its beginning, I have always been especially drawn to Lisa Simpson, the family's perennially eight year old daughter, a student of life, a feminist, environmentalist, social activist, and soulful jazz saxophonist. And with Tikkun magazine's exploration of how a society might look beyond patriarchy, I had been thinking about Lisa Simpson—I was curious about her perspective on the relationship of patriarchal culture and humor, about her perception of her character, and how she might view *The Simpsons'* relationship with its audience.

The Simpsons began as cartoon characters drawn by Matt Groening. Those characters were then animated and, after a short stint on *The Tracy Ullman Show*, eventually became the TV series, now in its 29th year, one of the longest running shows in TV history. The Simpsons has provided its audiences, both in the United States and internationally, a unique view of contemporary society, challenging its



Image Courtesy of Heretic Wear T Shirts

audience to perceive reality from a satiric perspective, and, in turn, being itself challenged by the changing nature of the reality it satirizes.

So when I ran into Lisa Simpson at the March 24, 2018 “March for Our Lives” youth-led demonstration against gun violence in Washington, D.C., I felt compelled to speak with her, although still somewhat intimidated by her iconic status despite her small size. Standing about two feet tall, both she and her brother Bart were overshadowed by the larger marchers around them, but they nevertheless made their presence known with their big handmade sign that read, “We are the future. Please listen!” Emboldened by the spirit of the march, I gently made my way through the marchers, and through my intimidation. I bent down to get Lisa’s attention, and apologizing for disturbing

her, told her I was writing for Tikkun magazine, and asked if she was familiar with the spiritually progressive journal. “Of course,” she said, smiling and shaking her spiky yellow curls. “We’re subscribers! We were introduced to Tikkun by our dear friend, Krusty the Clown.” That would be Krusty Krustofsky, whom I knew, from watching *The Simpsons*, was estranged from his Orthodox rabbi father. What I did not know, and which Lisa now told me, was that Krusty had become interested in the Chasidic tendency in Judaism and then in the Jewish Renewal movement. Her friendship with Krusty had piqued her interest in Jewish history and culture, and led her to push The Simpsons’ writers to bring this history into Simpsons’ episodes. In the 1991 episode, “Like Father, Like Clown”, she had to delve into the Talmud, when she and Bart tried to heal the breach between Krusty and his father—“I got some dynamite stuff from Rabbi Simon Ben Eliazar”. And with that, I felt fully comfortable asking if she would consent to an interview. She graciously agreed, and later that already remarkable afternoon we sat down in a Georgetown coffee shop. We settled in quickly as Lisa brought her own booster chair and asked for a cup of Moroccan mint tea. We spent a few minutes sharing our euphoria about the march, and its significance for the future of the country. I then tapped the “record” button on my iPhone and we got down to—

THE INTERVIEW:

MS: Lisa, I’m just going to jump right in. As a progressive feminist, do you ever feel at odds with the other members of your family?

LS: Well, you make the common mistake of equating the characters we play as actors on the show with who we actually are. In fact, my parents, Marge and Homer, have been part of a progressive group of cartoon actors, the Activist Cartoon Association (ACA) for years, and they imbued us kids with the importance of fighting for justice, equality, and a better world. The ACA originated back in the 1950’s with several disgruntled Disney characters, most notably with our friend Donald—Duck, of course, not Trump! You really should read the 1973 “Interview with Donald Duck” in *Radical America*, Vol 7, No.1. During the 1950’s, the group was mostly involved with both the fight against McCarthyism, and at the same time resisting the more conservative strains in the political theory of Theodore Adorno and the Frankfurt School of social theory.

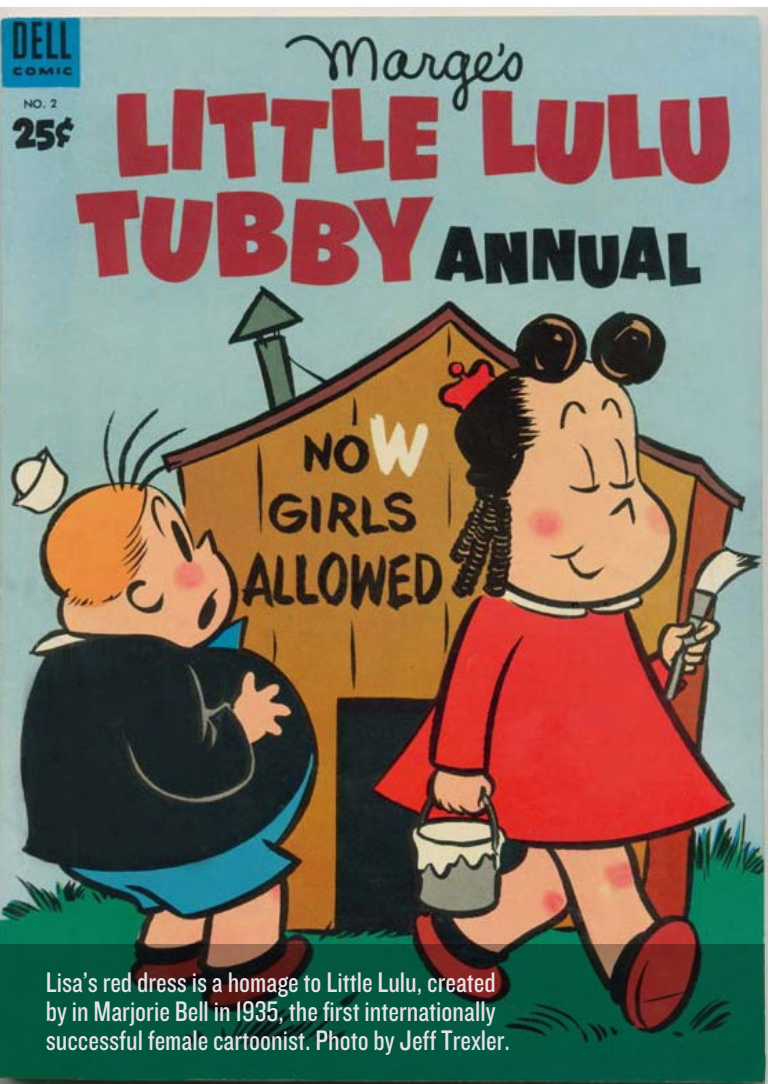
“My own family has worked, and sometimes struggled, with our creator, Matt Groening, and with our various writers, to bring more social commentary as well as more character depth to The Simpsons episodes.”

More recently the ACA has fought for cultural, racial and ethnic diversity in comics and animation, for the realistic portrayal of women, and for the introduction of LGBTQ characters—and very importantly, for more creative collaboration between us cartoon

actors and the people who write for us. My own family has worked, and sometimes struggled, with our creator, Matt Groening, and with our various writers, to bring more social commentary as well as more character depth to *The Simpsons* episodes.

MS: And the ACA continues to this day?

LS: Oh, yes! ACA continues discussing political and social issues, and even has a long standing reading group to keep itself educated. I remember when they read Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*, my father, Homer, wrote to Marcuse, complaining that the title was offensive to



cartoon characters, but I don't believe he ever got a response from Marcuse.

MS: Homer must have been disappointed.

LS: Yes, he held onto a resentment against Marcuse for years!

MS: I can understand that. So, what are *you* reading these days?

LS: Oh my gosh! I live to read! I just finished and loved my friend Nell Scovell's wonderful new book, *Just the Funny Parts*. She wrote for a *Simpsons* episode, which is how we became friends. Her book is really about the difficulty of women writers, especially comedy writers, in what she calls "the Hollywood Boys' Club." Nell

has been a big influence on me, and I'd like to think I've had some effect on her!

I'm currently reading Michael Pollan's wonderful study of the new research on psychedelic drugs, *How to Change Your Mind*. He's such a great writer, and, of course, the world of cartoons and animation has always been involved with altered perceptions of reality. Yeah, I would be *nothing* without my books!

MS: Fascinating! Well, earlier you referred to the complex relationships between *The Simpsons*' creator and writers and the characters, which is tantalizing, and I am very curious to hear more, but first I wanted to see how you view *The Simpsons* in general and your character in particular, with regard to the history of cartoons and comics in this country.

LS: That is a great question! Let me start with my own character. As a character I draw, no pun intended, heavily from my incredible precursors, especially *Little Lulu*. My red dress, of course, is homage to Lulu's little triangular red dress. Lulu was created by Marjorie Buell in 1935—she was the first female cartoonist in the US to achieve international success. And Lulu was very feisty; in the 30's she resisted the authority of adults with imaginative and mischievous pranks, and my brother Bart has taken a lot of Lulu's rebellious nature into his own character, a wonderful fusion of female and male ingenuity, and a hint of how gender fluidity can allow more creativity. Later in the 1950's, Lulu increasingly resisted the hegemony of male privilege, typified in the comic strip by Tubby and Iggy's all boys clubhouse.

MS: Yes! I LOVED *Little Lulu*, and I remember when Lulu crashed into that clubhouse.

LS: Yes, that was a famous comic book cover! Lulu was prescient in her anticipation of Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which was not published until 1963.

But even earlier, in the late 1920s and early 30s, there was Betty Boop, the indomitable flapper girl. Betty Boop's character, drawn by cartoonist Max Fleischman, represented the Jazz Age girl/woman, rebelling against conservative morals, and was both a parody and a symbol of female sexuality. Betty's independence distinguished her from other female cartoon characters of the time, who were portrayed as mere clones of their male partners, like Olive Oyl with Popeye, and Minnie Mouse with Mickey. Betty's subversiveness threatened the establishment, and was met with the imposition of censorship on cartoons and movies in the mid thirties by National Legion of Decency, the Motion Picture Production Code of 1934, also known as the Hays Commission. These groups placed severe restrictions on films with presumed sexual innuendo, and eventually led to the demise of the Betty Boop animated cartoons.



But I want to mention, getting back to Olive and Minnie, that they were not happy with the portrayal of female characters that their creators and writers imposed upon them. Minnie, in particular, became clinically depressed, being unable to tolerate the passivity of her role, and the ridiculousness of her outfits, and she pretty much dropped out of comics. But, as members of the ACA reading group I mentioned earlier, both Olive and Minnie read and were inspired by *The Feminine Mystique*, *Sexual Politics*, and *The Dialectic of Sex*, and eventually got together to form support groups for female cartoon characters portrayed by misogynistic cartoonists, like R. Crumb, brilliant though he is. I've heard recently that they are now encouraging these characters to speak up

against this portrayal in the #MeToo movement.

MS: "Time's up" for misogynist cartoonists!

LS: Well, we can hope! But getting to the other part of your question, with regard to *The Simpsons'* relationship to the history of American cartoons and comics, I think we first have to look to what our creator, Matt Groening had to say about this. Matt, whose father, by the way, was also a cartoonist, grew up inundated by pop culture, including the bland sitcoms of the 50's, as well as Walt Disney's animated characters. He loved Dennis the Menace comic strips—and we see a little of Dennis in Bart Simpson's character. He loved the sophisticated cartoon satires offered by the *Rocky and Bullwinkle* shows. He was also influenced by the music and the anti-war protests of the 1960's, and early on he recognized the gap between the reality of everyday life and the "zombified" (his word) ideal that was promoted on TV. So he began to see cartoons as little windows with which to see beyond what he called "the gray environment" of conventional culture. He has said, "It seems that the best art always comes from struggle." And this places Matt Groening well within the tradition of the political cartoon, or any cartoon that can lead to a new way of seeing reality, in projecting a vision of what could be.

MS: You use the word "tradition", implying a history. Can you expand on the history of the political cartoon?

LS: Oh, there's a long history! Political cartoons, as such, probably began in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, with artists like Hogarth, whose cartoons offered a social critique of British politics. That tradition was continued in the United States, by artists like Art Young, Robert Minor and Maurice Becker, who drew cartoons for *The Masses* magazine in the 1920's, poking

holes in the smug self-satisfaction of the wealthy ruling class. Later this tradition was continued by the artists who drew for *Mad Magazine*, by Garry Trudeau's *Doonsbury*, as well as by Art Spiegelman and his *Maus*, and Harvey Pekar's *American Splendor*. And by the way, Paul Buhle has edited a wonderful history of comics, *Jews and American Comics*, which delves into the radical history of cartoons and reproduces some incredible old comic strips.

MS: What about the underground comics of the 60's?

LS: Yes, they are also part of this tradition, of course, but require the additional commentary that while wildly imaginative and joyously crazy, they also reflected and reproduced the rampant sexism of the time. The depiction of women was often vicious and overtly misogynistic. It is not surprising that women artists were excluded from the male underground comics club. This led to the development of *Wimmin's Commix* and *It Ain't Me Babe Commix* in the early 1970's, started by Trina Robbins, which promoted women's art and voices and created space for women like Alison Bechdel (*Fun Home*), Margane Satrapi (*Persepolis*), and Lynda Barry (*Ernie Pook's Comeek*) to develop their work. I should add here that to date, most of *The Simpsons* animating team is still predominantly male.

MS: Wasn't there a Simpsons episode that dealt with these women cartoonists?

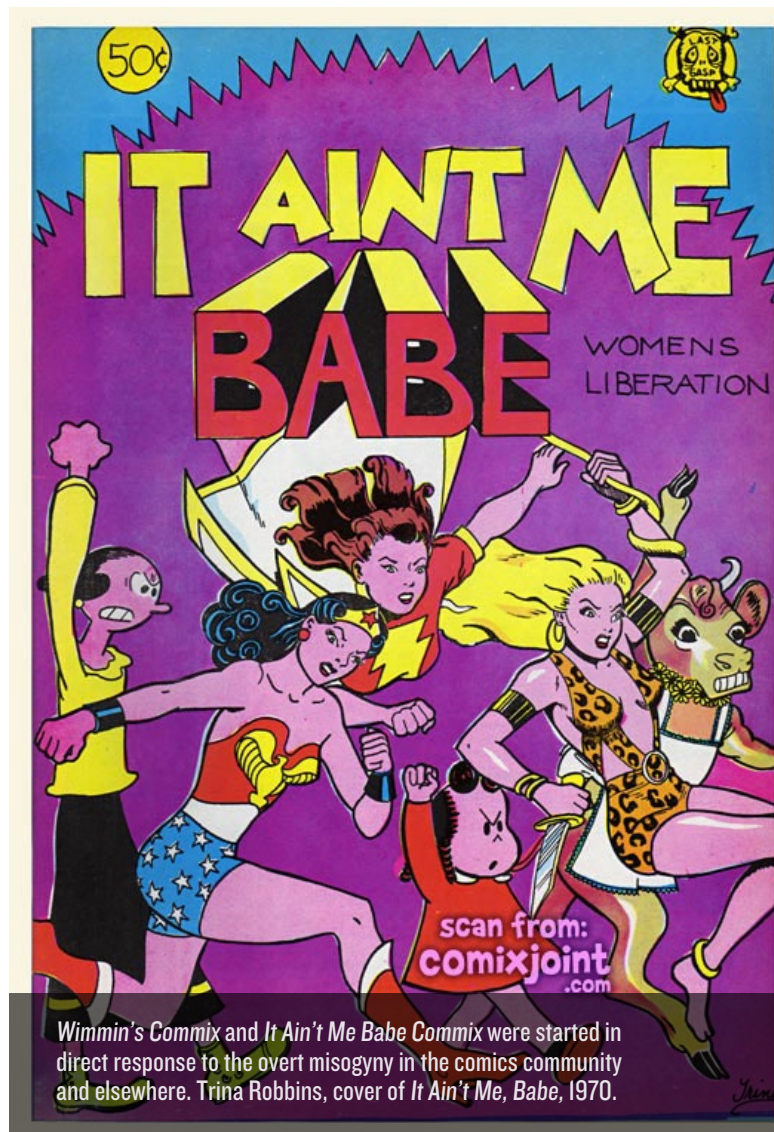
LS: Yes, that was "Springfield Splendor", a riff on Pekar's *American Splendor*. In this episode I write a memoir called "Sad Girl" which becomes a graphic novel hit. I am invited to participate in a comic's convention at which I appear on a panel with Bechdel, Roz Chast, and Margane Satrapi. The episode had potential,

“Humor, like dreams, can allow us to consider ideas that we might normally repress.”

but I thought it fell short... it did not go the extra step in looking deeply into the relationship of writers, cartoonists and their characters beyond allowing Roz Chast to distinguish

between “funny ha ha and funny ah ha”.

MS: Well then, let's get right into that! Because I want to get back to your earlier comment about your struggles with the writers. What about humor and politics, and how does this issue impact your relationships with the writers?



LS: Hmm, well, this is a big question, and there is not a quick and easy answer.

MS: Just start somewhere and I'm sure we will eventually get to everything.

LS: OK. Well, let me start by saying that, of course, the relation of humor and politics is very complex, but my own view is that humor can be used both to reinforce oppressive politics, i.e., the misogyny of some male humor, or to resist or even transcend oppression. Humor is not a thing, but rather a process, and it is a continually evolving aspect of our experience. Humor, like dreams, can allow us to consider ideas that we might normally repress. So, for example, having a little eight year old girl, Lisa Simpson, articulate feminist ideas allowed people who might have otherwise been closed, to be more open to these ideas—they were incongruous and not threatening. My character is cute, and she speaks with that wonderful Yeardley Smith voice—who could not love her?

MS: Yes, I understand what you're saying. But do you think that all satire is transformative? I mean, what about some of the contemporary comedy, like Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, that satirized and often ridiculed the Bush administration, or John Oliver, or Stephen Colbert, on Trump, his administration and his base? Isn't this contemporary satire more a negation of what *is* rather than a comedic depiction of what *could be*?

LS: Well, yes, you have a point. But I think it has to be viewed historically. That is, comedy which is rooted in negation may, in fact, have transformative qualities at a time when people need to be uplifted from demoralization, as they have in the Bush and Trump years, to feel that they are not alone, and gain confidence in laughing at power, in acknowledging that "the emperor has no clothes." A lot of Simpsons' humor fits into this category. But that same comedy at another time, when social move-

ments actually begin to develop, may no longer be transformative, and a new comedic process will need to evolve. Current satire fits with emerging *rebellion*, which is by its nature negative—we are rebelling *against* something. But *after* the rebellion, when we are trying to build something, envision something positive, there will be a new challenge for humor. What that new comedy will be is hard to say, but I suspect it will involve some satirizing and humor about how we earnestly blunder and often clumsily grope our way through a transformative process, so we don't take ourselves and our leadership too seriously. We will have to develop empathic humor.

MS: So the forms humor and comedy assume must evolve as we evolve.

LS: Exactly! And, by the way, for *Tikkun* readers, getting back to my friend Krusty for another moment—his whole identity as a clown was based on his perception of the importance of humor to progressive spirituality. Krusty continually reminds me that the Chasidic master, the Baal Shem Tov, taught his students that humor and laughter can take you from a state of constricted consciousness to an expanded consciousness. And *everyone* loves to laugh. One of the cruelist current misogynistic memes is that women, and especially feminists, have no sense of humor. That's why it has been hard to forgive Louis C.K. for his comment that there's "a fight between comedians and feminists which are natural enemies, because feminists can't take a joke." Oh, for heavens' sake! Hasn't he heard of Sarah Silverman, Tina Fey, Gilda Radner, Tracy Ullman, Lily Tomlin, Margaret Cho, Phoebe Robinson, and...Betty White? And frankly, speaking of humorlessness, I think the male left has little competition in that arena!

MS: So true! Okay! Well, all this discussion about humor and politics and consciousness, is

reminding me of one of my favorite plays, *The Comedians*, by the British playwright Trevor Griffith, about a school for comedians...

LS: Oh, yes! One on my favorite plays, too, even though it was written in 1974! It really delved deeply into how humor evolves. We tried to get our writers to do a take on this play in response to the Apu controversy (which I will come back to), but they didn't do anything with it. As a result, though, I know parts of the play by heart. Is it OK if I quote?

MS: By all means!

LS: OK, so the comedy teacher, Waters, tell his students,

"A real comedian dares to see what his listeners shy away from...and what he sees is a sort of truth, about people, about their situation, about what hurts or terrifies them, about what's hard, above all, about what they want. A joke releases the tension, says the unsayable...But a true joke, a comedian's joke, has to do more than release tension, it has to liberate the will and the desire, it has to change the situation."

MS: Yes, and as I recall, Waters goes on to say something like "A joke that feeds on ignorance starves its audience." So, how does this relate to *The Simpsons*? And to patriarchy? And Apu? And please forgive the bluntness of my questions—I'm no Terry Gross.

LS: And I'm no Lily Tomlin! But let me start by pointing

out that of the roughly 118 writers for *The Simpsons*, there are only about 12 women. And while the male writers have mostly done a wonderful job in creating a successful series for nearly 30 years, what was new and inventive 20-30 years ago may not be so today. The Apu controversy is a good case in point.

MS: Just to clarify for readers who may not be familiar with the Apu controversy: *The Simpsons*' character, Apu Nahasapeemapetilon, is from India, and manages the local Kwik-E-Mart, although he has a PhD in computer science from India. Apu is voiced by Hank Azaria, with a thick and exaggerated Indian accent. In 2016 the Indian comic Hari Kond-

abolu made a documentary called "The Problem with Apu", which criticized the depiction of Apu as a negative stereotype of Asian-Americans.

LS: Right. The response of Matt Groening and the Simpsons writers was so disappointing to me. In an episode called, "No Good Read Goes Unpunished," they have *MY* character being upset by a favorite book because of its racist stereotypes. When Marge asks me what to do about it, the writers gave me these lines, spoken as I gaze, significantly, at a picture of Apu, "It's hard to say. Something that started decades ago and was applauded and inoffensive and is now politically incorrect. What can you do?"

So here's the thing. First, they made their most progressive character, Lisa Simpson, deliver their defensive and inadequate message, and second,



in so doing, they revealed their regressive attitudes toward both Apu AND Lisa. They remained unwilling even to *consider* that the depiction of Apu might be offensive to a younger Asian audience even if it had not been 20 years ago. And giving Lisa these lines reflected the limits of their consciousness in understanding her character. If there were more women writers, I believe that Lisa Simpson, fully understood, would NEVER have been given the lines “What can you do?” This was one of the struggles we had with the writers. I urged them to push their boundaries and confront the issue of Apu with more understanding of its effect on contemporary audiences, and for Matt to remember *his own words*, that “the best art always comes from struggle.” And, I wanted them to see that *my* character would have understood and empathized with the hurt and pain that a negative stereotype caused, and had *plenty* to say about it. Lisa Simpson would *never* have fallen back on the dismissive “politically incorrect” trope—it was totally out of character! Argh! I’m still fuming about it! (She pauses for a sip of tea and a deep breath.)

MS: I see how troubling this has been for you...

LS: Yes! And it gets back to *The Comedians* again, in that the writers had an opportunity to say something, but chose to say nothing, and in this sense, they stifled their characters and “starved their audience.” They abdicated their responsibility to reveal rather than obscure the issue, and that is so sad. Art Spiegelman has said, “...cartoons are most aesthetically pleasing when they manage to speak truth to power, not when they afflict the afflicted.” Or, as bell hooks put it, “Humor is an intervention in a dysfunctional situation, which leaves the door open for healing and understanding.” The bottom line was that they did not allow their characters, and therefore their humor, to EVOLVE!

MS: But do you think that the writers were

consciously trying to “starve their audience”?

LS: No, no, of course not. I think they succumbed to defensiveness, and as defensive behavior often does, it obscured their perception of the situation and of what they could do to change it. I truly believe that these male writers have had good intentions regarding all *The Simpsons*’ characters, including my character and have, in fact, a lot of affection for them.

In the case of my character, the writers reflect many of the contradictions of a patriarchal culture. On the one hand, these male writers identify with Lisa’s spirit, and find in her character a safe place to explore their own aspirations for spiritual and emotional growth. On the other hand, though, the dearth of women writers and cartoonists, has limited their understanding of the depth of their characters, or how these characters might *evolve*. They have been unable to get beyond their patriarchal *lack of curiosity* about the soul of my character and so they remain stuck in a fairly simplistic portrayal of what they think feminism means. They were unable to appreciate or even imagine the visionary aspect of feminism, again quoting bell hooks, “feminism is for everybody!”

MS: This is great, because one of the questions we at *Tikkun* are asking is how humor might look “beyond patriarchy.” Can you comment further on this?

LS: With pleasure! It’s something I’ve thought a lot about. *The Simpsons* characters of Homer and Bart are more fully developed because they are more familiar to the male writers. Homer and Bart represent two aspects of contemporary males, the tragically comic character of a slave to his job, and the character of the rebel/prankster, but both remain mostly out of touch with their inner feelings. The characters of Marge and Lisa are more simplistically stereotypical. Look, if our writers could get beyond patriarchy they would have allowed Lisa more

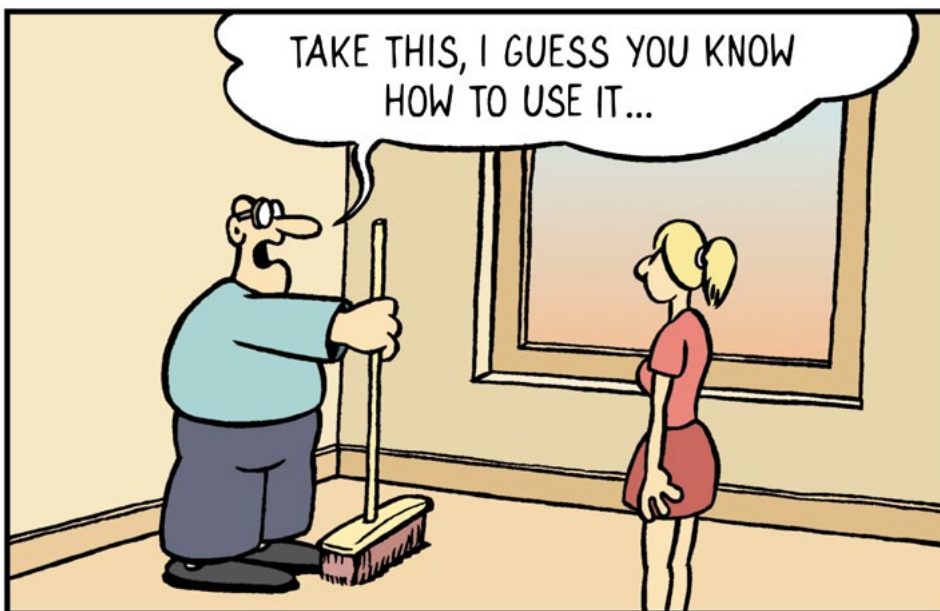
depth of character, to express more nuanced perceptions, to have a little more joy and laughter in life, rather than portraying her as a mostly humorless feminist. They would have allowed her to have friends! I always wanted my friends Huey Freeman, from Aaron McGruder's *Boondocks*, or Marji, the wonderful girl from Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, outspoken critic of the Islamic fundamentalists in Iran, to be on some episodes. Or, the writers might have allowed Lisa to meet up with some of her precursors, as I mentioned above—because you know, as cartoons, we live forever!

MS: I love the idea of Lisa getting together with Little Lulu and Betty Boop!

LS: Yes, that would really be fun! And by the way, my mother, Marge, has also felt cramped by the writers. Their portrayal of Marge is that she has forsaken her more radical “hippy” youth, and is now just a Springfield housewife. But my mother wanted to fill out her character, show that Marge is still an independent spirit—she proposed an episode in which Marge formed a housewives’ protest group to fight for wages for housework, inspired by Selma James’ 1972 pamphlet, *The Power of Women and The*

Subversion of the Community. But that was beyond the pale of the male writers’ curiosity and went nowhere—I think it would have resonated with women writers. I’m saying that one tragic problem of patriarchy’s effect on art and humor is that it constricts creative or imaginative vision. Here’s a cartoon I’ve been carrying around in my wallet—I don’t remember where I found it—because it illustrates that constriction of vision:

What we see here is the man giving a woman a broom, with an *assumption* of how it will be used. The humor lies in her actual use of the broom, which transcends his limited vision. Our writers are still stuck with their patriarchal blinders.



Used with permission from Martin Perscheid (perscheidcartoons.com)



MS: So you believe that there is still a role for humor beyond patriarchy?

LS: Oh, most certainly. As long as human beings are involved in transformational activity, there will be a role for humor. In the midst of change, we find new ways of being, new ways of seeing, and new ways of relating to each other, new forms of community, that may not have been anticipated by the original pioneers—this is what the Apu controversy is about—and this is fertile ground for the comic and the cartoonist, *if* they can be open to it. Beyond patriarchy, we will begin to have authentic experience of each others' humanity, and that transformational activity will take time, and funny things will happen in that process. Krusty always quotes the Yiddish proverb, if you can appreciate it in spite of its own patriarchal construction: "Man plans and God laughs." We will have to join our Higher Power and learn to laugh at ourselves as we journey into a world beyond patriarchy, and watch effects on family structures, work environments, gender fluidity, the very nature of romance and eros. And the openness, the curiosity about the fascinating and amazing complexity of human behavior, that openness which is so critical to all artistic work, including humor, that openness will flourish when unbound by patriarchal culture.

MS: Wow! That is really inspiring!

LS: Thanks. Yes, beyond patriarchy there will still be power inequality issues, ego issues, and psychological issues that will provide ample material for humor. We have to continue to be open to how we evolve, and to continue to allow laughter in the process. If I can quote another of my heroes, the late Grace Boggs—she said, "To make a revolution, people must

not only struggle against existing institutions. They must make a philosophical/spiritual leap and become more "human" human beings. In order to change, transform the world, they must change/transform themselves." We do not really know what the unfettered imagination can reveal, but that transformational process, that philosophic and spiritual leap, has to happen to political activists, artists, writers, comics and us cartoon characters!

And getting back to the amazing march we saw today, we are witnessing that transformational process in a generation moving toward a positive vision of the future. They will need a lot of humor to keep them going. And

I'm on my way right to do my own interview with Naomi Wadler, that incredible 11 year old who captivated the attention of the world at today's march!

MS: Yes, she was amazing! I imagine she'd be a good friend for your character.

LS: And a friend of Bart's, too!

MS: Lisa Simpson, thank you so much for talking with me today. It has been a real pleasure!

“As long as human beings are involved in transformational activity, there will be a role for humor.”



