

Tikkun

POLITICS+SPIRITUALITY+CULTURE

(tē·kūn) To mend, repair, and transform the world. JULY/AUGUST 2010

**BOYCOTT ISRAELI
OCCUPATION?**

page 13



QUEER SPIRITUALITY & POLITICS

**WHY GAY RIGHTS IS
A RELIGIOUS ISSUE**

by Jay Michaelson

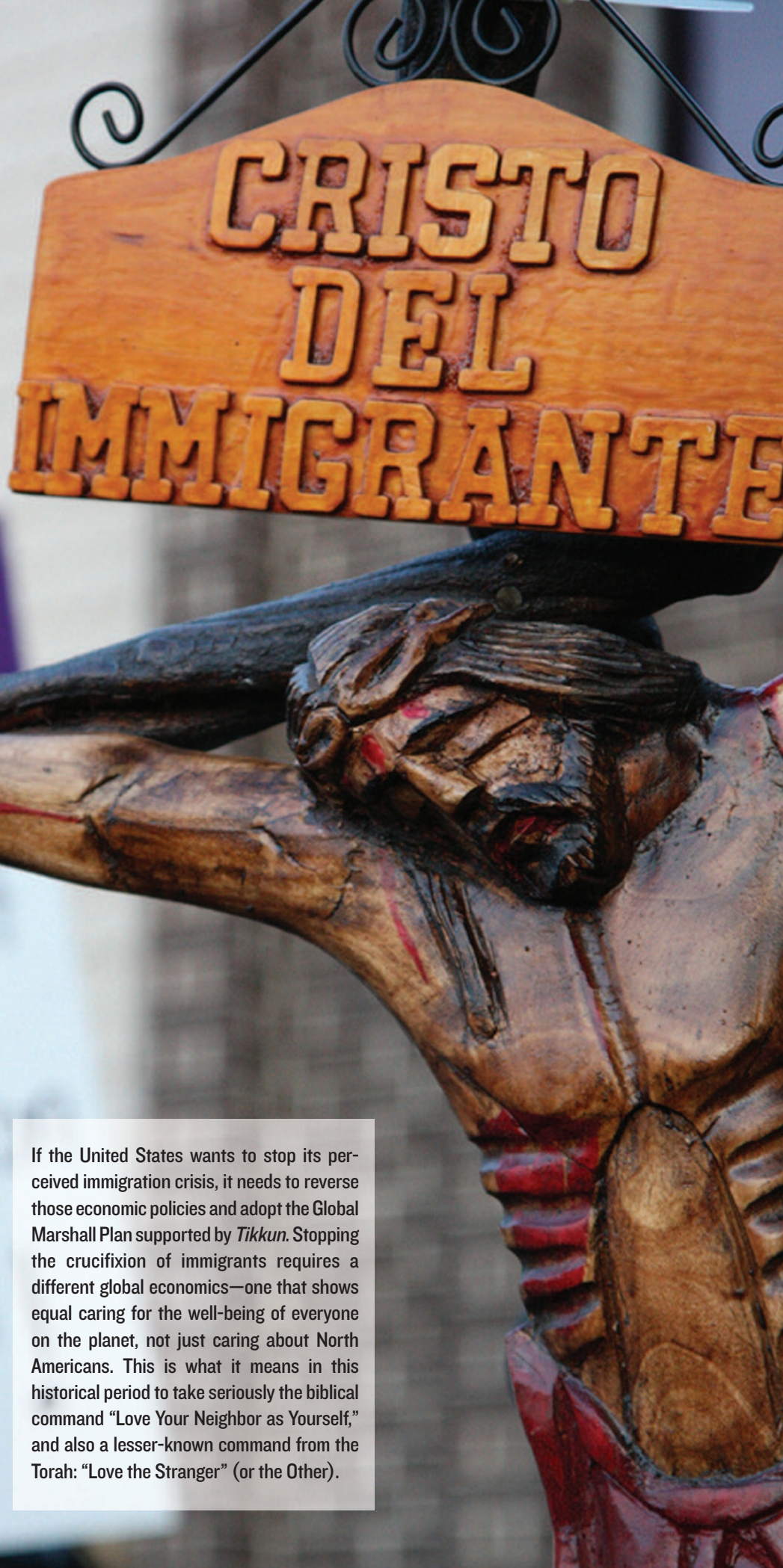
Plus essays by Starhawk, Jay Bakker, Yvette A. Flunder,
Emi Koyama, Joy Ladin, Parvez Sharma, Andrea Smith,
Dean Spade, Ruth Vanita, and others.

\$5.95 U.S. \$6.95 Canada



J Street and Peace Activists on Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
Gulf Oil Disaster | Anguish and Wonder in the Psalms | Rav Kook
Humor from Josh Kornbluth | The Second American Revolution
Collateral Healing | Prophetic Courage in an Imperial Age

Arizona's new immigration law, which empowers police to stop people and demand proof of citizenship, is supported by a majority in the United States, according to recent polls. Many citizens say this country is already "overrun" by immigrants and express fear that immigrants may take their jobs and bankrupt their government-sponsored social services. Few understand the way that our own economic arrangements—particularly NAFTA and CAFTA—have played a major role in destroying the economies of Central and South American countries, pushing many to economic devastation, and thereby generating the desperation that leads people to risk their lives to come across U.S. borders.



If the United States wants to stop its perceived immigration crisis, it needs to reverse those economic policies and adopt the Global Marshall Plan supported by *Tikkun*. Stopping the crucifixion of immigrants requires a different global economics—one that shows equal caring for the well-being of everyone on the planet, not just caring about North Americans. This is what it means in this historical period to take seriously the biblical command "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself," and also a lesser-known command from the Torah: "Love the Stranger" (or the Other).

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IN MEMORY

In memory of those who lost their lives in the flotilla to bring humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza, and in prayer for all those (on all sides of that struggle) who were wounded in Israel's assault on the flotilla.

And in honor of the memory of two Israeli friends of *Tikkun* who championed peace and justice:

Rabbi David Forman Z"L

the founder of Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel

Dr. Moshe Greenberg Z"L

a professor of Bible and Jewish Studies at Hebrew University who also taught at *Tikkun's* Beyt Midrash Le Shalom in Jerusalem

(Z"L stands for *Zichrono Livrachá*—may his memory be a blessing)

Readers Respond

ANOTE ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

We welcome your responses to our articles. Send your 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.

SECULARISM VS. RELIGION?

I HAVE READ WITH INTEREST THE winsome statement of Bruce Ledewitz (*Tikkun*, March/April 2010) on the future of secularism. It may or may not be true, as he says, that “the number of nonbelievers in the world will have increased dramatically.” Without counting heads, what matters is that such secular thought is indeed a live, credible alternative to established faith traditions for many people. I like very much his generous notion that the thought and faith of secularists may indeed impinge on the nature of faith, for he offers what I would term “an ecumenical secularism.”

There is no reason to think, however, that the vitality of lively faith traditions will shrivel or die. Here I do not refer to obscurantist fideism or to the institutional structures that beset all traditions, not least the Roman Catholic Church at the moment. Rather I refer to critical faith that is, for many, theologically compelling and that can hold its own in an intellectual engagement with critical secularism. Obviously uncritical faith and uncritical secularism cannot take each other seriously.

I imagine that, given a critical faith tradition and given critical secularism of the kind Ledewitz champions, we may anticipate an ongoing critical engagement that is not about winning or losing, but is an engagement whereby all parties continue to rethink and reformulate. Surely it is true, as Ledewitz anticipates, that secularism will impact faith, but influence that runs in the

other direction may also be acutely important. I hope that this other kind of secularism can get us past the dismissive silliness of Dawkins and company. I submit that serious secularists may take note of the analysis of Terry Eagleton, a nonbeliever who in fact understands the claims of Christian faith, who makes the specific case that Christian faith appeals because it deals with the “scum of the earth.” That is, the credibility of this faith is not in its intellectual force but in its practice of a “preferential option for the poor” that is deeply grounded in a theological affirmation. The tired categories of nineteenth-century quarrels, as Ledewitz knows, help none of us, whether rendered by secularists or by fideists. I welcome Ledewitz’s largeness of spirit and expect to be fruitfully engaged in the ongoing work that matters to those situated in both the narrative of the secular and the narrative of faith. Both narratives, at their best, refuse reduction to the generic and summon to the specificity of time, place, and neighbor.

Thanks for publishing the piece by Ledewitz.

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN
Cincinnati, OH

Bruce Ledewitz Responds:

IT IS A FORTUNATE SECULARIST whose work is read by Professor Walter Brueggemann, America’s foremost interpreter of the Hebrew Bible. I agree with Professor Brueggemann that the road of influence between religion and secularism must run in both directions. Terry Eagleton is indeed an example of

that influence. I would add the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian realism on American foreign and domestic policy and Karl Barth’s letter to Swiss trade unionists in 1911, in which he spoke of “the inherent connection between Jesus and socialism.” I would include Professor Brueggemann himself in this connection, with his biblically grounded teaching about the capacity for surprise in the heart of history.

My hesitance has to do with something deeper in the biblical tradition. Professor Brueggemann’s entire life has been the exemplification of Israel’s encounter with the living God. This encounter is so vibrant in the Hebrew Bible as to have no concomitant in secularism. Indeed, that empty space, where God dwells in the faith traditions—whether they are literally theistic or not—might be said to reflect the essence of secularism. No one has found a way yet to bridge that gulf of significance and meaning.

Professor Brueggemann might say that the reminder of that empty space is precisely the contribution that religion makes to secularism. If so, I fear it is a reminder that can only emphasize the loss that secularism has experienced. I am not a secularist by choice and so I feel that loss particularly.

DIVESTMENT

THIS IS TRULY A COMPLEX ISSUE. It is being viewed as a snapshot of a long relationship. Something must be done, and

MORE LETTERS

Thank you for all your letters! We receive many more than we can print. Go to tikkun.org/letters to read additional letters about God and science, Israel and global anti-Semitism, immigration, “the Obama you voted for,” Libertarians and the Tea Party, forgiveness, and more!

soon, to avoid a further tragedy. Most of us were excited years ago to discover Zen Buddhism. But we seem to forget that we learned that it is not always appropriate to act/react; sometimes inaction is more appropriate and powerful. Sometimes nothing we can do can be of positive influence. It's humbling and frustrating.

All those who honestly believe that this is the correct and most effective tool when dealing with an abused paranoid (remember even paranoids have enemies)—one who has been threatened and abused for most of his living memory and will, if further threatened and attacked by his only protector—make a difficult, dangerous, perilous decision ... please stand and vote for divestment.

YORAM GETZLER

Moshav Aminadav, Jerusalem

SACRED EVOLUTION

AS AN OBSERVANT JEW TRAINED IN evolutionary biology, I was first excited then disappointed by Arthur Green's article in your March/April 2010 issue.

The first problem was Green's assertion that the emergence of science represented progress toward the Divine. The second was his repeated reference to the evolution of "more highly developed" organisms and cultures.

This thinking clearly stems from a progress-oriented historical narrative. Yet both evolutionarily and historically, such a narrative is absurd; animals have been known to evolve from more to less complex, as have cultures. This may seem like a minor quibble, but it is not: The progress model of history is a major intellectual underpinning of imperialism and other poisons. Even Green falls into this trap, offensively dismissing cultures that venerate "primitive tribal gods" as less enlightened than those capable of "greater abstraction and depth of thought."

Just as troubling is Green's deification of the scientific process. All cultures have investigated the nature of the world, and this can be a sacred pursuit. Yet "science" as we know it is the product of a very specific, nature-hating worldview that spiritual progressives

and radicals should find repellent. Modern science, as it is taught and practiced, is intrinsically amoral, reductionist, and utilitarian, viewing nature as a dead thing to be dissected and controlled.

Is there a place for evolution in a spiritual narrative? Of course. But I much prefer the parallel stories model proffered by Chara Curtis in her children's book to the "God is Dead; Long Live Science!" theology forwarded by so many authors in the last issue.

BEN PACHANO

Tuscon, AZ

IN "SACRED EVOLUTION" (*TIKKUN*, March/April 2010) Arthur Green suggests that it is possible to remain faithful to the Darwinian account of evolution by natural selection while also viewing evolution as "a meaningful process" by which God reveals itself within creation. However, natural selection does not easily lend itself to such an imputation of meaningfulness. The Darwinian picture of evolution is that of an essentially random process in

Tikkun

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PUBLISHERS George & Trish Vradenburg

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which there is no progress or even development, but only brute change. Darwinian evolutionary change is driven by arbitrary facts about relative reproductive fitness and random genetic mutations. Nevertheless, the project of building a sacred interpretation of evolution need not be abandoned. Contemporary evolutionary biology is starting to recognize that Darwinian natural selection is only one of several factors that drive evolution. Much more promising from a religious point of view is work done over the last few decades on self-organizing complex systems. Innovative evolutionary theorists like Brian Goodwin have tried to show how the science of complex systems challenges the neo-Darwinian orthodoxy. I believe that this new science of complexity provides a much better partner than neo-Darwinism for trying to achieve the kind of synthesis between evolution and mystical Judaism that Arthur Green proposes in his article.

AVI CRAIMER
Montreal, Canada

ENTRENCING ANTI-SEMITISM

AS HIS ARTICLE IN THE MAY/JUNE 2010 issue of *Tikkun* ("Are Israeli Policies Entrenching Anti-Semitism Worldwide?") attests, Tony Klug is part of that broad camp for Israel's security and a two-state solution that I also inhabit. He also shares with me an iconoclastic idea: that today's Jew-hatred is more about the televised and webcast views of Arab suffering at the hands of Israeli power than traditional anti-Jewish prejudices.

Where I depart from Dr. Klug is in his apparent conviction that this is entirely the fault of Jews—of the narrow "tribalistic" bond of Jews with their Israeli brethren on the one hand, and of the unconscionable policies of settlement expansion, military brutality, and discriminatory practices of the State of Israel on the other. I don't deny that these play a role, but nowhere does Klug attach any responsibility to Arab terror groups or to the Palestinian Authority's failure to bridge gaps with moderate Israeli peace offers in 2000

and in 2008 (I hasten to add that the PA's negotiating failure was Israel's as well).