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



Partnerships Instead: Deconstructing the Domination

RIANE EISLER

HOW A SOCIETY STRUCTURES GENDER roles and relations not only shapes our personal life options; it directly impacts whether our social institutions—from the family, education, and religion to politics and economics—are equitable or inequitable, authoritarian or democratic, violent or nonviolent. These connections have been thoroughly documented. Yet they are still rarely acknowledged, and this failure is perpetuated by popular and scholarly narratives, as well as by our language. As linguistic psychologist Robert Ornstein points out, “. . . language provides an almost unconsciously agreed on set of categories for experience, and allows the speakers of that language to ignore experiences excluded by the common category system.”¹

The only categories in our language that describe gender relations are *patriarchy* and *matriarchy*. But patriarchy is not an accurate term, since male-dominance is not only control by fathers. Moreover, patriarchy implies that the alternative is matriarchy, or control by mothers rather than fathers. Semantically, neither matriarchy nor patriarchy describes egalitarian gender relations: their message is that our only alternatives are either men or women ruling.

Our language's other social categories, such as Eastern/Western, religious/secular, rightist/leftist, technologically developed/undeveloped, pay scant or no attention to the relations between the male and female forms of human-

ity—even though these relations are essential for our biological survival. Moreover, societies in all conventional categories have been oppressive and violent—whether secular rightist societies like Hitler’s Germany in the West, secular leftist ones like Kim Jung Un’s North Korea in the East, or religious ones like ISIS, the Taliban, or the would-be theocracy advocated by U.S. religious fundamentalists.

None of the categories provided by our language describe the components of a more equitable, sustainable, and caring society. Yet this is precisely the information we need to build a less violent and more humane world!



A cultural shift to partnership requires human agency, new language, and new narratives.

NEW LANGUAGE FOR A BETTER WORLD

Decades of multidisciplinary cross-cultural research have identified two contrasting social configurations that transcend old social categories. One is the *domination system* and the other is the *partnership system*.

Biologically we are a dimorphic species (we have two forms). So these new categories take into account the cultural construction of relations between females and males, as well as the value accorded to traits and activities we have been taught are “masculine” or “feminine.”

Psychology and neuroscience show that the relations that children experience and observe play a critical role in human development—impacting nothing less than how our brains develop, and hence how we think, feel, and act. So the partnership and domination systems take into account the cultural construction of the relations children first experience and observe: gender and parent-child relations.

Our problems—personal, political, economic, and ecological—revolve around how we relate to ourselves, others, and the Earth. So these new categories focus on what kinds of relations a culture supports or inhibits in all spheres of life, whether in families or the family of nations.

Stalin’s USSR (a secular Western leftist society), Pinochet’s Chile (a Western, rightist society), Khomeini’s Iran (an Eastern religious society), and Idi Amin’s Uganda (a tribalist society) are obviously very different. But they share the core configuration of the domination system. This system consists of *hierarchies of domination*: relationships of man over woman, race over race, religion over religion, and so forth. Its family and social structure consists of top-down rankings ultimately maintained through abuse and violence, with rigid gender stereotypes in which conquest and violence are associated with “real masculinity” (caring men are dismissed as “effeminate sissies”), and women and the “soft” or “feminine” are excluded from governance. Consequently, social and economic priorities in domination systems follow a *gendered system of values* where anything considered “feminine,” such as caring and nonviolence, are devalued.

In partnership systems, starting with the difference in form between male and female, difference is not equated with superiority or inferiority, dominating or being dominated, being served or serving. “Feminine” social and

economic priorities such as caring and nonviolence are valued in both women and men as well as in social and economic policy. Rather than massive investments in weapons, wars, and prisons, resources are heavily invested in caring for people, starting in early childhood, and caring for our Mother Earth—all devalued in domination thinking. There are *hierarchies of actualization*, rather than domination, where the ideal is not power-over but power-to and power-with.



Both capitalism and socialism are gendered valuation systems that discount caregiving and other activities typically associated with women.

The first book reporting these findings was *The Chalice and The Blade: Our History, Our Future* (now in its 56th US printing and 26 foreign editions).² It provides a new narrative about cultural evolution in terms of the underlying tension between these two basic alternatives for organizing how we think and live, showing that for millennia of prehistory the cultural mainstream oriented to partnership rather than domination. For instance, prehistoric settlements such as Catalhoyuk were egalitarian, with neither houses nor burials reflecting large differences in wealth; there are no signs of destruction through warfare for

over 1,000 years; and, as Ian Hodder, the archaeologist excavating this site, writes in *Scientific American*, women and men were equally valued.³

The Chalice and the Blade also outlines Cultural Transformation Theory, proposing that shifts from one system to the other can occur in times of extreme social and technological disequilibrium. It details evidence of a prehistoric shift from more partnership-oriented to domination-oriented cultures, and documents that in our time of massive technological, economic, and social upheavals there is movement toward another fundamental shift—from domination to partnership.

But this cultural shift will not happen by itself. It requires human agency. And this requires new language and new narratives.

“None of the categories provided by our language describe the components of a more equitable, sustainable, and caring society.”

THE PARTNERSHIP-DOMINATION SOCIAL SCALE

Like domination-oriented societies, cultures orienting to the partnership end of the partnership-domination continuum (it is always a matter of degree) also transcend conventional categories such as religious/secular, Eastern/Western, industrial/ pre-industrial/post-industrial. Contemporary examples are the tribal Teduray of the Philippines, the agrarian Minangkabau of Sumatra, and technologically advanced Western cultures such as Sweden, Norway, Finland, and other Nordic nations.⁴

These are not ideal societies. But both families and the state are democratic, women have higher status, and “feminine” nurturance and nonviolence are considered appropriate for men as well as women—and are socially supported.

The strong statistical correlation between the status of women and a nation’s general quality of life empirically shows that partnership-oriented societies are better for both men and women.⁵ This is not only because women are half the population, but because when the status of women is low, traits and activities stereotypically associated with women such as caring, caregiving, and nonviolence are less valued than those stereotypically associated with men. So less money goes into supporting the activities that make for a high quality of life for everyone, and more money goes into those stereotypically associated with men, including manufacturing weapons and fighting wars.⁶

This gendered valuation system is reflected in both capitalism and socialism: neither Adam Smith nor Karl Marx included as “productive” the work of caring for people, starting in childhood. So childcare workers are paid less than dog-walkers. And when caregiving is performed outside the labor market, whether by

“The strong statistical correlation between the status of women and a nation’s general quality of life empirically shows that partnership-oriented societies are better for both men and women.”

men or women, it is not even counted in measures of productivity such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—which instead includes making and selling cigarettes and weapons, activities that destroy rather than nurture life. And this, despite studies showing that, if included, the work of caregiving in families would constitute between 30 to 50 percent of reported GDP!⁷

Nordic nations do not have immense gaps between haves and have-nots, or the huge child poverty rates of the United States. International surveys show that these are the happiest nations in the world, largely because people’s material and emotional needs are met by caring policies such as generous paid parental leave, high quality childcare, and elder care with dignity.

The reason these nations heavily invest in caring for their people is not that they are well-to-do. Many more prosperous nations fail to invest in their people. Moreover, as Hilkka Pietila and others have documented, the Nordic “caring society” was not the consequence of greater prosperity. It was the other way around.⁸

Another claim is that these societies are more caring because they are more homogenous. But homogenous societies such as Saudi Arabia have huge economic disparities, as well as despotic governments and brutal institutionalized violence, such as public beheadings.

The real difference is the Nordic nations' orientation to the partnership side of the partnership/domination continuum. And a key component of the partnership social configuration is that the status of women—and with this, of caring, caregiving, and other activities stereotypically considered feminine—is higher.

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR A PARTNERSHIP WORLD

Re-examining modern history from this new perspective, we see that underneath its seemingly random events lies a powerful movement towards a partnership social organization, countered by strong domination resistance. All the modern progressive movements challenged traditions of domination—from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rights of man, anti-slavery, anti-monarchist, economic justice, pacifist, and feminist movements to the twentieth- and twenty-first century anti-colonialist, anti-war, participatory democracy, women's rights, and environmental movements—the latter challenging “man's conquest of nature.”

However, the emphasis was on dismantling the top of the domination pyramid: economic and political relations in the so-called public sphere. Far less attention was paid to the so-called private sphere—relations between the female and male halves of humanity and between parents and children—which were generally seen as secondary “women's issues” and “children's issues.” As a result, we lack solid foundations for a truly democratic, equitable, and peaceful society.

Today we are on the threshold of a crucial second stage in the challenge to traditions of

domination: a politics of partnership that encompasses *both* the public and private spheres. This *integrated partnership political agenda* focuses on four cornerstones:

- *Partnership gender relations*
- *Partnership childhood relations*
- *Partnership economics*
- *Language and narratives that support partnership*

The domination of one half of humanity by the other is a model for in-group versus out-group thinking—be it white people over Black people in the U.S., Shias over Sunnis (or vice versa) in the Middle East, or top-down economic injustice. This is why a top priority for those



We need to start constructing a partnership economics that recognizes the economic contribution of caring and caregiving.

pushing us back to the “good old days” when all women and most men “knew their place” is getting women back into their “traditional” place in a male-dominated, punitive family where children learn that it is painful to question orders, no matter how brutal or unjust. It is why the most repressive modern regimes—from Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union to Khomeini's Iran and the Taliban of Afghanistan—have sprung

up where family and gender relations based on domination and submission are firmly in place, and why, once in power, these regimes enacted policies to reinstate a punitive father in complete control, as we starkly see in so-called religious fundamentalism worldwide.

If people experience relations of domination and submission in their early years, they often believe that our only alternatives are dominating or being dominated. So just as children often repress their rage toward abusive parents

(as they must to survive) and divert it against children they perceive as weak, these people often scapegoat groups they see as weak or feminine, while they respect and even love leaders who stand for control and punishment, in a replay of emotional habits learned in domination families.

We can no longer ignore the political importance of these primary human relations, or the pandemic of violence against children and women. A global campaign to stop intimate violence will help the millions who are beaten, raped, and killed, and is crucial for dismantling two cornerstones on which the domination pyramid rests: domination parent-child and gender relations.

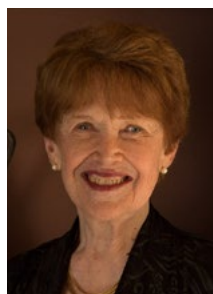
Another key strategy is constructing a partnership economics that recognizes the economic contribution of caring and caregiving. We need training and adequate rewards for the socially essential work of caregiving in both the formal and informal economy, if only because otherwise we won't have what economists call the "high-quality human capital" needed for the postindustrial economy. This is essential to end poverty—including the disproportionate poverty of women worldwide—and unless we value caring for nature, our children have no future.⁹

Cultural narratives and language that support partnership are also vital. If we believe male-dominance, violence, and oppression are inevitable, decreed by God or genes, we cannot free our enormous evolutionary gifts: our extraordinary capacities for empathy, creativity, caring, and conscious choice.

The mix of high technology and a domination system is potentially lethal. To avert this catastrophe, we must join together to build these four foundations for cultures of partnership and peace. ●

Footnotes

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- [9] Eisler, R. (2007). *The Real Wealth of Nations*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.



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

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Parenting without Obedience

A Preliminary Guide to Intergenerational Collaboration

MIKI & ARNINA KASHTAN



When my son¹ was three-and-a-half years old, one set of his grandparents visited us and slept in a downstairs room. At about 8am, my son started banging a pole on the floor upstairs. I told him that I was worried the banging would wake them up and that I would like them to be able to rest as long as they wanted, and asked if he was willing to stop banging or to bang on the couch. He replied: "I don't want to, but I'm willing." I asked, "How come you don't want to?" He replied: "Because it's not waking me up!" Then I asked, "So how come you're willing?" He said: "Because I want to consider you."

He then put down the pole, without any of the sense of resentment and anger that people often exude when they are doing something against their will. I expressed my gratitude to him for meeting my need for cooperation, and we moved on with our morning.

At most of my workshops, when I share this story, someone will invariably say: "But of course, your son was clear that if he didn't do what you asked you would take the pole away!" "No," I reply. "I would not have taken the pole away. In fact, I believe that because my son knew that I would not physically take the pole away from him, he was willing to put it down even though it was not what he wanted."

**THIS STORY DEFIES
CURRENT CHILD
DEVELOPMENT THEORIES.
YET IT HAPPENED.
AND IT'S NOT AN
ISOLATED INCIDENT.**

WHEN PARENTS AND ADULTS SHIFT from obedience, shaming, and right/wrong thinking, to freedom, love, willingness, and caring dialogue, children can and do find and cultivate their organic and genuine desire to care for the well-being of others, both adults and children, alongside their own. No “should,” punishment, or reward which prioritize the needs and perspectives of the parents; no “permissive” giving up on the parents’ needs, perspectives, or values, either; only trust in the unfolding of life and in the capacity of all, together, to come up with solutions that work for everyone in the family.

Patriarchy, as we understand it, emerges from a fundamental separation from self, other, life, and nature. As such, reproducing patriarchy requires obedience so each new generation will internalize the separation and continue enacting patriarchal ways of being at all levels. Much is needed, at all these levels, in order to interrupt the reproduction of patriarchy. One of the core necessary pieces is to transition to collaborative parenting being the norm rather than the rare exception. Without it, even if we somehow manage to transform the larger political and economic social structures, each generation anew will be exposed to the impossible internal conflicts and compromises that patriarchal training demands of us, internalize the dominant version of reality in order to survive, and inevitably recreate the existing relations and institutions. More significantly, without shifting our parenting, we might run out of sufficient collective capacity to love.

Even people who are generally committed to social justice and egalitarian politics, for example, still fundamentally believe that children need to be told what to do. This is why without

specifically changing the structure of parenting and its assumptions, it will continue to be unconsciously based on current patriarchal norms. Although patriarchy affects women and men differently, none of us emerge from childhood without internalizing patriarchy, and both mothers and fathers pass it on.

In this article, we aim to provide some pointers to how patriarchal upbringing operates, why this way of raising children is detrimental

to our very essence of being human, and what we can do about it, both systemically and individually. Our proposals are both radical and practical.

“It’s no surprise that patriarchy requires coercion, since it fundamentally goes against our evolutionary makeup.”

PATRIARCHY AND CHILDBREARING

As the intrinsic unsustainability of patriarchal economics and politics is being fully exposed, more and more of us know that we are at a crossroads as a species.

The nature of the crossroads is a choice that is entirely in our hands at this point: are we, collectively, going to continue on the suicidal path we’ve been on, leading us to watch all that we love die, now or within the foreseeable future, possibly within the lifetime of our own children? Or will we manage to reclaim and restore our fundamental relatedness with all things alive, surrender our attempts to control nature, and find a way of living that averts or mitigates the worst possible catastrophes while it’s still possible?

Even as the external threats to our survival are more prominent, our species’ survival is also threatened by the loss of what Humberto Maturana and Gerda Verden-Zöller call “the biology of love,” distinguishing it from a biology of dominance and submission, which is the

essence of patriarchy.² As they remind us, for any mammalian species it is what the young learn and then conserve that drives evolution, since everything else dies off. This means that our very survival depends, in part, on how we raise our children.

My father raises his voice: “NO!!!” he says. Again. Then he gives me his look.

My father, my protector, on whom my very existence depends, is angry.

What can I, a small human child, full of fear, make of that look?

Being born into the only paradigm known to humans for generations—that of “Right/Wrong” thinking, I know from very early on that, in such circumstances, one of us must be wrong.

The moment of illusory choice arrives, similar to countless others throughout my childhood and to millions of moments throughout human history: Who will be the “bad guy” and—of course—pay the price? Like most children under patriarchy, I took the blame upon myself.³

As this simple story illustrates, under conditions of patriarchy, we raise children in an environment of obedience, shame, scarcity, and often narrow self-interest, fully interfering with the flow of love and with children’s ability to experience freedom, belonging, natural abundance, and genuine care for the whole. Each new generation’s innate trust in life and, specifically, in the adults who care for them is broken many times over.

Patriarchy and its main educational institutions (parenting and schooling) have achieved this feat of maintaining domination over so many generations through direct coercion when possible, and through indirect coercion in the form of shaming when not. The result is twofold. One is an activation of the fight/flight/



freeze mechanism in a way it wasn’t designed for and the other is a residue of internalized shame. Both of these serve to reproduce the dominant patriarchal paradigm.

These mechanisms were not invented by patriarchy. Rather, patriarchy has moved them from margin to center. Instead of being used in extreme conditions, where the survival of an individual or group calls for exit from the biology of love into temporary adoption of potentially traumatizing measures, patriarchy has elevated them to the norm.

It’s no surprise that patriarchy requires coercion, since it fundamentally goes against our evolutionary makeup. This is why coercion is particularly directed at children. If you think about the core value of patriarchy in relation to children, it’s, sadly, obedience. It’s seen as a virtue rather than as a traumatic experience. The results go far beyond our collective well-

Within the patriarchy, obedience is seen as a virtue in children, rather than a traumatic experience.



being as individuals, because obedience is the very pathway that makes it possible for us to override our aversion to inflicting harm.

Shame, one of the four emotions associated with survival (along with fear, anger, and guilt), originally evolved when we lived in small groups in order to encourage us to act in ways that are less likely to lead to being devalued by others, thereby strengthening belonging.⁵ Here we are focusing on its *social* function: as each individual avoids damaging social relationships, the cumulative result is that shame protects human groups from the potential threat of an individual acting in ways that can endanger the group. With patriarchy, shaming becomes a central mechanism for raising children. Because, as children, our need for belonging is so vulnerable, through shaming this need is mobilized to maintain the power of the imposed patriarchal order.

Given that we come into life “a bundle of needs,” normative patriarchal upbringing, what Alice Miller refers to as the “hidden cruelty of child rearing,” is, quite simply, an assault on our needs and on what we want.

Given the legacy of so many generations of patriarchal functioning, we have forgotten, especially in the most recent period of such extreme polarization and hostility, that trust is our natural state, not fear and not shame. As Humberto Maturana reminds us, “Biologically, trust is the spontaneous manner of being of any living system when in comfortable congruence with the medium.”

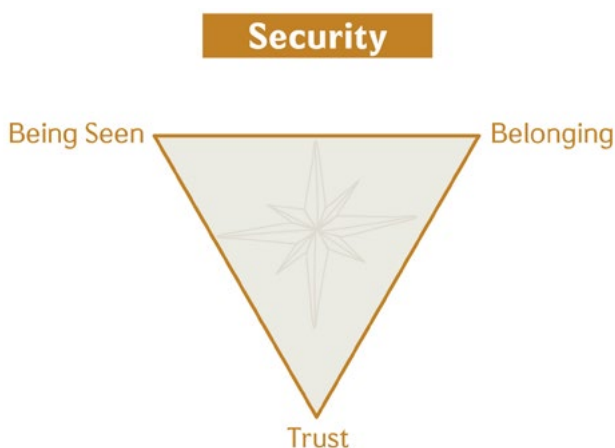
Patriarchal upbringing, however, undermines trust through repeated experiences of trauma resulting from persistent coercion and shaming and the chronic experience of needs not being attended to, starting with modern birth and its consequences for both mother and child. These experiences have two dramatic results. One is a higher propensity for interpreting incoming signals as danger and activating the fight/flight/freeze system. This mechanism, which originally evolved for facing rare situations of real danger, makes the other seem like an enemy. It thus separates us from others and leaves us caring only for ourselves. Beyond the individual scale, at least in its European version, patriarchy arose from a series of catastrophes. This would mean loss of trust in nature, followed by loss of trust in people as invasions followed. We’ve never had time to recover from this trauma, as patriarchy has only intensified its grip on human societies over the millennia, infiltrating more of the planet and more of our consciousness to the point where now we live in a semi-permanent activation of the fight/flight/freeze system, and a high propensity to reach full activation of it.

The second consequence is that when shaming, or the persistent denial of the child’s basic

needs for love and belonging, are routinely used as part of patriarchal upbringing, it leaves an overwhelming number of us with a propensity to believe we are fundamentally “wrong,” leading us to hide our “unwanted” parts and cease our “unwanted” behavior in order to regain acceptance in the group.

Through both coercion and shaming, one of patriarchy’s core ways of interfering with development takes the form of separating and opposing two sets of crucial needs.⁶ One is the cluster of security, which includes needs such as trust, belonging, and being seen, and the other is the cluster of freedom, which includes needs such as self-expression, truth, and presence. The tragedy of socialization within the patriarchal world we live in is that the two triangles polarize. As children, our security triangle is not a given; we have to earn it by being “good,” which means, essentially, overall obeying and following adults’ ideas and instructions.

This means we get a subtle and profound message that the price of security and belonging is loss of the freedom to be who we fully are.



Credit: © Miki Kashtan and Arnina Kashtan, 2018

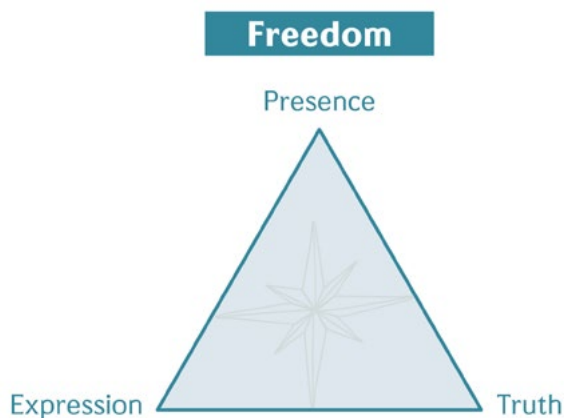
The overwhelming majority of us accept this extremely difficult deal, difficult because both of these sets of needs are essential for survival. We give up much of who we are, our authentic expression, our truth as it lives in us moment by moment, for the hope of being seen and accepted (even if only partially) as part of the whole. We must, because our survival in relation to these needs depends on others. We thus have almost no choice but to conclude that freedom is impossible even as we keep longing for it from afar, or finding hidden and sometimes destructive

ways for having at least some of it, since even hidden it remains essential to our life.

This is patriarchy’s “success:” we become obedient and disconnected from ourselves and from life. And because this is the only game in town, we are then more likely to internalize patriarchy’s messages and pass them on to our own children and less likely to challenge either specific people in positions of authority or the system of patriarchy as a whole.

A very small minority of us, in the same circumstance of polarization, choose freedom, recognizing, consciously or not, the immense cost that *this* choice incurs: living without safety, belonging, or being seen. This choice is never articulated as an option, partly out of care for us when we are young and partly out of loyalty to the internalized versions of patriarchy that our parents and teachers have themselves absorbed. Without the option of choosing freedom over belonging being named, and since, as children, we are so dependent on others for safety, it is not surprising that only few of us make that difficult choice, almost tantamount to a willingness to risk our lives for freedom.

“We have forgotten, especially in the most recent period of such extreme polarization and hostility, that trust is our natural state, not fear and not shame.”



Credit: © Miki Kashtan and Arnina Kashtan, 2018

The full tragic weight of this polarization is that no matter what we choose, we come out of childhood fractured. Darcia Narvaez concludes: “The caregiving environment that has been normalized by culture represents an aberration in human species history, creating systematic ‘undercare’ of children, denying their evolved needs.”⁷ This affects our capacity to live fulfilled lives as well as our capacity to care for others, both peers and, eventually, our own children, the new generation. This is in deep contrast to the persistent findings, starting from early European accounts of contacts with indigenous, matriarchal populations, and continuing well into the 19th century, of what Narvaez calls “a common prosocial personality that is inclusive, humble, egalitarian and generous.”

In stark terms: our upbringing primes us to compete and fight with others for the few positions of dominance, where those are even available, or to submit to others’ dominance. How? By making love absent or conditional, by shaming us, and by creating impossible choices that divide us internally and keep us struggling with the fear of our secret “wrongness” being exposed. Within a patriarchal world, maintaining dominance also requires external divisions between people, starting with gender and age, and extending to class, race, and beyond. As Riane Eisler said: “These traditions of

domination and submission in the parent-child and gender relations are the foundations on which the entire dominator pyramid rests.”⁸

Such upbringing is necessary because no amount of external physical coercion could ever be enough to sustain patriarchal rule without patriarchal messages getting internalized. This is precisely why every patriarchal system controls both the upbringing of children and the stories that propagate in the culture. Both serve to bind people emotionally and cognitively to the patriarchal rulers so they will support the social order with ostensible willingness.

In addition, the vast majority of us lack role models or inspiration to even imagine a different possibility, and only very few of us manage to muster the immense courage to wake up from the ongoing nightmare, adopt a new consciousness, and reach for full connection with self and other, within our families and beyond.

In this tragic context, even the relationship of mothering itself is transformed. As Maturana and Verden-Zoller point out, instead of being an organic and central part of life, patriarchy “instrumentalizes child upbringing by making it a function of designs for the future. ... [It] separates the mother and the child from the present of their living in mutual acceptance and mutual trust.” Within this context, the social structures that separate home from work, a product of the industrial revolution, result in impossible choices now foisted on many women: either remove themselves from adult productive life and raise their children within a non-communal, artificially intensified dyadic relationship (if they even have that option in terms of their class standing), or join the labor market and shift the child’s upbringing to a transactional context of paid childcare. With each successive generation, we leave our children with less love to pass on to the new



We must aim as individuals to live as if the world of our dreams is already here.

generation. We are, finally, at risk of losing the biology of love altogether. According to Maturana and Verden-Zoller: “love is fading away from the spontaneous world of the child.” Following the spontaneous unfolding no longer supports the biology of love; its continuation now requires conscious choice, based on active reflection.

We are reaching the end of the road. It’s time for collective transformation, and parents are key.

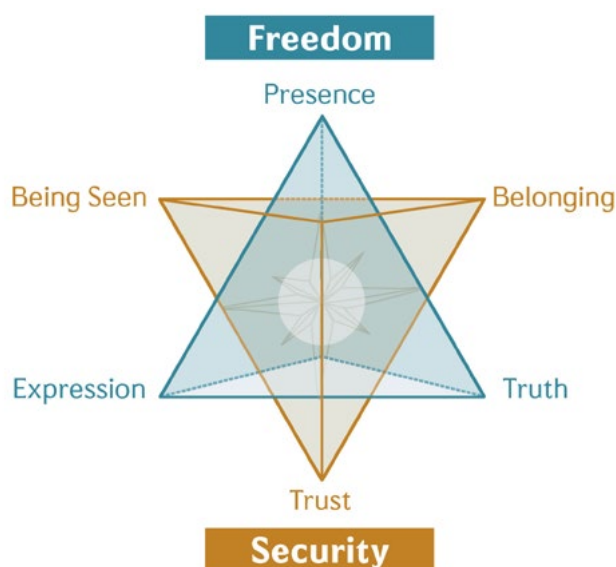
REINTEGRATION: HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION FOR PARENTS

What else can we do if we are aware that “The history of human beings is carried by children,

not by adults” and that, therefore, “human lovingness will be conserved or lost through the upbringing of the children”?⁹

The paradox we live in is that we are creatures that need love in order to give love, and we have created the worst conditions for anyone to be able to receive consistent love. Somehow, we need to find a way to bootstrap ourselves despite this difficulty. How else will we find, quickly enough, a way to infuse enough love at enough levels to make our children’s lives more whole? As Alice Miller’s own life illustrates, being a champion of children is not in and of itself enough: her son’s account of her life and her mothering clearly shows she never fully succeeded in freeing herself from her own legacy sufficiently to raise him in line with her

own beliefs.¹⁰ Reversing the effects of patriarchal upbringing means nothing short of undertaking the monumental task of reclaiming wholeness and bridging the two need triangles, regardless of which of the two we gave up early on. If we gave up freedom and authenticity, the process of reclaiming it means risking again loss of belonging and safety in order to choose, freely, to show more of ourselves. If we gave up security and belonging, the process of reclaiming it means choosing vulnerability and, once again, opening up to the potential disappointment of not being seen or loved adequately instead of protecting ourselves by separating or



Credit: © Miki Kashtan and Arnina Kashtan, 2018

hiding our vulnerability from others.

As we move towards more and more integration, we have the option of reaching a unique destination—the Star of Life. When integrated, our presence is no longer dependent on being seen by others, our truth is no longer at odds with belonging, we experience trust even as we express our full authenticity, and we can experience freedom and security at the same time. That integration is a definite subversion of patriarchy on the individual plane, and serves as a foundation for restored capacity to see others

for their own wholeness and live in interdependent freedom with them.

As individuals within the context of a patriarchal world, this may be as close to heaven as we can get.

And if we have children, this is also the foundation on which we can take on raising children in an environment that is as close as possible to the biology of love, consciously choosing and embodying the values and ways of being that we know are our lifeline.

A word of caution, though. This work of healing and integration is, by necessity, lifelong. We don't reach any particular destination. We remain embedded in the existing paradigm, and thus prone to polarization, either/or thinking, blame, shame, fear of being judged, and right/wrong frames for understanding life and people. Once raised in a world of separation, only ongoing choice and endless support from others can sustain us in our quest to overcome separation and harshness so we can bring infinite tenderness to our own and others' choices.

We are well aware that in the absence of fundamental change at a community and systemic level, it is next to impossible for individuals to create such massive changes, including the necessary support structures to sustain them. It is not individual failings that keep us stressed, angry, and helpless as we navigate life, and especially parenting; it is the effects of the larger patriarchal, capitalist structures that separate and isolate us from external support and internal clarity and resolve.

We will only have rare individuals or families who are able to make these profound shifts until and unless we have social structures that, at the *systemic* level, support the creation of communities of care; are pro-parent and pro-child; attend to needs rather than profit; distribute decision-making to communities; and restore

the commons and with it the flow of generosity and care. Until then, all we can do as individuals is aim to work with others to transform these conditions, and make *individual* decisions, usually at cost to ourselves, to live as if the world of our dreams is already here.

As we embark on this enormous challenge, the more we understand the systemic context within which we struggle, beyond the individual and familial realities we are already aware of, the more we can bring compassion to ourselves and others. Along the way, we can replace our fundamental interpretive frame. Patriarchal training prepared us for thinking, always, about who is to blame for what is happening and how to punish them, be it ourselves, our children, or world leaders.

We can choose, instead, to adopt a radically different frame for making sense of life: the perspective that everything that any human being ever does is an attempt to attend to needs which are common to all human beings, regardless of age, gender, race, class, or any other category that divides us. This is one of the core insights that Marshall Rosenberg, who formulated the core principles and practices of Nonviolent Communication™, brought to the world.¹¹ When we apply this insight to self and other, it can support us in the shift from the fear-shame-blame frame to a love-vulnerability-curiosity way of living. This shift is the foundation on which we can begin to transform our



With freedom, security, love, trust, play, and ongoing gifting, our children can develop fully.

parenting practices and consciously choose the biology of love as our approach to relating to our children while remaining ever tender to all the many moments in which we will slip right back into patriarchal modes of being, especially under stress.

PARENTING FOR CHANGE: COLLABORATING WITH OUR CHILDREN

Following in the footsteps of our beloved deceased sister Inbal, and seeing that our continued existence as a species emerging from the lineage of the biology of love is endangered, we recognize more deeply her call to action. She knew that at least some of us, somewhere, need to find a way to do the near-impossible—parenting outside the patriarchal norms—in order to make a future truly possible. This is a key way in which we can create support for this generation of children to carry forward and conserve a renewed capacity to live in the biology of love. This means nothing less than supporting children in having the freedom to disobey.

We are under no illusion that this in itself will transform the entire miasma of patriarchy. As we hope we have made clear earlier, changing patriarchy requires transforming the actual systems of patriarchal capitalism, at this point at the global level. Still, oases are key as we march through the current desert hoping to reach flow again. The systemic and the individual are intertwined. We don't get to know what our tiny individual efforts could make happen, what would be reabsorbed by the existing systems, and what would ripple into larger changes. For as long as we are individuals or families caught in the desert, being supported, soothed, and nourished along the way, before we take the next lonely step, is an integral part of any picture of large social change.

What would this look like? Those of us caring for children will be called to find a way to provide enough freedom and enough security, through love, trust, play, and ongoing gifting, so that our children can develop fully. If we manage to remove the intense pressure to consider a tradeoff between core needs, maybe our children will be able to continue the path of

love with less effort than it took us. Maybe this will mean they can pass it on to their next generation without the heroic efforts our generation of parents is asked to undertake given the intensity of external and internal conditions of patriarchy.

This means nothing short of fully orienting to children's needs without giving up on our own; working out disagreements without ever resorting to punishment, including guilt as a form of self-punishment; encouraging children's own choices and responsibility without invoking "shoulds" or praise in the name of concern about their future; listening to children, taking their ideas seriously, and exercising respect for who they are and what they are trying to teach us; using force in extremely rare circumstances, only when imminent physical risk is present; and making decisions *with* children and not *for* children, fully expressing our own needs, too, in ongoing collaborative dialogue consistent with our evolutionary legacy.

If this feels overwhelming, it's because it is... Every step of the way is fraught with internal and external obstacles: others will often object; institutions will push back against our fledgling efforts; and our inner capacity will waver. In addition to ongoing practice, this will require a deep internal decision. This is why support structures for parents, which are almost absent, are so vitally necessary. We offer, below, a few words about key practices that can support parents in this monumental shift. This is only a skeleton, a conceptual map of the path, not a full practical blueprint, which we hope to create in an upcoming book.

Self-empathy: The moments of stress, the legacy of patriarchy, and the absence of support structures make collaborative parenting immensely challenging. As much as possible, take time, while not interacting with your children, to connect with your own needs and



We long to see a world in which it's common for adults to maintain an unwavering commitment to children's freedom, wisdom, and power.

intentions, so you can remember why you are embarking on this difficult path and why the obstacles are there: it's not your doing that parenting is so challenging; it's systemic.

Empathy: Whenever you have a challenge with your children, aim to remember that your children have their own needs, plans, hopes, and perspectives, independent of your own. Aim to understand your children's needs on *their* terms, whether or not you are able or willing to do what they want, because this in itself is a deep act of love. Use words and body language to communicate to your children that you understand them even if you disagree. Tip: The more you express yourself by guessing their experience, and end your words with a question mark, the more you create bonding and trust, and thus diminish conflicts.

Transparency and limits: Make every effort possible to include your own needs in the mix, and make them known to your children, es-

pecially when conflict is present. In this way, rather than establishing *imposed* limits by naming what *should* happen, or by controlling the outcome or telling children what to do, you create *natural* limits by naming your own needs. Children then learn organically that others have their own needs instead of being told and expected to act on it without understanding. They then have the freedom to recognize their own generosity and care so they can learn organically how to attend to others' needs rather than struggling to integrate rules that arise from what is ultimately patriarchal authority.

Proactive conversations: The more you initiate islands of conversations away from the heat of the moment, the more you can experience the transformative potential of such moments. Talking with your children at a chosen time gives you the opportunity to prepare yourself, thus having more choice in applying the bond-

ing elements of empathy, acknowledgment, and transparency. These times can then be an opportunity to establish dialogue about challenging, repeating situations, and reach agreements together that will work for the entire family and subsequently reduce stress and facilitate smooth navigation of daily challenges.

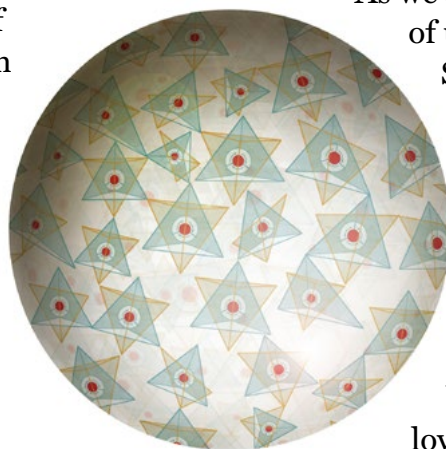
Decision making: Many parents struggle in particular with the practice of collaborating with children in navigating the multitude of daily decisions. The challenge arises from a combination of lack of trust in children's capacity to make wise decisions, the inevitable time-crunch that modern living entails, and the habit of trying to control the outcome that is so endemic within patriarchy. In particular, shifting habits of control is at the heart of the healing and transformation that are required for fully non-patriarchal parenting. With practice, you can learn that everyone, including young children, is capable of caring for everyone's needs when they are articulated. Although you will often be the one to come up with the creative proposal for how to work things out, it won't be always: when Inbal's son was as young as two, about a quarter of the time he was the one who came up with the solutions that attended to everyone's needs.

Accompaniment: Just as much as we live in a patriarchal world, so will your children. We cannot fully protect them from the trauma and assault on their dignity and autonomy that being a child in this world entails. We can, however, reduce the chances that they will encounter these challenges alone, and that already makes a huge difference. The main obstacle

“Aim to understand your children's needs on their terms... because this in itself is a deep act of love.”

here is the habit of unconsciously and implicitly identifying with the authority of adults rather than with the suffering of children. Aligning

with the experience and perspective of children rather than with whatever authority says is one way of inoculating our children against the hazard of obedience. We can dis-identify ourselves with the system as we support our children in getting through it. In this way, we can give them a way to relate to the patriarchal order from choice rather than the fear and inner disconnection that accompany obedience. With our backing, the resilience, self-trust, and care they will likely internalize instead might help them remember that although they cannot individually change the larger social order, they can, and even better than us, choose when to follow the norms and when to stand up to them based on their deepest values.



As we already mentioned, this kind of upbringing is rare and difficult. Still, it seems vital to us to speak of what it makes possible. When we are able to offer this to our children, their needs are less likely to be polarized. As a result, they won't have the task of reintegrating their needs; their needs will simply be. A person who grows up in love and with little or no punishment is also significantly more likely

to be willing to disobey, a necessary trait for caring action in a world based on domination. Perhaps it is time for us to see the act of being able to raise disobedient children who are not riddled with shame as a badge of honor. This is what awaits us when we can fully transcend the existing images of what “good” children are or the habit of believing that we're supposed

to control our children. We long to see a world in which it's common for adults to maintain an unwavering commitment to children's freedom, wisdom, and power, and where community and relating to children are no less important than any other pursuit. For many of us, supporting and witnessing this consciousness shift might in itself serve as a major motivation for the huge effort of such parenting.

To get there sooner than otherwise means that we surround ourselves with enough love to be able to reclaim our own full loving nature. It also means that we consciously seek others to build community with, so that the task of raising children can come back to its communal context, so that the loving is spread around and multiplied. Such communities can also be the places of experimenting with what it means to restore relationships of reverence with nature so the flow of trust in abundance can resume, and, with it, restore the gifting ethos that has sustained us since time immemorial. If we succeed, even partially, and if we manage to avert the worst of global warming, then our children can bond with each other, freer than us. Perhaps their children will reach the image on the previous page, of many stars of life, in their multiple shapes corresponding to whole, unique, fully developed, not-necessarily-symmetrical humans, coming together with room for all in the large circle of life.

With that, we may complete a species journey described by evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris: "Species after species, from the most ancient bacteria to us, have gone through a maturation cycle from individuation and fierce competition to mature collaboration and peaceful interdependence." ●

Footnotes

[1] Taken from the transcript of the CD *Connected Parenting*, created by our late sister Inbal Kashtan.

[2] All mentions of Maturana and Verden-Zöller refer to *The Origins of Humanness in the Biology of Love*, Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2008.

[3] Arnina's story

[4] See "The Freedom to Disobey" for much more on this point.

[5] See <https://www.futurity.org/shame-humans-evolution-1112252-2/>

[6] This formulation was developed by Arnina Kashtan and is not yet available in print.

[7] Darcia Narvaez, "Baselines for virtue." In J. Annas, D. Narvaez, & N. Snow (Eds.), *Advances in virtue development: Integrating perspectives*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

[8] Riane Eisler, *The Power of Partnership*, (New World Library, Novato CA 2002), 106.

[9] *The Biology of Love*, 98.

[10] See Martin Miller, *The True "Drama of the Gifted Child": The Phantom Alice Miller — The Real Person*.

[11] See *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Love*, San Diego: Puddle Dancer Press.

[12] See Miki Kashtan, "The Freedom to Disobey", where research by Samuel and Pearl Oliner on WWII Rescuers is cited. (<http://thefearlessheart.org/the-freedom-to-disobey/>)

[13] (<https://www.kosmosjournal.org/article/ecosophy-natures-guide-to-a-better-world/>) (footnote from this: See Elisabet Sahtouris' *Celebrating Crisis* at <http://worldbusiness.org/celebrating-crisis-towards-a-culture-of-cooperation/> which includes an image of the maturation cycle.)



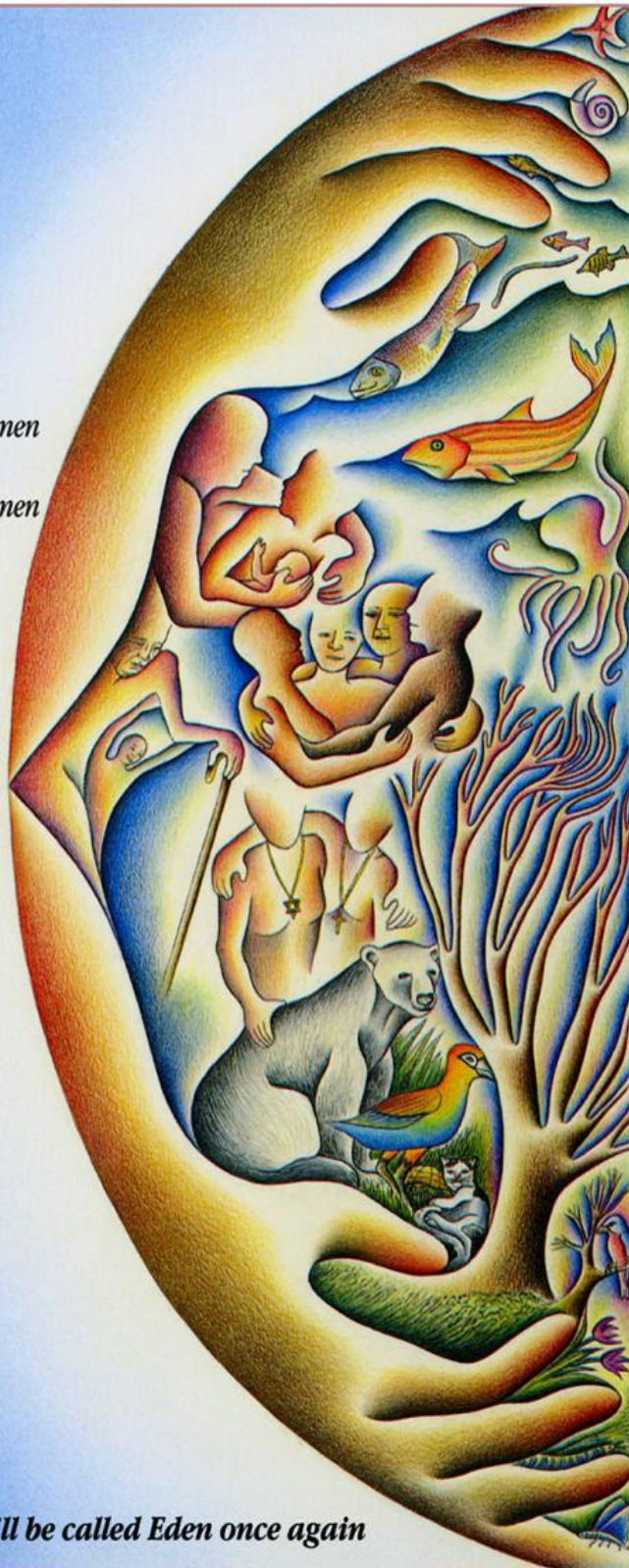
MIKI KASHTAN and ARNINA KASHTAN are sisters. Between them, they work on six continents with individuals, groups, and organizations,

engaging in the complex experimentation necessary to support rapid restoration of our capacities to heal and transform ourselves moving towards a collaborative and vibrant future. This article is a work in progress towards a book by the same name, and is partly based on and condensed from a longer piece written by Miki Kashtan which is available on academia.edu and partly on "The Compass", a body of work developed by Arnina Kashtan designed to achieve personal, familial, and social liberation.

Merger

JUDY CHICAGO

And then all
that has divided us
will merge
And then compassion
will be wedded
to power
And then softness
will come to a world
that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women
will be gentle
And then both women and men
will be strong
And then no person
will be subject
to another's will
And then all
will be rich and free
and varied
And then the greed of some
will give way to
the needs of many
And then all
will share equally in
the Earth's abundance
And then all
will care for
the sick and the weak
and the old
And then all
will nourish the young
And then all
will cherish
life's creatures
And then all
will live in harmony
with each other
and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again



JUDY CHICAGO

For over five decades, Judy Chicago has remained steadfast in her commitment to the power of art as a vehicle for intellectual transformation and social change and to women's right to engage in the highest level of art production. As a result, she has become a symbol for people everywhere, known and respected as an artist, writer, teacher, feminist and humanist whose work and life are models for an enlarged definition of art, an expanded role for the artist, and women's right to freedom of expression.

Written and illustrated by Judy Chicago © 1979



Beyond Patriarchy

JOY LADIN

THE POEM “BEYOND PATRIARCHY” FOLLOWS the tradition of Biblical prophets, who often write in the voice of God. However, unlike the Biblical prophets, who channel or ventriloquize a patriarchal version of the Divine, this poem is written in the voice of the Shekhinah, the immanent, feminine aspect of God who, according to Jewish mystical tradition, dwells among human beings and experiences what we experience. The Shekhinah’s voice here literally grows out of the

Biblical prophetic tradition, fusing language drawn from divine monologues in Isaiah 41 with language from the *Cosmopolitan* magazine article credited in the epigraph.

To me, the Shekhinah is a trans feminine archetype, a disembodied being who is nonetheless gendered, and who, like me and other transgender people, has to fight through the gender binary on which patriarchy depends in order to be seen, heard, or loved.

For the Shekhinah, patriarchy is like static that surrounds human beings, making her urgent summons inaudible and incomprehensible to those living within it. But unlike us, the Shekhinah has never had to live within patriarchy. She has never had to define herself in patriarchy's terms, never been forced to accept patriarchy's assumptions and roles or punished for refusing or failing to do so. She lives outside patriarchy's zero-sum binaries, a form of femaleness that has never been defined or circumscribed by anyone's idea of maleness, because she has never consented to be less than all of who she is.

“In the world beyond patriarchy, maleness and femaleness will be recognized as two of many ways human beings can be human.”

To me, the Shekhinah represents the ever-present possibility and urgent necessity of life beyond patriarchy—a life in which identity, safety, status and vitality do not come at the expense of others. As the source of infinite abundance, she gives the lie to patriarchy's insistence that only some of us can be seen, loved, heard, valued, paid fairly, nurtured, mentored, admired, protected; that only some of us have power; that only some of us deserve and only some of us are capable of and responsible for promoting justice, kindness, mercy, blessing, tenderness, generosity, feeling, dignity, community, and hope. In the Shekhinah's light, patriarchy's fears and fantasies fall away, and we realize—I realize—that life beyond patriarchy, the life she represents, is already with us, summoning us to embrace it.

What will the world beyond patriarchy, the world in which the Shekhinah's voice comes through loud and clear, be like? Because it is up to us to create that world together, no one, not even the Shekhinah, can presume to dictate its details. But in the light of the Shekhinah, for whom the future is always present, its outlines are clear. In the world beyond patriarchy, maleness and femaleness will be recognized as two of many ways human beings can be human, just as maleness and femaleness are only two of many ways God can be God. In that world, no one will be greater than the least of us, and no one will be less than the greatest of us, and so even our basest, most selfish impulses will inspire us to lift one another up. In the world beyond patriarchy, we will see that individuality enriches community and community enriches individuality, and that recognizing one another's differences expands our understanding of what it means, and what it can mean, to be human. In that world, what is true of God will be true of humanity: our center will be everywhere, and our circumference nowhere, because each of us will be embraced as a center, someone for whose sake, as the Shekhinah will happily remind us, the universe was created.

Fear not, I am the one who helps you...

I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys...

Isaiah 41:13, 18

“7 Empowering Life Lessons from ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer.’” Emma Dibdin. *Cosmopolitan*.

I. In the Midst

I know: you're afraid to admit I'm talking to you,
because, deep down, you fear
you're less than nothing,

so anyone who would talk to you
must be nothing too. Amiright?
Patriarchy raised you to be afraid,

to believe the demons, the vampires, the
misogynistic gods
who tell you you're hollow inside

and warn you to hold your tongue
when cruelty and brutality, degradation and evil,
stab you through the heart.

Patriarchy likes you this way, self-loathing and
numb,
believing you're no one I'd ever choose,
a worm in a tunnel, chaff in a gale,

a nameless pool of blood
that doesn't deserve my love. Never not
gonna be mad about that.

Let's just say I know how hard it is
to keep showing up
when the people you're talking to insist

you aren't who you are.
You, for example, keep confusing me with dust—
er, men—dead for thousands of years.

Wondering how to tell us apart?
I have power. They don't.
I summon them all to judgment,

the fears that stalk you to the ends of the earth,
the shame and disgrace that not only put
but nail you in your place,

everything that gets in the way
of you believing
that I am calling you.

Don't be afraid.
Blood relations may fail when you need them;
hurt you in ways they confuse with love;

love you in ways that hurt.
That's what our old friend patriarchy
trains relations to do.

I say: I was there before patriarchy
and I am there beyond it,
calling you to me,

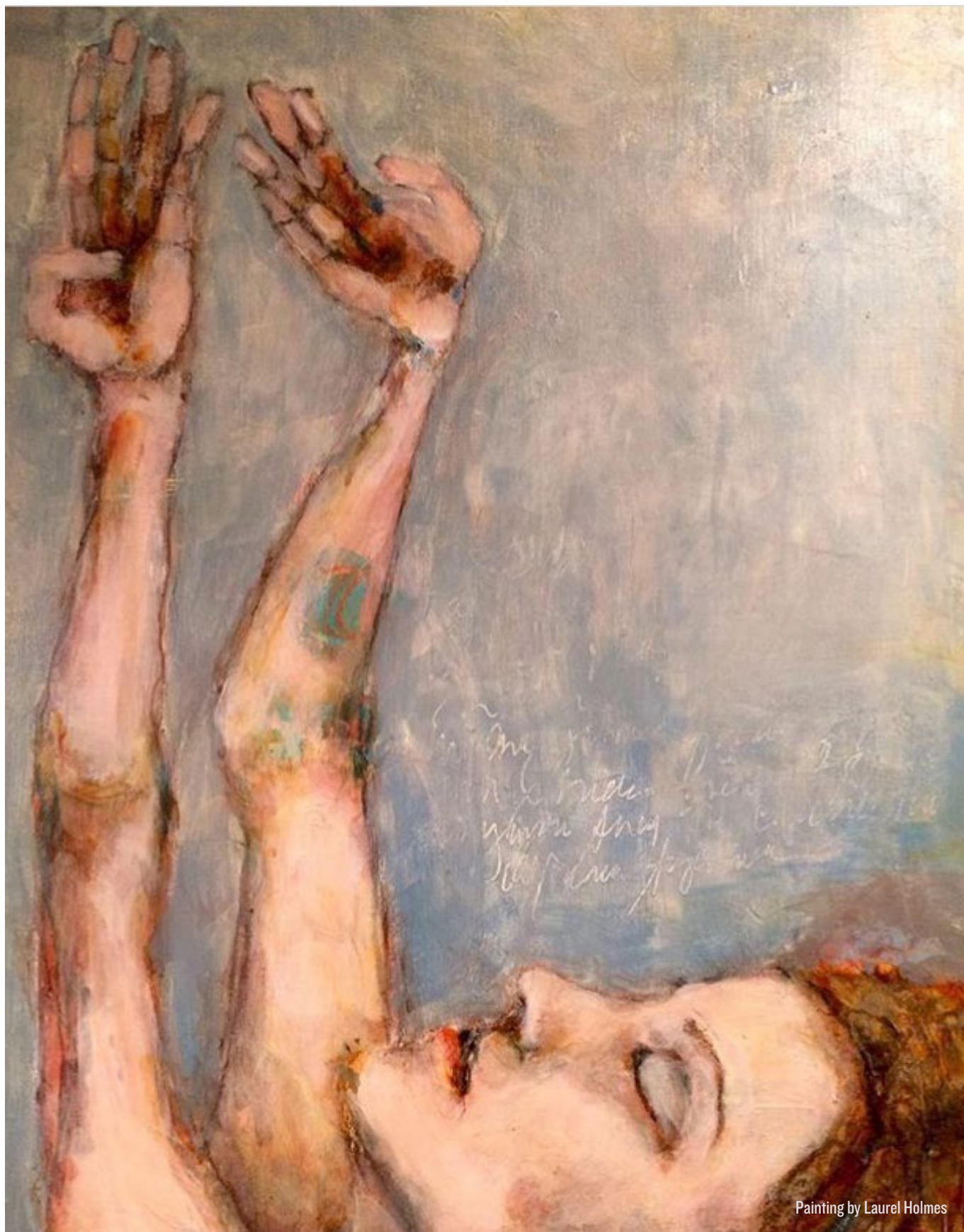
every family, clan and nation,
by paths you haven't walked,
by ways you cannot imagine,

Are you ready to be strong?
Are you ready to remember
who you really are?

Here is the soul you thought you lost.
Here are myrtles and olives, deserts and brooks,
entire continents,
I created for you.

Here I am, the one who declares
you have nothing to fear and nothing to prove,
who soldered you, nailed you,

gilded and pearled.
What are you waiting for?
Time to remake the world.



Painting by Laurel Holmes

II. Beyond

Are you ready to be strong?
Are you ready to follow me beyond
the demons, the vampires, the misogynistic gods

who tell you to stay hollow inside,
self-loathing and numb? Are you ready to stop
stabbing yourself through the heart?

Fear not: The soul-destroying job
will not destroy you,
nor the smallness of colleagues,

nor the creepiness of bosses, nor toxic debates
about who should be listened to, who should be
shamed,
who should go to hell.

When you walk through desert, it will become
forest.

Cruelty and brutality, degradation and evil,
will turn into pools of water.

Your father will finally see, your mother will
understand
you, every version, young and old,
real and imagined, future and past,

the guitar-playing angel, the queer fluid light,
the thresher of mountains, the solitary pine,
the bisexual fountain of happiness.

Don't be afraid.
I was there before patriarchy
and I am there beyond its end,

calling you toward me
across generations,
opening fountains in the midst of depression,

trampling kings underfoot.
You are ready to be strong.
Time to remake the world.



JOY LADIN, Gottesman Professor of English at Yeshiva University, is the author of a memoir, *Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders*, and seven books of poetry, including *Coming to Life*, *Psalms*, and the forthcoming *Impersonation*.

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Far Beyond Patriarchy: A Gender Fluid View

MAGGID JHOS SINGER

PATRIARCHY” CONJURES UP TWO WILDLY divergent myths—one of a valiant and respectful world overseen by wise, brave, and benevolent gentlemen; the other a sinister misogynistic dystopia overrun with selfish, brutal, and immature dudes. I’ve had experiences of both—strong, helpful men who stood up for me, and creepy predators whose “manhood” was expressed through lust, greed, and callousness. This paradox has always been confusing and troubling. And exploring it is both thorny and slippery.

I am a transgender man, or a trans-masculine person, or maybe I’m a male-presenting-cisgendered female with some male remodeling, or maybe I’m just plain old queer. After years

of struggling with and suffering from inaccurate labeling, I’m inclined to take the easy way out these days, and so my pronouns are He/Him/His. In a perfect world there would exist a pronoun that shouted, “This is a well integrated person!”, but we’re not quite there yet. As it is, getting to this point required the reorientation of my masculine and feminine energies. Originally, my naturally retiring and introverted feminine self was erroneously expressed through my physical body, while my more gregarious male self was closeted in the recesses of my soul. Once I found the magic formula to flip the location of my yin and yang, life improved dramatically. My “expertise” in tackling an epic concept like patriarchy is based on my years of living in the margins of

masculinity and femininity. My insights are well examined, but through my own unique lens.

Though perilous at times, I am grateful for my circuitous journey. Like my forebears Jacob the homebody and Esau the adventurer (who switched places in myriad ways), I think having my Emily Dickensonian soul out in the noisy world for so long deepened and strengthened her. And similarly, having her butch brother living a circumspect and quiet existence within my inner-world tempered him. But enough was enough, and there finally came a day—with the help of expert guides—that they grabbed each other by hand and heel and began their slow 180-degree spin. And with that shift, I came to new and/or deepened perspectives—on masculinity, femininity, maturity, and spirituality.

“My position as something of a changeling gave me an eye into the deeper, inner workings of how gender empowered or limited those caught in its grip.”

Before I transitioned, I inadvertently stirred up gender anxiety in those around me. I was about 4 years old the first time I remember being asked: “Are you a boy or a girl?” When I was 6, a playmate’s mom cornered me and demanded, “Do you want to be a boy?” During my entire pre-transition adult life I was routinely carded in the ladies room (“Excuse me sir, aren’t you are in the wrong bathroom?”). And it carried on to the next generation. One day at the library I heard a little kid ask my 6 year old, “Is your mom a boy or a girl?” Of course my response, spoken or not (usually not), to all of these inquiries was: “No.” Walking in those

liminal spaces gave me a unique perspective on the meaning of *boy*, *girl*, *man*, and *woman*.

Before transition, I was perceived as a “masculine woman” which brought with it the assumption that I was tough, mean, and randy. In fact I was none of them. I aspired to be



strong, gallant, romantic, and courageous, but alas, that apparently read as being intimidating. Fortunately, I was also kind of cute and zaftig, which softened the edges for those who moved past their initial trepidation. Those who discerned the dissonance between my butchness and my softness had to sort it out or flee. The folks who stuck it out typically sought a pigeon-hole where I might roost. Bull Dagger. Baby Dyke. Badass Butch. Tomboy. These were

the terms of endearment, the expressions of affection, which, never-the-less, totally missed my full essence. Of all the possible sobriquets, the one I championed was Androgyne—it was a little Victorian and nerdy for the times, but I felt that it honored my wholeness. It didn't re-



duce me down to just a gender or an affectional orientation. It felt as authentic as a label might. (I even got a personalized license plate in 1985 that read ANDRGYN.) Alas, no one really embraced it. Not the hetero-normative folks nor the sideways folks. It was just too floaty for the late 20th century.

Though my social circle may have gravitated to an *au courante* description of me, in quiet ways my gender fluidity allowed me to easily

move between worlds. Straight women friends were often flirtatious, not because they were interested, but because I made them feel safe. I was a friend with psycho-spiritual benefits: male enough to make them feel affirmed as attractive and protected, and female enough to be at home and relaxed. On the other side of the spectrum, I was that woman who men treated like "one of the guys". I heard the raunchy jokes, the homophobic quips, the complaints about their gals. I got clapped on the back, invited to have a beer, and welcomed into the edges of their fraternity. And, over time, I was also privy to expressions of male insecurity, fear of each other, the weight of being responsible for others, and the occasional tear. Though I was deeply steeped in the feminist and lesbian communities, my position as something of a changeling gave me an eye into the deeper, inner workings of how gender empowered or limited those caught in its grip.

In the 1980s and 90s I was reading Mary Daly, Sonia Johnson, and Andrea Dworkin. In my memory banks, they were the radical, feminist, full-throated voices that named, blamed, and shamed "The Patriarchy" as the most singular destructive force in the universe. This version I'll call "The Daly Patriarchy". Their critique, as I remember it, took on both religious and social systems. They agreed that women bore the brunt of patriarchal oppression and violence—though they each had their own take on exactly how that played out. Misogyny they asserted was the foundation stone of patriarchy. And so The Daly Patriarchy must be upended by women, who would then be free to do a much better job of reorienting the world in a more peaceful and nurturing direction. In *Gyn/Ecology*, Mary Daly located this argument in the biological fact that women are the physical life givers of the species, an idea reviled by other feminists, which didn't bode well for the envisioned Gynotopia. Similarly, heated and often hateful

debate arose regarding the nascent trans community. I remember feeling contradictory sets of emotions from reading those fiery essays: excited and empowered; and dismissed and diminished; scared and skeptical. On the one hand, calling out the longstanding oppression of women was illuminating and invigorating; on the other hand, blaming “The Patriarchy” seemed dangerously simplified and vilifying. Looking back, I would have to say that the thoughts, concepts, and theories proffered by this particular trio of labrys-swinging feminist philosophers struck different chords within my gender-swirling soul.