Klug's indignation seems especially overwrought in a section asserting that if Israel's harsh deeds were committed by a government of Buddhists or Hindus, the world would similarly denounce them, and there would be repercussions for diasporic Buddhists and Hindus who showed solidarity with their kin (an especially nasty speculation on the part of Klug). One wonders if Klug's been following events in Sri Lanka and Kashmir. Sri Lanka in particular is a close parallel, where a separate ethnic and religious group supported a terrorist movement that fought for independence and was mercilessly pounded into submission last year, almost exactly at the same time that Israel hit back at Gaza with somewhat less violence, inflicting far fewer casualties. (No, I did not support the Gaza offensive.) We have yet to see indignant reactions by the world against the Sinhalese (Buddhist) majority government, not to mention against India's violent occupation over restive Muslims in Kashmir, nor (G-d forbid) against their respective diasporas.

Israel's move to the right can be attributed to the awful fact that the Oslo peace process was mishandled, crippled by Rabin's assassination and Netanyahu's first election, and finally collapsed into the second intifada, costing one thousand Israeli lives; then Israel's unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza resulted in more attacks. The causality is not as simple as most Israelis and Jews believe, but the coincidence of events has persuaded them of a direct causation and of total Arab culpability.

A more effective and radical peace posture is not to cast blame on one side, as Klug does, but to patiently unpack historical details as completely and fairly as possible. Israelis and Palestinians together killed the peace process of the 1990s, in a tragic and fateful unfolding of events.

RALPH SELIGER
New York, NY

SO I TAKE IT THAT TONY KLUG THINKS that when it comes to anti-Semitism of the third millennium, I'm to blame. I, an American expatriate who became a citizen of the State of Israel sixteen years ago, and now keeps busy mostly by working as a pediatrician and helping to raise three small children. Before reading Mr. Klug's piece I suffered from lingering anxiety that perhaps my life was turning out to be less significant than I'd hoped, but now I know better: the behavior of me and my ilk has become the source of the modern-day version of the moral scourge of western civilization for the past 100 or so generations. Never mind that most of the children I care for in my clinic are Palestinian Arabs. Apparently the fact that I travel through Jerusalem neighborhoods that were annexed to Israel after 1967 on my way to work, and have failed to protest "the Occupation" vigorously enough, make me a part (no ... a cause!) of the problem rather than part of the solution when it comes to modern-day Jew hatred.

I, along with many supporters of Israel who actually live here, vote, and pay taxes, take a pragmatic rather than a moralistic view of the Israeli presence in the West Bank. Better to leave most of it, we say, for the good of our children. On the other hand, the thought of bringing them closer to mortar range is not one we relish either.

Personally, I believe it is rather quixotic to believe that a peace accord with the Palestinian Authority, even under the best of circumstances, is likely to ameliorate Israel's security in any meaningful way in the foreseeable future. Mr. Klug is free to disagree with me on this matter. However, to imply as he does that moral insouciance or callousness are the only plausible explanations for the policies of the current Israeli government is to my mind simply incorrect. But there's more: by insinuating that Israelis who do not share his political views are stained by moral turpitude, perhaps Mr. Klug is lending credence to the same form of bigotry he accuses his co-religionists of fomenting.

ELI EISENSTEIN
Modiin, Israel

(Tony Klug's response and more letters on page 78)

Do You Want to Know Your Future?

BY GEORGE VRADENBURG

ARRIVING AT YOUR LOCAL WALGREENS—A DNA kit that will estimate your chances of getting cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer’s, and myriad other diseases or conditions: just check the ones you want to know about. Are you going to buy it? If so, will you check the box for Alzheimer’s? Do you want to know your future?

The medical establishment wants to take this product off the shelf and deprive you of the choice to look into your health future, even if all the uncertainties of the risk assessments are adequately disclosed. Are they right to do so?

These new DNA products—whether offered by Walgreens, 23andMe, or Navigenics—are opening a whole new world where we can assert responsibility for our own health. Doctors are already irritated that the Internet has given us so much information about our health conditions and treatments that they don’t have enough time to answer all the questions that better-informed patients are asking. We get fifteen minutes and out. Any longer, and the doctor can’t make money from the reimbursement provided by Medicare, Medicaid, or private insurers for a routine health examination.

OMG, were we patients to know from genetic testing that we had a higher-than-average risk for serious disease in the coming years, we might ask how we should change our lifestyles or take preventive steps to reduce that risk. Doctors would have to be better informed about the efficacy of different lifestyle and treatment regimes. They might lose control of the doctor-patient dialogue. They would no longer be the all-knowing dispenser of information; we patients might actually be empowered to have an adult dialogue about our health.

It is *our* health that is the issue, after all, isn’t it? And shouldn’t it be *our* responsibility to understand what makes us healthy or sick? And isn’t it better for us, and for the health of the nation, to *prevent* disease and disability and not just manage a disease—and perhaps the suffering—after symptoms appear?

Why are doctors so reluctant to let us have genetic information about our future health? They argue that predicting future health risk based on genetic analysis is an uncertain science, that we would not be able to understand that genes are simply a risk factor, not a determinant, of future disease. They want to protect us from the fear and anxiety of living

with the knowledge that we may have a greater-than-average risk of certain diseases.

That seems a bit paternalistic.

No one is mandating genetic testing. These genetic testing products permit a patient to choose whether or not he or she wants to know the risk from certain diseases. One can choose to get a report about one’s risk for heart disease, but not Alzheimer’s, or about one’s risk for diabetes but not cancer. Perhaps a patient may want to know about the risks of a certain disease because a parent or sibling has that disease. Or perhaps one wants that knowledge to determine whether to have a child, or to test one’s fetus in utero for specific disease risks. Perhaps one wants to know the risk for diseases that have a means of prevention but not for a particular disease that has no cure, like Alzheimer’s. Francis Collins, the new Director of the National Institutes for Health, undertook genetic testing and thought long and hard whether to check the Alzheimer’s box. Eventually, he did. That was his choice, and that should be the choice we all are permitted to exercise. That choice should not be denied by the FDA.

New products are coming on the market all the time. And there are “early adopters” who like to try new products out. Feedback from these early adopters tells us a lot about how new products can be improved in updated versions—added functions, improved convenience, more product explanation. Early adopters of genetic testing products will let us know how we (and the medical profession) handle more knowledge of our own future, even if that knowledge is imperfect.

Recently passed health care reform relies heavily on empowering patients to use their own health information better to reduce the risk or severity of future health conditions. Genetic testing is a powerful shock treatment to make us think about how to do just that. With personalized diagnostics and treatments coming soon, we need to begin to get comfortable about knowing our own genes.

Our health is too important to be relegated to the medical profession.

Our future and the future of our families is our responsibility too. ■

George Vradenburg is the co-publisher of Tikkun.

Disaster in the Gulf: A Plague to Warn Us to Change Our Relationship to the Earth

PRESIDENT OBAMA WAS OFFERED AN AMAZING opportunity to change our economic system when he came into office at the peak of a global economic meltdown—a crisis brought on in part by the selfishness and materialism fostered by global capitalism. He misused the chance and instead gave priority to the needs of Wall Street and the big banks.

Now Obama has another amazing opportunity—this time to change the course of U.S. environmental policy. To seize it he must help people understand that oil drilling and the resultant destruction of large swaths of land and sea are just one tiny example of the colossal environmental destruction produced by our unrestricted capitalist orientation to the world.

Instead of messing around with partial measures, the president should transform our approach to the environment by orienting it around this key idea: the earth is not a “resource” to be used for private profit. It is our mother, our body, our very selves. We are deeply implicated and dependent upon it, and we must respond to it not by asking how we can use it but how we can protect and restore it. Starting now. What is now universally acknowledged as the greatest environmental disaster in American history could be the moment when people finally understand that our very existence as a species is at risk because of our reckless endangerment of the planet. Unless the human race can abandon the false notion that progress is about acquiring more material goods and instead recognize that the progress we need to make is in living in harmony with the planet and with each other—and in reverence, gratitude, and thanksgiving for this amazing universe—we will simply not survive. This is a moment that calls for both a radically new political approach and a deep, new spiritual orientation for the human race.

Will Obama use this opportunity? Let him know your ideas, and join our campaign for the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment (ESRA) to the U.S. Constitution. The ESRA would take money out of politics, require corporations to prove that they have a satisfactory history of environmental and social responsibility, and require schools to teach the skills necessary to preserve and protect our environment on both an individual and a global level. Most Americans want to save the environment but don’t think it’s possible. The ESRA shows how it can be done. There has never been a better moment for you to become involved. Join our campaign to support the ESRA at www.spiritualprogressives.org/ESRA.

The earth is crying out to us: stop destroying the environment that nurtures all life! The people of the planet earth are crying out to us: stop wars, stop squandering your wealth on military

spending, and stop imposing economic policies that benefit the rich but ignore the suffering of three billion people who live in extreme poverty! Build a global human community based on love, generosity, true caring, mutual forgiveness, and compassion. Allow yourself time each day, and a Sabbath day each week, to connect with your own inner spiritual being. Allow yourself time to experience awe, wonder, and radical amazement at the grandeur and mystery of the universe, the ongoing miracle of your own consciousness, and the beauty and fragility of life itself!

Awe, wonder, and radical amazement are a place to start.

The Gulf disaster is yet another one of the plagues that the spiritual reality of the universe is sending to wake us up, to let us know that our path is leading to planetary disaster. What more does the earth have to do, what more does God have to do, what more does Gaia have to do, to awaken us to the craziness of the economic and political world that we continue to support? What will it take for us to recognize that we must no longer frame environmental questions in terms of “what is realistic, given the political configurations in Washington, D.C., and the power of the corporations” but rather in terms of “what steps are necessary to save the planet from the environmental destruction that our global capitalist system is inflicting upon it”? The ESRA is only “unrealistic” in a world that finds it unrealistic to demand that British Petroleum, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Chevron, Monsanto, Halliburton, and all the other corporate gangsters be held responsible for what they are doing, or to demand that they and the other polluters stop now. Yet failing to do this is being complicit with our own self-destruction.



As we go to press, the worst oil spill in U.S. history continues unchecked. Who knows how many birds, how much marine life we will kill this time?

And, yes, there *is* something you can do! Take the ESRA and get it endorsed by your local city council, your state legislature, and your elected representatives to the House and Senate, your local church or synagogue or mosque or ashram, your professional organization, your civic group, your college or university, and your neighbors and friends. We'll help you—but you need to let us know that you want that assistance. Write to me at

rabbilerner@tikkun.org or send a letter to 2342 Shattuck Ave, #1200, Berkeley, California, 94704. Donate to *Tikkun*. Put us in your will and get your friends to join the Network of Spiritual Progressives. It's only when we become a significant moral force that we can get the support we need to pass the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment—a major step toward environmental sanity. (Join at www.spiritualprogressives.org.) ■

Reflections After My Home Was Vandalized: Stop the Assault by Right-Wing Extremists on Israel's Critics

YOU MAY HAVE READ THAT A GROUP OF ZIONIST extremists plastered the outside of my home with signs identifying me with Judge Richard Goldstone, who put together the UN report on Israeli human rights violations during the war in Gaza (it also pointed to human rights violations on the part of Hamas). The vandals' signs called Goldstone and me “extreme leftists” and “Islamofascists,” accusing us of supporting terrorism. The police said the point of the vandalism was to show us that we are vulnerable to personal physical attack even in our own home, and to scare us. And in fact, to this day my wife and family remain very concerned.

If only my personal safety were at stake, I wouldn't take this space in *Tikkun* to discuss the incident. But the truth is that hundreds of thousands of Jews in the United States and around the world face this same problem: many of the most vocal defenders of Israel in the Jewish community personally assail anyone who criticizes Israeli policies toward Palestinians, declining to answer the actual criticisms and instead labeling the critics as “self-hating Jews” or “anti-Semites” or, as you'll read below, worse. You can hear these attacks in the pews of not only Orthodox but also Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist synagogues. And you can hear this among both secular and religious Jews. The resort to assaulting the integrity and decency of critics of Israeli policy, instead of answering their criticisms, is a move by frightened people who cannot really understand why Israel treats Palestinians so harshly, who really can't provide a rational defense. To protect themselves from the horrible realization that the Jewish State is acting immorally and self-destructively, they react by denouncing the people who call this reality to their attention.

The long-term effect of this intimidation of dissenters is a weakening of global support for Israel. These defensive attempts to silence critics also drive people away from the Jewish community and provide aid and comfort to the real anti-Semites, whose hatred of Jews becomes easier to hide behind criticisms of Israel. But in the short term, it is an effective technique for suppressing dissent and ensuring that people in the Jewish world rarely get to hear

the ideas and nuanced strategies for Israel's security from those who share our pro-Israel/pro-Palestine “progressive middle path.” And it's not just *Tikkun* that faces this—J Street, the New Israel Fund, Rabbis for Human Rights, and the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem now also face the same attacks that *Tikkun* and I have endured for two decades.

The most recent phase of the political assault on dissenters began this way: in mid-April we learned that leaders of the Jewish community of South Africa were telling South African Justice Richard Goldstone that he should not attend his grandson's bar mitzvah because right-wing Zionists had threatened to disrupt the event. Jewish community leaders told Goldstone they could not guarantee his safety. We at *Tikkun* were outraged at this capitulation to threats of violence.

Let's remember that Goldstone was an honored jurist who—though he served under the apartheid regime and apparently upheld its laws—was selected by Nelson Mandela to continue in office under the new regime; Goldstone played a role in legitimizing the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa that had headed off the feared civil war between Blacks and whites after the apartheid system was dismantled. The UN later selected Goldstone to head investigatory commissions into the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia. It was with this background, and as a proud Zionist and former member of the board of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, that Goldstone accepted the UN task of investigating the large number of deaths of Palestinian civilians, particularly children, during the Israeli assault on Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.