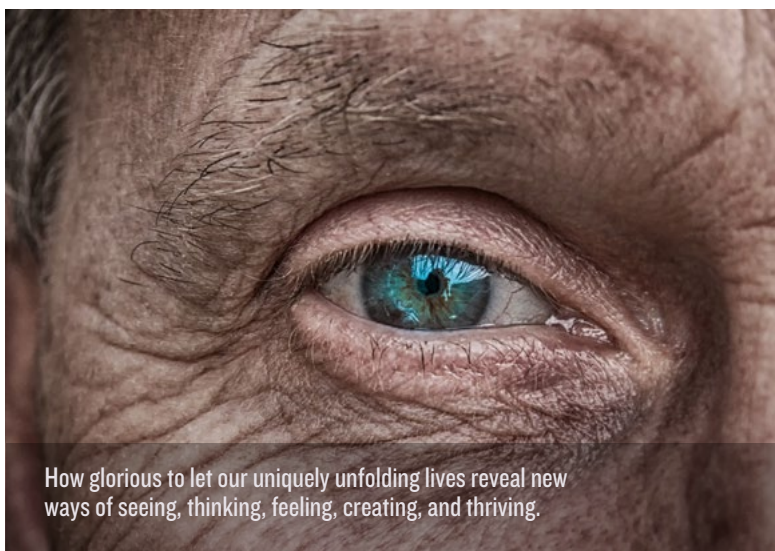
Their assertions—that significant limitations were placed on women through male domination, male privilege, and male violence—were certainly borne out by my lived experience as a woman. I suffered derision for inserting myself into even the most insignificant realms of male culture—skateboarding, taking woodshop in high school (permitted, but just barely tolerated), wearing my hair boyish and short—and I experienced the trauma of sexual assault, both physical and verbal. There was no question that the world of my childhood and young adulthood was highly gendered, with clearly discerned roles for women and men. That said, my silent male *neshamah* (soul) had a hunch that it was actually men who were on the front lines of male oppression. After all, while there is no question that women suffer horribly from male violence of the Daly Patriarchy, I was often within spitting distance of the violence and brutality that pervades every aspect of male culture. If men were also victims of this system, why did it exist?

The word patriarchy conjures up a set of paradoxical ideas for me. I’m a word nerd, so sought wisdom through parsing the whole into its parts: *partri* + *archy*. *Partri*—meaning father and *-archy* implying rule or government, thus *Patri* + *archy* = Father rules. This idea suggests the perhaps mythic notion that true Patriarchy entails a degree of nobility. Father as elder and therefore wise. Father as strong and protective of his clan, and therefore revered. Father as dedicated spouse, provider, and guide, and therefore trusted. Just as feminist theorists envisioned a future when women’s stereotypical traits were pure and good, I could imagine a mythic past when paternal traits were also seen and projected through a rose-tinted lens, a Noble Patriarchy, if you will. Vestigial elements of this ideal persisted into my lifetime: boys don’t hit girls; a man who doesn’t provide for his family is not a man;

women and children are put first in the meal line, into lifeboats, and out of burning buildings, “Father knows best”. Children were to respect their mothers, if for no other reason than that she was an extension of their father. Of course this didn’t square with my own experience. My mom and I were more or less abandoned by my father, who was soon replaced by a violent and abusive stepfather. The other fathers in my neighborhood who were selfish and scary, who beat their kids, and who drove their families into ruin, also ran afoul of their assigned roles as providers or protectors. The myth of a Noble Patriarchy didn’t explain the single moms or the double moms, who fended for themselves with no man in sight. I grew up in the 1960s when there was discernible tension and confusion between the Noble Patriarchal ideal and the messy reality of Daly patriarchy.

And now, as a mature adult who is perceived male, I have encountered another facet to this conundrum. After being inducted into American manhood 15 years ago, my report from the field is this: Many men really are a red-hot mess. This isn’t news, as radical feminists have asserted for decades, and who have been joined by a bevy of cis-gendered men who are themselves resisting Daly Patriarchy. John Stoltenberg’s extensive writing on the perils of manhood is just as scathing—if not more so because he is an insider. In addition to being emotionally stifled in the name of “manhood”, sometimes to the point of madness, my

observation is that men are often terrified by and of each other. As a group, they work at this—maybe in response to a primal instinct to ascribe a dominant member of a troop, or to relinquish responsibility to a perceived superior. I have no idea from whence it came, but I will tell you with a broken heart, that male culture is shot through with a dread of inferiority, weakness, and vulnerability. In subtle and overt ways men both seek each other’s approval and compete for status. Weirdly, this sometimes plays out with younger men who, according to the ideals of Noble Patriarchy, *should* be revering their male elders, but instead revile them.



How glorious to let our uniquely unfolding lives reveal new ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, creating, and thriving.

I was at a family lunch recently. A neighbor came by to pick up some supplies for an epic Halloween party he throws. My relatives have been attending his party for years. They were reminiscing about past parties, the clever and involved costumes, the outrageous

decorations, when the friend launched into a story. One year during the party (which he hosts in his home), the friend reacted to a guest’s costume with a particularly graphic, rude, and sexually suggestive gesture. His parents, who attended the party, witnessed this display. The next morning, his father pulled him aside and said, “Son, you owe your mother an apology for behaving in such a crude and disrespectful way last night.” At this point in the story I was thinking, “Way to go, Dad!” But the friend continued, “I told him, ‘Dad, I’m 50

years old, it's my house, I'll do what I want.” The friend laughed, amused that his dad was still trying to school him even though he was fully-grown and ostensibly an adult. And I thought, “Huh...wow, I think I just witnessed Daly Patriarchy slap the Noble Patriarchy in the face.”

I couldn't shake that story. I felt for the dad, whose son mocked him, shamed him, and clearly disrespected his role as patriarch. I thought about the many ways that our culture disparages seniors; our fixation on youth; and the widening divide between our elders and the upcoming generations. I also thought about the flip side of this humiliation—older men who turn themselves inside out, upside down, and backwards to stay competitive with young men as a way of also seeking their approval. This is an old story, Biblical in fact. 1 Kings 12:1-14 tells a story about the rise of King Rehoboam, who was the son and successor of King Solomon, The Wise. When Solomon ruled he was exceedingly harsh to a group of Israelites, who left in protest to live in Egypt. When their leader, Jeroboam, hears that Rehoboam has ascended the throne, he gathers a group of Israelites to go to talk with him. When they meet, Jeroboam and his caucus say, “Your father brought difficulty upon us. If you will be less severe with us, we will come back and serve you.” Rehoboam says, “Let me think about it. Now, go away and come back in three days for your answer.” Rehoboam goes to take counsel from the old men who had known and served his father, Solomon. The elders counsel him, saying, “If you will be a servant to this people and will serve them and answer them and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.” Rehoboam leaves the elders and seeks counsel with the young men, who did not know Solomon, but only had served Rehoboam. Rehoboam asks them, “What shall I tell people who have asked me to

make their yoke lighter than my father's?” The young men say “Here's what you should tell the ones who said, ‘Your father made our burden heavy, but you could make it lighter.’ Tell them this: ‘My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. And now where my father burdened you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father beat you with whips, I will beat you with scorpions.’” Rehoboam eschews the counsel of the elders, and listens to his peers, forsaking the unity and healing of his broken tribe for the acceptance and approval of handful of immature sandal-lickers. This ancient text is basically letting us know that the Noble Patriarchy was dead on arrival.

This text presents a set of contrasts—tempered male seniors versus their fiery male juniors, the loud din of male voices against the utter lack of women's voices—and raises up several archetypal binaries. The constructs “Male” and “Female”, “Youth” and “Sage” collide and lay the foundation for the assumptions held by “The Patriarchy” in which the power goes to a male elder. Stereotypical attributes and deficits are encoded in these limited identities. On the upside, masculinity is associated with strength, reserve, and courage; femininity with regeneration, sensitivity, and caring; youth with energy, innovation, and hope; maturity with wisdom, patience, and integrity. Equally there are negatives: masculinity is associated with violence, territoriality, and brutality; while feminine culture can be competitive, cruel, and erratic; youth is typified by impulsivity, inexperience, and arrogance; while advanced age is often associated with rigidity, conventionality, and weakness. Given this set of cross currents (albeit highly reductive and painted with a broad brush), it seems to me that the impediments to establishing and maintaining any highly selective hierarchy based on gender or age (i.e., Patriarchy or Matriarchy) that would prove to be overwhelmingly virtuous, rooted



Male elders disappear their own wisdom and maturity in deference to virility, beauty, and muscle within a male juvenarchy.

in a moral imperative to do more good than harm, and a system to be trusted by all, was doomed from the start. Let's be generous for a moment and imagine that Noble Patriarchy, in its finest hour, was designed expressly to ensure the health and well-being of clan, tribe, or nation, and to safeguard the most vulnerable members of the family by way of a respected, courageous, and responsible paternal figure-head. Then I say to you, with Rehoboam as my

proof-text, that a lot of guys faced with that charge caved to their desire to be revered by younger, probably less well-developed or integrated men, and threw everyone else, including women and children, under the chariot, stagecoach, locomotive, and bus. Desperately clinging to their own youth and vigor, men destined to be patriarchs easily fall prey to securing the admiration of their juniors. This mythic Noble Patriarchy never fully took root—it appears we may have been beyond it all along.

Rather than a patriarchy, I think what has been fostered instead is a male dominated juvenarchy. I mean no offense to young folks, especially those who I consider my dear and valued friends and teachers. But there is a problem that arises when potentially virtuous elders, especially male elders, disappear their own wisdom and maturity in deference to virility, beauty, and muscle. Worse still are those senior leaders who never bothered to cultivate mature ideas, deep feelings, decency, or humility throughout their adulthood because they were too busy developing and

maintaining their swagger in an effort to secure the loyalty of their juniors. Look no further than the debacle of our current president for a glaring example of this phenomenon. The example of Rehoboam and Jeroboam is a classic case wherein a "patriarch" is faced with a choice between serving his people/clan and appeasing his male inferiors. At this choice point we discover a symbiotic dependency. The man

defers to the boys, and the boys protect the man. The man appears to be in charge, while actually catering to the whims and conventions of his puerile scouts. And when, as is often the case, a patriarch is in fact a juvenarch, well then rest of us be damned.

So where does that leave us? Given my journey, I'd have to say that gender alone is a very shaky foundation upon which to build much of anything, and certainly not a solid base for a pervasive social structure. Despite what is still a fairly popular belief, gender is not all that fixed, it certainly isn't immutable, and it covers a delightfully wide range of expressions, far greater than the common morphologic binary would suggest. My initial critique of patriarchy is that by limiting power to men, we limit the power of men, and by extension everyone. Can we really be secure that males are inherently more qualified to run our families, communities, and societies than women? Is the range of what it means to be male so narrow that we could hang entire civilizations on it? After 15 years of living within the boundaries of male-land, it is my firmly held belief that the commonality between men is far smaller than the diversity. Yeah, testosterone tends to amplify one's libido and muscle mass, and maybe affects the male mind towards compartmentalization, but from my vantage point the rest is conditioned and often to men's own detriment.

I feel fortunate that I didn't grow up having to conform to the rules established by the patriarchy for men. Though it was sociological bushwhacking to get here, I'm delighted that I now inhabit the watery and wonderful gender-fluid universe that queers what it means to be a man or a woman, and allows for the possibility of being neither, or both. Living between the lines is my proof-text affirming how an array of amazing human qualities can co-exist and emerge through us when the onus of exclusive masculinity or femininity is relieved. How

freeing to be a man with a deeply rich feminine interior! How amazing to have a body that feels terrific and accurately expresses an important aspect of my soul! How amazing to be wise in some realms and still a fool in others! How wonderful to be a man who has no stake in proving his manhood, because, frankly, once you have birthed and nursed a child, well, there's nothing left to prove!

But this queering doesn't stop at gender. It extends to age, class, culture, and skills. Living beyond the patriarchy allows everyone to come forward, leading with our skills and wisdom, intelligence and experience, capacity and compassion. What a blessing to accept the gifts and puzzles of this human experience! Why curse ourselves with imagined and manufactured gender-based limitations when it is utterly thrilling to let our masculine and feminine energies intermingle, our past and present intertwine; how glorious to let our uniquely unfolding lives reveal new ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, creating, and thriving. Maybe it's time to consider empowering our most deeply-held ideals rather than something as utterly random and flimsy as gender. Let's give power to the wise, just, and compassionate peacemakers and healers of every description, regardless of age, gender, culture, creed, or color. Beyond Patriarchy? Absolutely. It's time to go far, far, beyond. ●



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Moving Beyond Patriarchal Trauma

YASMEEN MJALLI




How do we avoid the legacy of patriarchal trauma? How do we heal some of the wounds that patriarchy has inflicted on all of us, such as negativity, hostility, isolation, among others?

MY SISTER AND I WERE PULLING UP TO Zuwadeh, a hipster cafe/grocery store which probably charges too much for smoothies but is loved nonetheless by the locals of Beit Jalla. We happened to stop in on a Friday evening so parking was nearly impossible. As we slowed to a crawl in search of a spot, a young woman crossed the street in front of us and my sister and I both turned our heads to watch her. She was stunning in a tight-fitted dress and long lustrous hair—even more so attractive for strutting so confidently in streets notorious for catcalling and the unsolicited male gaze. But before my conscious-self could exclaim “wow, she’s stunning and confident,” my instinct acted out first and said “I can’t believe she’s wearing that.”

This all took place in my head over the course of a few seconds before shame flooded my chest, making me question what just happened. This wasn’t the first time my instinct had to be corrected by my character. Why was my instinct to judge a woman so confident in her body and its place in the world? In a society so quick to suppress a woman, her body, and her love for her body, this simple act of strutting in the streets is an act of bravery and rebellion. While I knew this, I had to start asking myself where this patriarchal instinct was coming from within me. I recognized how problematic and even dangerous it was.

My mother is one of those women who was blessed with a childish sense of wonder, glowing with a youthful radiance both externally and internally. I’ve inherited a lot of things from her, both good and bad. She most definitely passed on her sweet tooth, sense of adventure, and familial love. Recently, I’ve come to realize that she’s also passed on her legacy of patriarchal trauma; something that happened so subtly and subconsciously that I had never realized how it came to shape my own identity.

Writer and doctor Meera Atkinson explains that in order to talk about the concept of



Trauma shapes the way we view ourselves, how much we value ourselves, and how we interact with others.

patriarchal trauma, she has “to speak from the inside out because patriarchy isn’t ‘out there’.” Our skin is not an impenetrable barrier against its effects. It infiltrates our beings and shapes our lives—first from the outside in, then from the inside out.” In other words, trauma is internalized and even passed down to us from the women in our families, not genetically speaking, but rather in the way they raise us and teach us to exist within the world. That trauma is bolstered by the individual experiences that we collect as we go through life. These experiences take shape in countless ways, including everything from society prizing your wedding day over your graduation day to hearing men’s sexual comments in the streets.

After this incident with the confident woman in the street, I began to question the other ways trauma had penetrated my life, the way I view myself, and the way I interact with the world around me. Making my way about the streets, I no longer paid attention to the sunlight as it filtered through the city or to the architecture as it towered over my head. Rather, I kept my eyes on the sidewalk and tensed up when a man walked by me, preparing myself to retaliate if he muttered a sexual comment.

More often than not, I chose my outfits to minimize attention rather than in accordance with whom I wanted to be that day. On the rare occasion that I took a taxi cab, I made sure to take a photo of the license plate before climbing in. The trauma even goes so far as affecting my ability to function healthily in my relationships.

Atkinson is right when she explains that as we internalize the consequences of patriarchy, we end up perpetuating negativity, hostility, and even isolation. As we get lost in our own trauma, we stand vulnerable to losing traits like kindness and trust. She goes on to say, however, that “there are countless opportunities, presenting in myriad forms, throughout our days, in which we can take pause to reassess, court change, and choose healing.” Here are five things I’ve learned on my journey with healing.

IDENTIFY YOUR TRAUMA

As humans, we have this natural mechanism to defend ourselves from any sort of pain. This defense mechanism even acts to protect us

from pain we've already experienced. In other words, we suppress our pain and reach a point of living in which we're denying that we've been hurt and traumatized, bottling it up for the sake of temporary mental peace.

The reality is that we're all healing, dealing with something that has happened to us at some point(s) in our lives. Whether or not we're conscious of it, the trauma shapes the way we view ourselves, how much we value ourselves, and how we interact with others. Maybe it's in the way we choose to ignore a kind stranger's greeting or in the way we avoid taking a certain street to get to work. Identifying the underlying trauma is key to starting a journey of healing.

The problem is this: when we close our heart off from the bad, we inevitably close it off from the good. So, when we shut off from our pain, we shut off our connections with the people around us, those there to love and support us.

It is haunting but necessary work to unearth and confront the reality of our pain. Our chance at dissolving trauma is giving greater faith to the possibility of healing rather than the comfort of ignoring pain. Start identifying the pain to begin the journey of healing.

RELEASE YOURSELF

There is no point in telling someone to handle trauma with "grace." This notion of experiencing trauma and immediately emerging somehow happy and healthy is unrealistic and even inhumane. We're going to feel a little bit of everything: anger, sadness, joy, and numbness. The chaos of the darkness after trauma is a scary but necessary place for a human to reside in. It is in this space that we confront the parts

of ourselves we like to pretend aren't there, the memories and feelings we thought we had moved on from, and the thoughts and instincts stigmatized by society.

"The chaos of the darkness after trauma is a scary but necessary place for a human to reside in."

I'll be frank: none of this feels good but it's so, so necessary. It allows us to understand exactly the roots of our pain and to use those roots to grow out of our darkness. Em-

brace the days in which you feel negative emotions. Don't let them drown you but be sure to acknowledge them and take the time to understand the roots. Tell the pain: I know why you're here and I welcome you. While the pain is visiting, take the time to do what you need to do, be it cry, write, meditate, vent...then move on. Tell the pain: thanks for coming; you can go now because I have things to do.

DON'T HOLD YOURSELF HOSTAGE TO MILESTONES

We never really acknowledge the fact that healing is a journey which follows absolutely no formula. It's all too easy for us to create milestones that we end up holding ourselves hostage to. We think "okay, this should be easy because I'm over it now" and then force ourselves into uncomfortable and even painful situations because we're terrified to admit we need more time. And is that such a bad thing? Vulnerability isn't weakness—that's been something I've been trying to embrace lately.

There have been so many times recently in which I tried to force myself to fit a version of myself that just isn't me right now. Then I beat myself up for it. "Why aren't I happier? Or more outgoing? Why am I still sad?" Well, healing isn't linear. It's 4 steps forward and 2 steps back—and then knowing that there is



Just as each of my fingers was different
from the other, so are people.

absolutely nothing wrong with that. So, when we wake up feeling sad/angry/numb after days or weeks of feeling good, it's perfectly okay. This means we're human. We only show ourselves love when we approach life with emotional generosity.

REDEFINE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH PAIN

The pain will lessen over time, and so much so that there will be oceans of time in-between the moments that it visits you again. It will, however, never fully go away. This is our mind's way of reminding us where we once were and where we are now, of shedding the occasional light on the experiences that tested our strength and allowed us to grow. So, rather than trying to live to erase the pain, know that the journey is about redefining our relationship with that pain.

DIFFERENTIATE YOUR FINGERS

In the months that followed after my first experience with sexual assault, I was consumed by bitterness. My desperation to release my pain and anger translated into hostility towards all men, deserving and undeserving. On a sunny autumn morning in Ramallah, I was making my way to one of my favorite cafes when I noticed a wall covered in jasmine flowers. The sight was too beautiful to avoid stopping to smell the flowers. As I did so, a man walked by me and uttered something I couldn't (or didn't want to) hear. I immediately retaliated and started to tell him off.

Confused, he asked, "Did you hear what I said?"

I replied, "No..."

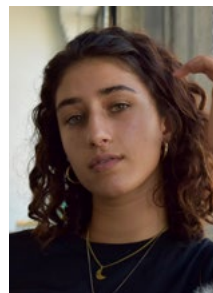
He kindly repeated, "*Sabah il ward*. Good morning."

Embarrassed, I explained to him why I reacted the way I did and before I could finish, he asked me to put out both of my hands. So, I obliged.

The man pointed to my fingers and told me that "Just as each of my fingers was different from the other, so are people."

The majority of people may disappoint you. They may be the bearers of injustice and cruelty. The few kind humans, however, are the reason we must never let our faith in humanity be defeated. Those few people who believed in empathy and justice and humanity were the change makers. We are the ones who experienced trauma and allowed ourselves to heal in order to emerge kind and yet still strong.

Do a bit of introspection and identify the ways that patriarchal trauma has manifested itself in you. Whether by instinct instilled from within us from generations of women or by pain planted in us by traumatic encounters with patriarchy, it can be healed. When we experience trauma and heal into a place in which our hearts can still maintain vulnerability, kindness, and strength then we have won a battle in the war with patriarchy. ●



YASMEEN MJALLI is a social entrepreneur, artist, and Duke University grad student whose work includes critical writing, cross-disciplinary workshops, and social-engagement projects. Mjalli says: "I have this thing for collective cultural experiences and women's rights."



Author wearing Freedom Collection scarf, created in collaboration with Laurie Phoenix Niewidok. Photo credit: Graciela Valdes

Compassion in Action

CHEVARA ORRIN

I DON'T DO IT ALL THE TIME. ONLY WHEN I FEEL SAFE.

And that shit's relative. Safety, I mean.

First time, I was at a traffic light. It was early morning. Daybreak. They were gathered on the corner, at an intersection near my neighborhood. Day laborers waiting for a chance to work. A group of 20 or so. Smoking cigarettes. Shooting the breeze. I'd see them most days on my way to catch the sunrise over the St. Johns River.

Usually, I don't get stopped by the light and turn before they even notice me.

Not this morning.

My ritual: convertible top down, meditation music on deck, water with fresh lemon, raw, unsalted almonds, and a ripe banana.

"Hey baby, I got something else to put in your mouth."

I glance to my right. I say nothing but slowly lower the banana.

"Yeah YOU, sexy bitch!"

The others laugh.

“I ask him where he grew up, if he was raised with a momma, sisters, aunties or a grandmother.”

I feel violated. Womanhood interrupted by the Patriarchy. I wonder how many seconds before the light turns green. I contemplate closing my convertible top.

I glance to my left. There's a gas station and sometimes police cars.

Not today.

A few moments later, the light changes and I drive away. I'm scared and pissed. I don't get far.

I've thought about it before. Exactly what I'd say. I even practiced in the mirror.

But each time, I'd freeze. Feeling overwhelmed with the ordinariness of it all.

Not today.

I abruptly turn around in the middle of the street, burning a little rubber.

There's an abandoned lot across the street from the day laborer spot and I pull in. I zig zag through oncoming traffic, my eyes focused on the one with the smart, dirty mouth.

They see me coming and give each other high fives.

I walk up, extend my hand.

"Hi, I'm Chevara. What's your name?"

He looks startled and grins. Like maybe I'm about to ask for his seven digits.

He says his name is T.J. I don't ask what it stands for. I don't care.

"I assume that what you were trying to do was say 'good morning' but somehow the right words failed you."

Before he has a chance to respond, I ask if he's ever heard of poet, essayist, and activist June Jordan.

His blank stare answers my question before he begins to shake his head from left to right.

They've crowded around us now. It feels like a spectator sport. I imagine I'm in a boxing ring. Except I'm not feeling much like a champ. I feel as though I might suffocate. I feel small. I'm wearing sneakers and not my trademark stilettos. Spears of light pierce through clouds as the sky brightens and I feel a sliver of safety.

Before I lose my nerve, I tell him that June Jordan wrote a piece about Mike Tyson called "Requiem for a Champ." I read it in college.

She writes about the horrific conditions of poverty and oppression under which Tyson learned the "rules" of interacting with a girl... of talking...to a girl. I tell him that June Jordan says "the choices available to us, dehumanize."

I'm not sure if he understands the quote or the enormity of the moment.

I ask him where he grew up, if he was raised with a momma, sisters, aunties, or a grandmother. I ask if he has brothers, uncles, a dad, or grandfather. I ask if he has daughters. He says his grandmother reared him. He says he grew up in the church and had a paper route. He says his little girl is three.

The other men are silent. A few have wandered away to stand on the periphery.

I tell him I live blocks away and that I shouldn't have to detour to feel safe. Not in my

neighborhood nor anywhere in this world.

I tell him I'm an incest survivor. I ask them all if they know what that is. Now, it's really uncomfortable. A few lower their heads. One nods.

"It means that my father's semen was on my thigh when I was 10."

I say it slowly. I want them to hear it. I want them to feel the pain in my words.

I tell him that his morning greeting almost f***** up my day. Disrupted my spirit. That his words felt violent and hurtful and disrespectful and mostly made me sad.

Something changes. The air is lighter and heavier at the same time. He looks like he might cry.

He tells me again that his daughter is three. He calls her name.

I tell him that I don't need him to see me as his mother or sister or daughter. I need him to see me as human.

He asks if he can give me a hug. I walk into his outstretched arms.

I leave him with June Jordan, whispering: "I can stop whatever violence starts with me."

I don't do it all the time. Only when I feel safe.

And that shit's relative. Safety, I mean.

I've done it with construction workers at a city job site and college students in a grocery store near the frozen waffles and corporate executives in a towering office complex.

Irrespective of status or profession or age or geography.

The struggle is real. The intersection of my identity as a Black woman.

The struggle is real. Navigating toxic masculinity on a daily basis.

The struggle is real. Layers of unbalanced power and complicity of men in causing harm and maintaining misogynistic structures.

The struggle is real. Demanding autonomy of voice and power of agency in a world filled with men who never learned how to talk to a girl.

Today, I awakened channeling June Jordan's spirit:

"...I am the history of battery assault and limitless armies against whatever I want to do with my mind and my body and my soul...
...and I can't tell you who the hell set things up like this
but I can tell you that from now on my resistance my simple and daily and nightly self-determination may very well cost you your life."

I don't do it all the time. Only when I feel safe.

And that shit's relative. Safety, I mean.

I am not the one. I believe in necessary disruptions. You will be held accountable on my watch.

[Here is context about the scarf worn by the author at the beginning of the article.]

The scarf is from the Freedom Collection that I created in collaboration with fiber artist, Laurie Phoenix Niewidok, that honors the Freedom Riders of the 1960s.

Art is often an access point. Connecting us despite of, and because of, our differences.

Engaging even the most cynical among us. Throughout the ages, artists have used canvas to create social and political change. Artists have used prose to record memories, resist oppression and inspire revolutions. Artists have danced for freedom and awakened us to the realities of racial injustice. There is redemptive power in the voice of the artist.

My father (whose image is on the scarf next to my white, Jewish mother) was on the first bus that arrived in Jackson, MS on May 24, 1961. The "colored only" sign is reminiscent of Jim Crow laws that mandated the segregation of public schools, public places, and public transportation, and the segregation of restrooms, restaurants, and drinking fountains for whites and blacks. Facilities for Black people were consistently inferior and underfunded, compared to the facilities for white Americans; sometimes there were no Black facilities.

My father, James Bevel initiated, strategized, directed, and developed SCLC's three major successes of the Civil Rights era: the 1963 Birmingham Children's Crusade, the 1965 Selma voting rights movement, and the 1966 Chicago open housing movement.

He is also perpetrator of my incest. ●



CHEVARA ORRIN is diversity & inclusion practitioner, social entrepreneur, author, social justice activist and survivor of childhood sexual violence. Her work and passion lives at the intersection of gender parity, racial equity, LGBTQ equality, and arts activism. Recognized nationally as a leader, advocate, and ally for the

LGBTQ community and featured in publications including *The Washington Post*, *The Feminist Wire*, and on SiriusXM Radio, Chevara is inspired to use her personal journey of tragedy and triumph as a catalyst to ignite social transformation.

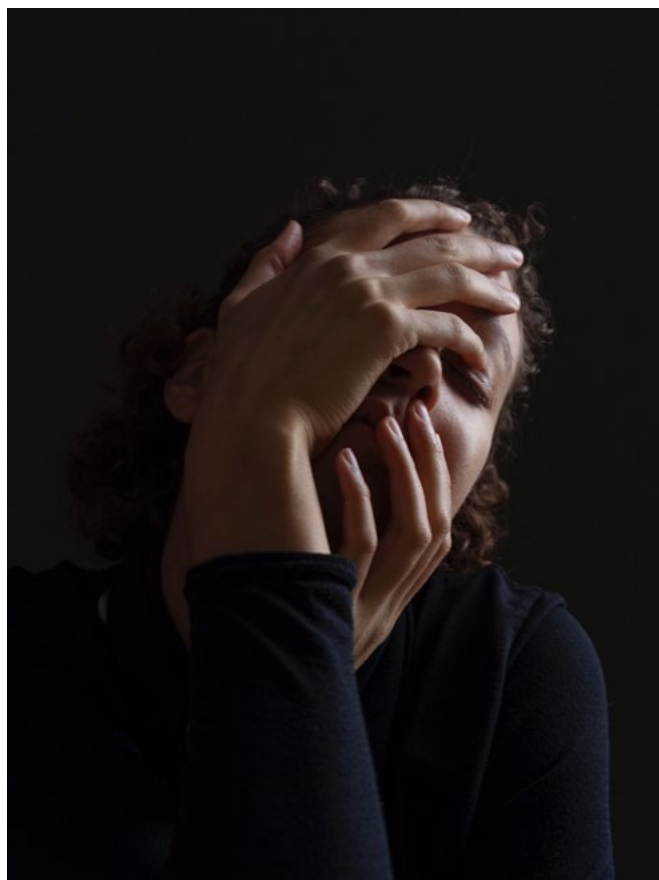
Beyond Patriarchy

An Unexpected Encounter

JIHAN MCDONALD

I'VE SAT WITH THIS QUESTION FOR A LONG time now: what is beyond patriarchy? To be honest, some days, I can't see beyond it. I can't imagine. The ocean of it that we swim in is so deep, and dense, and the currents so strong that to pit myself against it, one vulnerable body weighted by marginalized identities—Black, female-bodied, queer—seems entirely futile. What could this one do against centuries of a system that has managed to make humanity subjugate more than half of its own being? Patriarchy has done this in the name of male dominance, of the justification of breeding aggression, analysis, and judgment as the foundations for decision-making, competition, and fear as the means of control. We are taught this, and we are told that this is our history. I believe this to be true. This has been the HISstory of humanity, but it is not the whole story.

In my own non-binary existence, his or hers fails to tell mine fully. If I am to speak of seeing oneself as a complex unity, of seeing oneself as a microcosm of the total story of the universe, of what lives beyond the categorical, then I must get away from HISstory and HERstory and get into THISstory: this story that the Earth is telling itself through us, this story that the Earth is telling the Universe through us, and vice versa. THISstory lives at the queer intersection of HISstory and HERstory. One



story. Non-gendered. Queer. Abiding. And as I thought about what is beyond patriarchy I realized I must answer it with a thread of THISstory that I've lived that allows me to see what lives beyond patriarchy.

This episode of THISstory takes place in a store. It is the day after Dr. Christine Blasey Ford has been made to testify to her own credibility as a survivor of sexual predation by Brett Kavanaugh, a New Age good ole boy seeking a seat on the Supreme Court. I am the only Black person in this store in a neighborhood that is predominantly White and wealthy, in a city that is becoming increasingly gentrified and defined by Whiteness and material wealth—pillars of this country's patriarchy. I am in distress. My Black, queer, female body that has also survived sexual predation is mourning and grieving in public; inappropriate to business as usual. In this state I approach the register with my groceries and my tears. The cashier,



This is what's beyond patriarchy.
Vulnerability. Acceptance. Informed compassion.

a middle-aged white man I am guessing to be both cis and hetero, sees me and asks if I am okay. His hand is on my groceries, but he has not made a move to do anything with them because in this moment what is more important is the answer to the question of whether or not I am okay. I know this because I can feel his concern on the breeze coming through the window of welcome he has opened to see me more clearly. My eyes rise to meet his and although everything that was already happening will continue to be true, in that moment, I can say, honestly “I am, I just got some bad news.”

My body is shaking, and I ask him if I can pull a paper towel sheet from the roll at the unoccupied register next to his. He says, “Of course,” and I do. As I do the next customer in line—male, older, White, who I am also guessing to be cis and hetero—comes closer. He approaches me with not quite hesitancy, but with an awareness that I might not want him to. I

“And we stand there, in this store, grieving and sorrowful and connected.”

turn to meet his approach, and he repeats the question, “Are you okay?” And again, I am able to say, “Yes, I just got some bad news.” He looks at me, my piercings, the coloring of my hair and my nails and my skin, and my black hoodie declaring that I am “Straight Outta Oakland”. He reaches for me and places his hand on my shoulder, tenderly, and says “And with whatever it is, with the way that things are going in this country right now...”

He is unable to finish the sentence as he is now on the edge of falling into tears, but I understand.

His head drops, and I reach my hand across my heart to rest it on his. He lifts his head and pulls me into a huge bear hug. And we stand there, in this store, grieving and sorrowful and connected. The cashier gives his permission, holds this sacred space. I can feel the permission wafting over the counter, I can feel it in his waiting, because he is done ringing me up and he is not rushing us. He is witnessing us.

I hug the other customer back and thank him. He pulls away to look me in the eyes and tell me, “Take care of yourself.” We do that thing people do when we feel weak: we hold each other up, hands to shoulders, shaking slightly, affirming our sense of belonging to one another as part of Earth’s humanity, of THISstory. The cashier continues to witness, and we are able to stand, in our vulnerability, in our fear, in the love that lives underneath it, in our empathy, in the knowingness that we are accountable to each other for Reality. And we keep each other there until we are ready to move on with our respective days, our respective lives. His eyes are awash and mine are overflowing but I am ready now, to finish the transaction, to continue to move beyond what had momentarily engulfed me.

This is what’s beyond patriarchy. Vulnerability. Acceptance. Informed compassion. Our minds and actions applied and aligned to the will of our hearts and not the other way around. It is not a theory or an argument, it is an experience. It is something to be lived, something to be shared, something to be discovered as it is happening. It is Life not being controlled or conformed to fit into the boxes our minds have been accultured to create. It is his tenderness and me taking up space in public. It is queer. It is blurring the lines in the sand, understanding they are part of a shore and it is their nature to be washed away. It is responding to what is alive in the moment and doing what you can no matter who it is for.

And, fortunately for us, we do not need to wait to discover what lives beyond patriarchy: this is what is already living inside of it, waiting to be given welcome to emerge from the constraints within like the potential energy within a seed. It is discovering what comes out of what has been. It is the wisdom and the lessons learned from our intimacy with patriarchy. It is understanding cycles and that this one is coming to

an end. Not only because of the harm that has been visited but because it is the way of things.

We will mourn it. It is familiar, and it has been home for so many of us. It has been part of being human. Whatever exists after the expiration of patriarchy, if it is truly an evolution, it will carry the lessons that we have learned. Just as how matriarchy, although no longer coordinates business as usual, the men in this story still knew the value of its principles as manifested through their actions. The emotional instinct has not departed. Patriarchy will not disappear, it will be transformed, composted, become something to nourish and inform. It is how every seed grows.

I do not share this story for it be analyzed. I share it to help you find the thread of it in your own life. Take the seed challenge: do not try to get beyond patriarchy, get into it. Not in the sense of picking up its mantle, we’ve already learned too much that way, in the way of understanding it, learning its lessons so that they can be broken down to what is essential. Take what can be repurposed, and do so, build from there. Build enough energy, complexity and integrity to break out of what constrains our full potential to realize what it can mean to be human. Build a reality that values the wholeness of the human story: the cognitive and the creative, the competition and the collaboration, the categorically masculine and feminine, because all of these are part of what it means to be fully alive. ●



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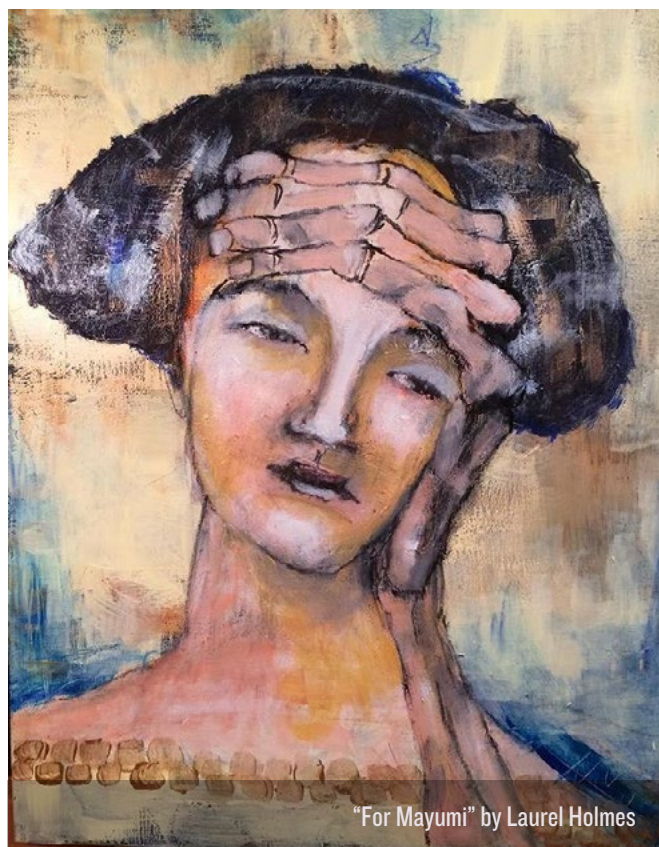
From Status-Quo Stories to Post-Operational Transformation

ANALOUISE KEATING

“STATUS-QUO STORIES” IS MY TERM FOR people’s foundational beliefs about the world—potentially malleable beliefs so deeply embedded in our psyches that we treat them as permanent, unchanging facts. Status-quo stories represent our unquestioned acceptance of already-existing knowledge systems, realities, and beliefs. Status-quo stories powerfully guide our expectations and direct our interactions with others, although we typically don’t recognize these stories as beliefs but instead take them as accurate, factual statements about the world. Statements like these often signal status-quo stories:

- “It’s *always* been this way.”
- “That’s just how things are.”
- “Live and let live.”
- “People gonna do what people gonna do.”
- “Don’t rock the boat.”
- “It is what it is.”

Status-quo stories are self-fulfilling. When we live our lives—or sections of our lives—according to these stories, we don’t try to make change because we assume that change is impossible to make.



“For Mayumi” by Laurel Holmes

The status-quo is so normal, so natural, so *permanent*, so God-given, that it can escape our imaginations even to try.

Oppositionality often functions as a status-quo story.

OPPOSITIONAL STATUS-QUO STORIES

Those of us living in the United States and other western cultures are immersed in oppositional status-quo stories, which take a variety of forms, including:

- “Survival of the fittest”
- Competition always makes us stronger
- Us against them

Typically, oppositionality functions in a winner-takes-all manner, creating either/or frameworks that limit our options to two extremes:



Either *I'm* right and I win; or *you're* right and you win. This dichotomous structure prevents us from forging the complex, nuanced commonalities and relational differences that facilitate the creative development of a range of possibilities, such as these:

I'm partially right, and so are you; *and* we're both partially wrong. We're all right, although we need to figure out how to align our perspectives. None of us are right; let's start over! Instead, we have two options: Either our views are entirely the same, or they're completely different. Oppositionality's status-quo story prevents us from embracing the messy contra-

dictions that so often occur as we work to build new (transformational) knowledge and create diverse, inclusive communities.

Although oppositional politics have been crucial for progressive social change, they also limit our possibilities for the future in several ways. First, oppositionality traps us in the very systems we're trying to change. As Flora Bridges notes, the dominating Western worldview is based on a restrictive, dichotomous form of oppositionality:

[W]hat becomes normative, "right," and regulatory within the culture is determined by beating down or stamping out various other alternatives. Norms and values are established by way of domination. In this mental framework the possibility for both/and is destroyed. Both/and thinking is basically determined as irrational, primitive, or illogical. What results is a ravaging, hate-filled dogmatic form of establishing cultural values.

Our oppositional politics have their source in some of the most negative dimensions of western eurocentric thought and are themselves a tool in oppressive social and epistemological structures.

Second, oppositional energies seduce us into adopting a reactionary stance. We're primed to engage in battle. Rather than thoughtfully consider a range of options in order to develop effective strategies that can satisfactorily address the specific situation at hand for *everyone* involved, we automatically fight back, trying to gain the upper hand for ourselves and our allies. Third, and closely related, oppositionality inhibits our ability to create and enact innovative strategies for progressive social change. Because oppositional energies encourage us to react immediately to that which we oppose, we remain locked into the existing framework. Fourth, oppositional thinking can erode our

alliances and communities. As numerous activists have noted, oppositional politics often fragment from within, damaging both individual activists and the group. Oppositional energies become poisonous when we direct them at each other, as we too often do. And fifth, oppositionality can negatively impact our health, leading to increased stress, compromised immune systems, depression, and more.

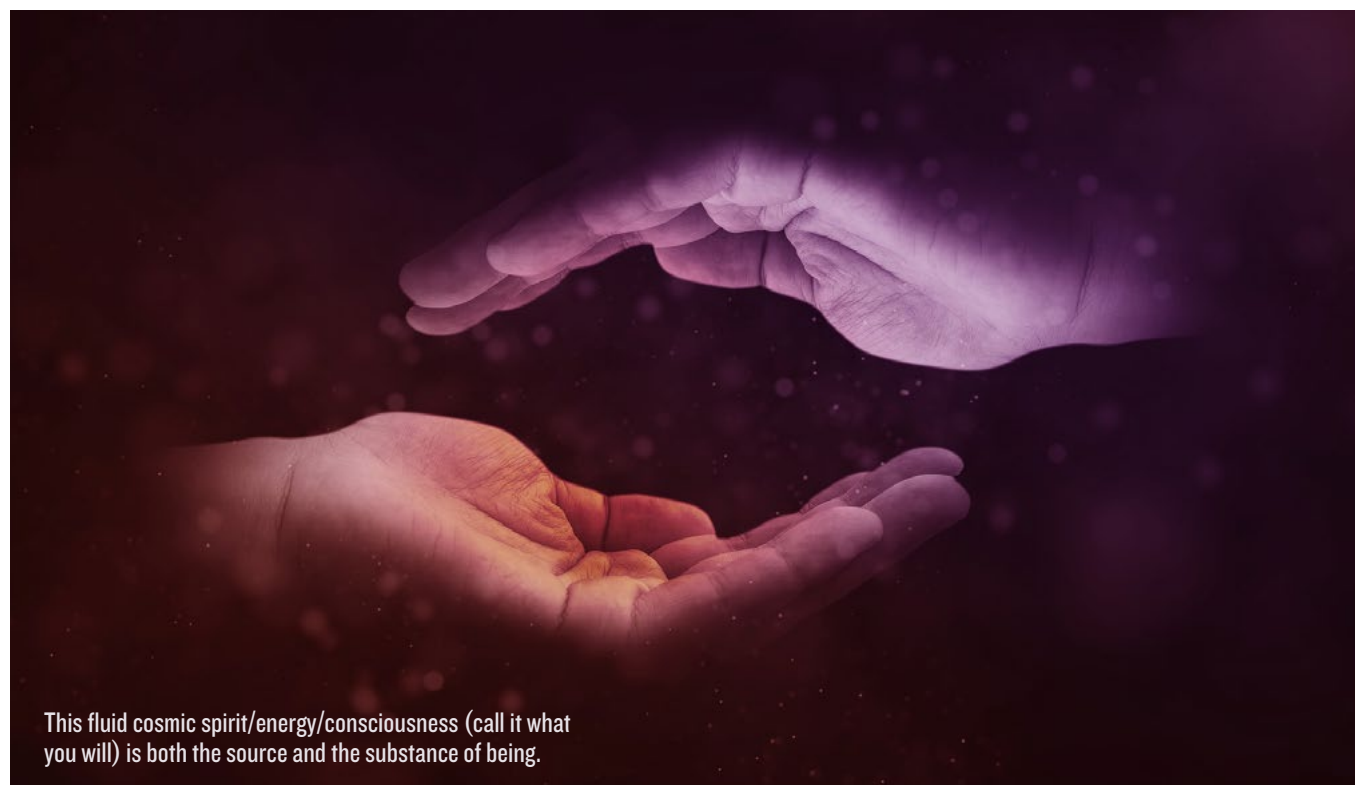
My dissatisfaction with oppositionality's status-quo stories compelled me to search for alternatives, and in my search I was met with the possibility of post-oppositionality.

POST-OPPOSITIONALITY

As I define the term, "post-oppositionality" represents relational approaches to identity, social interactions, knowledge production, and transformation that borrow from but do not become restricted to oppositional thought and action. I do not entirely reject oppositionality;

indeed, to do so would, itself, *be* oppositional and thus trap me inside the approach that I want to transform. "Post-oppositional" is not synonymous with "*anti*-oppositional." And so, I use post-oppositionality to move *partially* outside binary frameworks. I underscore the partial nature of this movement. I'm *not* saying that it's possible (or even desirable) to move entirely beyond oppositionality.

Post-oppositionality can take a variety of forms, but these forms share several traits: First, a belief in our profound interrelatedness to *everything* that exists; second, a desire to be entirely (and, at times, paradoxically) inclusive—to seek and create complex commonalities and broad-based alliances for social change; third, an acknowledgment (and, whenever possible, an acceptance) of contradiction; and fourth, intellectual humility, which I define as an open-minded, flexible approach to thinking that acknowledges limitations, uncertainty, and the inevitability of error.



This fluid cosmic spirit/energy/consciousness (call it what you will) is both the source and the substance of being.

Post-oppositionality emerges from a metaphysics of radical interconnectedness. Although Western intellectual traditions typically associate “metaphysics” with abstraction, transcendence, or escape from the material, physical world, I use the term differently, to indicate spirit’s embodied presence—its immanence in materiality. Expressing itself concretely in the dailiness of our lives and our surroundings, a metaphysics of radical interconnectedness situates us in the existing physical-material world and the present moment. In a metaphysics of radical interconnectedness matter/spirit, mind/nature, body/soul, “inner”/“outer” are intertwined layers of a single, complex, interwoven reality—not separate spheres of existence. I describe this interconnectedness as “radical” to underscore the foundational inter-relatedness of everything (visible, invisible, semi-visible; tangible, intangible; physical, nonphysical, etc.) that exists. Or, as Marilou Awiakta puts it, drawing on teachings from her Cherokee Appalachian upbringing and from nuclear physics, “Stars, trees, oceans, creatures, humans, stones: we are all related. One family.”

According to a metaphysics of radical interconnectedness all reality emerges from some type of shared ontological ground that embodies itself throughout—and as—all existence. This fluid cosmic spirit/energy/consciousness (*call it what you will*) is both the source and the substance of being; it’s the framework and creative force underlying, infusing, and shaping all that exists. In a metaphysics of radical interconnectedness, oppositionality is connection by refusal. Although overtly denied, connection still functions because that which we oppose has shaped our opposition.

But perhaps you’re wondering why I’ve named

this approach *post*-oppositional. After all, there are already so many “post-” movements and theories: Post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-secularism, post-humanism, post-feminism, post-colonialism, post-positivism, and the “posts” go on and on and on. Previously, I used the term “non-oppositional;” however, I realized that this word remains trapped in the oppositional logic it attempts to refute: To be non-oppositional is to refuse oppositionality. I don’t entirely reject oppositional thought, and the term “post-oppositional” enables me to develop a nuanced, selective relationship to oppositionality, even as I invite us to move through and (*sometimes*) beyond it. With this term I can acknowledge oppositionality’s limitations, draw from its insights, and (at

“Language has causal power; it (re)shapes reality on multiple levels, including the material.”

least sometimes) avoid its poisonous effects. Post-oppositionality does not entirely *reject* oppositional consciousness but instead moves through it, taking what’s useful and *transforming* (rather than negating or denying) the rest. Post-oppositionality stays in relationship with oppositionality.

And so, I use the word “post-oppositional” both to avoid the dichotomies I’m trying to transform and to acknowledge the vital work that oppositional consciousness and actions have performed. Moreover, as Indigenous philosophies remind us, the words we use matter and can assist us in bringing about change. Language has causal power; it (re)shapes reality on multiple levels, including the material. Manulani Aluli Meyer explores this transformational power, or what she calls “causality in language,” in her discussion of Hawaiian epistemology: “Words cause something. For Elders and our ancient people we had terms that allowed you to enter a forest or show your good manners beside the ocean. We even had people who



could pray you to death. This teaches me that words had a life, a resonance, and a purpose.” Post-oppositionality—as word, idea, and action—can do real work in the world.

Post-oppositionality includes modes of thought and action that incorporate the lessons of oppositional politics but don’t remain trapped in the status-quo. It transforms either/or thinking into the acceptance of multiplicity, contradic-

tion, and paradox, energized by a search for complex commonalities spacious enough to contain differences.

To illustrate one of the many forms post-oppositionality can take, I offer a quick look at cultural theorist, creative writer, and philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa was deeply involved in feminism and other social movements from the 1970s onward, during a

time when many movements were often, and not surprisingly, immersed in oppositionality. But even during the most hyper-oppositional years, Anzaldúa generally adopted a post-oppositional approach seen even in her self-definition. Look at her early autohistoria, “La Prieta” (first published in 1981, in *This Bridge Called My Back*) where she positions herself as a participant in numerous contradictory social locations and movements:

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator. Gloria, the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses. “Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement,” say the members of my race. “Your allegiance is to the Third World,” say my Black and Asian friends. “Your allegiance is to your gender, to women,” say the feminists. Then there’s my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there’s my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? *A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings*. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label.

These demands conflict and cancel each other out. Each movement followed a status-quo story in which belonging required 100% allegiance solely to their group: You’re either *with* us, or you’re *against* us. When approached from this oppositional stance, the demands are impossible to fulfill because each group requires exclusive loyalty.

Anzaldúa maintains her allegiance to all of these groups while, simultaneously, reframing their demands that she align herself with only one identity and cause. Addressing the various oppositional activists demanding her exclusive allegiance, she redefines herself in expansive terms:

Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and -legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web.

Who, me, confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.

I describe this response as post-oppositional. Anzaldúa’s self-definition rewrites the status-quo stories about identity so common at that time: The problem is not her; it’s the oppositional thinking that shapes the activists’ labels, motivates their demands, and restricts their visions of community.

Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism sidesteps this exclusionary logic. As she demonstrates in her preface to *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, although identity typically functions through exclusion (e.g., I’m queer because I’m not heterosexual; I’m a woman of color because I’m not white), she defines identity differently: “Many of us identify with groups and social positions not limited to our ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, or national classifications. Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include—what I call the new tribalism” (“(un)natural bridges” 3). Significantly, Anzaldúa does not discount the importance of gender, ethnicity/race, sexuality, ability, and other such components. However, she maintains that social identity categories are too restrictive to completely define us. Indeed, she suggests that such categories can be used to disempower and oppress us: “the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories render[s] the conventional labelings obsolete. Though these markings are outworn and inaccurate, those in power con-

tinue using them to single out and negate those who are ‘different’ because of color, language, notions of reality, or other diversity.” When we base our assessments of others primarily on their “markings,” we make biased, inaccurate assumptions about their politics, worldviews, and so forth. And, when we act on these assumptions we close ourselves off from potential allies. Or as Anzaldúa so eloquently asserts, “For the politically correct stance we let color, class, and gender separate us from those who would be kindred spirits. So the walls grow higher, the gulfs between us wider, the silences more profound.”

Positing radical interconnectedness, Anzaldúa dismantles these walls and builds bridges. She enacts a post-oppositional approach and adopts flexible, context-specific perspectives enabling her simultaneously to see and see through exclusionary identity classifications. She does not ignore the importance of color, class, gender, and other identity markers; however, she views these classifications relationally and defines each person as a part of a larger whole—a “cosmic ocean, the soul, or whatever.” She insists on a commonality shared by all human beings, a commonality that spaciously includes and acknowledges the differences among us. For Anzaldúa, this “common factor” goes beyond—*without ignoring*—identities based on gender, ‘race,’ or other systems of difference; it is “wider than any social position or racial label.” Indeed, this identity factor exceeds (and decenters) human beings: “Your identity has roots you share with all people and other beings—spirit, feeling, and body comprise a greater identity category. The body is rooted in the earth, la tierra itself. You meet ensoulment in trees, in woods, in streams.”

Post-oppositional work is not easy. The willingness to witness all sides can lead to accusations of disloyalty, stupidity, and (ironically)

bias. However, if we aspire to be creative, to think more independently, to enact progressive change, to break out of the status quo, we can’t allow ourselves to become further entrenched in binary-oppositional thinking and its “either you’re with us or against us” mentality and activism. When we always limit ourselves to this oppositional approach, we remain trapped in a reactionary stance that’s been shaped by the dominating culture and the existing framework. Post-oppositionality invites us to think more spaciously, to step beyond conventional rules, to liberate ourselves—at least occasionally—from the status quo. The possibilities might be almost endless. ●



ANALOUISE KEATING is professor and director of the doctoral program in multicultural women’s & gender studies at Texas Woman’s University. Her most recent book is *Transformation Now! Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change*; and she has edited several of Gloria Anzaldúa’s books including, most recently, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Her work focuses on transformation studies: multicultural pedagogies; U.S. women-of-colors theories; Gloria Anzaldúa; womanist spiritual activism; and post-oppositional thought.

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The Case Against Patriarchy in Islam

MAHA ELGENAIDI

DEFINE PATRIARCHY AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL system in which men are ideologically viewed as inherently dominant over women, regardless of abilities, and therefore belong in positions of power and authority over them. Women in this worldview are viewed either as children, needing to be protected or cared for, or as tools of power in service to men, never truly whole or independent of men, let alone equal to them.

Patriarchal ideas at different levels exist throughout the world in every social system and are especially present in religious communities, where scriptures or the will of God are used to justify them.

In practical terms, I highlight in this article what patriarchy looks like in Muslim American institutions today. I aim not to single out my community over others, many of which are much worse in this regard, but rather to provide an example of what patriarchy looks like in one specific context.

In religious leadership:

- Women are excluded from speaking at the pulpit during Jumah, Friday congregational services, even to give an announcement, let alone to teach by delivering a *bayan* (the teaching portion of congregational prayers) in the presence of a mixed congregation.

- The title of “imam” is reserved exclusively for men, even when women perform much of the imamate’s pastoral activity, such as counseling, washing bodies for funerals, visiting the sick, etc.

In religious space:

- Women are generally required to pray behind men even when there’s space to pray side-by-side (with a divider between them).
- Prayer spaces for women are often not maintained to the same standards as those of men, or even kept available, because it’s assumed that since women don’t have to attend religious services there’s no point in bothering with maintaining their spaces.
- Women are often expected to sit behind men even in community events other than prayers.

In political leadership:

- A woman’s status or position is often determined by her relationship to a male family member: father, husband, or brother, unless she has celebrity status which she gained through social media or other channels.
- Mosque boards (often all male) convince themselves that women “are just not interested” when they find few women volunteering to run for leadership positions.
- Mosque boards dedicate a special seat or group of seats for women, thereby excluding them from other functions on the board, such as board president.
- A woman’s opinion is often only heard or considered when a man gives voice to it and the idea or opinion is attributed to him, not her.

In Muslim-majority societies, including Muslim institutions right here in the United States,



the greatest impulse for patriarchy comes from Muslims who believe that Islam itself is inherently patriarchal, or that God calls for a patriarchal system in the Quran, or that historical tradition requires the maintenance of patriarchal structures in which women are a step behind men in both family and community.

Having studied the Quran, which we believe to be the directly revealed word of God, on numerous occasions and with a number of different scholars, and as a practicing Muslim, I’ve not found places where God specifically commands the domination of men over women. On the contrary, the Quran, revealed over 1400 years ago, confirms the spiritual equality of women and men, gives women the right to inherit, to own property (and not to be considered property), to seek a livelihood, to marry only by their consent, to divorce and keep their children, and to be educated—rights that were won by Western women only in the last century. Verses in the Quran that suggest patriarchal arrangements should not be treated as timeless or universal but must be understood as a response to specific historical circumstances. This in fact accords with the traditional Islamic principle that many verses in the Quran need to be interpreted in the light of the situation in which they were revealed.

We get the patriarchy not from the text but rather from early interpretations of the Quran

that disregard the text's social-historical and cultural context and that are glaring in their patriarchal import. Such interpretations are considered authoritative, indeed almost sacred, because of the character of those delivering them. People fail to consider the human limitations of these interpreters as people impacted by their time and place, circumstances, upbringing, and even mental disposition. Even religious geniuses and men close to God are human beings not immune from their experiences and the cultural biases of their time and place.

OVERCOMING PATRIARCHY

Overcoming patriarchy in religious communities will probably be easier to do than it will be in non-religious communities where one may have to appeal to values that not everyone embraces on a woman's worth and value. In Muslim communities, overcoming patriarchy will require us to remember three things about our religion that mandate the equality of women and men in every respect:

First, to recognize that revelation from God applies to men and women equally: Everything in the foundational beliefs of Islam and in ritual practices that applies to men applies equally to women. Both men and women will be held accountable equally in the hereafter, and both are equally required to be vicegerents of God on earth and must therefore be educated and given the resources in order to practice their religion fully and manifest good works as they're obligated to do.

Second, to keep in mind that Islam's universal principles apply equally to men and women

“Overcoming patriarchy in the Muslim community is not simply a matter of fulfilling a social or political demand; it is a fundamental religious obligation.”

as we interpret our sacred texts and traditions: These universal principles include the sanctity of all human life, male and female, the taking of which is among the gravest of

all sins; the right to freedom of thought, religion, conscience, and expression; the right to security in one's livelihood, profession, and residence; the divine diversity of all of creation; the mandate to uphold human dignity; and the obligation to model prophetic traits in our lives and characters and to work for the good of our homeland and society, wherever that might be. All of these apply equally to men and women.

Third, and most important, to remember that God created human beings, men and women, in a state of *fitra*. *Fitra* is an Arabic word that is usually translated as “original disposition,” “natural constitution,” or “innate nature.” Islamic theology holds that *fitra* is the state of purity and innocence that we are all—men and women—born with; it includes an innate inclination towards *tawhid* (Oneness of God), which is encapsulated in the *fitra* along with compassion, intelligence, *ihsan* (virtuous behavior), and all the other attributes that embody what it is to be human. This innate nature belongs equally to all human beings, male and female, and thus implies a fundamental and inviolable equality.

Therefore, in the vision of Islam, men and women are inherently equal in their nature and their relationship to God. Men and women share equally in the fullness of human nature and deserve equal dignity. Interpretations of the Quran and prophetic traditions should be viewed and understood in this light, and when an interpretation is found to be bound to a particular time and culture, it should be relegated to its historical time and place.

Above all, we must remember that in Islamic understanding, God is considered The Just, or the standard of justice Who never commands injustice. Therefore, any interpretation of the Quran that leads to injustice against women, in this case, must be wrong or misguided.

Religious men who understand this should therefore be among the foremost in calling for women's equality in every aspect of life, beginning with their rightful place in Muslim institutions and societies. So Muslim Americans—men and women—must ensure that women are equally represented on the boards of

mosques, that they have the right to speak during religious services and to deliver the *bayan*, that they can be given the title of imam, and that their prayer spaces are maintained equally with those of men. Eventually this will lead to women's voices and opinions being heard and considered in the Muslim community.

The task of overcoming patriarchy cannot be left to women, as if they bore the responsibility for their oppression; rather, men must take responsibility for changing a situation which was created and is maintained by men. Achieving complete equality for women is a task that requires men and women working together.

Overcoming patriarchy in the Muslim community is not simply a matter of fulfilling a social or political demand; it is a fundamental religious obligation. I therefore call upon my sisters and brothers in the Muslim world to join with me and others to build a movement aimed at challenging patriarchal cultural, religious and political structures, practices, or teachings. I'm happy to announce that *Tikkun* magazine will give space on their website for anyone who wants to present articles seeking to promote this campaign that accord with *Tikkun* magazine's larger goal of healing, repairing, and transforming the world. Send your ideas to Cat@spiritualprogressives.org. ●



Achieving complete equality for women is a task that requires men and women working together.



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Leadership Award" from the California Association of Human Relations Organizations, and the "Dorothy Irene Height Community Award" from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).