Goldstone sought Israel's collaboration in this investigation. He was going to hear a great deal of evidence indicating Israeli human rights violations and even war crimes, and he hoped to include in his report Israel's version of what happened. He also hoped that Israel would punish any members of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) found guilty—by appropriate Israeli judicial process—of illegal or immoral acts.

Unfortunately for Israel, the world, and the Jews, Israel refused to cooperate with Goldstone's UN mission or to present its

information and explanations. As a result, the report that Goldstone issued was necessarily one-sided. Recognizing that, Goldstone called upon Israel to hold its own public, objective, and credible investigation into what had happened, calling both Palestinian Gazan witnesses and members of the IDF to explain their experience of what had happened. He hoped Israel would announce an intention to punish the individuals responsible for breaking international law. As Goldstone explained to me, the crimes he was detailing need not have been seen as “Israel’s crimes.” The state could have distanced itself from the crimes by holding people from the bottom to the top of the command structure accountable and disciplining those who erred. This is precisely what happened, Goldstone told me, after the massacres at Sabra and Shatilla in Israel’s Lebanon war: Ariel Sharon, who was deemed responsible for the massacres, was forced to resign, thereby showing that it was not “Israel” but rather specific Israelis who deserved to be blamed. And this is what *Tikkun* is now calling for in regard to the assault on the flotilla of boats bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza that took place on the high seas on May 31, 2010, resulting in the deaths of some and injuries to many of those who sought to bring aid to Gaza.

Unfortunately, in the case of the invasion of Gaza, the response was just the opposite of what it had been with Sabra and Shatilla. Following a pattern with a long history in the American Jewish tradition, Israel decided to “shoot the messenger” rather than investigate the message. Israeli government officials attacked Goldstone, suggesting that he was an anti-Semite or a self-hating Jew. Israeli *hasbara* (public relations “explainers” of whatever Israel does) spread the word that Goldstone himself could not be trusted—that he was intentionally serving Arab interests.

We criticized this response when it first began to happen and soon assumed that it had quieted down. But in fact what was happening was a growing fear of a purported delegitimation of Israel. According to the Israeli Right and its champions around the world, Goldstone and other critics of Israeli policies—in particular the movement for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS)—are to blame for spurring on this “delegitimation.”

There is a range of positions in the BDS movement. Some support boycotting Israel itself or anyone who collaborates with Israeli economic, military, cultural, or higher education institutions. Others only support the use of BDS against the Occupation—in other words, against products produced in the occupied territories, against corporations that produce goods or services that help Israel enforce the Occupation (like Caterpillar, which has been building bulldozers specifically designed for use in bulldozing Palestinian homes), and against corporations that trade with and help the settlers. But these distinctions are sometimes lost on some Israelis and many American Jews who have difficulty distinguishing between delegitimation of Israel’s policies toward Palestinians and delegitimation of Israel itself as a country.

Americans who oppose U.S. imperial adventures and wars have experienced a similar kind of repression. We have often been told that our criticisms of the Vietnam War, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the almost-war in Iran are really manifestations of disloyalty. But in the Jewish world, the anger on the part of



Judge Richard Goldstone, a Zionist and friend of Israel, urged Israel to investigate charges of war crimes in order to show the world that justice rules in the Jewish State. Israel declined. Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz has accused the thirty-nine rabbis who wrote a letter in support of Goldstone of being “rabbis for Hamas” and committing “blood libel” against the Jewish people.

defenders of Israel toward critics takes on a very personal feeling: people find their own family members accusing them of “betraying” the family by criticizing Israeli policies, or even of rejecting God and Judaism!

This intolerance of dissenters was a major reason why *Tikkun* lost its funding sources in the Jewish world once it started to critique the Occupation of the West Bank and the expansion of settlements. This same discounting and marginalization has also been inflicted on a wide variety of Jewish peace organizations, including the Jewish Peace Fellowship, Breira, the New Jewish Agenda, Jewish Voice for Peace, and now J Street and the New Israel Fund as well.

One of the reasons why the various peace groups have not worked together in a more coordinated and powerful way like AIPAC does on the right is that each peace-oriented group has the fantasy that if it shows itself to be “not as radical” as some other groups, it will gain legitimacy and have more impact.

Eventually each group has found itself demonized anyway, because for many in the right wing of the Zionist movement anyone suggesting that Israel give up control of the West Bank (Judah and Samaria) is a traitor who seeks the destruction of the Jewish people.

Ironically, we learned shortly before going to press that Rahm Emanuel, who played a role in convincing the Clintons to distance themselves from *Tikkun*’s peace perspective on the Middle East in the 1990s, moved his son’s bar mitzvah ceremony in May 2010 away from the sacred Temple Wall in Jerusalem’s Old City, at least in part because of threats from right-wing Zionists who announced their intention to disrupt the ceremony in protest of the Obama administration’s support for a building freeze in Jerusalem and shouted at him that he was an anti-Semite when he visited the Wall shortly before the bar mitzvah. These right-wingers had already forgotten how Rahm Emanuel served AIPAC in Congress and helped Obama show obeisance to the pro-right-wing Israel lobby in Congress. For the demeaners of the peace movement, it’s not the level of moderation that makes a difference—anyone who articulates criticisms of Israeli policies toward Palestinians or who does not toe the line of the settlers is perceived as an enemy, no matter how nuanced or gentle the criticisms are.

Nowhere was this demonstrated more graphically than in the San Francisco Jewish Federation, which had earned a reputation

for being a “liberal” bulwark within the conservative Jewish establishment because it funded some projects of the New Israel Fund. Imagine everyone’s surprise when, in fall 2009, the federation issued guidelines that essentially threatened to end financial support for any Jewish institution that allowed speakers who might be seen as delegitimizing Israel. The policy was understood to have emerged after the leaders of the extreme right-wing Koret Foundation and its allies in the Jewish Federation expressed outrage when the Jewish Federation-funded summer 2009 Jewish Film Festival in San Francisco presented a film about the killing of Rachel Corrie. Some right-wing leaders reportedly demanded that the Jewish Federation stop funding the annual film festival; others thought the focus should not be specifically on the festival but that the federation should instead develop a general policy to induce all potential funding recipients to police themselves.

When it became clear in mid-April that the attacks on critics of Israeli policy had escalated to a point where a grandfather (Goldstone) was being kept from attending his own grandson’s bar mitzvah, a group of thirty-nine rabbis signed the letter below.

Meanwhile, we announced at *Tikkun* that if the boycott of Goldstone from his grandson’s bar mitzvah continued, we would invite him to hold the bar mitzvah at Beyt Tikkun synagogue in Berkeley, California. We also announced something we had decided upon previous to this incident—namely, that we would

confer one of the prestigious Tikkun Awards on Judge Goldstone at our twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in 5771 (2011).

When the Jewish media got hold of this announcement, they made a rather loud fuss. I started to receive death threats on the phone and hate mail on the computer. Tensions dramatically escalated when Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz wrote a hate piece in the *Jerusalem Post* and the *Huffington Post* (don’t know why it was printed there—ask Arianna) in which he described the thirty-nine of us as “rabbis for Hamas.”

Let Dershowitz speak for himself (with my italics):

A group of rabbis, many of whom have long records of *anti-Israel activism*, authored a “Rabbinic letter” to Goldstone congratulating him on his grandson’s bar mitzvah and using the occasion to make *virulently anti-Israel claims*, including the *blood libel* that Israel deliberately targeted innocent Palestinian civilians without any military purpose. *These ignorant rabbis ...*

These bigoted rabbis ...

These “*rabbis for Hamas*” have no shame and no credibility. They exploit their rabbinical status to support any conclusion that undercuts self defense Israeli actions....

Rabbis Thank Judge Goldstone for Upholding Principles of Justice, Compassion, and Truth

Dear Judge Goldstone,

As rabbis from diverse traditions and locations, we want to extend our warmest mazel tov to you as an elder in our community upon the bar mitzvah of your grandson. Bar and Bat Mitzvah is a call to conscience, a call to be responsible for the welfare of others, a call to fulfill the covenant of peace and justice articulated in our tradition.

As rabbis, we note the religious implications of the report you authored. We are reminded of Shimon Ben Gamliel’s quote, “The world stands on three things: justice, truth, and peace as it says ‘Execute the judgment of truth, and justice and peace will be established in your gates’ (Zekharya 8:16).” We affirm the truth of the report that bears your name.

We are deeply saddened by the controversy that has grown up around the issuing of the report. We affirm your findings and believe you set up an impeccable standard that provides strong evidence that Israel engaged in war crimes during the assault on Gaza that reveal a pattern of continuous and systematic assault against Palestinian people and land that has very little to do with Israel’s claim of security. Your report made clear the intentional targeting of civilian infrastructures such as hospitals, schools, agricultural properties, water and sewage treatment centers and civilians themselves with deadly weapons that are illegal when used in civilian centers.

This is the ugly truth that is so hard for many Jewish people to face. Anyone who spends a day in Palestinian territories sees this truth immediately. Judge Goldstone, we want to offer you our deepest thanks for upholding the principles of justice, compassion and truth that are the heart of Jewish religion and without which our claims to Jewishness are empty of meaning. We regret that your findings have led to controversy and caused you not to feel welcome at your own grandson’s Bar Mitzvah. We believe your report is a clarion call to Israel and the Jewish people to awaken from the slumber of denial and return to the path of peace.

Rabbi Rebecca Alpert
Rabbi Chava Bahle
Rabbi Benjamin Barnett
Rabbi Pamela Frydman Baugh
Rabbi Haim Beliak
Rabbi Phillip Bentley
Rabbi Phyllis Berman
Rabbi Stephen Booth-Nadav
Rabbi Anna Boswell-Levy
Rabbi Ayelet S. Cohen

Rabbi Meryl M. Crean
Rabbi Michael Feinberg
Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer
Rabbi Everett Gendler
Rabbi Shai Gluskin
Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb
Rabbi Julie Greenberg
Rabbi Erin Hirsh
Rabbi Linda Holtzman
Rabbi Margaret Holub

Rabbi Doron Isaacs
Rabbi Douglas Krantz
Rabbi Michael Lerner
Rabbi Eyal Levinson
Rabbi Mordecai Liebling
Rabbi Shaul Magid
Rabbi Nina H. Mandel
Rabbi Jeffrey Marker
Rabbi David Mivasair
Rabbi Victor Reinstein

Rabbi Brant Rosen
Rabbi Michael Rothbaum
Rabbi David Shneyer
Rabbi Gershon Steinberg-Caudill
Rabbi Brian Walt
Rabbi Arthur Waskow
Rabbi Sheila Weinberg
Rabbi Lewis Weiss
Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman

Not surprisingly, the worst of these rabbis (and that is saying a lot), Michael Lerner, after attempting to politicize the bar mitzvah by offering his anti-Israel synagogue for the event, has decided to honor Richard Goldstone with Tikkun Magazine's "Ethics Award." I guess all it takes to be honored by Tikkun is to pass Lerner's litmus test of lying about Israel. That's Lerner's definition of "ethics." There are some good people on the advisory board of Tikkun Magazine. They now have an obligation to reconsider their membership unless they wish to be associated with a rabbi who is prepared to accuse Israel, in the absence of any evidence, of deliberately setting out to murder Palestinian civilians without any military purpose.

Hamas, of course, is a violent group, and we at *Tikkun* (and I as a public representative of *Tikkun*) have frequently denounced its violence, just as we have denounced the violence of the Israeli Occupation, and the violence of many other countries and their human rights abuses (including China in Tibet; Russia in Chechnya; the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan; Sudan in Darfur; and Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt's violence against their own people). We are strong supporters of nonviolence as the best strategy to build a world of peace.

For Dershowitz to associate me with a terrorist group makes it easier to understand why those who attacked my home might have found it reasonable to take action against this alleged supporter of terrorism! There can be little question that in this context this language of "blood libel" and "rabbis for Hamas" is inflammatory and violent speech. Two days later, the vandalization took place. I doubt that this was Dershowitz's conscious intention, just as I doubt that his defense of targeted assassinations by the Israeli army against "suspected terrorists" (assassinations of suspects never given a chance to prove that they were not in fact terrorists) was intended to encourage attacks against many civilians ("collateral damage"), though of course that did then occur. What is reasonable to conclude is that the creation of a climate in which nonviolent activists, theorists, or rabbis are described essentially as cheerleaders for terrorists does risk encouraging others to take violent actions.

There was no doubt that the vandalization had an impact. Members of my family felt scared that the next action might be violence against us, not just our home.

When asked to respond to the role his language might have had, Dershowitz's response was, "I will continue to tell the truth about Michael Lerner, as long as he continues to lie about Israel."

The underlying message: the proper response to a criticism of a government's policies is not a rebuttal of the content of the critique, but rather an attack on the individual who offers the criticism.

Broad-brushed, emotive putdowns of a government are not, in my view, the smartest way to do politics, but they are a legitimate form of public speech. Attacking and demeaning an individual, on the other hand, is not appropriate unless that person is a holder of state power, and even then the attack on them should be limited to a critique of their actions and public speech.

We at *Tikkun* have strived to live up to this standard of ethical critique. For example, we always rejected the practice of



White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel's longtime support for AIPAC did not save him from accusations of anti-Semitism on a May 2010 visit to Israel to celebrate his son's Bar Mitzvah. Here Emanuel, center, and his son, left, visit Jerusalem's Old City.

demeaning George Bush through smears about his use of English grammar. Instead we criticized Bush's public actions and the policy content of his public statements. I believe that the Jewish command against using "evil language" *lashon hara* even applies to the personal life or intentions of a public official, and much more so to private citizens who engage in political activity.

Why this asymmetry in what is legitimate to critique? Critics of the powerful are vulnerable in a way that large corporations, wealthy and powerful elites, and the states that wage wars and violate human rights are not! And that is precisely why liberal ideology developed to protect us from the powerful.