Using Progressive Muslim Thought to Take Down Patriarchy

DR. ADIS DUDERIJA

AS SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN FOLLOWING academic debates on gender and religion for close to two decades (and publishing on them for over a decade), especially in relation to the Islamic tradition but also as a husband, father, and a concerned citizen of the world and concerned about what the future holds, I have come to the conclusion that there are three main pillars in which patriarchy and its worldview are rooted. Namely,

1. Traditional masculinity,
2. 'Gender oppositionality,' and
3. Patriarchal honour.

In my considered view, it is these three concepts and the various assumptions that underpin them, that are responsible for the construction of beliefs, values, and practices that have resulted in various forms of exploitative and highly asymmetrical power relationships in general and systematic marginalisation of women's rights, experiences, and voices in the construction of (religious) knowledge and the formation of (religious) ethics in particular. The aim of this article is to explain the worldview and the 'logic' behind these concepts.

It is important at the very outset to state that the theories and the concepts that underpin the patriarchal worldview manifest themselves in traditionalist approaches to many major religious traditions. However, the discussion pertaining to the theory of gender oppositionality and patriarchal honour discussed below is primarily informed by my research and readings into the premodern Islamic interpretative tradition and its contemporary articulations in particular and should be taken as such. In the final part of the article I provide brief thoughts on how to go beyond the three pillars of patriarchy in order to overcome the patriarchal ideals and the worldview with which they are intricately associated.



Capitalist ethos and social order is lethal on an individual and collective level.

PATRIARCHY AND TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

In what follows I wish to examine the concept of patriarchy through a particular lens, namely that of traditional masculinity as theorised by Kilmartin.¹ Traditional masculinity is the ultimate source of the values and norms of patriarchy. These values and norms include, among others, power, competition, aggression/domination, and sexual conquest.

Patriarchy is a dual system of domination of a small percentage of powerful men over other men and the domination of men in general over women and children. Patriarchy, as a system of domination, is based upon a certain worldview that manifests itself in all aspects of human existence, both at the level of society and at the level of the individual. It affects the way people think, behave, and feel.

Patriarchy is anchored in the ethos of traditional masculinity that is upheld as an ideal and norm for many men and women. It is founded on competition and creation of hierarchies that can have devastating consequences. Capitalism is based on the same characteristics of domination and power over. This combination is lethal both on an individual and

collective level. Patriarchy, in its most recent iteration, is exacerbated by the capitalist ethos and social order. Patriarchy provides a foundation upon which capitalism can thrive and capitalism is buttressed by patriarchy's hierarchical value structure. Together they result in an economic system whose gods are greed and ever greater profit margins at almost every and any cost. Success is measured by an unending need for larger profit margins, larger market shares, better stock market performance, increased military capability, more effective co-opting of "democratically elected" politicians, or the number of attractive-looking women a man can 'score'. The vast majority of banking systems in the world are, in one way or another, structurally implicated into perpetuation of this patriarchal economic system and worldview. Events surrounding America's financial crises from the previous decade that, due to our state of interconnectedness, have reverberated in just about every other place on this planet, are a clear testimony to this truth.

These two interests and worldviews have entered many political systems even in Western liberal democracies.² Money created through the exploitative nature of patriarchal and capitalist hierarchies are used in funding political campaigns and are a major source of corruptive and undemocratic practices in the world. Hence, political systems whose survival depends on patriarchal and capitalist interests are a major impediment to attaining world peace.

Hans Küng, a noted theologian, once famously asserted that without peace between religions there cannot be world peace. Unfortunately, the dominant interpretations of religion have been wearing the garb of patriarchy for as long as patriarchy has been in existence. Patriarchy has not only been able to significantly dampen the original spirit of constant prophetic messages which emphasized the need for and

spoke in favour of social justice and protection of the weak and marginalized (and paving the way to their emancipation), but has often co-opted and perverted religious ideas to serve its selfish interests. What is important to keep in mind is that patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts are neither inevitable nor are they in line with the prophetic spirit I just mentioned. Patriarchal values, norms, and ethics disguised in religious idioms and slogans not only betray the original prophetic spirit and message, they often coexist very comfortably with the vested economic and political interests on which the patriarchal and capitalist worldview defends and depends. This is most unfortunate and causes much needless suffering in the world and is a major threat to world peace. What we need instead are theologies of peace and compassion that honor the original prophetic spirit of social justice and care for all.

Degradation and exploitation of the environment are also a legacy of patriarchy shrouded in the ethos of traditional masculinity, exacerbated by the capitalist fallacy that the earth can endlessly produce to meet our never-ending desires. The mindset of competition and creation of a *homo economicus*, a unique species of human whose worth is solely defined by material profits, detached from (m)any ethical constraints, and who views the world through the single conceptual lens of profit-making is directly responsible for unprecedented and irreplaceable destruction of natural habitats which can have and are, in fact, having catastrophic consequences for survival of all life on earth including human beings. This destruction of the environment can only worsen the prospect for world peace by further increasing the already stiff competition for earth's finite resources.

Patriarchy, with traditional masculinity as its source, does not just give rise to a certain view of economics, politics, religion, and attitude to

our mother earth. It is also based on certain personality traits. With its focus on competition and domination, patriarchal personality traits give rise to arrogance and greed, eschew cooperation, have a disregard for and disrespect for meaningful dialogue, and generally lack empathy and the consideration of the legitimate needs and aspirations of others.

PATRIARCHY AND THE THESIS OF GENDER OPPOSITIONALITY

Let us now move on to discussing the second pillar of patriarchal worldview, namely the concept of gender oppositionality. By this phrase I wish to convey the idea that in (neo)-traditional (Islamic) religious discourses, the construction of normative masculinity is almost exclusively done in terms of anti-femininity and vice versa. This “gender oppositionality” theory has given rise to a number of androcentric, if not outright misogynistic, beliefs and practices encoded in the very nature of gender roles and norms it endorses. Specifically, on the one hand, the theory of gender oppositionality conceptually links masculinity with the idea of religious knowledge and interpretative authority, spirituality, authority in both the public (i.e., political authority) and domestic realms (i.e., familial authority), unreasonable levels of sexual jealousy, and even ontological and biological



Destruction of the environment can only worsen the prospect for world peace by further increasing the already stiff competition for earth's finite resources.

superiority. On the other hand, according to this theory of gender oppositionality, femininity is conceptually linked with various kinds of lacks and imperfections/defects, be they in the realm of religious authority and spirituality, rationality, or any forms of power and authority. Moreover, femininity is strongly associated with an aggressive, extremely powerful, and voracious sexuality that ought to be constantly supervised and tightly controlled through practices such as veiling/seclusion of women and strict gender segregation. Femininity, and female sexuality in particular, is also viewed as a site of male honour. Hence, it is also associated



We need to question the rationale of male honour as directly connected to female sexuality and its deadly consequences.

with particular, and by all means in the view of this author, burdensome and ethically reprehensible conceptualisations of female modesty and shame that reduce women and their bodies to mere objects of male sexual pleasure (although the proponents of these practices claim to the contrary). Femininity is also, at times, conceptually associated with ontological and biological inferiority which are, needless to say, extremely demeaning to women. These gender cosmologies are then employed as the basis of engendering gender-specific (religious) laws, practices, ethics, and even systems of morality with considerable asymmetries between genders in terms of their rights and responsibilities, greatly restricting women's autonomy and agency. In fact, subscription to such a gender cosmology renders much of women's agency/autonomy under the control of their male kin.

PATRIARCHAL HONOUR

Another pillar of patriarchy is the concept of patriarchal honour that we alluded to in the previous section. The basic premise of this concept of honour is that the honour of the family patriarch resides in the behaviour of 'his women-folk,' especially the behaviour that can be construed as being sexual in nature. Having conceptually invested in the idea of the 'category of a woman,' especially the aggressive and powerful nature of female sexuality, societies in which patriarchal honour codes are prevalent strongly regulate this female sexuality through several socio-spatial mechanisms such as veiling/seclusion of women and strict gender segregation. The regulation of female sexuality can also take place through practices such as female genital cutting (i.e., female genital mutilation, FGM) whose major rationale is the 'reduction' of female sexual pleasure as a means

of preserving their 'modesty' and bringing their voracious sexual appetite under control, all in the name of safeguarding patriarchal honour.

The practice of honour killings is also based on the same logic of patriarchal honour. A paradigmatic example of an honour killing is the killing of a young woman, by her brother or male cousin, who is considered to have breached societal moral codes by engaging in behaviours, usually construed as being sexual in nature, that compromise the honour of the family patriarch. It is the most extreme and most violent form of honour-based violence through the 'regulation' of female behaviour/sexuality as often³ *the only* means of recovering/redeeming lost patriarchal honour.

BEYOND PATRIARCHY

How can we go beyond these three pillars informing the patriarchal worldview?

My thoughts/suggestions are as follows. In addition to applying methodologies of conceptualising and interpreting Islamic normative texts that inhere in progressive Muslim thought, such as comprehensive conceptualisation and the adopting of a rationalist approaches to (Islamic) theology and ethics,⁴ the answer to this question would be in:

1. **Engendering alternative conceptualisations of gender cosmologies based on reciprocal and non-hierarchical relationships.**

In this respect, it is important to problematize and ultimately destabilize the conceptual

prioritising of masculinity with religious, political, and familial forms of authority and, in turn, conceptually (and actually) strengthening the link between femininity and the religio-political forms of authority. In particular, this could be achieved through the establishment of religious spaces that affirm female religious and communal authority/leadership. For example, through the establishment and support of women-led mosques (such as

the Women's Mosque in America in Los Angeles)⁵ or mosques which are run by female imams (as in the case of a Danish female imam of the Mary Mosque in Copenhagen, Sherin Khanakan).⁶ The recognition and uplifting of female scholarly authority that engages in interpretation of normative texts and brings it into fruitful

discussion with the existing, male-dominated (and often androcentric) forms of scriptural reasoning is also essential to bring about the necessary paradigm shift in the manner in which gender aspects of religious cosmologies function.

2. **Rethinking the very nature and the conceptual relationship between masculinity and femininity where masculinity and femininity are not considered as binary opposites.**

Traditionalist approaches to the relationship between gender roles, norms, and religion are a byproduct of premodern, patriarchal cultures, and cultural value systems that are, to varying extents, either reflected or, in some cases, challenged in the normative religious texts. However, it is important to remember that these normative scriptures neither provide systematic nor comprehensive theories

“It is necessary to shift the very language of honour to that of individual human dignity where every individual in their own right, regardless of gender, is considered a source of their own and no one else's honour.”

regarding gender roles and norms and that the above discussed gender oppositionality theory is an outcome of androcentric forms of scriptural reasoning. As such it is possible to develop alternative conceptual relationships governing the nature of the masculinity-femininity dynamic that are more contextually responsive (i.e., not rooted in supposed biological determinism-based arguments) and are not premised on the logic of complementarity (i.e., oppositionality). The embracing of more dynamic views of masculinity and femininity and respective gender roles and norms would remove an important element of a patriarchal worldview, namely the idea of the 'naturalness' of male authority, especially in the religious and political realms. This, in turn, would have an emancipatory effect on women's rights and would help facilitate both a worldview and a world beyond patriarchy in Muslim contexts.

3. Reconceptualization of the concept of honour itself that delinks the honour of men from the sexual or sexually-perceived behaviour of 'their women-folk.'

As we saw above, the lowest common denominator of a patriarchal honour-based value system is the conceptual linking of male honour with (perceived) female sexual behaviour. In order to engender a world beyond patriarchy, it is absolutely essential to, in the short term and at the very minimum, question the rationale behind this form of 'honour.' In the longer term, it is necessary to shift the very language of honour to that of individual human dignity where every individual in their own right, regardless of gender, is considered a source of their own and no one else's honour. This would, of course, require a major cultural shift in Muslim contexts that still maintain a patriarchal honour-based system of values. Fortunately, Islamic normative texts have the necessary resources to help in achieving this paradigm shift from male honour to a gender

equalitarian dignity-based system of values.⁸

There are a number of scholars, activists, and organisations associated with the ideas and principles underpinning the theory of progressive Islam⁹ working in the field of gender and Islam today, who have, over the last two to three decades, already made important theoretical interventions in relation to the three points outlined above, myself included. I sincerely hope that their voices will be amplified and eventually extinguish the still dominant voices of patriarchy, especially in Muslim-majority contexts. ●

Footnotes

[1] Kilmartin, Christopher. 2009. *The Masculine Self*. 4th Edition. New York: Sloan Publishing.

[2] Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens, *Perspective on Politics*, Volume 12, Issue 3 September 2014, pp. 564-581

[3] In cases of rape, the woman is forced by her male kin to marry her rapist and thereby restore their patriarchal honour.

[4] A.Duderija, *Constructing a Religiously Ideal 'Believer' and 'Woman' in Islam: NeoTraditional Salafi and Progressive Muslim Methods of Interpretation (manahij)*. New York: Palgrave, 2011.; A.Duderija, *The Imperatives of Progressive Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2017)

[5] <http://womensmosque.com/about-2/>

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherin_Khankan

[7] Adis Duderija, "Tensions between the Study of Gender and Religion The Case of Patriarchal and Non-Patriarchal Interpretations of the Islamic Tradition", *Hawwa-Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, Volume 15, Issue 3, 2017, pp. 257-278

[8] Sachedina, Abdulaziz. *Islam and Challenge of Human Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

[9] See footnote 3.



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Raising Jewish Boys

What will they stand for? Who will they stand with?

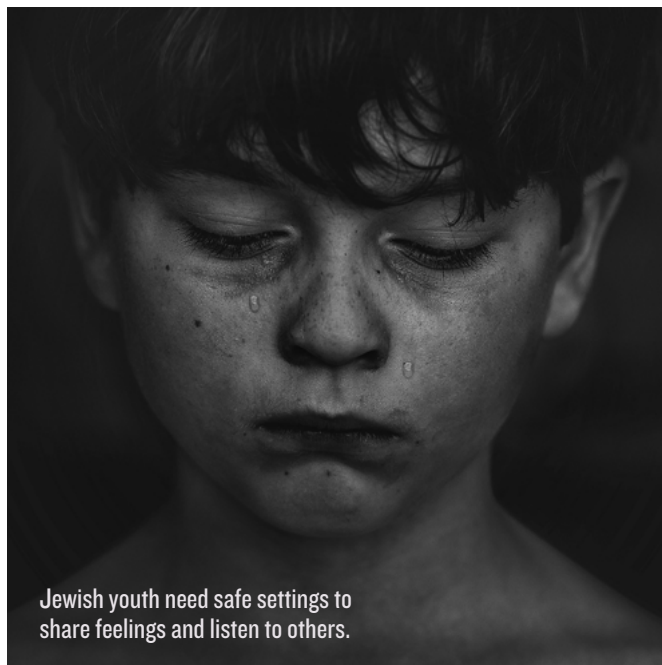
PAUL KIVEL

ACT LIKE A MAN! GROW UP! BE A MAN! What are the messages Jewish boys in the U.S. receive about what it means to act like a man? Many of the messages are the ones most American boys hear.

Be tough, aggressive, in charge, strong, successful, independent, athletic, don't cry, don't show your feelings, don't make mistakes, and don't ever ask for help. The bottom line expectation is you should never be vulnerable, you should always be in control.

Of course, some of the messages Jewish boys hear are more typically "Jewish" although what it means to be Jewish varies widely. What messages do boys receive in an orthodox community in Brooklyn, a reform community in the suburbs of Los Angeles, a Sephardic community in Chicago, a renewal community in Berkeley, or a conservative community in Dallas? What do they have in common? I think the messages have two things in common, even though there is much overall particularity. The first message is: even though you're Jewish and shouldn't beat any-

one up, you should still to be in control. Most Jewish boys are taught to control their bodies, control their feelings, control their tempers, and as they become adults to control their children and their partners.



Jewish youth need safe settings to share feelings and listen to others.

There are many ways to be in control and our different sub-cultures value these differently. Depending upon culture and community Jewish boys are taught to use verbal tools, emotional skills, intellectual acumen, physical strength, financial success, and sexual manipulation to remain in control. Control is the goal.

They are also given the expectation that men should be in charge. Through Jewish tradition and current practice, through both mainstream Christian and traditional Jewish cultural norms, men are expected to be superior to, more important than, and in control of women. There are exceptions to these expectations in individual families and a few Jewish congregations. But overall the pattern is stark and clear. Throughout the Tanakh and later



Jewish boys are given the expectation
that men should be in charge.

Jewish texts men are the decision-makers and women have lesser roles. They are generally visible as the wives, daughters, sisters, or seducers of powerful men. These texts convey the message that men are superior to women and therefore should be in charge. A sense of entitlement, coupled with a view of Jewish women as inferior or less than men leads some Jewish men to take out any anger, confusion, frustration, or pain they feel on the Jewish women and children around them. These abusive acts are then sometimes spiritually sanctioned through reference to religious texts, or emotionally sanctioned by male portrayals of shrill, controlling Jewish women conveyed by contemporary Jewish and mainstream literature.

At the same time we have an image of the Jewish man as a *mensch*, a good and caring person, a thinker or scholar, as someone who is more passive than aggressive, perhaps even unable to defend himself. Because of these stereotypes the Jewish community continues to be in great denial about the high levels of incest, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and domestic violence committed by Jewish men. There is a presumption of innocence given to Jewish men. Because of these stereotypes and the presumption of innocence we often fail to talk about family and relationship violence or to counter the negative messages our sons receive about Jewish women. We fail to prepare them—regardless of their sexual orientation—to be non-violent, equal, and respectful lovers, partners, and parents.

Many Jewish boys grow up in families where they experience incest, physical abuse, emotional and physical neglect, or witness domestic violence. Some Jewish boys grow up to be men who perpetrate these kinds of abuse on

others. And yet most of us do not talk about issues of violence and relationships with our sons either at home, in religious school and Bar-mitzvah settings, or in youth programs. We are setting them up to be in abusive relationships because they will lack the skills to work out life's challenges without controlling potentially abusive behavior.

How can boys resist the messages to be tough, competitive, and in control? As adults, we need to be willing to talk with them about issues of

We need to engage them in discussions of what it means to be powerful in ways that do not involve control or violence.

abuse—issues of abuse in our own lives, in our families, in the Jewish community, and abuse in Israel (where a militarized society has led to high levels of domestic violence and sexual assault in addition to the

normalization of violence directed at Palestinians and others). We need to engage them in discussions of what it means to be powerful in ways that do not involve control or violence. We can also teach them how to express their feelings, listen to and nurture others, and how to solve conflict without violence. We need to help them think about what it means to enter into right relationship with others, particularly women—relationships based on respect, mutuality, reciprocity, and equality. In this task we can draw on traditional Jewish beliefs which value peace in the home, honoring one's neighbors, and justice for all. We can encourage our boys to see themselves as an ally to those around them—not as a hero or savior, or as an act of charity—but as a member of the community who reaches out to those abused and challenges those who are abusive from an understanding of our mutual interest and interdependence.

We cannot afford a presumption of innocence for our boys. They see images in the media

and in daily life of toxic masculinity extolling control, violence, and dominance over women. They are confused about their roles, unsure about how they should act. They are eager for us to initiate discussions with them about these issues. They do not need us to lecture them about our values, they need help thinking critically about what is going on in our communities and support determining their own values. They also need help in coming together with other Jewish youth, in safe settings, to share feelings, listen to others, and explore these issues.

Many of us in the Jewish community are concerned about how our sons will become good men with good values. We want to be proud of what they stand for. But we also have to be concerned about who they stand with. Without a grounding in Jewish values and a firm sense of their role as an ally to children, to women, to other men, to those who are gender non-conforming, and to all those marginalized in our communities they run the risk of becoming one of the significant number of Jewish men who are abusive to others and destructive of our community life. We need to ask not only what will they stand for, but also who will they stand with. In doing so we will become allies to them so they can become allies to others. ●



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God as Virtuality

ANA LEVY-LYONS

Open your eyes. You are a fisherman in the Pacific, a weaver in the Philippines, and a journalist on the front lines. You act with kindness; you fight with courage. You swim the depths of the oceans; you float the heights of the skies. You walk on top of the world and you are someone else's world. You are with family; you are with friends; you are with ancestors."

So goes the voiceover for the latest ad for Oculus Go, a virtual reality headset that allows you to virtually travel to all these places and be all these things. As the female voice narrates the virtual experiences you can have, the images are gorgeous. You see the fishermen in their wet yellow rain slickers hauling in baskets of shining fish; you see the earthy colors of the weaver's loom in the Philippines. When she says, "you're a journalist on the front lines," you see an urban stairwell shredded by shrapnel.

When she says, "you are someone else's world," you see a baby staring up at you with wonder. And when she says, "you are with ancestors," you see a Native American drumming circle around a bonfire. The images flash faster and faster—all the choices, all the things you can be, all the experiences you can have without even having to get out of bed. You can order this thing on Amazon for \$200 and if you have Prime you'll get free shipping and have it by tomorrow. In the words of the ad, you can, "live every story."

What's not to like? Where the physical world has limits, the virtual world is limitless. Where our own bodies can't do certain things, in the virtual world we can do anything. Where in real life the laws of time and space dictate where we can go, in the virtual world, we can go anywhere anytime. A real fisherman *pays* for his experience of the ocean in sweat and

injuries and backbreaking labor. With Oculus Go we get it for free. A real weaver in the Philippines pays for her immersion in the rich colors of the threads by decades of practice and monotonous, tedious work for dollars a day. We get it for free. A real parent pays for the wonder of their baby's love in sleepless nights and countless sacrifices. We, the wearers of the Oculus Go headset, sacrifice nothing.

You might say that there's nothing really wrong with this. That these are just fantasies and everyone knows it. It's just a taste. What's wrong with playing? And to be fair, virtual reality has been used for therapeutic purposes. Domestic abusers, in one application, get to experience a virtual reality scene of a larger man looming over them, threatening them. And they emerge from that better able to empathize with victims and understand what they've done as abusers. Aspiring pilots use flight simulators. Medical students learn in virtual surgical theatres. It's a beautiful thing because mistakes in that dimension won't mean life or death.

But the notion of virtuality in our culture goes way beyond these specialized applications. With our virtual desktops and virtual navigation systems and virtual meetings and virtual gaming and virtual doctors and virtual communities and virtual assistants and virtual tours and virtual shopping, we are creating an entire parallel reality—a life overlay. It's all easier than real life and most of it is free or close to free. We are Godlike, re-creating the world, but one level removed.

But in fact, we are not God. And the universe of ones and zeros that we create is, put simply, not real. When God—or the wisdom-flow of the cosmos—created the world we know, bibli-

cal and evolutionary accounts agree, that the stuff of creation was all rock and fire and water that became earth that became our bodies. The first human in Genesis was named Adam, which comes from the Hebrew word “adamah,” soil. We are earthlings. We are physical beings and everything that we are springs from the soil beneath our feet. We are literally what we eat. We are what we breathe. We are shaped by the billions of microorganisms who live in our guts. We are shaped by those whom we physically touch. We are living in a material world and we are material beings.

“Virtuality is becoming, not just play, but a growing collective misunderstanding of what we are.”

When we deny this fundamental truth, we do so at great risk and great cost. And deny it we do. Virtuality is becoming, not just play, but a growing collec-

tive misunderstanding of what we are. The virtual world in so many ways seems better to us (and I don't mean us as individuals, but us as a culture). Virtuality is unencumbered by the nuisances of location and history. Picture the American highway. If you use a GPS to get around you may never actually know where you are. You follow the directions, turn here, exit there, and arrive at your destination. It's like playing a video game. The highway stretches out infinitely in front of you. The road on the screen becomes more real than the road beneath your wheels.

Everything in the virtual world has a kind of uniform sheen and sparkle. Instagram stars get paid big bucks to convey a “lifestyle.” Even things that are supposed to be gritty and harsh like that image of the torn-up stairwell in a war zone has a kind of romantic shine. Everything is clean, and even when it's made to look dirty that dirt never really sticks. You never get dirty and you never get hurt. If you run into trouble in a virtual community, you never have to be

held accountable. You can just disappear. And it's all free from unpleasant political realities. A Native American drummer on Oculus Go isn't freighted with a history of genocide and oppression. A beautiful woman on Oculus Go is never going to turn to you and say "Me too."

And so virtuality represents a kind of collective dream—a world where everything is simple. It's two-dimensional, even when it creates the illusion of 3D. We've recreated reality but with latex gloves on. It's life abstracted. It lives on the plane of ideas and images and denies the plane of the body.

In some archetypal systems this cerebral, rational world is the masculine, whereas the embodied, emotional world is the feminine. This is not to say that women aren't rational; cosmic energies interplay and women and men participate in both. But as a society we are catapulting headlong into the world of the disembodied mind, which has long been linked with male prerogative, and we are collectively deciding that it's better than our voluptuous earth-bodies.

The etymology of the word "virtual" is helpful here. It comes from the Latin *virtus* ("virtue" in English) which meant "excellence, potency, efficacy." It also meant "manhood" or "manliness," from the Latin root *vir*, which means man. So virtual in the 14th century basically meant "good and manly." And down the line virtual came to mean what it means today. The virtual world is virtually the same as reality itself, but better and more

manly. It's almost as if the virtual world is primary—like Plato's "forms"—the virtual is the ideal while the physical is just a pale imitation. It's as if virtuality is God to us.

So we have two worlds before us: the shiny, Platonic, *virtus*-virtual world and the earthy, messy, ad-hoc-physical world—the wetware as they call it. We all know which is ascendant right now. Sears—which used to be the largest retailer in the U.S.—recently closed its doors. They are the most recent in a string of giant retailers (including Toys 'R' Us) to do so. Little mom and pop shops are closing every minute as Amazon now sells online everything they used to sell, but for less. We are in the midst of what experts are calling a "brick-and-mortar retail fiasco." They speculate about whether

Virtual reality lives on the plane of ideas and images and denies the plane of the body.



there will even be brick-and-mortar stores ten or twenty years from now. Print publications are shutting down, one after another, as people get their corporate news and entertainment for free online. New York's *Village Voice*—an alternative newspaper—is a recent casualty. The iconic red plastic boxes are empty all over the city. *Tikkun* magazine and The Jewish daily *Forward* recently discontinued their print editions. The physical world is failing.

The recent UN report on climate change shows us that the natural physical world is also failing. And I can't help but think there is a connection. We are embracing cerebral *virtus* and closing our eyes to Mother Earth. We are so entranced by the logic of virtuality we have forgotten how organic matter works. As we can draw and erase on a screen, change themes and colors at will, we've forgotten that the natural world is not malleable like that. As location is irrelevant in cyberspace and one's address is in "the cloud," we've forgotten that ecosystems

are place-based and cannot be moved—each serves a vital, irreplaceable function on earth. As a click of a mouse creates instant effects, we forget that in the natural world, change takes decades or millennia—the global warming we're seeing today is because of fossil fuels we burned years ago. As we can easily hit "delete" on a screen or move something to the trash and throw it away, we've forgotten that there is no "away"—there's only moving our waste from one place to another. As virtual space is infinite, we've forgotten that space on earth is finite. And as life online is largely free and easy, we've forgotten that anything worthwhile on earth takes effort, time, work, and even sacrifice. *Our collective fantasy is crashing into our reality with devastating effects.*

And in the midst of all of this, humans are more isolated from one another than ever. We spend more and more time online, ordering what we used to go out to stores for. We text and browse social media, where we used to get



We can immerse ourselves in the unrepeatable beauty of a particular place.

together with our friends. Studies have shown that as people use their phones and live in the virtual world more, we slowly lose our ability to read social cues and body language and communicate with real people. The birthrate in Japan has been dropping dramatically and in surveys and speculation, they're finding that—among other reasons—it's because people are scared of each other. They'd rather watch online porn or play games than risk face-to-face contact with all its uncertainty and vulnerability. Here in the U.S. too, teenagers are going out with their friends less, dating less, getting more depressed and anxious, and having less sex—which has the happy side-effect of fewer teen pregnancies, but the reason is not good. As a human species, we're apparently deciding that we'd rather be on our phones than have sex.

Sex aside, we have too little touch. With all the cases of violent and unwanted touch in the news these days, we forget that touch is something that we need as physical adamah-beings. Babies and even monkeys who don't get touched can die. Elderly people with too little touch suffer much more from depression and disease. We humans need physical contact and eye contact with other human beings. And we're not getting it.

There is something ineffable but irreplaceable about the physical presence of another human being. We rarely pause to take in the miracle of our existence—the genius conglomeration that is us—somehow physical and spiritual, energetic and emotional. We give off heat and scents and create vibrations with every word and every heartbeat. Our eyes tell an entire story, while taking in the story of another. Our bodies die and the foreknowledge of that death makes everything urgent. We are earth animated by spirit. Try to siphon off just the spirit and upload it to the internet and you are left with virtually nothing.

Plato got it backwards: this world is not a wannabe imitation of some ideal world of forms in the clouds. Actually, it is the virtual world of the cloud that is an imitation of physical life on earth. God is at least as present in the adamah as in the *virtus*. In the physical world, and even in its limitations, we can discover holiness. We can immerse ourselves in the unrepeatable beauty of a particular place and specific time, of seasons that change, of leaves that fall from trees, of things that fade and die. We can take a moment to marvel at our own skin, the miracle of our own adamah-bodies, bodies made of everything and everyone who came before us.

The Oculus Go ad ends with this line: “Live every story. Because when you learn to love a life different from your own, the world becomes a little closer.” That sounds so romantic, but the truth is, we cannot live every story. We are finite beings and it's all we can do to fully live our *own* story. And if we really want the world to become a little closer, the real challenge is to bridge the enormous gulf between ourselves and our closest neighbor. To commit ourselves to that—to be present with who we actually are and to open ourselves to the physical presence of the other; to look into the eyes of another human being—that is as wild a ride and as much adventure as any of us can ever really handle. ●



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Global Healing Is Possible

EMMA SHAM-BA AYALON

THE WORD HEALING, LIKE most of the important words in our vocabulary, has lost its meaning due to overuse, misuse, and abuse; the challenges of our times call us to reclaim the meaning of healing on an individual and global level. In this article, I explore components of healing that I believe are important to reclaim. Hebrew has three different words for healing: *ripuy*—connected to letting go; *achlama*—connected to dreaming; and *havraa*—connected to drawing us to our original wild nature. All three are components of what Dieter Duhm calls a “healing biotope” and what forms the foundation for “Tamera”—a community in Portugal that could be a model for how to heal ourselves and the world. A healing biotope is a place in which we feel safe and held enough to let go of our pretenses and possessiveness, even in our love relationships, in which dreams are honored, and connection between humans and creation is re-established. I hope that together with other dreamers we can create more healing biotopes. Doing so, just might be what will save us from our sense of isolation and from the brink of ecological disaster.