It's ironic and outrageous that Dershowitz calls himself a liberal, even while supporting targeted assassinations—a classic case of governmental power abuse. Dershowitz then claims to be a liberal because he supports a two-state solution (probably in the same spirit that Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu and George W. Bush have publicly claimed that they too support a two-state solution).

But Dershowitz is not the originator or chief perpetrator of the violent discourse against dissenters, and I am not the only or the most significant victim of it. The vandals did only minimal damage, and the attack was not aimed at killing us—unlike the bomb set in front of Israeli peace-oriented Hebrew University scholar Zeen Sternhell. The most significant victims within the Jewish world are the hundreds of thousands of young Jews who have moved away from their Jewishness because they have learned that anyone will be demeaned and shunned who raises fundamental questions of how Palestinians have been treated since 1949. They have been taught by the Jewish community, that to be a "good Jew" requires silencing one's moral doubts about Israeli treatment of Palestinians, so they are distancing themselves from the Jewish community.

For this reason, though I've welcomed statements of support from various Jewish federations and boards of rabbis who have condemned the acts of violence, I've tried to explain to them (and ask you now to join me in this) that **the issue is not just acts of violence, but the discourse of violence that begins with labeling as "anti-Semitic" or "self-hating Jews" all critics of Israel or those who engage in nonviolent struggles to change Israeli policy.**

Nor is this simply an issue for Jews. U.S. policy in the Middle

East has been shaped in part by legislators and government officials who have been intimidated by this violent language. So non-Jews have as much right as Jews to challenge their Jewish neighbors when they start to throw around terms like “anti-Semitic” as a functional equivalent to “critical of Israeli policies.”

Of course defenders of current Israeli policies have every right to criticize the arguments of Goldstone, or *Tikkun*, or J Street—but they cannot label the individuals or the members of the organizations that take critical stands as “anti-Semitic” or “self-hating” unless they have reason to do so. In my book *The Socialism of Fools: Anti-Semitism on the Left*, I lay out a variety of good reasons to see certain kinds of criticism as anti-Semitic, for example those that single out Israel and apply a different standard to Israel than to other countries. I’ve met real anti-Semites and self-hating Jews on the left, and I’ve publicly criticized their behaviors (though avoided mentioning names because I don’t want to make any individual vulnerable to personal attack).

But the profligate use of these accusations works against Israel, against the Jewish people, and against the best interests of the United States.

In addition to turning young Jews away from Judaism and the Jewish community, the tactic of demeaning the critics of Israel has two other terrible consequences.

First, by labeling these critics as “anti-Semitic,” the Jewish world actually empties the charge of anti-Semitism of its sting. Increasing numbers of people are beginning to say, “OK, if ‘anti-Semitic’ means ‘being critical of the policies of the state of Israel,’ then I guess I support anti-Semitism because I know I dislike Israel’s policies.” That, in turn, weakens the Jewish people and makes it easier for the real haters of Jews to mix with the mass of critics of Israeli policy who aren’t anti-Semitic at all, and thereby get their own voices taken seriously. This is a terrible outcome.

Second, to the extent that the labeling of critics works in the short run, it produces a deep resentment against Jews that will eventually explode into real anti-Semitism, which can then be manipulated in destructive ways, both against Israel and against the Jewish people worldwide. People hate “political correctness” imposed upon them by the powerful. Jewish political correctness—to the extent that it effectively imposes a silence on honest debate about Israeli policy as it largely has in the United States—may eventually explode in our faces in unpredictable ways, or even in a resurgence of fascistic forces and widespread anti-Semitism.

When will all this craziness stop? Not soon, judging from Israel’s assault on the flotilla bringing aid to Palestinians living under the Israeli blockade of Gaza. “We were being lynched,” cry the IDF assailants on the flotilla, apparently unaware that when an armed force seeks to board a ship in international waters, the law counts that as an act of piracy or terrorism, and every ship in that situation seeks to defend itself. As writers for the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* put it on June 1, the provocation came from Israeli troops trying to stop the flotilla and, in a broader sense, the irrationality and immorality of the Israeli blockade of Gaza itself. Too many Jews still insist that whatever Israel has done must be just, and whoever suffers must have deserved it, implicitly assuming that “the rules of humanity do not apply to us, because we are



After the Goldstone Report, Israel could have appointed an investigatory commission as it did after the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in 1982. That commission’s report forced Defense Minister Ariel Sharon (above at left in 1983) to resign. Had Israel followed Goldstone’s recommendations, it could have protected itself from growing attempts at delegitimation.

Jews and we have suffered and we must always be perceived as the underdog and righteous victim!” We who love Israel must do all we can to save it from this arrogant and self-destructive blindness.

None of this, however, is to put the blame solely on Israel for the current mess. Hamas rocket attacks—however understandable in light of the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the misery it was causing in 2007 and 2008—were themselves terrible violations of the human rights of Israelis. In my book *Healing Israel/Palestine* I give a full account of the way both sides have been willfully ignorant of the pain and fear that they have caused to the other side. Those who see either side as the “righteous victim” are deeply ignorant of the hurtful, disrespectful, and violent ways that each side has acted toward civilians on the other side.

Yet in the final analysis, it is only through a fundamental shift from the focus on who can best dominate the other to who can win the hearts of the other that is the only hope for a lasting peace. That’s why we at *Tikkun* are urging the United States to take a leadership role in championing a GMP—a Global Marshall Plan (please visit www.spiritualprogressives.org/gmp to read details and learn why we are advocating that the GMP should be implemented first in the Middle East).

If the United States does not publicly let go of the belief that homeland security comes from domination and does not embrace a new worldview that recognizes security as coming from a spirit of caring and generosity toward others, then how can we blame Israel or the Palestinians for not being able to get to that new consciousness when both of them are far more vulnerable than the United States? So our task is not to demean Israel or the Palestinians, nor even to demean those who attack us with words and deeds, but rather to become witnesses to the possibility of a world of kindness, generosity, and love.

For that very reason, starting the day after the attack on my home, I have prayed for God to forgive those who did it, to forgive Dershowitz and others who demean me and my fellow rabbis, and to change the hearts of the Jewish people so that they no longer demean those among us who feel called upon to be witnesses to the possibility of a world based on open-heartedness, repentance, and reconciliation between former enemies! ■

Politics & Society

Is BDS the Way to End the Occupation?

ON MAY 11, 2010, *TIKKUN* HOSTED A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION AMONG PEACE activists on the issue of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS). A transcription of their lively debate—edited for space and clarity—appears below. We invite you to join this important discussion by continuing the conversation on our website and on the Tikkun Daily blog (www.tikkun.org/daily).

Rabbi Michael Lerner (ML): We've convened this roundtable discussion because we at *Tikkun* are aware that the various movements and people engaged in the struggle for peace in the Middle East and who seek reconciliation between Israel and Palestine are increasingly divided over the issue of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS). What we all share in this discussion is the desire to bring peace and justice to the people of Israel and the people of Palestine. We also share a belief that the violence and the suffering on both sides must end and that one important step in that direction is to end the Occupation of the West Bank by Israel, though that is only part of the solution. So today, we're not here to explore the suffering on both sides, though that provides the backdrop to this conversation. Instead, we're asking, "What are the most effective strategies to end the Occupation and to move toward peace, justice, and reconciliation between these two peoples, and how does BDS contribute or not to that process?"

Rebecca Vilkomerson (RV): I want to thank you, Rabbi Lerner, and to thank the *Tikkun* community for giving us the opportunity to have this conversation. I think it's a real model for exactly the kind of conversations we should be having in all sorts of forums within the Jewish community about boycotts, divestment, and sanctions—the BDS movement.

We in Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) recognize that BDS has been used as a tool of all kinds of righteous social justice movements over time. JVP defends the right of activists to use the full range of BDS tactics without being persecuted or demonized. We practice one such use of BDS: the divestment from and boycott of companies that profit from Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. That would include companies operating in occupied Palestinian territory, exploiting Palestinian labor, participating in providing materials or labor for settlements, exploiting environmental resources, producing military or other equipment, and helping to enforce the Occupation. We have come to this position out of a real sense of frustration—not to say despair—that after forty-three years of occupation and decades of "a peace process" there's been no improvement in the situation and things have gotten simply progressively worse on the ground.

BDS is a nonviolent tactic against the daily violence of the Occupation. It's a time-honored tactic that's been used in our own civil rights struggles in the United States, in the grape boycott organized by the United Farmworkers Union under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, in India's struggle for independence from the British led by Gandhi, and of course in South African apartheid days. It's a legitimate tactic and a way of holding Israel accountable to human rights standards and international law. There are a growing number of Israeli groups who are asking the allies of peace around the world to join in this boycott, in support of the Palestinians who are calling for this help from civil society. Many of the participants in the

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

(in order of appearance)



Rebecca Vilkomerson
Executive Director of Jewish Voice for Peace



Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb
Cofounder of the Shomer Shalom Network for Jewish Nonviolence



Maya Wind
Israeli Shminitsi (Conscientious Objector)



Jeremy Ben-Ami
President of J Street

TOP TO BOTTOM: COURTESY OF REBECCA VILKOMERSON, COURTESY OF RABBI LYNN GOTTLIEB, ELLEN DAVIDSON, COURTESY OF JEREMY BEN-AMI



UC Berkeley's student government debated whether to divest from companies profiting from Israel's Occupation of the Palestinian territories this spring. Above, Jewish and Muslim members of the university's Students for Justice in Palestine hold nametags in support of divestment (recreated below for clarity). The motion, which gained support from Noam Chomsky and Desmond Tutu, was passed but vetoed.

Another Jew for Justice for Human Rights. Divest from the Israeli Occupation!
Dan, Chicago

Another Human Being for Human Rights. Divest from the Israeli Occupation!
Cindy, Colorado Springs

Another Jew whose extended family died in Europe's camps for Human Rights. Divest from the Israeli Occupation!
Adrienne, Seattle

COURTESY OF JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE

boycott movement are Jewish, so this is a legitimate part of the Jewish community. It may not be the mainstream part, but it is a growing part.

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb (LG): I have been involved in Israeli/Palestinian conflict transformation for about forty years, since 1966. I've had deep and enduring relationships with the Israeli peace community as well as the Palestinian peace community. I have watched, over the years, a whole variety of strategies devoted to ending military occupation, curtailing violence from suicide bombs and rockets, and ending the Occupation. During this period I have seen public and private negotiations, U.S. presidents sending high-level representatives to try to bridge the differences between the sides, dialogue groups, and mostly what I would call symbolic demonstrations—people gathering in the street to express their will—and after forty years I have seen the situation deteriorate.

When we talk about ending the Occupation we have to be especially mindful of the context: there is an ongoing and increasingly systematic violence targeted against Palestinian nonviolent movements, appropriation of Palestinian land and water, and decreasing freedom of movement—all this has increased exponentially during the processes of peacemaking. As a person committed to nonviolence for my entire life and the Torah of nonviolence, I

also believe that one should continually reevaluate the effectiveness of any strategy used to reduce violence. Dialogue and negotiations have not been successful. Talks and the use of the U.S. as a supposedly “honest broker” between the parties have not worked.

Palestinian society and individuals and groups in Israeli society are now calling upon us to use a time-honored strategy that is designed to target corporations, institutions, and individuals who profit from the Occupation by earning money from making and manufacturing either the instruments of occupation—which is in the security industry—and/or profiting on lands that have been expropriated illegally from Palestinians. These are the subject of boycott, divestment, and sanctions. There is no other way to engage corporations, institutions, and organizations that are profiting without applying pressure, and this works because it creates a partnership that depends on international work. It is not exclusive of the fine efforts of negotiation and/or lobbying, but neither negotiations nor lobbying will be effective without the international and grassroots partnership of individuals who are working in this way.

Maya Wind (MW) [calling into the roundtable from Israel]: I can say a few things sort of as a representative of the *Shministim* movement in Israel (composed of teenagers who refused induction into the Israel Defense Forces in protest of the Occupation). It's important for me to start out by saying that we've had many discussions within the refusal movement in Israel about BDS, and as of now we don't as a group call for it or oppose it—we don't have an official stance. So I'll speak for myself, but a lot of things I will be saying do represent ideas that are common among many in the broader refusal movement in Israel.

As to the *Shministim*, while we are Israelis and our statement of refusal to take part in the military was not only challenging Israeli society and trying to stimulate a different internal Israeli discourse, it was also very much turned to the international community. A lot of our focus as a refusal movement is toward the world, which expresses the sense we have that it's not just up to the Israeli society to bring peace.

In fact, Israeli society is not moving toward peace but rather further away from it, so many of us look to the international community to play a central role in bringing an end to the Occupation and bringing peace.

I think the refusers generally feel that we cannot struggle against the Occupation using the tools or playing by the rules of the occupying forces—you know, the government, the army. Economic activism like BDS is nonviolent, and it's not playing by the rules; it's using a very different tool. We believe in nonviolence because it can be effective. This kind of economic activism is used everywhere, and why shouldn't it be used here in relationship to Israel and the Occupation as well? Often we discuss at great length within the refusal movement: “What does *refusal* refer to?” Refusal could be a much broader term. Our

refusal to be drafted is one thing, but as Israelis what else can we do to refuse to take any sort of part in the Occupation? As Israelis we can't fully engage in BDS as long as we're paying taxes, for example. We discussed: "Should we as a refusal movement call to not pay taxes to the government? Should we refuse to buy products from Israel?" Living in Israel, our ability to engage in BDS is limited. But personally I fully advocate BDS and yes, I and many other of the refusers would certainly be among those Israelis that Rebecca mentioned before who are also calling to the world to boycott us in Israel.

Jeremy Ben-Ami (JBA): Where we start is with a shared deep desire to end the Occupation, to achieve a two-state solution in which the two peoples who have a claim to this one land are able to find peace and security and find a homeland for themselves and for each other in two states, not in one.

We in the J Street movement are very concerned by the views of some of those who are using BDS tactics, and I don't cast aspersions on anyone today in this conversation or on everybody who uses the BDS tactics, but there is a sense in large parts of the BDS movement that there may not be a legitimacy to a State of Israel that is the homeland of the Jewish people.

We in J Street start in our thinking about how to end the Occupation, how to achieve a two-state solution, by reaffirming the principle that Israel has a right to exist as a homeland for Jewish people, that it has an obligation both morally and legally to provide equal rights for all of those who are *citizens* of Israel, and that the only way that Israel will be able to survive as that democratic and Jewish home over the long run is if there is a Palestinian state living alongside it.

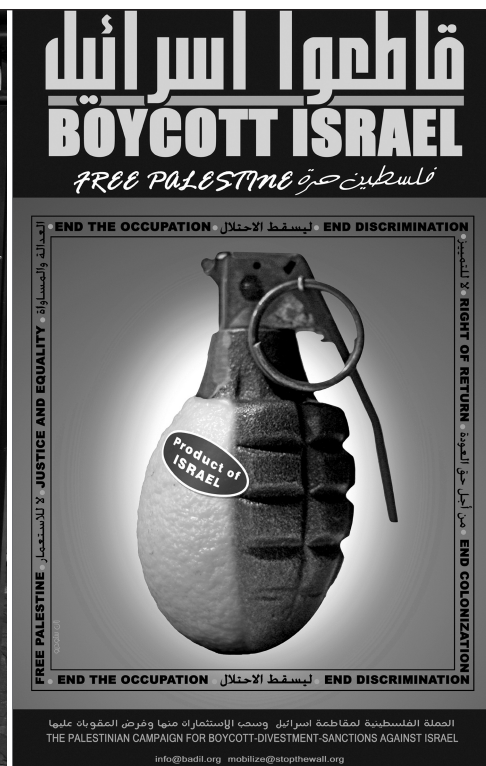
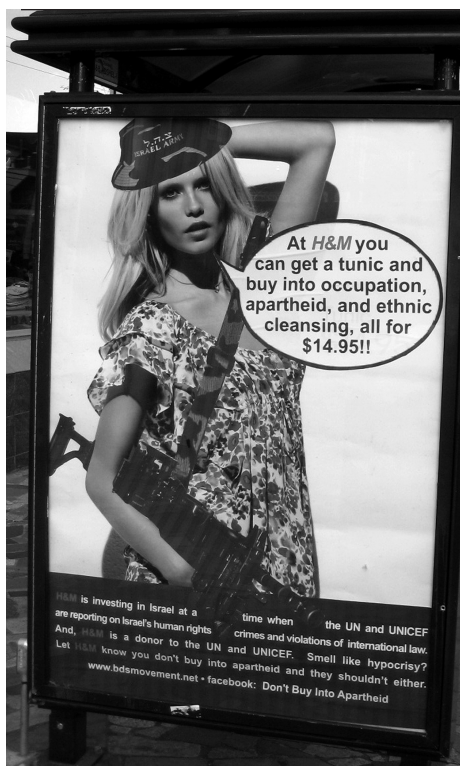
J Street's challenge to those who are using the BDS tactics is not over the tactics. I mean the tactics themselves are neutral—there's nothing inherently wrong or right with any particular tactic. The question is whether or not those tactics are effective and what framing the tactic is being used in. I have not found that BDS efforts are being presented in a way that is in any way supportive of Israel and its right to exist. One can be opposed to Israel's behavior and its policies, and to the particular policies of this particular government, and to the blockade of Gaza, and to the occupation of the West Bank, and to the expansion of the settlements—all of those are things that we at J Street oppose. But the question is, is the BDS critique being framed in a way that allows some to conclude that there is no need for an Israel or that there wouldn't be any great loss if there were just to be one state? That is where our red line is: it's not about the use of the particular tactic; it's the frame of the campaign and the way in which this is being presented.

I am deeply afraid—as somebody who loves Israel, whose family is there, and who has spent a lot of time there—I'm deeply afraid that the way that Israel behaves and the policies that it is following over the next few years and into the next generation are going to lead to Israel becoming a pariah state, to it becoming delegitimized by virtue of its actions. I'm very concerned about that, and to me the key is, how do we get it to change its actions?

I don't think that attacking Israel by boycotting, divesting, engaging in protests, preventing its ambassador from speaking, preventing academics from going places, and not buying



All four participants in this roundtable oppose Israel's Occupation (evoked by this 2009 photo of an Israeli soldier's weapon in front of Palestinians protesting Israel's separation wall). But the participants have different visions about the most viable route toward bringing it to an end.



The BDS movement comprises a variety of organizations and voices. Some only seek to disinvest from firms that, like Caterpillar, are believed to have produced tractors to the specifications of the IDF (Israeli army)—tractors used to destroy Palestinian homes (right). Others seek a more general boycott of Israel (center), while yet others focus on boycotting anything produced in the occupied territories. At left: BDS graffiti on an ad for the Swedish clothing company H&M, which is opening stores in Israel.

When discussing “the BDS movement,” it is important to distinguish among the various elements and organizations, just as we needed to do in the West, for example, in distinguishing different elements in the anti-war or civil rights movements.

products from Israel is going to encourage Israelis to think that there’s an atmosphere in which they can make peace.

I think these behaviors on the part of people opposed to the Occupation only feed into a mentality and an atmosphere in which people circle the wagons and become more defensive. And in fact they argue: “The entire world is against us. How can we make concessions for peace when everybody’s against us?”

The types of tactics that are being used only feed into that mentality and make it more plausible to argue that in fact the world is ganging up on Israel. I know that it is counterintuitive, because the tactics are being used because of the very behaviors that Israel’s engaging in. But it’s all a vicious cycle, and I’m afraid that this set of tactics feeds rather than helps to halt that vicious cycle.

Rabbi Gottlieb said that after forty years of being involved in attempts at the peace movement and negotiations and two-state solutions and all of that, that she’s given up a little bit of hope and so have a lot of people. But I don’t see an alternative, and I think we need to double down on our movement to try to get particularly President Obama to be deeply and actively engaged to outline what a solution is and to make it clear that Israelis and Palestinians have to make some choices now about where they’re at and what they’re going forward to do. Only with American leadership and only in the next couple of years can we stop the situation from becoming irreversible, which really in the long run, for those of us who care about Israel, would mean the end of Israel as we know it.

LG: We all believe in respectful dialogue, which is a matter of grace and civility, and so thank you for that because we all know that talking about issues outside of the accepted or conventional notions of what the peace movement should look like evokes incredible disdain and actually—as Rabbi Lerner very well knows—death threats, loss of jobs, the withdrawal of monies such as is happening in San Francisco to organizations that have a different point of view. So I think that the fact that we can sit at a roundtable and have a respectful conversation and call on our community, the Jewish community, to have such respectful conversations and roundtables is an important accomplishment.

I believe BDS is a sign of hope. It is not taken up out of despair or the feeling that nothing is working. It is one element of ten thousand flowers—let them all bloom—which include pressuring the United States, working in the international community, etc. I believe that BDS is a form of pressure which has a historical track record, which the Jewish community itself has used on many occasions, including the outbreak

of World War II—*l'havdil*, of course, not to equate the two—but the Jewish community has used BDS itself. So I would not characterize it as a lack of hope. I would say it is simply the next phase in this struggle. As Jeremy himself said, if we truly are at the end of a process that in two or three years will take us to a very different dimension if it hasn't already, then BDS should be looked at as a positive influence to apply pressure where none has worked up till now.

RV: I very much agree with what Lynn just said. I find BDS to be the most hopeful thing that's happened in recent years. I was still living in Israel during the Gaza war and during the elections after that, and it was one of the most despairing times that I can remember. The BDS strategy brought Israeli and Palestinian activists together, and it made activists in both communities feel that there is a way to start to transform the current situation, which otherwise seemed hopeless.

I want to ask Jeremy Ben-Ami about the recent Berkeley divestment resolution because you talked, Jeremy, about your fears that boycott was being used to attack Israel and to say it didn't have a right to exist. The Berkeley divestment resolution was a very carefully crafted resolution that simply asked the university to divest from two American military companies that are supporting the continuing Occupation, which is a recognized illegal occupation. I know that J Street is against the Occupation and is against the expansion of settlements, and yet J Street took a position against that divestment resolution at Berkeley along with a long list of other organizations, including the David Project and the Anti-Defamation League and Stand With Us, which have been quite extreme in their tactics and rhetoric. What was your reasoning to oppose a resolution like that, that is so targeted and in no way challenges the right of Israel to exist but simply challenges the Occupation?

JBA: Well I think it was a sin of omission rather than commission. I would agree that the bill was drafted in a way to limit it to the two companies. But I wonder whether it wouldn't have been possible to reaffirm somewhere in the "whereas" clauses that Israel has a right to exist, that there is a historic right to a Jewish home. In these kinds of resolutions there should be affirmation of the right of Israel to exist and of a state of Palestine and a Palestinian home, to live side by side in peace and security. That kind of an introductory paragraph would, to my mind, be a very important step in the right direction. I think that it would be helpful for there to be indications that while the Occupation and the treatment of Gazans and settlement expansion are all bad things, a resolution like that should also indicate that the use of terror and the use of rockets and all of the violence that has been used in the past against Israel are bad things too. A resolution like this would have to have more balance and it would have to indicate that there's not just one side to the story. For the record, J Street will not be signing on to letters with organizations like that in group settings again. I won't comment on going backward, but I will just say going forward you won't find us signing on to letters like that.

RV: Well, I appreciate hearing that very much.

ML: Apart from it being a good feeling for those who have been engaged in the movement to be able to come up with a tactic that feels like "We are doing something," which is of course important for the people in the movement, is there any reason to believe that this is an effective strategy?

MW: As an Israeli activist, I can attest to the fact that Israelis freak out when people talk about BDS, and certainly they do tend to get very defensive. And it kind of plays to the whole narrative that anyway is so strong here, about how "the whole world is against us; we're in an existential threat forever."

I would argue, however, that the alternative that you pose of having Obama or the U.S. administration push Israel along in changing its policies does a similar thing. I mean, if you go around the West Bank, there's countless signs of Obama with a kaffiyeh, "Hussein Obama," "Danger to the Jews," and even just today on the radio, I heard Ehud Barak say very clearly, "Jerusalem, both east and west, is the capital of the Jewish people. We will do with it as we please. The U.S. and Obama can say what they want via recommendations, and we will listen, but it's our country and it's our right." And I think there's a lot of discourse in Israel right now about our autonomy, which of course is a joke, because we get so much in subsidies

COMMUNITY OF
YES

CHORUS OF

NO

J Street rejects what it sees as the negativity of the current BDS movement, as illustrated in its graphic above. The group seeks a positive approach centered on pressuring the U.S. government to push Israel toward peace.



Tikkun has always held that each side needs to understand the emotional suffering, as well as the explanatory narratives, of the other side. The Birthright Unplugged program (above) works mainly with North Americans, many of them Jews, traveling with them to the West Bank, Occupied East Jerusalem, and Israel. They also attempt video conference calls with people trapped in Gaza. Their goal is to offer firsthand experiences in these areas and access to conversations with Palestinian people about their histories, concerns, aspirations, and work. Birthright Unplugged supports Palestinian-led nonviolent campaigns, including the BDS movement, that seek to pressure Israel to comply with international law.

from the U.S. But still, a lot of Israelis are talking about how it's important to stand strong and be independent and not let the U.S. decide for us, because we're not their fifty-second state or whatever. So I would argue that it also contributes a very negative and defensive response from Israelis, probably no less than BDS.

To answer your question, Rabbi Lerner, about its effectiveness, I do think it's effective, for several reasons. For one, a lot of people—both in Israel and probably in the U.S. as well—feel very fed up with the government and big businesses, and all these other CEOs that sort of run the show. And I feel that BDS makes people feel that it's a very down-to-earth, everyone-can-do kind of thing, everyone can stop buying certain products or shop elsewhere, and I think it's effective in that sense—it's a very grassroots sort of thing, it's a thing for the masses to take part in and

feel like it's a very effective, direct action that they are directly involved in; it's not an indirect thing of trying to affect a government to affect another government to affect a situation.

LG: I also want to talk about the ethical dimension of BDS. I would not describe BDS as making us feel better per se, because we are in a struggle for lives and for the future and there is an ethical dimension of noncooperation which is part of the refusal movement, in which even from a kosher point of view one is not allowed to profit or benefit from any products that are either created by exploited labor or through the use of violence. So, from an ethical Jewish point of view, I believe we have an obligation to look at noncooperation, *omets lesarev*, the courage to refuse to cooperate with the products and outcomes of occupation. That is a religious obligation for me, which I take very seriously.

No one who engages in nonviolent struggle knows the outcome of the struggle. There is a level at which one does things because we are ethically called to do them.

And we have a history of success stories, so the idea that BDS is not successful, I think, is contradicted by the very successful history of the use of boycotts by communities of struggle from the United States to South Africa to Europe, throughout the world. So I think it is really up to those who are opposing BDS to show that actually their methods have a hope of success. I would propose that those seeking peace between Israel and Palestine and using different strategies should form a partnership; we should see our work as a partnership, not as "either this or that," but something that we're doing together.

ML: Some who question the effectiveness of BDS in this particular struggle point out that it has only been an effective strategy when proposed in countries where the majority already opposes a given evil reality and is seeking a way to change that reality. If we go to apartheid, for example, in the 1980s, the overwhelming majority of people across the political spectrum, from Reagan on leftward, all believed that apartheid was wrong and articulated that publicly but disagreed about what was the most effective strategy, with Reagan saying "economic and political engagement will give the U.S. more clout to pressure South Africa" and we at *Tikkun* and many others in the movement to end apartheid saying BDS would be more effective. But that opposition to the reality of the Occupation does not yet exist in the U.S. in regard to Israel/Palestine. In fact, a recent poll in May 2010 shows that when asked who they believe is at fault or more at fault for the problems in the Middle East, 80 percent of Americans said that Israel was less at fault and the Palestinians were more at fault. Without that background condition, attempts at BDS only demonstrate how isolated and powerless the peace movement is, not how powerful and potentially effective. That, at least, is one argument that needs to be addressed.