I studied the meaning of healing very intimately with my mother when she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer level 4 and with a prognosis of one year to live. When she was diagnosed, I brought her a book as a gift with the title: *You Can Heal Your Life*, by Louise Hay. The title of

the book inspired my mother and she integrated this shift of consciousness and focused on healing her life instead of merely focusing on healing the disease. She lived 11 years after her initial diagnosis; they were the happiest and most fulfilling years of her life. Healing does not mean that we will not die. It means that something in the core is healed. If we want to heal humanity we need to look at our core.

There is a Hasidic saying: “You cannot heal evil but by reaching to its core or by reaching to its root”; but what is the core of evil? The core of evil is the illusion of separation—the false perception that we are actually separate beings rather than deeply connected. In contrast, a



healing biotope is an attempt to heal our sense of alienation from life itself by a model of unity in diversity. The process of healing always asks us to engage in a wider frame of reference. Rather than focus merely on self-healing, to heal myself I need to work to create the conditions that both address and transform the systemic sickness in society. Why? Because most of our sicknesses come from living in a culture that isolates us from each other and teaches us to see ourselves as separate beings. To heal, we need to create a world in which we can *all* feel and experience a sense of home in the world.

One of the biggest questions of our times is homelessness. We are aware of the physical and concrete ways homelessness manifests itself as millions of refugees, fleeing from their homelands, often due to war and other extreme conditions, try to start a new life in a safer place. But there is another form of homelessness, namely, spiritual and psychological homelessness. It expresses itself in the upper class, in the richest privileged areas, where people can hardly find social embedding and a sense of belonging. Capitalism thrives on this sense of loneliness, offering various substitutes to cover our sense of emptiness. Feelings of emptiness and homelessness also stimulate our defense mechanisms, often driving us into the arms of a lover who, at least temporarily, fills this spiritual angst. This sense of safety is so rare that when we find a glimpse of it we try to protect and keep it to ourselves. If we want to heal the core of humanity we

need to heal this spiritual void. To do this we need to create communities where we can find the sense of home in a network of meaningful contacts. This is how we can free our love from fear and possessiveness. By creating a healing biotope we can collectively claim our right and our responsibility to steward a place in which we can heal our souls.

In the last few months I had the honor of accompanying a young Gazan woman who fled her home in a search of a new life. Her name is Haneen—which means longings in Arabic. I am in awe of her spirit and touched by the depth of our connection—sharing so intimately what we love, our dreams, our family stories, our friends, our fears and losses, our traumas, our sexual desires, and our spiritual experiences. When a Palestinian woman and an Israeli woman find this level of love and connection, the possibilities for personal and global healing expand. Are we an Israeli and a Palestinian coming together or are we two women finding



Photo by Cat Zavis

our humanness that is beyond any nationality? How many Palestinians believe that there is no Israeli that is really trustworthy? How many Israelis believe that there is no Palestinian who is really trustworthy? Can it be a base for a new adventure—coming together with more people to create a model for a healed culture based on our humanness? Could we see this search for home as an opportunity to create something together that will inspire many others? In what way will the historic trauma heal through us? Once Haneen asked me: “Do you have this feeling sometimes that your soul is communicating with you, wishing you to be somewhere, not knowing where, but giving you a glimpse of this other reality?” Yes. I know this feeling when I have no other choice but following the calling of my soul—even when it is about risking everything for the sake of healing.

Haneen and I co-created a quality of connection and safety that nourished both of us. A functioning healing biotope is always about connections. Its power comes from the sense of connection between its members, the sense of connection with the divine point that exists in every human being, and the sense of connection with all that lives. It is a nature reserve in which humans are not the destroyer of nature but the ones who support the regeneration of the ecosystem and it is a place where the holiness of life can shine through. A healing biotope is like a micro cosmos or a hologram. When a small group of people comes together they collectively hold all the light and shadow of humanity. This kind of community calls upon us to be ready to engage in healing the structures of separation that we integrate within ourselves.

This readiness to show up is expressed by the

phrase “Hineni—Here I am” that appears 178 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is uttered most often in response to God asking “Where are you?”, but it is also spoken from one individual to another. This question: “Where are you?” was first asked from God to Adam in the Garden of Eden. According to the story, Adam’s response to this question was to hide! It was the first hiding in the long history of humanity’s hiding. Rabbi Shneur Zalman (an eighteenth-century Hasidic Rabbi who was also my great, great, great grandfather) taught that God wasn’t seeking Adam’s coordinates with this question, but offering Adam an opportunity for a dialogue with his Creator. He asked him—where are you innerly, and where are

you in connection to me? Sometimes when I hear the birds I think that they ask each other—“Where are you?” and answer zif zif: “Here I am”. Like the birds—whenever we ask somebody where are you—we ask it in order to establish contact. When we answer truthfully,

there is a chance to get closer and fly together. A healing biotope is a place where we don’t need to hide anymore, not from God, not from other fellow humans, not from our lovers, and not from ourselves.

Being ready to answer the question—“Where are you?” with the answer—“Here I am” is already a big step of spiritual growth and presence. Another step is when a group is able to answer this existential question with the answer: “Here we are”—we are connected with each other and with our vision so deeply that we know our place in the evolution of life toward unity. Then, we can start moving together as one. Answering “Here we are” might not be glorious in the beginning. We might

“A healing biotope is a place where we don’t need to hide anymore, Not from god, not from other fellow humans, not from our lovers, and not from ourselves.”

We will find home in the sense of truth and trust and mutual support that we will develop between us.



find ourselves far away from our ideal destination and yet—if we will hold our vision close to our hearts—we will be able to answer honestly—“Here we are”—we are not there yet—but we are on the right path. Having a vision of a healed earth and a healed society is like a GPS. We can find orientation if we have a clear direction of where we want to go and if we are honest about where we are right now.

In the same way that individuals need to find their embedment in a community, a community needs to find its embedment and growth through its position in a network of communities that shares the same goal of global healing. In this way, a functioning healing biotope is an open system. Its power comes both from the transformation process that its members

are ready to go through and also from this network of connection with other centers of transformation. I like to compare it to astronomical research that began in May, 2017. In this research the astronomers wanted to know more about the huge black hole that is in the middle of our galaxy. It is impossible to look directly at a black hole, but you can look at its event horizon—at the effect it has on its surrounding. To be able to do this, nine different observatories in different places around the world simultaneously focused their radio telescopes at the black hole. United together, the nine telescopes were able to give us insight into the possibility of cooperation between different centers around the earth. When they manage to be coherent and attuned with each other, we can better understand the center of

our galaxy. Processing the data gathered from this experiment will take around 2 years, but the first images and calculations are already available. The attempt to look at the core of our galaxy is similar to the attempt to look at the core of humanity. I can see a similar experiment in which nine healing biotopes in different places around the world simultaneously focus on the questions of our times, deploy people to be of service to the transformation that is needed while exploring the core of their humanness. When we manage to transform the human core in those experimental centers from fear to trust it might have an attraction power as strong as a black hole that causes the whole galaxy to dance around it. We will never know if we do not try!

I end with in an invitation to a common adventure:

Finding home will be our adventure and on the way home we will find home in each other.

We will find home in the connection to our longings and dreams.

We will find home in the sense of truth and trust and mutual support that we will develop between each other.

We will find home in traveling as pilgrims together, becoming intimate with the earth that holds us all.

We will find home while serving the emergence of other communities around the world.

Finding home will be our adventure. It might take a while. It might be sooner than you think.

We all come from a homeland. We all look for a home to land. They may not be the same place.

Our homeland will ask us to serve its healing. The home in which we will land will ask to heal us.

Through our healing we will heal our homeland. Healing will be our adventure. Healing will connect us to the whole. We will heal the heart of humanity. We will heal our sexuality. We will heal capitalism, colonialism, racism, nationalism, and all the other “isms”. We will dedicate ourselves to healing collective trauma. Finding home will be our adventure and we will find home as soon as we stop looking for home just for ourselves and start looking for a home for a new culture; saying readily: Here we are.



EMMA SHAM-BA AYALON was born in Israel and holds a vision of establishing a peace research village in the Middle East inspired by the healing biotope “Tamera” in Portugal. Emma came to Tamera for the first time in 2002 and since then has held peace pilgrimages, community courses, and study groups. Emma is a Rabbi, an artist, a poet, and a committed peace worker.



Unsplash/Patrick Fore

Animal Allies: Healing and Empowering Children

BRENDA PETERSON

MY IMAGINARY FRIEND REALLY LIVED. . . once,” the Latina teenage girl began, head bent, her fingers twisting her long, black hair.

She stood in the circle of other adolescents gathered in my Seattle Arts and Lectures storytelling class.

Here were kids from all over the city—every color and class, all strangers one to another. Over the next two weeks we would become

a fierce tribe, telling our own and our tribe’s story. Our first assignment was to introduce our imaginary friends from childhood. This shy fourteen-year-old girl, Sarah, had struck me on the first day because she always sat next to me, as if under my wing, and though her freckles and stylish clothes suggested she was a popular girl, her demeanor showed the detachment of someone deeply preoccupied. She never met my eye, nor did she join in the first few days of storytelling when the ten boys

and four girls were regaling one another with favorite superheroes.

So far, their story lines portrayed the earth as an environmental wasteland, a ruined shell hardly shelter to anything animal or human. After three days of stories set on an earth besieged by climate change, environmental evacuees, and barren of nature, I made a rule: No more characters or animals could die this first week. I asked if someone might imagine a living world, one that survives even our species. It was on this third day of group storytelling that Sarah jumped into the circle and told her story:

“My imaginary friend is called Angel now because she’s in heaven, but her real name was Katie,” Sarah began. “She was my best friend from fourth to tenth grade. She had freckles like me and brown hair and more boyfriends—sometimes five at a time—because Katie said, ‘I *like* to be confused!’ She was a real sister too and we used to say we’d be friends for life. . .”

Sarah stopped, gave me a furtive glance and then gulped in a great breath of air like someone drowning, about to go down. Her eyes fixed inward, her voice dropped to a monotone.

“Then one day last year in L.A, Katie and I were walking home from school and a red sports car came up behind us. Someone yelled, ‘Hey, Katie!’ She turned . . . and he blew her head off. A bullet grazed my skull, too, and I blacked out. When I woke up, Katie was gone, dead forever.” Sarah stopped, stared down at her feet and murmured in that same terrible monotone, “Cops never found her murderer, case is closed.”

The kids shifted and took a deep breath, although Sarah herself was barely breathing at all. I did not know what to do with her story;

she had offered it to a group of kids she had known but three days. It explained her self-imposed exile during lunch hours and while waiting for the bus.

All I knew was that she’d brought this most important story of her life into the circle of storytellers and it could not be ignored as if *she* were a case to be closed. This story lived in her, would define and shape her young life. Because she had given it to us, we needed to witness and receive—and perhaps tell it back to her in the ancient tradition of tribal call and response.

“This story lived in her, would define and shape her young life.”

“Listen,” I told the group, “We’re going to talk story the way they used to long ago when people sat around at night in circles just like this one. That was a time when we still listened to animals and

trees and didn’t think ourselves so alone in this world. Now we’re going to carry out jungle justice and find Katie’s killer. We’ll call him to stand trial before our tribe. All right? Who wants to begin the story?”

All the superheroes joined this quest. Nero the White Wolf asked to be a scout. Unicorn, with her truth-saying horn, was declared judge. Another character joined the hunt: Fish, whose translucent belly was a shining “soul mirror” that could reveal one’s true nature.

A fierce commander of this hunt was Rat, whose army of computerized comrades could read brain waves and call down lightning lasers as weapons. Rat began the questioning and performed the early detective work. We determined that the murderer was a man named Carlos, a drug lord who used local gangs to deal cocaine. At a party Carlos had misinterpreted Katie’s videotaping her friends dancing as witnessing a big drug deal. For that, Rat said, “This dude decides Katie’s to go down. So

yo, man, he offs her without a second thought.”

Bad dude, indeed, this Carlos. And who was going to play Carlos now that all the tribe knew his crime? I took on the role. As I told my story, I felt my face hardening into a contempt that carried me far away from these young pursuers, deep into the Amazon jungle where Rat and his computer armies couldn’t follow, where all their space-age equipment had to be shed until there was only hand-to-hand simple fate.

In the Amazon, the kids changed without effort, in an easy shape-shifting to their animal selves. Suddenly there were no more superheroes with intergalactic weapons—there was instead Jaguar and Snake, Fish, and Pink Dolphin. We were now a tribe of animals, pawing, running, invisible in our jungle, eyes shining and seeing in the night. Carlos canoed the mighty river, laughing—because he did not know he had animals tracking him.

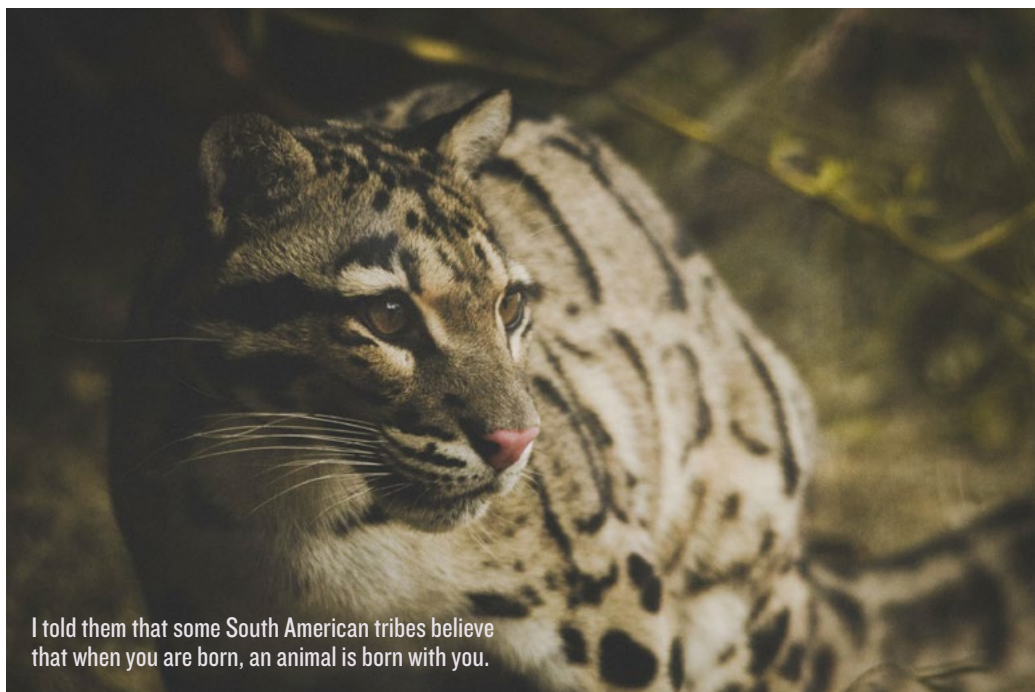
All through the story, I’d kept my eye on Sarah. The flat affect and detachment I’d first seen in her was the deadness Sarah carried, the violence that had hollowed out her inside, the friend who haunted her imagination. But now her face was alive, responding to each animal’s report of tracking Carlos. She hung on the words, looking suddenly very young, like a small girl eagerly awaiting her turn to enter the circling jump rope.

“Hey, I’m getting away from you!” I said, snarling as I imagined Carlos would. I paddled my canoe and gave a harsh laugh, “I’ll escape, easy!”

“No!” Sarah shouted. “Let *me* tell it!”

“Tell it!” her tribe shouted.

“Well, Carlos only thinks he’s escaping,” Sarah smiled, waving her hands. “He’s escaped from so many he’s harmed before. But I call out ‘FISH!’ And Fish comes. He swims alongside the canoe and grows bigger, bigger until at last, Carlos turns and sees this HUGE river monster swimming right alongside him. That mean man is afraid because suddenly Fish turns his



I told them that some South American tribes believe that when you are born, an animal is born with you.

belly up to Carlos’s face. Fish forces him to look into the soul mirror. Carlos sees everyone he’s ever killed and all the people who loved them and got left behind.

“Carlos sees Katie and me and what he’s done to us. He sees everything and he knows his soul is black. And he really doesn’t want to die now because he knows then he’ll stare into his soul mirror forever. But Fish makes him keep looking until Carlos starts screaming he’s sorry, he’s so sorry. Then...” Sarah shouted, “Fish *eats* him!”

The animals roared and cawed and congratulated Sarah for calling Fish to mirror a murderer's soul before taking jungle justice.

Class had ended, but no one wanted to leave. We wanted to stay in our jungle, stay within our animals—and so we did. I asked the kids to close their eyes and call their animals to accompany them home. I told them that some South American tribes believe that when you are born, an animal is born with you. This animal protects and lives alongside you even if it's far away in an Amazon jungle—it came into the world at the same time you did. And your animal dies with you to guide you back into the spirit world.

The kids decided to go home and make animal masks, returning the next day wearing the faces of their chosen animal. When they came into class the next day it was as if we never left the Amazon. Someone dimmed the lights. There were drawings everywhere of jaguars and chimps and snakes. Elaborate animal masks had replaced the super heroes who began this tribal journey. We sat behind our masks in a circle with the lights low and there was an acute, alert energy running between us, as eyes met behind animal faces.

I realized that I, who grew up in the forest wild, who first memorized the earth with my hands, have every reason to feel this familiar animal resonance. But many of these teenagers, especially minorities, have barely been in the woods; in fact, many inner city kids are *afraid* of nature. They would not willingly sign up for an Outward Bound program or backpacking trek; they don't think about recycling

in a world they believe already ruined and in their imaginations abandoned for intergalactic, nomad futures.

These kids are not environmentalists who worry about saving nature. And yet, when imagining an Amazon forest too thick for weapons to penetrate, too primitive for their superhero battles, they return instinctively to their animal



In that story stretching between us and the Amazon, we connected with those animals and their spirits.

selves. These are animals they have only seen in zoos or on television. Yet there is a profound identification, an ease of inhabiting another species that portends great hope for our own species survival. Not because nature is “out there” to be saved or sanctioned, but because nature is *in* them. The ancient, green world has never left us though we have long ago left the forest.

As we told our Amazon stories over the next week, the rainforest thrived in that sterile classroom. Lights low, surrounded by serpents, the jaguar clan, the elephants, I’d as often hear growls, hisses, and howls as words.

They may be young, but kids’ memories and alliances with the animals are very old. By telling their own animal stories they are practicing ecology at its most profound and healing level. Story as ecology—it’s so simple, something we’ve forgotten. In our environmental wars the emphasis has been on saving species, not *becoming* them. It is our own spiritual relationship to animals that must evolve. Any change begins with imagining ourselves in a new way.

But children, like some adults, know that the real world stretches farther than what we can see. That’s why they shift easily between visions of our tribal past and our future worlds. The limits of the adult world are there for these teenagers, but they still have a foot in the vast inner magic of childhood. It is this magical connection I called upon when I asked the kids on the last day of our class to perform the Dance of the Animals.

Slowly, in rhythm to the deep, bell-like beat of my Northwest Native drum, each animal entered the circle and soon the dance sounded like this: *Boom, step, twirl, and slither and stalk and snarl and chirp and caw, caw. Glide, glow, growl, and whistle and howl and shriek and trill and hiss, hiss.* We danced as the humid, lush jungle filled the room.

In that story stretching between us and the Amazon, we connected with those animals and their spirits. In return, we were complete—with animals as soul mirrors. We remembered who we were, by allowing the animals inside us to survive.

Children’s imagination is a primal force, just as strong as lobbying efforts and boycotts and endangered species acts. When children claim another species as not only their imaginary friends, but also as the animal within them—an ally—doesn’t that change the outer world?

The dance is not over as long as we have our animal partners. When the kids left our last class, they still fiercely wore their masks. I was told that even on the bus they stayed deep in their animal character. I like to imagine those strong, young animals out there now in this wider jungle. I believe that Rat will survive the inner-city gangs; that Chimp will find his characteristic comedy even as his parents deal with divorce; I hope that Unicorn will always remember her mystical truth-telling horn.

And as for Sarah, she joined the Jaguar clan, elected as the first girl-leader over much boy-growling. As Sarah left our jungle, she reminded me, “Like jaguar . . . I can still see in the dark.” ●



BRENDA PETERSON'S over 20 books include *Duck and Cover*, a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, and the recent memoir, *I Want to Be Left Behind: Finding Rapture Here on Earth*, selected as a “Top Ten Best Non-Fiction Book” by Christian Science Monitor and “Great Read/Indie Next” by independent booksellers. “Animal

Allies” originally appeared in Peterson’s essay collection, *Nature and Other Mothers*. Her new books just out for kids are *WILD ORCA* and *LOBOS: A Wolf Family Returns Home*, which has just been long-listed for the Green Earth Book Award for children’s literature. BrendaPetersonBooks.com

We Need an Ecological Civilization Before It's Too Late

JEREMY LENT

In the face of climate breakdown and ecological overshoot, alluring promises of “green growth” are no more than magical thinking. We need to restructure the fundamentals of our global cultural/economic system to cultivate an “ecological civilization”: one that prioritizes the health of living systems over short-term wealth production.

WE’VE NOW BEEN WARNED BY THE world’s leading climate scientists that we have just twelve years to limit climate catastrophe. The UN’s International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [has put the world on notice](#) that going from a 1.5° to 2.0° C rise in temperature above pre-industrial levels would have disastrous consequences across the board, with unprecedented flooding, drought, ocean devastation, and famine.

Meanwhile, the world’s current policies [have us on track](#) for more than 3° increase by the end of this century, and climate scientists publish dire warnings that amplifying feedbacks could [make things far worse](#) than even these projections, and thus [place at risk](#) the very continuation of our civilization. We need, [according to the IPCC](#), “rapid, far-reaching and



unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.” But what exactly does that mean?

Last fall, at the [Global Climate Action Summit](#) (GCAS) in San Francisco, luminaries such as Governor Jerry Brown, Michael Bloomberg, and Al Gore gave their version of what’s needed with [an ambitious report](#) entitled “Unlocking the Inclusive Growth Story of the 21st Century by the New Climate Economy.” It trumpets a [New Growth Agenda](#): through enlightened strategic initiatives, they claim, it’s possible to transition to a low-carbon economy that could generate millions more jobs, raise trillions of dollars for green investment, and lead to higher global GDP growth.

Now, in early 2019, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other progressives are leading the call for a [Green New Deal](#): a bold plan for sweeping economic and political reforms, envisioning decarbonizing the entire U.S. economy, a federal jobs guarantee, large-scale public investments, and a just transition away from fossil fuels. Within the current parameters of U.S. electoral politics, it’s a courageous agenda and worthy of wholehearted support.

But even the Green New Deal, while overwhelmingly preferable to the Republican

Party's malfeasance or the mainstream Democratic Party's torpor, is utterly insufficient to respond to the crisis facing our civilization. Trying to fix the current system with a few adjustments—even those proposed by the Green New Deal—risks turning a blind eye to [the fundamental drivers](#) propelling civilization toward collapse, and ultimately deflects attention from the profound structural changes that our global economic system must make if we hope to bequeath a flourishing society to future generations.

ECOLOGICAL OVERSHOOT

That's because even the climate emergency is merely a harbinger of other existential threats looming over humanity as a result of ecological overshoot—the fact that we're depleting the earth's natural resources at a faster rate than they can be replenished. As long as government policies emphasize growing GDP as a

national priority, and as long as transnational corporations [relentlessly pursue greater shareholder returns](#) by ransacking the earth, we will continue accelerating toward global catastrophe.

Currently, our civilization is running at [40% above its sustainable capacity](#). We're rapidly depleting the earth's [forests](#), [animals](#), [insects](#), [fish](#), [freshwater](#), even the [topsoil](#) we require to grow our crops. We've already transgressed three of the [nine planetary boundaries](#) that define humanity's safe operating space, and yet global GDP is expected to [more than double](#) by mid-century, with potentially irreversible and devastating consequences. By 2050, it's estimated, [there will be more plastic](#) in the world's oceans than fish. Last year, over fifteen thousand scientists from 184 countries [issued an ominous warning](#) to humanity that time is running out: "Soon it will be too late," they wrote, "to shift course away from our failing trajectory."



Techno-optimists, including many of the GCAS dignitaries, like to dismiss these warnings with talk of “green growth”—essentially decoupling GDP growth from increased use of resources. While that would be a laudable goal, a number of studies have shown that it’s **simply not feasible**. Even the most wildly aggressive assumptions for greater efficiency would still result in consuming global resources **at double the sustainable capacity** by mid-century.

A desperate situation indeed, but one that need not lead to despair. In fact, there is a scenario where we can turn around this rush to the precipice and redirect humanity to a thriving future on a regenerated earth. It would, however, require us to rethink some of the sacrosanct beliefs of our modern world, beginning with the unquestioning reliance on **perpetual economic growth** within a global capitalist system directed by transnational corporations **driven exclusively by the need** to increase shareholder value for their investors.

In short, we need to change the basis of our global civilization. We must move from a civilization based on wealth production to one based on the health of living systems: an ecological civilization.

AN ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION

The crucial idea behind an ecological civilization is that our society needs to change at a level far deeper than most people realize. It’s not just a matter of investing in renewables, eating less meat, and driving an electric car. The intrinsic framework of our global social and economic organization needs to be transformed.

And this will only happen when enough people recognize the destructive nature of our current mainstream culture and reject it for one that is life-affirming—embracing values that emphasize growth in the quality of life rather than in the consumption of goods and services.

“The driving principle of enterprise would be that we are all interconnected in the web of life—and long-term human prosperity is therefore founded on a healthy Earth.”

A change of such magnitude would be an epochal event. There have been only two occasions in history when radical dislocations led to a transformation of virtually every

aspect of the human experience: the Agricultural Revolution that began about twelve thousand years ago, and the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century. If our civilization is to survive and prosper through the looming crises of this century, we will need a transformation of our values, goals, and collective behavior on a similar scale.

An ecological civilization would be based on the core principles that sustain living systems coexisting stably in natural ecologies. Insights into how ecologies self-organize offer a model for how we could organize human society in ways that could permit sustainable abundance. Organisms prosper when they develop multiple symbiotic relationships, wherein each party to a relationship both takes and gives reciprocally. In an ecology, energy flows are balanced and one species’ waste matter becomes nourishment for another. Entities within an ecology scale fractally, with microsystems existing as integral parts of larger systems to form a coherent whole. In a well-functioning ecosystem, each organism thrives by optimizing for its own existence within a network of relationships that enhances the common good. The inherent resilience caused by these dynamics

means that—without human disruption—ecosystems can maintain their integrity for many thousands, and sometimes millions, of years.

In practice, transitioning to an ecological civilization would mean restructuring some of the fundamental institutions driving our current civilization to destruction. In place of an economy based on perpetual growth in GDP, it would institute one that emphasized quality of life, using alternative measures such as a [Genuine Progress Indicator](#) to gauge success. Economic systems would be based on respect for individual dignity and fairly rewarding each person's contribution to the greater good, while ensuring that nutritional, housing, healthcare, and educational needs were fully met for everyone. Transnational corporations [would be fundamentally reorganized](#) and made accountable to the communities they purportedly serve, to optimize human and environmental wellbeing rather than shareholder profits. Locally owned cooperatives would become the default organizational structure. Food systems would be designed to emphasize local production using [state-of-the-art agroecology practices](#) in place of fossil fuel-based fertilizer and pesticides, while manufacturing would prioritize [circular flows](#) where efficient re-use of waste products is built into the process from the outset.

In an ecological civilization, the local community would be the basic building block of society. Face-to-face interaction would regain ascendance as a crucial part of human flourishing, and each community's relationship with others would be based on principles of mutual



An ecological civilization offers a path forward that may be the only true hope for our descendants to thrive on Earth into the distant future.

respect, learning, and reciprocity. Technological innovation would still be encouraged, but would be prized for its effectiveness in enhancing the vitality of living systems rather than minting billionaires. The driving principle of enterprise would be that we are all interconnected in the web of life—and long-term human prosperity is therefore founded on a healthy Earth.

CULTIVATING A FLOURISHING FUTURE

In the Fall 2017 issue of *Tikkun*, David Korten wrote a seminal article, “[Ecological Civilization and the New Enlightenment](#),” where he described the unfolding collapse of three inter-related global systems—environmental, social, and governance—and called for a new foundational narrative based on a sense of Sacred Life and Living Earth. “We need a multitude of voices and actors,” he wrote, “clearly and explicitly connecting these potentially mutually reinforcing and amplifying trends.”

While the Ecological Civilization vision may seem a distant dream to those who are

transfixed by the daily frenzy of current events, innumerable pioneering organizations around the world are already planting the seeds for the cultural metamorphosis Korten has called for. A visionary example of this new narrative in action is the [Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution](#) (ESRA) proposed by Michael Lerner and the Network of Spiritual Progressives, along with its call for a world based on a [New Bottom Line](#) such that success is measured not by money and power, but rather by measurements such as love, kindness, generosity, justice, sustainability, treating each other as embodiments of the sacred, and responding to the universe with awe, wonder, and radical amazement.

Other transformative actions and ideas are meanwhile being propagated around the world. In China, President Xi Jinping [has declared](#) an ecological civilization to be a central part of his long-term vision for the country. In Bolivia and Ecuador, the related values of *buen vivir* and *sumak kawsay* ('good living') are written into the constitution, and in Africa the concept of *ubuntu* ("I am because we are") is a widely-discussed principle of human relations. In Europe, hundreds of scientists, politicians, and policy-makers recently [co-authored a call](#) for the EU to plan for a sustainable future in which human and ecological well-being is prioritized over GDP.

Examples of large-scale thriving cooperatives, such as [Mondragon](#) in Spain, demonstrate that it's possible for companies to provide effectively for human needs without utilizing a shareholder-based profit model. Think tanks such as [The Next System Project](#), [The Global Citizens Initiative](#), and the [P2P Foundation](#) are laying down parameters for the political, economic, and social organization of an ecological civilization. Meanwhile, in addition to visionaries such as [Michael Lerner](#) and [David Korten](#), other trailblazing authors such as [Kate](#)

[Raworth](#) and [Mary Evelyn Tucker](#) have written extensively on how to reframe the way we think about our economic, political, and spiritual path forward.