LG: Let me respond in two ways. First of all, the anti-apartheid struggle was a forty-year

movement. That's important to know. If you look generationally at where BDS is in this country, you will see, and I think Jeremy can attest to this from the J Street conference, that younger members of the Jewish community, for instance, are much more inclined to adopt BDS than the elders are.

Number two, I hesitate to use the word "evil." I don't want to use that word because I think we need to continue to humanize each other and refrain from a demonization process, and I believe that we are at a point when a country—which is called the Jewish State, so therefore I feel implicated—can drop white phosphorus bombs, which burn into the skin and are not put out by water, on innocent civilians with impunity, and can take land with impunity, and occupy with impunity. And those of us who have been eyewitnesses to this for the last forty years (as everyone here knows very well) can document the Jewish-only roads, the growth of the settlements, administrative detention, the use of torture, and so forth and so on, and see that this is systematic. It is not occasional or in response to one specific incident, but a systematic oppression.

If you look at the population numbers between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, you have a population that is under siege. Therefore, those of us who want to see a two-state solution, we are duty-bound, I believe, to respond to the call of the targeted population.

We are not in a balanced situation. No Palestinian can go into the home of an Israeli activist, take their computers, lock them up, and throw away the key. We are in a situation where one side has extreme power over the other side. Therefore, in this particular situation, the targeted population—and I'm not saying that there's not suffering on both sides or that rocket-shooting is not wrong and does not deserve to be condemned as a war crime, that has to be stated clearly—but the population targeted for systematic oppression is calling upon the international community to partner with it for the sake of ethics and morality. The majority of Palestinians also want a two-state solution. At this point in the struggle, those of us who would like to see that happen—for love of Israel and love of Palestine and love of humanity and love of future generations of children who will grow up without worrying about death and destruction—for those reasons, we are employing boycott, divestment, and sanctions against corporations.

JBA: I just worry about how to create the atmosphere that we need in order for there to be a mutually agreed-upon and negotiated resolution to this conflict. We need an atmosphere of trust, an atmosphere of understanding that there are very, very painful sacrifices to be made on both sides.

The Palestinian people will have to give up the notion that they can return to the homes that they had to flee in 1948 and that their grandparents and parents fled. Israelis are going to have to pull back their cousins and country-mates from settlements on the West Bank; they're going to have to share Jerusalem. There is going to be painful compromise required on both sides and there is going to be a need to provide a sense of assurance around security, that this is going to work, that people on both sides are committed to each other and committed to this happening. And my concern continues to be that the tone of BDS and the tone of some of the remarks even in this conversation do tend to point the finger at only one side, and tend to lay blame exclusively in one place, and are not helpful to creating that atmosphere. And that in fact they do the reverse—they make people dig in and they make it less likely that there is any hope of a nonviolent end to this conflict.

I still didn't hear from any of the other three folks an affirmation of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish home, with equal rights for all its citizens and a state of Palestine side by side. I'd like to hear that that is a fundamental tenet of the BDS movement and of those who use the tactics,



Jeremy Ben-Ami argues that pressure on the Obama administration—not divestment pressure on multinational companies—will eventually bring Israel to the peace table. Here, Ben-Ami (at right, partially blocking Rahm Emanuel from view) and other Jewish leaders meet with Obama in July 2009.

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that Israel has a right to exist, and I haven't heard that.

So, is there a fundamental tenet of this movement that the right resolution is two states, not one? And is there any sense that the BDS movement should be part of a broader socially responsible investing movement? I mean the issue of whether or not corporations follow the highest principles and morality: that applies to how corporations act all over the place. I mean, BP in the Gulf or military contractors who are profiting off wars all over the globe, and those who supplied the people in Sri Lanka, which led to tens of thousands of deaths at the end of that civil war. There's a range of bad actors out there, and there's a range of issues related to socially responsible investing, but when you just talk about Israel and it becomes the sole focus of these movements on campus and elsewhere, it raises the question in my mind as to whether the issue is morality or Israel? And that is, I think, important. And for people who want to use this in a way that is going to reassure Israel, reassure the Jewish community in the States, I think you need to lead with some reassurances about its right to exist and right to self-defense and right to have security.

RV: I certainly have no problem affirming the right of Israel to exist. I don't think during the anti-apartheid struggle anyone was saying that because we were against apartheid we were against the right of South Africa to exist. States exist.

Lynn actually did say that there is suffering on both sides, and that is absolutely true. And I—as someone who has an Israeli husband and children, who lived in Israel for three years—I don't think anyone can accuse me personally or anyone from JVP of not having the interests of the people of Israel at heart. And I think Maya is a fantastic example of someone from within Israel who is saying the same thing, that we're all fighting together for a better future for all of the people, both in Israel and in Palestine.

But I think one thing that is very problematic about the accusation that it has something to do with the legitimacy of the state is that it sort of turns the argument on its head. People have been condemning Palestinian violent resistance against civilians, rightfully, for years. Yet here's this nonviolent tactic that's a way for Israelis and Palestinians and people of good faith around the world to make an impact on what these policies are doing to people every day in real time, and yet it's those tactics that are being attacked as delegitimizing the state just as vociferously as, if not more than, the violent tactics were. So then what tactic is left to use? I think it's extremely important as citizens of the world, as Jews, and as Americans—as Jews we're implicated in the Israeli state; as Americans we're implicated because of our tax dollars—that we have a way to express, and express in the political full-citizenship sense, our displeasure with Israel's actions.

Additionally, I don't think it's fair to talk about this as a “conflict.” Israel is the occupying power. Israel is the one that is illegally, by international standards, occupying Palestinian land, and Israel is the one that is violating human rights, unfortunately, every single day. So I don't think it's quite fair to say that it always needs to be about two sides, because sometimes one side does need to be called out more than the other. I think Israel, especially because it is considered to be a democracy, it is held to that standard. There are certainly worse human rights abusers in the world. However, Israel as a democratic state, as a Western state, as it declares itself, should be held accountable to international standards. I personally—with my personal attachments to Israel—I hold Israel to that standard, just as I hold the United States to that standard.

ML: Jeremy, do you think it would matter to J Street if resolutions supporting BDS were framed in such a way as to name other countries that it should also be used against, for example, China in relationship to Tibet, Russia in relationship to Chechnya, and Darfur and a number of other human rights-violating states (and Israel was mentioned there as one of those), and then resolutions called for divestment, sanctions, and boycott against all of them and not simply against Israel? Do you think that would change—internally, in J Street and among the people who are the part of the peace movement who do want movement to end the suffering on both sides but who are concerned about Israel being singled out—do you think that would make the difference?

JBA: Well, I think that there would be support within J Street for an effort to frame the discussion around socially responsible investing. There's a whole range (*continued on page 74*)

OYL!

Corruption, the Spirit, the Earth, and Us

by Arthur Waskow

THIS IS NOT AN OIL “SPILL” WE ARE FACING, THE way water might spill from a dish or oil from a tanker—a finite amount in the first place, and then we clean up.

This is more like piercing a hole into the Caverns of Hell, so that they pour forth without limit.

But we can take this disaster as a teaching toward a turning in our lives and action. To that end, I will present some concrete proposals for action at the end of this essay. But let me begin by assessing the depth of our distress.

I. Spiritual Failings

FIRST AND MOST BASIC, THERE IS A SPIRITUAL TEACHING IN all traditions that the U.S. government and global corporations have been systematically violating.

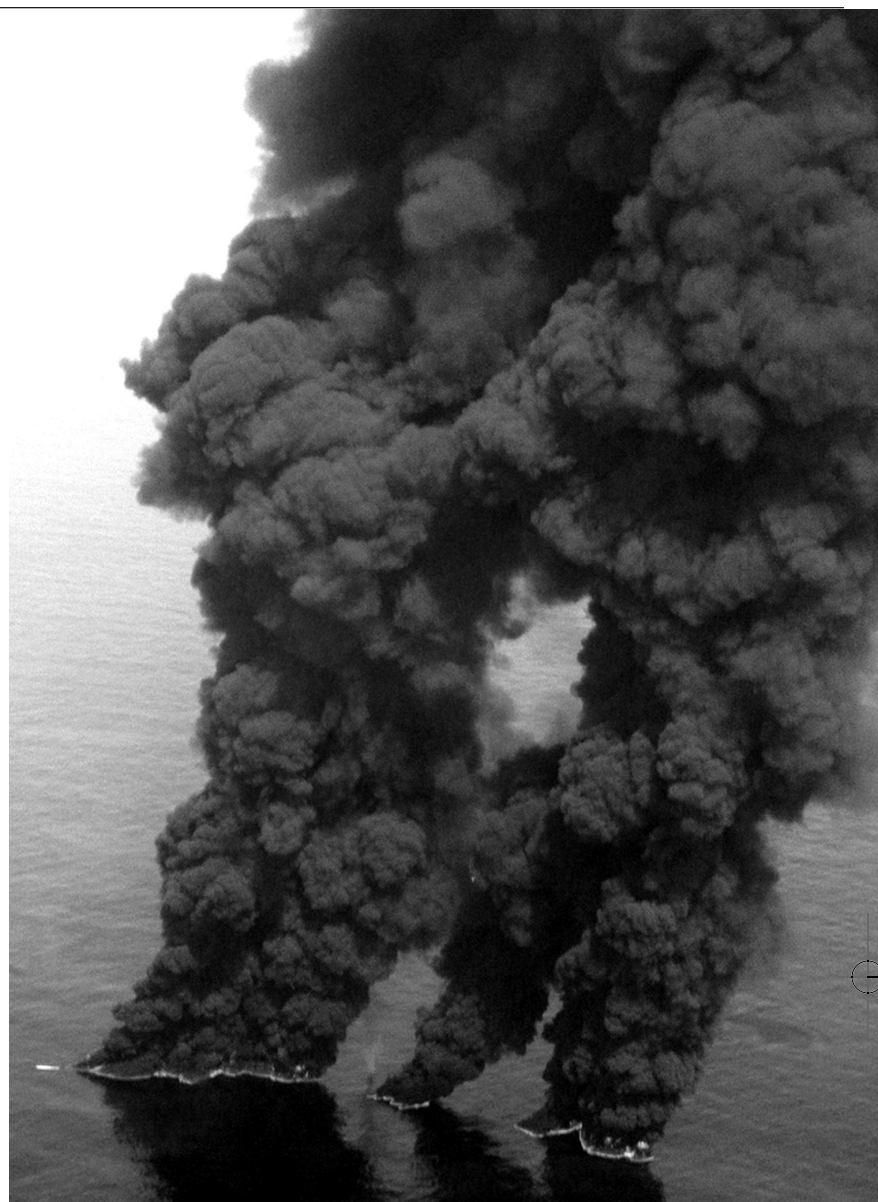
The gulf disaster is an issue of power and the Spirit, not technology. It is rooted in a spiritual disease. One passage of the Hebrew Scriptures—Leviticus 25–26—and millennia of human experience describe this as refusing to let the earth have its Sabbath rest.

When Leviticus 25 calls on us to let the earth and ourselves make a yearlong Sabbath every seventh year, it is not talking about the minutiae of an Orthodox Jewish Sabbath. It is talking about not blowing up mountains to recover every last chunk of coal, not piercing the mile-deep ocean floor to recover every last gallon of oil.

And Leviticus 26 starts by reminding us of the joy we can take in the earth’s abundance if we act with this sabbatical self-restraint; it warns us of the disaster that will follow if we let our greed swallow up the earth, trying to gobble up the abundance all around us; and finally, it calls us to turn in a new direction—and celebrate:

Ye shall make you no idols by carving out a piece of the Whole to worship,
neither rear you up a standing stony image against the flowing living breath

*Rabbi Arthur Waskow is the director of the Shalom Center (theshalomcenter.org), co-author of *The Tent of Abraham*, and author of *Godwrestling—Round 2*, *Down-to-Earth Judaism*, and a dozen other books on Jewish thought and practice, as well as books on U.S. public policy.*



Oil from the Deepwater Horizon/BP catastrophe is burned to reduce the amount in the water, May 19, 2010.

of all Earth's life-forms, to bow down unto it: for I am YHWH the Breath of Life your God.

Ye shall keep my Sabbath-times of restfulness, and revere my holy places: I am YHWH, the Breath of Life.

Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid:

But if ye will not hearken unto me, so that ye break my covenant, I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain.

And I will make your cities waste, and bring your holy places unto desolation, and I will not smell the savor of your sweet odors. And I will bring the earth into desolation.

Then shall the earth enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate; even then shall the earth rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it.

Yet—if they shall confess their iniquity and their trespass which they trespassed against Me, and that also they have walked contrary unto Me, then will I remember my covenant; and I will remember the earth.

What does it mean to “confess our iniquity” and turn in a new direction?

It means to confess our own addiction to the oil and coal that are burning up the earth, and turn as well to face the drug lords of that addiction. For just as Big Tobacco addicted millions of us to lethal nicotine, so Big Oil and Big Coal have addicted millions of us to burning up our planet, our home.

Should we do our best to end our own individual addictions to burning fossil fuels? Yes, and we should also realize that we are indeed caught in a structural addiction that the drug lords helped create. Just as many people with physical addictions to nicotine did their best to force legal restrictions on Big Tobacco, those of us who are forced by the structure of our society to use autos should be working to change that structure.

So we must strip these oil and coal lords of the power that a drug lord has.

On the streets and in the corridors of the Capitol, we must face them down.

The Bible addresses the use of arrogant power to shatter the earth as well as human society in the story of Pharaoh and the Ten Plagues. Indeed, if I believed in the kindergarten version of the Exodus story, in which a disgusted God looks at Pharaoh and says, “Slavery? ZAP! Frogs! Killing newborns? ZAP! Locusts, hailstorms, darkness, death!” If I believed that, I would think that the same God listened to President Obama announce he was opening our coasts to off-shore oil drilling and then just three weeks later said, “Oil drills? ZAP! How’s that for ‘Drill, baby, drill?!’”

I do believe the blowout was an act of God, but in a much more complex way: God as the deepest process in our web of life, the YHWH Interbreathing. (Try pronouncing that “Name” with no vowels; what emerges is the sound of breath and wind. The sound of the breath that we humans breathe in, from what the trees breathe out; the sound of the breath that the trees breathe in, from what we humans and other animals breathe out.)

The difference between Pharaoh on the one hand and Moses, Aaron, and Miriam on

the other was that Pharaoh thought, in the immortal phrase of Pharaoh Rumsfeld: “Frogs? Oh well, stuff happens. Locusts? Oh well, stuff happens. Oil blowouts? Oh well, stuff happens.”

But Moses, Aaron, and Miriam knew that all life is interwoven, that YHWH is the One that Breathes us all. So as the *Sh'ma* (that crucial Jewish affirmation of God's Unity) teaches that if we reject that Unity and bow down to “gods” of greed, ambition, power—bad things will happen.

If we try to gobble up the earth's abundance, if we leave no room for self-restraint, then the abundance will vanish and we will face famine, drought, impoverishment, death.

Our self-restraint must be rooted in a sense of community that balances the impulse to control. I-Thou must balance I-It. And this attitude toward human communities and toward the earth is what Pharaoh rejected.

2. The Pharaohs of Our Day

START FROM A SIMPLE TECHNOLOGICAL QUESTION. IN MANY OF the world's offshore oil wells, there is a remote-controlled “acoustic switch,” a shut-off device that is the last resort when the technology malfunctions and a blowout nears. Some countries mandate the acoustic device, and many companies insert them even when they are not required. But the United States does not mandate them, and BP did not insert one.

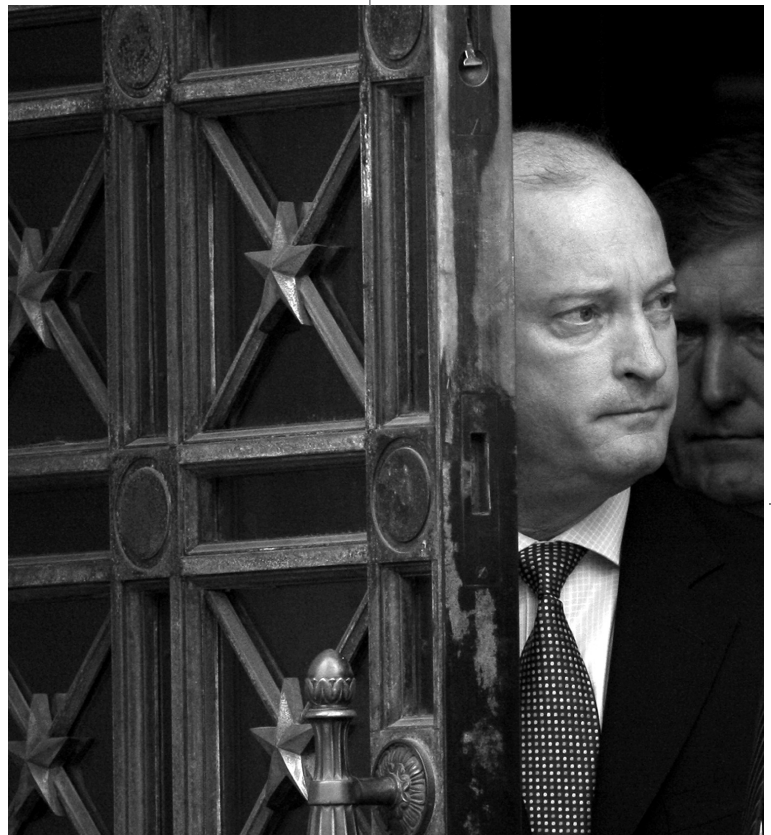
When I say “the United States,” in this case I mean a division of the Interior Department called the Minerals Management Service. What do we know about it?

That on September 10, 2008, at the end of the Bush years, Charlie Savage of the *New York Times* reported:

In three reports delivered to Congress on Wednesday, the department's inspector general, Earl E. Devaney, found wrongdoing by a dozen current and former employees of the Minerals Management Service, which collects about \$10 billion in royalties annually and is one of the government's largest sources of revenue other than taxes. “A culture of ethical failure” pervades the agency, Mr. Devaney wrote in a cover memo.... Two other reports focus on “a culture of substance abuse and promiscuity” in the service's royalty-in-kind program. That part of the agency collects about \$4 billion a year in oil and gas rather than cash royalties.... “The investigation also concluded that several of the [Minerals Management Service] officials ‘frequently consumed alcohol at industry functions, had used cocaine and marijuana, and had sexual relationships with oil and gas company representatives.’”

Each acoustic switch costs half a million dollars, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. It costs much less than that to provide enough gifts, outings, booze, drugs, sex, and promises of future employment to keep the Minerals Management Service happy. Here's the political balance book: invest a hundred thousand bucks or so to buy gifts for the agencies that oversee you, make billions in profit from the absence of oversight, use the billions to invest in election campaigns if some clueless sheriff starts complaining about your giftshop. A sweet deal, all around.

The Minerals Management Service gave British Petroleum (BP) a blanket exemption from having to prove the safety, both short-term in rig technology and long-term in



One of the pharaohs of our day, BP America Chairman Lamar McKay, leaves the Interior Department in Washington after a closed-door meeting, May 3, 2010.

ecological implications, of its highly profitable investment. Why not? Being bribed by sex and drugs is *so* sweet!

Now this kind of corruption is bad enough. And the Gulf disaster, a kind of blowup of the picture of this corruption, is surely bad enough. But even the Gulf disaster is small potatoes compared to the global disaster Big Oil is cooking up for us, colluding with Big Coal to see how much they need offer to buy the government.

If it took sex, drugs, and dollars to corrupt the Minerals Management Service and enable the Gulf oil disaster, it will take much more to corrupt Congress and enable a global disaster.

3. Making Policy Choices

AS FOR A CLIMATE HEALING ACT FROM CONGRESS: SENATOR GRAHAM, A REPUBLICAN who was originally among the sponsors of one of the Senate climate/energy bills, began to whine that the oil blowout was ruining the chances to pass a bill.

Why? Because now the big payoff to Big Oil, permission to do offshore drilling, was in danger. Those offshore permits were to pay for Big Oil's tolerating a climate act full of other

sweet goodies for itself. And without the permits, Big Oil would go home sulking, not ready to pay the House of ill repute called the Senate enough to buy their votes any more.

There are *two* climate bills before the Senate. Most of the Big Media are mentioning only one—sponsored by Senators Kerry and Lieberman. That was the one Senator Graham quit. But it still panders to the power of Big Oil, Big Coal, Big Nukes. Because it does, say the Big Media, it has a bare chance of passing.

Because the other bill does not contain lollipops for the Bigs, the media say it has no chance of passing. This other bill, by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) is the only one that is bipartisan, the only one that has women among its sponsors. It has supporters from parts of the environmental community but not from Big Coal, Big Oil, or Big Nukes.

What's the difference? The Kerry-Lieberman bill is almost a thousand pages long, the better to supply many, many goodies for Big Nukes, Big Coal, and Big Oil. For

example: Until the oil eruption in the Gulf, the draft bill opened the door wide for rampant oil drilling. Now, a little ashamed or a little scared, its authors changed it a little.

It still opens the door to drilling but now says coastal states can veto drilling near them. But to do it, they have to get the legislature to pass a law, and give up lots of federal money. When Big Oil gets New Jersey or Florida in its sights (remember the bribes of money, drugs, and sex Big Oil used on the Minerals Management Service in Washington?) we can all kiss goodbye to the beaches, fishes, and oceans of the Atlantic Coast.

The Kerry-Lieberman bill also gives Wall Street the gift of a system of carbon credits that can be sold like the derivatives that made such a mess of our economy in 2008.

And the Kerry-Lieberman bill cripples the ability of the EPA to set rules for emissions of carbon dioxide and other heat-increasing gases, and cripples the ability of states to set higher standards than Congress does. If those provisions stay in the bill, our planet and we are better off without it.

The Cantwell-Collins bill is much simpler. Just forty pages long. Where Kerry-Lieberman feeds the money to the derivatives market, Cantwell-Collins sets a national cap on carbon dioxide emissions, has the U.S. government auction all under-the-cap permits to emit carbon dioxide, and then passes on 75 percent of the auction proceeds as a dividend to every legal resident of the United States—about \$1,000 a year (so it's called "cap and dividend").



Democratic Senators Maria Cantwell, Diane Feinstein, and Barbara Boxer, next to a photo of the burning Gulf of Mexico oil rig, announce a bill to limit offshore oil drilling on May 13, 2010. Cantwell and Republican Senator Susan Collins have also proposed a climate bill, the Carbon Limits and Energy for America's Renewal (CLEAR) Act, which Arthur Waskow praises in this article.

AP PHOTO/HARRY HAMBURG

The rest goes to research and development for solar, wind, and energy-conserving measures, and for green jobs.

Fuel costs based on carbon would rise, but the \$1,000 dividend would more than pay the extra cost for working-class and middle-class families.

At the Shalom Center, we view the Collins-Cantwell bill as far, far preferable. And we think there must be a halt to offshore oil drilling. So if you go to <http://tiny.cc/shalomletter> you will find a draft letter to senators urging that Congress make strong climate/energy law the highest priority for national and global security, including these steps:

- Prohibit, at once and permanently, all new offshore oil drilling in U.S. waters, and end all offshore drilling by July 4, 2020.
- End all federal subsidies to oil and coal production, and raise the liability limit from the present ridiculous \$75 million to \$10 billion for companies that, like BP, wound the earth and our country.
- Channel large subsidies to research, development, and installation of energy-conserving practices, solar and wind energy production, and the creation of green jobs.
- Pass strong climate-healing laws that cap all greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. and return fees for emissions as dividends to all legal U.S. residents.
- Encourage stricter emissions limits by the states and the EPA.
- Provide crucial support to poor countries that are already suffering from the effects of global warming, and to help them pursue a non-fossil fuel path for economic development.

We provide two different versions of the letter, and we encourage you to make either one your own, in your own words, your own language. The more personal the letter feels when a senator reads it, the better.

4. Prayerful Public Empowerment

WHILE TRADITIONAL LETTER-WRITING TO CONGRESS MEMBERS IS NECESSARY, IT WILL not be enough to move them. We need the kind of nonviolent direct action that brought about the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. At last, in New Orleans and in Houston the American people are beginning to stir. Demonstrations have begun. Are the rest of us ready to turn our country—our world—in a new direction?

Start a boycott of BP in your community.

Use the days from July 18-20 for prayerful study and public action to prevent climate disaster and toward building a new worldwide sustainable economy.

July 20 is the three-month anniversary of the BP oil blowout, and it is also *Tisha B'Av*, the traditional Jewish day of grief for the destruction of the Holy Temple (which today means our earth itself) and of hopeful action toward the healing of the world.

How can we create a grassroots response that is rooted in spiritual commitment and effective political action?

My model and my motto is what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said as he came home from the March on Selma, Alabama, that brought about a Voting Rights Act at the height of the Civil Rights Movement: "I felt as if my legs were praying."

For there is only one answer to the disgusting, lethal—literally lethal—mess that we confront, imposed on us by the overweening power of Big Coal and Big Oil to purchase parts of our government.

That is prayerful public empowerment: Enough citizens angry enough about the poisoning of our planet and hopeful enough about the healing of our earth to answer the oil blowout in the Gulf by creating a democratic blowout across America. Small "d." A movement now as powerful as the Civil Rights Movement was forty-five years ago, when it forced Lyndon Johnson to bring Congress the Voting Rights Act.

That movement got laws passed by using both the conventional forms of lobbying (writing Congress members, visiting their offices, etc.) and unconventional forms (nonviolent direct action, civil disobedience, sit-ins, marches, freedom rides, *(continued on page 77)*)

Ha'Rav Kook: Master of the Lights

by Itzhak Marmorstein

A world of chaos stands before us, all the time that we have not yet reached the “*tikkun elyon*”—the highest level of healing, repairing, transforming—by uniting all life forces and all their diverse tendencies. As long as each one exalts himself, claiming, I am sovereign, I and no other—there cannot be peace in our midst (*Notebook 8:429*).

IN THE EARLY 1980S, IN A SUNLIT COTTAGE IN WINNIPEG BEACH, CANADA, I SAT down to read from the writings of Rabbi Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook, TZ”L (*Tzadik Zichrono Livracha*—the righteous, whose memory should be a blessing), who passed away in 1935. I knew well the world of chaos. I am an Israeli-born only child of Holocaust survivors; my mother was in Auschwitz. I absorbed on the cellular level the reality that a huge darkness and evil had recently occurred in the world. For some time, and in response, I had been seeking the greatest possible light.

My search brought me to serious study of the Torah in 1973, though I remained disturbed by the manifestations of parochialism in the religious world. And then I read:

All our endeavors must be directed toward disclosing the “*or hashalom haclali*,” the light of universal harmony, which derives not from suppressing any power, any thought, any tendency, but bringing each of them within the vast ocean of infinite light, where all things find their unity, where all is ennobled and exalted, all is hallowed (*Notebook 8:429*).

As I read, I experienced an internal expansion, an inner recognition.

We must liberate ourselves from confinement within our private concerns.... This reduces us to the worst kind of smallness, and brings upon us endless physical and spiritual distress. It is necessary for us to raise our thought and will and our basic preoccupations toward universality, to the inclusion of all, to the whole world, to humankind, to the Jewish people, to all existence.... The firmer our vision of universality, the greater joy we will experience and the more we will merit divine illumination (*Orot HaKodesh 3:147*).