As the mainstream juggernaut drives our current civilization inexorably toward the breaking point, it's easy to dismiss these steps toward a new form of civilization as too insignificant to make a difference. However, as the current system begins to break down in the coming years, increasing numbers of people around the world will come to realize that a fundamentally different alternative is needed. Whether they turn to movements based on prejudice and fear or join in a vision for a better future for humanity depends, to a large extent, on the ideas available to them.

One way or another, humanity is headed for the third great transformation in its history: either in the form of global collapse or a metamorphosis to a new foundation for sustainable flourishing. An ecological civilization offers a path forward that may be the only true hope for our descendants to thrive on Earth into the distant future. ●



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Wrapped in the Flag of Israel

Review

KEITH P. FELDMAN

Review of Smadar Lavie's book: *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture*, revised edition, University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

In May 2018, network news and social media alike broadcast a grotesque juxtaposition: split screens of pomp and circumstance at the opening ceremony for the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, and, some fifty miles away inside of Gaza, Israel's massacre of Palestinians during the Great March for Return, leaving scores dead and hundreds more injured. Much has already been made of the baleful forms of cruelty on display in this moment, but one modest thread warrants additional reflection, especially given the state's newly-codified exclusions of non-Jewish citizens into law. At the Embassy, a young female Ethiopian Israeli performer, Hagit Yaso, famous for her stint on *Kokhav Nolad* ("A Star is Born"), sang Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," an ethereal song of worship that, in Yaso's rendering, mixed the original English lyrics with evocative Hebrew translation. U.S. Ambassador David Friedman introduced Yaso this way:

In 1980, a Jewish man of 19 was married to a Jewish woman of 17 in Ethiopia. That night, the married couple shed all indicia of their Jewish heritage and set forth on foot



Performer Hagit Yaso sings Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah."

on a lengthy trek through the desert til they reached the Sudan. There they were led to a remote airfield and taken on a military aircraft to Israel. Having been rescued, they settled in the town of Sderot on the Gaza periphery, and years later they were kept safe from incoming rockets by the Iron Dome, an Israeli missile defense project financed by the United States. One of their daughters went on to become a successful singer and she is here with us today, to sing 'Hallelujah,' the great word of praise coined by King David, the first Jewish king of Israel.

Against the backdrop of Israel's active military operation in Gaza—to say nothing of its ongoing policy of detention and deportation for tens of thousands of asylum seekers from the Sudan and Eritrea—Ambassador Friedman frames Yaso's performance through the braided

narratives of salvation, security, and divine right. Yaso's avowedly non-European story is called upon to provide a liberal patina to this otherwise cruel event. What are we to make of this high-profile entanglement of raced and gendered inclusion with kinetic, diplomatic, and legal forms of sovereign violence?

One place to start is the debate about the place of intersectionality in struggles for justice in Palestine and Israel, including in the pages of *Tikkun*. A concept coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw and forged in the crucible of U.S.-based Black feminist organizing and activism, the transit of intersectionality to seemingly distant sites and spaces, including especially in Israel and Palestine, has sharpened analytical frameworks and widened the possible grounds for solidarity and resistance. Recent issues of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* and *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* have focused on the intersections of racial and sexual politics, nationalism, and decolonization, while the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) Student Network recently released a statement on intersectionality. This work interrogates the forces, policies, and practices that constellate systems of power and violence, including race, gender, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism. It calls upon intersectional frames to narrate the mundane texture of embodied experience and the felt vulnerabilities differentiated by race, class, and gender. Some queer and indigenous studies scholars have questioned whether an intersectional heuristic effectively problematizes matters of identity, subjectivity, or settler sovereignty; while others have raised the stakes of thinking through structures of oppression and practices of resistance—rather than identity—as the locus of intersections.

Smadar Lavie's award-winning *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture*, whose expanded second edition was released in summer 2018, is a



Image courtesy of the University of Nebraska Press.

significant contribution to this debate, providing crucial insight into Israel's particular agglomeration of race, gender, nationalism, and neoliberalism. Lavie is the author and editor of several important books of Middle East anthropology and a formative scholar-activist in the burgeoning field of Mizrahi studies. Deploying what Audre Lorde once called "orchestrated furies," *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel* couples sophisticated concept-work with Lavie's own blistering testimony as a Mizrahi single mother thrown into the welfare bureaucracy by the Israeli state. The book conveys what Lavie terms the "jagged edges" of embodied experience and the fierce analytic value of an ethnographic "I." As she writes at the outset of the book, "I became my own informant." Lavie draws from US Feminist of Color thought, though not simply for an intersectional toolkit,

nor for an aspirational horizon of cross-racial coalitions of resistance, nor to map potential transnational lines of solidarity. Rather, Lavie is interested in revealing the somatically-experienced predicaments of everyday intimate interactions with a state that radically delimits the capacity for poor Mizrahi women to perform and sustain agency.

Mizrahim are approximately 50% of the Israeli population, while Ashkenazim are about 30% and Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are about 20%. Yet, as Lavie argues, Mizrahim are a “majoritarian group that cannot exercise majoritarian rights.” Political Zionism has historically limited access to the polity for non-Jews and has prioritized Ashkenazi Jews and their experiences and needs. The state increasingly displays Mizrahi and other non-Ashkenazi forms of cultural difference (such as Yaso’s performance) without attaching them to a policy of redistribution; such limited modes of multiculturalism are plainly unable to curtail either the state’s propensity for sovereign violence or the routinized suffering enacted by its bureaucracy. The state reproduces a form of institutionalized racism that serves, through serpentine processes of what Lavie provocatively terms “bureaucratic torture,” to obligate those it stigmatizes to nevertheless embrace its nationalist presentiments. Witness, for instance, how the Druze are obligated to serve in the IDF even as they are treated like second-class citizens, a stigma now codified in the new Nation-State law.

Lavie reminds us that the foundation for Israel’s bureaucracy was an Ashkenazi racial formation. Until 1977, with Menachim Begin’s election, the bureaucratic structures of the state were generally maintained by Ashkenazi elites. “Still today,” Lavie argues,

“disenfranchisement, poverty, Arab phenotype, Arabic accent, and Arab name discrimination are still integral to the lives of Mizrahi women.” Yet, as the second edition’s afterword elaborates further, with the specter of war haunting everyday life, poor Mizrahi women can’t help but to embrace a nationalist project that reproduces their political marginality. “In striving to prove themselves to be just as Israeli as the Ashkenazi elite,” writes Lavie, “many Mizrahi are the staunchest supporters of Israeli ultra-nationalism and, by extension, all of Israel’s wars against its neighboring

Arab states and Palestinians—from the 1948 Nakba to Gaza 2014.”

Wrapped in the Flag of Israel is a rigorous refusal of those desires common on the Euro-American Left to see agency as integral to the life activity of those, like Mizrahi single mothers, who sit at the vertex of intersecting oppressions. Rather, “the mothers’ totalistic love for the state of Israel nullified the agency im-

manent in that act of identity politics.” In the bureaucratic functioning of a state that conceives of its citizens through the frame of “chosen people, chosen land,” and that dispenses its minimal social safety net through a “divinity of chance,” Mizrahi single mothers are locked out of any substantive agential politics capable of articulating dissent. Lavie calls this the work of “GendeRace,” “the calcified amalgamation of gender and race that, in the case of Israel, have become foundational classifications.” GendeRace “petrifies the amalgamation of ‘the intersection.’” Mizrahi protests, like the Single Mothers’ March in 2003 led by Vicki Knafo, raise the visibility of anti-Mizrahi racism and its links to neoliberal capitalism and settler violence before being squelched by a



“pincer-like sequential strategy: entangle leaders in a lethal web of bureaucracy and create a national crisis through military spectacle.” In 2003, 2011, and 2014, as Lavie explains in the new edition, Israeli military actions against ostensibly “external” threats shifted the attention of the media and elites alike and precluded many organizations and activists from linking their demands to combat intra-Jewish racism with demands to end the occupation of Palestine. The Israeli government’s recent curtailment of protests against the incarceration and deportation of African asylum seekers followed a similar pattern.

In this crucial way, the book conceptualizes intra-Jewish racism as a constitutive feature of Israel, one that routinely calibrates the capacity of differential privilege and stigma to be leveraged in ways that winnow away the unpredictable dispensation of a diminishing social safety net. In searing prose, Lavie illuminates how modalities of Mizrahi social protest can at once seek a more equitable distribution of the social wage and reinscribe non-Jewish difference as the state’s paramount exclusion. Securing the state against the demographic Palestinian threat trumps all, including the capacity to articulate substantive demands for social equality.

In *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel*, there are no anti-racist saviors and the agency of identity politics is not a given. GendeRace functions not so much as a dimension of the Left or the Right. After all, “it was the socialist Zionist left that advanced the ideologies and policies of intra-Jewish racism.” Rather, GendeRace is a “a primordial truism.... Rather than moving through it, people are stuck.” The differential distribution of life chances that racism ceaselessly works to legitimate casts the non-Jew as excluded and obdurate, the vessel of a divine as much as a demographic threat. While Ashkenazi feminists have readily mobilized against

Israel’s violation of Palestinian human rights, they have done so, Lavie argues, without engaging Mizrahi women’s issues, in no small measure due to the latter’s right-wing political orientation. At the same time, Lavie demonstrates that when Israel-Palestine serves as the sole binary framework for understanding the highly differentiated lifeworlds and life chances entangled in the region, we miss the tragically foreshortened horizons of possibility for social transformation. In problematizing the left-right binary alongside the Israel-Palestine binary, Lavie calls neither for an anti-politics nor an abdication of the field of the political to the status quo, but rather simply for a more capacious rendering of reality, jagged edges and all.

In short, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel* palpably renders the somatic violence of neoliberalism, the gendered racialization of the settler state, and the capacity of the state to incorporate its internalized racial others over and against its external threats. The book’s “orchestrated rage” and ethnographic rigor slice through the propensity among Left scholars and activists in the United States to seize on any glimmer of possible transnational solidarity and cross-racial coalition while missing the far more troubling and challenging realities, not only of inter-group animus, but also, and more importantly, of the structural obstacles that radically delimit the mundane horizons of action. Naming that pain, as bell hooks long ago argued, must be a foundational dimension of any liberatory future. ●



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50 Years of Feminist Poetry: Alicia Suskin Ostriker and Elaine Feinstein

Review

JULIE R. ENSZER

Waiting for the Light

Alicia Suskin Ostriker

University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017

82 pages, \$15.95

The Clinic, Memory: New and Selected Poems

Elaine Feinstein

Sheep Meadow Press, 2018

181 pages, \$19.95

In the first days of 2018, the secular new year, my Facebook feed filled with images of the year rendered as two zero *chai* (the word *chai* in Hebrew is spelled with two letters which are associated with the numbers 18). Friends and colleagues posted messages with uplifting wishes for a life-filled year; progressives responded with messages to go out and vote, and feminists hoped, cautiously at times, for another electoral year like 1992. The year two zero *chai* marks fifty years since 1968, a year of extraordinary activism in the burgeoning Women's Liberation Movement. As a decade,

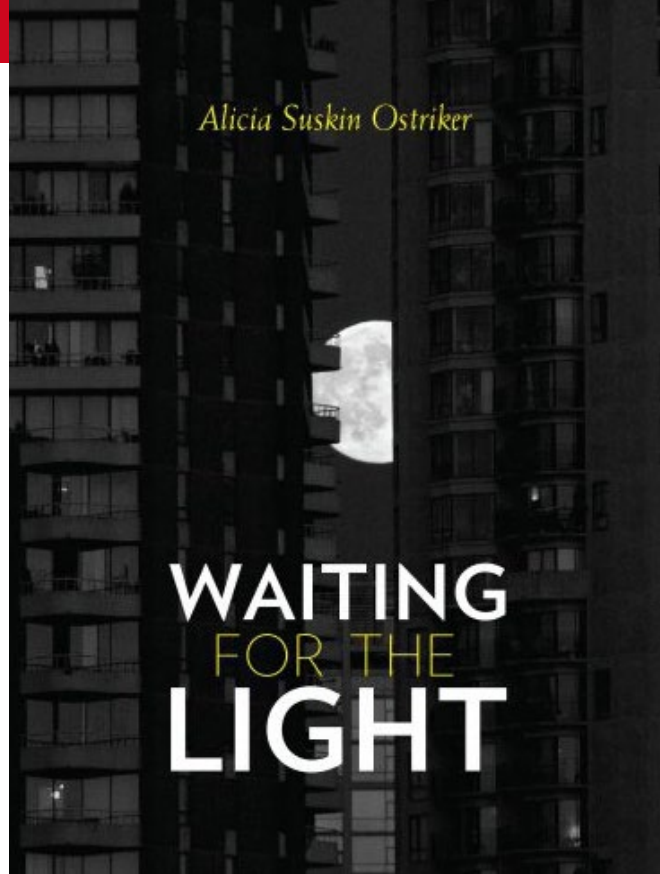


Image courtesy of University of Pittsburgh Press.

the 1960s marked a profound change of world, to use Adrienne Rich's phrase, for women writing poetry. Adrienne Rich's *Snapshots of a Daughter in Law* published in 1963; Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* in 1966; Diane Wakowski's *Inside the Blood Factory* published in 1968. These three books, among others, portended an explosion of poetry by women that expressed the passion, vision, fervor, triumphs, and disappointments of women's liberation. In the midst of these heady times, Alicia Ostriker and Elaine Feinstein began their work. Feinstein published translations of poems by the great Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva in 1961 and her first collection of poetry, *In a Green Eye*, in 1966. *Songs*, Alicia Ostriker's first collection of poetry, published in 1969. Now both poets have new books that offer readers vibrant histories of political activism and with a powerful intersectional and international consciousness for resistance.

In *Waiting for the Light*, Alicia Ostriker walks through the streets of Manhattan in the same

spirit as Walt Whitman and Frank O'Hara, celebrating the vibrancy of urban spaces and the work of the poet in the world. While Ostriker grounds the poems of this collection with sharp observations of contemporary life, the questions these poems ask are philosophical and searching.

The title poem begins with a direct address to O'Hara: "Frank, we have become an urban species." A few stanzas later, she confesses,

It is a Thursday morning, Frank, and I feel
rather acutely alive but I need a thing of beauty
or a theory of beauty to reconcile me

to the lumps of garbage I cannot love enclosed
in these tough shiny black plastic bags

Note the parallel Ostriker draws between the thing and the theory, either will reconcile her to the garbage.

The city imbues vitality into the speaker of these poems—and presents challenges. Ultimately, beauty emerges in the urban landscape from juxtapositions. "[T]he bulky slimy truth of waste" attacks "our aesthetic sense" leading readers to seek with the speaker for beauties within the city and find "corniced dwellings," "hives of intimacies," "the blue veil," and the "string / of red taillights departing" searching relentlessly for a message. Ostriker simultaneously celebrates the city with Whitmanian excess and revels in the quotidian in dialogue with O'Hara. The poem lands with the final observation, "Waiting for the light feels like forever."

Light, waiting for it, observing it, reflecting on it, is the metaphor to which Ostriker returns again and again in these poems. Light "stabs me with joy" in these poems and illuminates mourning. Light brings meaning to the photographs that weave through the poems in this book, and light offers the contrast for the "dark

matter," which for Ostriker is both "the way every human and every atom / rushes through space wrapped in its invisible / halo" and the challenge of our current political moment.

Ostriker grapples with politics directly and obliquely in this collection. She considers the minimum wage in a ghazal and the consequences of rape in Afghanistan in a short, heart-breaking lyric. Perhaps the most moving portraits are the difficult, contradictory, and personal ones that Ostriker presents. In a meditation on Bangladesh offered by a cab driver, the interaction concludes with an awkward physical exchange:

He then undertakes a complicated mix
of bowing, smiling, and sighing, all at once,
but he is awkward. When I mirror his motion,
while handing over the two tens and three singles,
I too am awkward.



The city imbues vitality into the speaker of these poems—and presents challenges.

By voicing the awkwardness of contemporary life with political resonances, Ostriker invites readers to step into the complicated mix of living, to engage with care and compassion in spite of, or perhaps because of, the awkwardness that will inevitably ensue.

In the poem “Ghazal: America the Beautiful,” Ostriker offers a complicated meditation on the nature of nationalism and citizenship where the Nation is revealed as “divisible / by money by power by color by gender by sex” yet the speaker still sometimes puts her “hand tenderly on my heart / somehow or other still carried away by America.” In the meditative poem “Underground,” Ostriker juxtaposes libraries and archives with the Underground Railroad coming to the final two couplets:

for it is difficult to find words of hope regarding
decency and courage
while words of the unhealed wound are everywhere

while bodies continue bleeding, officials continue
denying, op-eds continue decrying
because the language of hope is underground.

The words of hope may be underground, the language of hope may be elusive in the contemporary moment, but Ostriker’s poems affirm that they are there for people searching for them.

Many poems in this collection demonstrate Ostriker’s ease with form. *Waiting for the Light* includes multiple ghazals, an acrostic, and a golden shovel. Form lends order to the questions Ostriker asks and also exposes the unease, the inequality, and the pain that she observes in the world. Poetic forms lend a brief shelter to the experiences in the world, but Ostriker equally embraces and explodes form as her subjects demand.

A series of three Q&A poems are woven into this collection. These poems take the title from

the querying nature of language and verbal exchanges, but their structure and explorations are profound. In the first in the collection, “Q&A: Red Red Rose” Ostriker begins, “When you take off your mask, what is your true address” then leaps to two questions of choice:

If you had a choice, which tree
would you like to be

Which Beethoven symphony

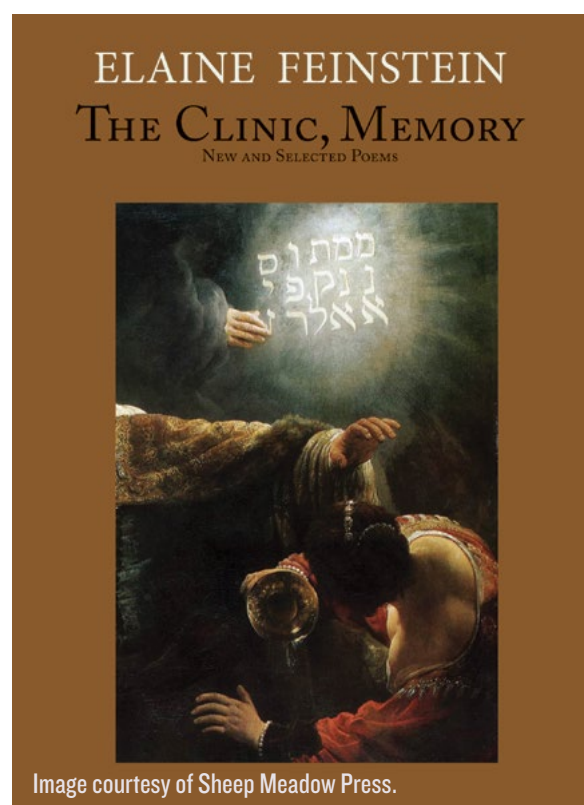
The childlike game of imagining oneself in other things emerges, but she turns quickly to adult questions, “Which is the most difficult of the Ten Commandments” and then, “Who is the one who hurt you the very most.” In “Q&A: Insurance,” the speaker asks, “If time is an arrow, what is its target” and “Are you satisfied with your detergent” and “Are you satisfied with your auto insurance” then concludes with this tercet:

When ecstasy approaches why do you resist
What are you afraid of
Can you please unbutton your shirt now

The banal, the profound, and the sensuous are all bound together in the poem as in the final Q&A poem. “Q&A: Reality” ends with this question, “Did the Stone Age end because of a lack of stones[.]” This seemingly simple question, almost childlike in its assertive query, captures the philosophical complexity that Ostriker evokes in *Waiting for the Light*. These Q&A poems unfold with creative and imaginative leaps, demonstrate the capaciousness of Ostriker as a poet. As much as the collection is waiting for the break of morning over the horizon or the light that illuminates darkness and mystery, the collection is waiting for the light at the end of a life, the light that ends an age, that light that exposes a lack.

Ostriker, a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, is well known in contemporary

poetry circles for her poems and her scholarship as well as to followers of Jewish literature. Her 2009 collection, *The Book of Seventy*, won the National Jewish Book Award in Poetry. Less known, possibly, to American readers is the work of Elaine Feinstein. Feinstein is a prodigious English writer and translator. In 2018, Sheep Meadow Press will publish her new and selected poems, *The Clinic, Memory*. *The Clinic, Memory* is a wonderful introduction to Feinstein's work.



Like Ostriker, Feinstein's poetry extends now across five decades and her themes dovetail with Ostriker's: domestic life, motherhood, feminism, Jewish experience, reworking of myth, and commodious engagements with an imperfect world. Feinstein published her first collection, *In a Green Eye*, in 1966 (Ostriker's *Songs* appeared in 1969). She has published more than a dozen collections of poetry since then as well as numerous novels, radio plays,

and translations. *The Clinic, Memory* provides an excellent overview of Feinstein's work over the decades as well as fifteen new poems.

Feinstein's poems are rich in detail of the English countryside, grounded in literary history, and wise and witty. Literary women fill these poems. Feinstein dreams of Amy Levy, "precocious, gifted girl, my nineteenth-century voice of Xanthippe," asking "Here it is my name that makes me strange. / A hundred years on, is it still the same?" She listens to Edith Piaf, "a tiny woman in a black dress, / with an audience ready to watch her collapse on stage," in Babraham observing "she learned to sell her ordinary life for applause." She imagines Marina Tsvetayeva visiting Anna Akhmatova in a dream: "Marina is / trudging through frozen mud[.]"

Her early poem about motherhood, "Mother Love," begins with the same grimness as other early feminist assessments:

You eat me, your
nights eat me
Once you took
haemoglobin and bone
out of my blood

The poem contains only a small sprinkling of affection and ends with further observances of the grotesque. Feinstein's stark assessments of women's lives resonate with other feminist poets writing during the past fifty years including Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Joan Larkin, Lucile Clifton, and Sharon Olds.

Since *The Clinic, Memory* gathers a lifetime of poems in a single volume, questions of age and aging arise organically; Feinstein exploits this structural condition. Selected poems from earlier volumes often end with a poem that considers aging. From her 1997 collection *Daylight*, Feinstein includes the poem "Mirror" with the observation that "A matron aunt

or stubborn father / these days looks out of the mirror.” From her 2010 collection *Cities*, she includes the poem “Long Life,” which begins:

Late summer. Sunshine. The eucalyptus tree.
It is a fortune beyond any deserving
to be still here, with no more than everyday worries,

The full volume opens with a poem about hair, “How can I reassure my dismayed self in the mirror / as a hank of hair comes away in the comb?” This prompts a meditation on history, both the history of the war with an image of “bewildered French women / with scalps exposed” because their “heads were shaved for sleeping with German soldiers” and her personal history of “the huge house we couldn’t afford” with

the raspberry
brambles and wild roses in the garden,
our library where my first poems took shape—
the terra cotta ceiling and sanded floor, where
young poets often came to sprawl and talk of their
messy lives, and the erotic charge

The opening salvo of “Hair” in *The Clinic, Memory* demonstrates the richness of Feinstein’s work. Her robust engagements with history and literature are grounded in precise observations of the world immediately around her. Alternately wry and earnest, Feinstein’s poems offer sharp observations on modern life. At the end of “Hair,” Feinstein observes “branches of bare trees catch November gold[;]” she is “suffused with extravagant happiness.” Feinstein’s “extravagant happiness,” like Ostriker’s, is earned through vibrant political engagements in the poems and in the world.

In a poem in the voice of Käthe Kollwitz, the German feminist and political artist, Muriel Rukeyser asked, “What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life?” For the past five decades, women poets have responded

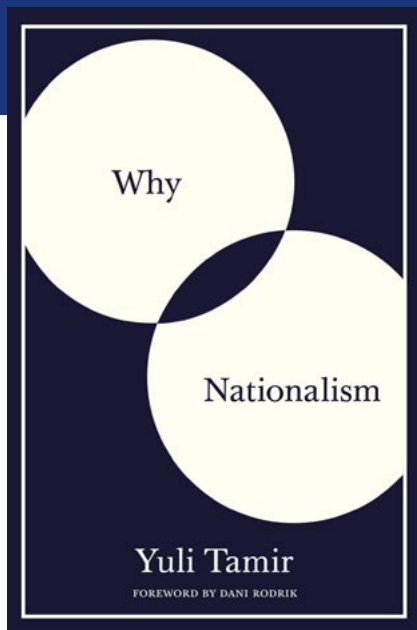
to that provocative question. Now, a broad constellation of responses exists, and Feinstein and Ostriker are two stars giving off intense light. For five decades, each poet has produced work that splits the world open. The retrospective of Feinstein’s work in *The Clinic, Memory* illuminates some stepping stones to this moment, while Ostriker’s *Waiting for the Light* demonstrates new and recurrent concerns of feminism. The contemporary resurgence of feminist activism, evidenced by #metoo and #timesup, demonstrates that more work remains. The women’s liberation movement used poetry as an activist tool; today, poetry sustains hopes, dreams, and desires as days unfold with advances and, inevitably, heartbreaks. New collections by Alicia Ostriker and Elaine Feinstein are perfect for readers looking for poetic expressions of feminist, progressive, and political aspirations. Both women offer words to cheer the potential of historic numbers of women elected to office, words to jeer regressive, harmful politicians, and words to foment political dissent and resistance. For readers needing poems as guides, as inspirations, as balms through these topsy-turvy times, “extravagant happiness” is a gift from both Feinstein and Ostriker. ●



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Works of Pat Parker and *Milk & Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry*. She has her MFA and PhD from the University of Maryland. Enszer edits and publishes *Sinister Wisdom*, a multicultural lesbian literary and art journal, and a regular book reviewer for the *The Rumpus* and *Calyx*. You can read more of her work at www.JulieREnszer.com.

Tikkun Recommends



Why Nationalism

By Yuli Tamir

Princeton U. Press, 2019

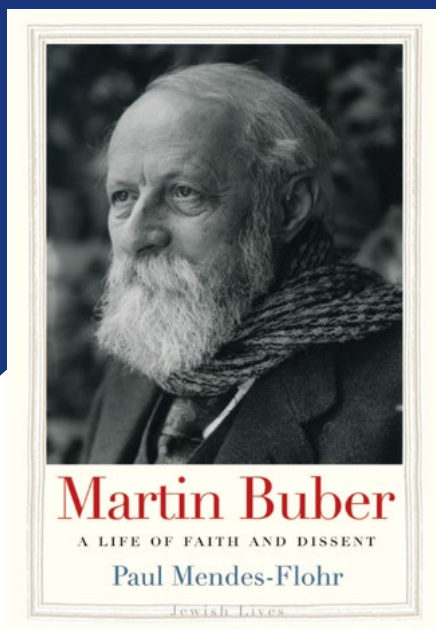
Much of polite society is shocked and discouraged by the reemergence of the new nationalism. As Tamir puts it, liberals believed that the post WWII era would “see the end of wars, the spread of reason, and the beginning of a new enlightenment.” Instead,

many of the achievements of the previous decades have come under threat; the younger generations fear the return of the crisis of capitalism and worry about the well-being of their parents and children. No wonder that liberal optimism has lost its popularity and that those who several years ago charged “Yes, We Can!” now suspect “No, We Can’t”.

What happened? Tamir argues against those who see the new populism and nationalism as “a conflict between the rational and the ridiculous.” She argues instead that “the new nationalism” we are seeing “is an expression of a distinct anti-elitist voice that reflects the widening rift between the people and the privileged few, as well as the anger inspired by growing inequalities.” She boldly warns those who seek to build a more decent social and political regime to remember that “no institution did it better than the nation-state.” Yet she also cautiously insists that

Nationalism is too powerful and flexible a tool to be given up; it should be endorsed and reshaped to fit the needs of the coming generations...the political stability of modern democracies depends on the emergence of a new equilibrium that makes for care, loyalty and belonging on the one hand while taming ethnocentrism and xenophobia on the other.

And she urges us to offer “a social contract that balances human rights and freedom with social solidarity and group identity.”



Martin Buber
By Paul Mendes-Flohr
Yale U. Press

Martin Buber is one of the greatest of Jewish thinkers. Sadly, much of his most exciting writing is rarely read by liberals and progressives for various reasons. First, he was someone who took Judaism and God seriously, not the perfect way to appeal to a Left that is often religiophobic. And second, he was a Zionist, though of a branch of Zionism that sought reconciliation with Palestinians as one of its central concerns. Sadly, that branch has withered in an Israel which,

from 1948 on, has been led by men (at first, those who claimed to be socialists, but after 1977 mostly by overt right wing nationalists) who have no use for any form of idealism, caring for the stranger/Other, or genuine reconciliation of heart with the Palestinian people.

His most famous philosophical work, *I and Thou*, contrasted the immediacy of an I-Thou relationship (with its requirement of being fully present to and involved with an “Other”) to the I-It relationship in which the “Other” is treated like an inanimate object. Buber seemed to be suggesting that we could have an I-Thou relationship with God, a theme that was picked up by his colleague in Germany, Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose teachings and life inspired the creation of *Tikkun* magazine. Buber delved deeply into the stories of Hasidic masters, introducing Hasidism to Jews and Christians who had dismissed the Hasidism with the same disdain that many Jewish scholars had manifested. Yet Buber today is best remembered as a religiously-inspired socialist Zionist who resisted creating the State of Israel without first finding a way to create reconciliation with the Palestinian people. He insisted that

the land cannot be built on injustice. . . Whenever any state banishes from the area of its protection and responsibility one of its minorities, one which is the most conspicuous and annihilates it slowly or quickly as Germany has done with its Jews, without the minority having transgressed against it—in so doing such a state shakes the foundations of its own existence.

The Zionist project, he said, could not and must not be sustained by a national egotism and insisted that in its focus on the economic and political project at hand it had neglected the ethical quality of its communal and interpersonal life, especially with respect to the Arabs of Palestine.

Paul Mendes-Flohr creates an insightful presentation of Buber’s life and work. Himself a scholar and professor emeritus of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and author (in Hebrew) of *Progress and its Discontents: Jewish Intellectuals and their Struggle with Modernity* and (in English) of *Contemporary Jewish Thought* (with Arthur A. Cohen), Mendes-Flohr is able to highlight in this book the full range of Buber’s powerful contribution to Jewish thought and its relevance for social change movements. Today, decades after his death, many progressives look to his prophetic visions for inspiration.

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