Continuing to read, I felt my soul stirring, touched by an extraordinary consciousness whose grasp of the brokenness and wholeness of existence and the possibilities for perfection was breathtaking and clear:

Tshuva-return is inspired by the yearning of all existence to be better, purer, more vigorous and on a higher plane than it is. Within this yearning is a hidden

Israeli-born Rabbi Itzhak Marmorstein, MSW, has been studying and teaching the writings of Rav Kook for thirty years. His focus now is on performing Rav Kook's poetry with jazz musicians. For CDs and booking, visit www.haorot.org. The textual translations in this piece are adapted from Rabbi B.Z. Bokser's translation; the poem is translated by I. Marmorstein.

life-force for overcoming every factor that limits and weakens existence (*Orot HaTshuva/Lights of Return*, 6:1).

Since that light-filled afternoon, I have often been inspired deeply by the writings of Rav Kook—known by some as *Baal Ha'Orot*, the Master of the Lights. I have dedicated my life to sharing his song with the world. His seventy-fifth *Yaartzeit* (anniversary of passing) approaches (Elul 3/August 14), and it is my privilege to share with you a little of his story and some highlights from the Kook book.

Everyone in contact with Rav Kook described a similar picture.

Here was a rabbi, a Cohen, with unparalleled knowledge of the breadth and depth of the entire Torah. Here was an enlightened soul whose illumination shone powerfully. Here was a fearless leader, instrumental in the process leading to the Balfour Declaration, the first Chief Rabbi of the nascent Land of Israel, whose love for all humankind was boundless.

He was respected and loved by Ashkenazi and Sephardi, religious and secular, intellectual and worker, Right and Left. Chagall said upon meeting him that he now knew what holiness is. Einstein on conferring with him in 1925 said that Rav Kook was one of the few people who understood his theory of relativity. He told Einstein about passages in kabbalistic texts that speak of varying experiences of time in different *hechalot* (chambers of experience). In *Jewish Mysticism*, Gershon Sholem explained that Rav Kook was the “last [newest] example of productive Kabbalistic thought that I know.”

The noisy opposition of a small percentage of the ultra-Orthodox Old Yishuv (Jewish residents of the land before establishment of the State of Israel) did not prevent him from boldly putting forth a vision of integration, a vision of universal peace and love:

The whole Torah, its moral teachings, commandments, good deeds and studies has as its objective to remove the roadblocks so that universal love should be able to spread, to extend to all realms of life (*Midot HaRaya: Ahava* 12).

He first arrived in the land of Israel on the twenty-eighth of Iyar, 1904.

He stepped off the boat in Yaffo and prayed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and Israel. This day is now forever stamped in Jewish history as *Yom Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem Day). For it was on Iyar 28 (June 7), in 1967, that the IDF captured the Old City of Jerusalem in the midst of the Six-Day War. Rav Kook was the first to use the term *Medinat Israel* (the State of Israel).

In 1908, he wrote a letter calling for the reconciliation of Jews, Muslims, and Christians. He explained that the Torah records Yaakov, saying upon his emotional reunion with his twin brother/enemy, Esau, “I have seen you; it is like seeing the face of *Elokim*” (Genesis 33:10). Rav Kook continued:

The words of Yaakov shall not go down as a vain utterance. The brotherly love of Esau and Yaakov, of Itzhak and Ishmael, will rise above all the “*mehumot*”—disturbances ... and transform them to “*or ve'chesed olam*”—universal light and compassion (*Letters* 1:112).

Jewish tradition explains that the feud between Yaakov and Esau is the prototype for the hostility between Jews and Christians and that the history of Itzhak and Ishmael seeded the tension between Jews and Muslims. At the beginning of our return to the land, Rav Kook called for the core of love that exists between each brother and sister to re-emerge:



The author, Rabbi Itzhak Marmorstein, declaims Rav Kook's poetry as Rabbi Greg Wall leads his band, Greg Wall's Later Prophets, on the CD Ha'Orot: The Lights of Rav Kook. This summer is the 75th anniversary of the death of the much-loved poet and scholar Rav Kook, the first chief rabbi of the nascent land of Israel.

This broad understanding [that we are all actually brothers and sisters each reflecting Divinity] must be our guide in all our ways in the end of days ... turning the bitter to sweet and darkness to light (*Letters* 1:112).

His entire life and thought was dedicated to *tikkun*, to directing life toward the light of harmony:

When love-possessed people see the world, living creatures full of quarrels, hatred, persecution and conflicts, they yearn with all their being to share in those aspirations that move life toward wholeness and unity, peace and tranquility.... They want that every particular shall be preserved and developed and that the collective whole shall be united and abounding in peace (*Notebook* 1:101).

He encouraged the inward journey:

The greater a person is, the more they must seek to discover themselves. The deep levels of our soul remain concealed, so that we must be alone frequently, to elevate our imagination, deepen our thought, and to liberate our mind. Then our soul will reveal itself to us by radiating some of its light upon us (*Orot HaKodesh* 3:270).

He invited each person to value and share his or her inner truth:

Let everyone express in faithfulness and truth whatever their soul reveals to them, let everyone bring forth their spiritual creativity from potentiality to actuality without any deception. Out of such sparks torches of light will be assembled and they will illuminate the whole world out of their glory. Out of such fragments of inner truth, will the great truth emerge (*Orot HaKodesh* 1:166).

He supported the highest possible idealism:

The great dreams are the foundation of the world.... The crudeness of conventional life, wholly immersed in its materialistic aspect, removes from the world the light of the dream.... The world is in convulsion with pains engendered by the destructive toxins of reality, devoid of the brightness of the dream.... The free dream, which is in revolt against reality and its limitations, is truly the most substantive truth of existence (*Orot HaKodesh* 1:226).

People often ask, "What would Rav Kook say if he were alive today?"

I feel he was too original and too independent a thinker for anyone to really know, though many are happy to speculate. As he himself said, "The inner essence of the soul ... must have absolute inner freedom. It experiences its freedom, which is life, through its originality in thought" (*Orot HaKodesh* 1:177).

I write this as a personal tribute to a sage who has brought so much light into my life and the lives of countless others. And as an invitation to anyone seeking deeper understanding to read directly from the wisdom of Rav Kook. Contemporary idealists, spiritual seekers, and world fixers of all backgrounds will find much of interest in his sophisticated and holistic teachings.

We, like him, continue to be faced with the immense challenge of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). In exploring the dynamics of repair, Rav Kook emphasized that *tov* (good) is the strongest force in existence and our dedication to it is our most powerful tool.

(continued on page 70)

Word Jazz: Music and the Poetry of Rav Kook

by James Stone Goodman

WE CAN SENSE THE SHARED MATRIX OF POETRY AND MUSIC IN the rhythmic loam of language from which they both arose. Some of our languages preserve the connection in name: in Hebrew we use *shirah* to signify both song and poem, as if all song implies poetry and all poetry implies music.

It is no stretch, in a theoretical sense, to walk the bridge between poetry and music, but to accomplish it in a compelling way that elevates both the music and the poetry—well, that is tricky. I hear this sort of bridging on the new Tzadik Records CD, *Ha'Orot: The Lights of Rav Kook*, a collaboration between New York jazz group Greg Wall's Later Prophets and Rabbi Itzhak Marmorstein. For the music to complement the words, and the words to integrate around the music—this is rare.

Rabbi Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook (1865–1935) was one of the great lights of our tradition. He came to Israel in the early years of the twentieth century. He spent the World War I years in England, and later returned to Israel to become the rabbi of Jerusalem and then the first chief rabbi of the land of Israel, before the state was founded. He was a great teacher, a master of both *Halachah* (law) and *Aggadah* (lore), a practical man, a poet, and a mystic. He made a profound impact.

Rav Kook's poetry is a visionary poetry of traditional associations and allusions, of yearning, purity, return, a sense of brokenness, and a universality of spiritual reach and redemption. Itzhak has dedicated himself to be Rav Kook's interpreter, and joining him on this album is a stellar quartet that deeply respects the music of Rav Kook's poetry.

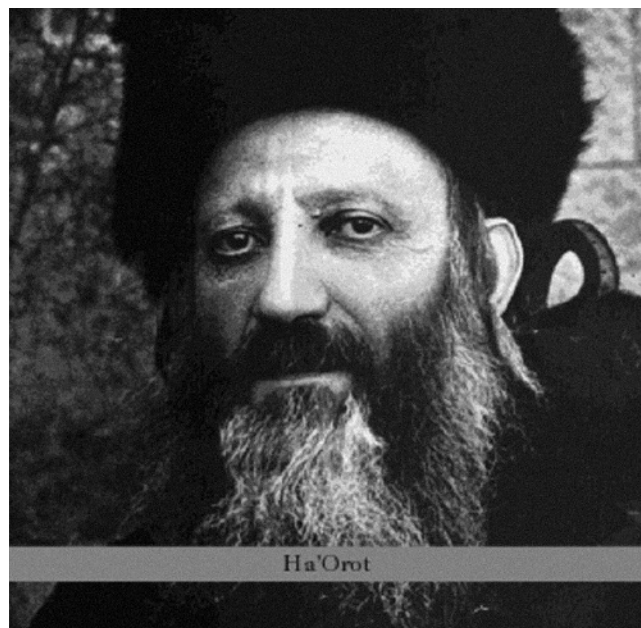
A solid rhythm track begins and ends the CD, a bluesy accompaniment that is not too stingy but does not usurp the place of the language. I love Dave Richard's bass playing throughout. The language floats and leaves room for saxophonist Rabbi Greg Wall to play over the top and reach. "It's the good that I desire," calls Itzhak, yearning, and its shadow echo follows in the mix.

Some of the tracks have a freer jazz accompaniment or even some electronics, always leaving space for the other instrumentalists. All the musicians—including Shai Bachar on keyboards and Aaron Alexander on drums—are wonderful and are featured well in the mix.

There is more room in some tracks than in others, a modal nod now and again from the saxophone to Eastern European musical rootedness. Itzhak declaims some of the poetry in English translation but mostly includes the original Hebrew so the listener has a sense of the music in the words. He also modulates his voice to suit the poetry. There is an easy mix of Hebrew and English throughout, often moving back and forth between languages.

There is room for words and music on this unique and stirring CD, some play in the mix and arrangements, an occasional freer jazz feel, and always a respect for the music of poetry and the poetry of music, honor to both.

It's a great way to experience the light of Rav Kook. ■



Ha'Orot

Rabbi James Stone Goodman serves Congregation Neve Shalom and the Central Reform Congregation in St. Louis, Missouri. He is a musician (five CDs) and a writer whose creativity can be found at www.stonegoodman.com.

Speaking Our Pain: Anguish, Comfort, and Wonder in the Psalms

by Pamela Greenberg

THE PSALMS, THAT BODY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE SO BEAUTIFUL AND PASSIONATE, so full of longing, are often rejected by those committed to progressive politics. There are good reasons people might object to aspects of the psalms (and I address a few of these concerns in online essays at www.tikkun.org). Here, though, I would like to encourage those of us interested in changing the world and transforming ourselves to turn to them again and take another look. As someone who has spent a good amount of time over the last ten years wrestling with the psalms and translating them, I will offer some thoughts about how we can use this ancient body of literature to strengthen us in our spiritual and moral lives, in our pursuit of inner transformation and outward justice.

The first and most obvious thing about the psalms is that they awaken us to the possibility of speaking honestly about our pain. So much of life and so many of our distortions rise up when we react to our emotional lives rather than expressing our sorrows and hurts in a transformative way. And in the psalms, the expression of pain is different from, say, most psychotherapy (which certainly has a useful place). The psalms are about “getting things out,” but doing so in the faith that we will be somehow comforted and upheld by a force of transcendence. The faith of the psalms is not a simple one. It is, for the most part, a willed faith, even in the context of God’s perceived absence. Over and over, the psalmist interrupts a catalogue of anguish and grievance to interject a statement of affirmation and hope. Here is an example from Psalm 73:

As for me, my legs almost stumbled beneath.
Only peace for the wrongful did I see ...

Pride is the adornment around their neck.
Their clothing in a shawl of violence ...

If I were to tell what I have suffered,
behold! I would be a traitor to your children’s generation.

And when I pondered this,
all life seemed trouble and turmoil in my eyes—

until I entered your holy sanctuaries,
and understood that even they come to an end ...

Rock of my Faith and my Portion:
your blessing of life continues forever.

One thing progressives can learn from is precisely this hope rooted in faith. It is the faith of Martin Luther King Jr. when he says, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” It is the faith that allows us to listen to another whose views we may find contrary or even

Pamela Greenberg is a writer and translator. Her translation of the psalms, The Complete Psalms: The Book of Prayer Songs in a New Translation was published in April by Bloomsbury (see www.thecompletepsalms.com).

insulting to ideals of justice, and say, “I hear your fear and anguish, but here is another way.”

The psalms are often outraged by the lack of justice in the world and are constantly calling upon God to account for it. They express our frustration at the world’s mysterious and stubborn refusal to measure up to what seem like such obvious and clear ideals. But that frustration is also accompanied often by a belief in God, which colors the anger and gives it contours of trust and patience. Here is an example from Psalm 37:

Calm your anger, abandon rage.
Don’t grow heated; it can only bring harm ...

In just a little while there will be no one
who causes hurt.

You will glance at where they were,
and they will be there no longer.

But the humble will inherit the earth.
They will delight in their long contentment.

And this, from Psalm 42:

Why are you bent so low, my soul?
And why so in tumult over me?

Be hopeful; wait for God.

In my translation, because I refer to God as neither masculine nor feminine, I often refer to God by one of the divine attributes—Holy One, Eternal, Creator, and a whole range of others. For those of us working to heal and transform the world, one of the most important of these names is Source of Hope. God stands for comforter, companion, and hope for a better world. From the midst of darkness, the psalmist cries out, “*Min ha metzar karati ya*,” lines from Psalm 118, which is among those Jews sing on all major holidays. “From a place of constriction I called to you,” the psalm reads, “and you answered with an expanse of heavenly presence ... God is with me, I have no fear. / What can a mere mortal do to me?” Ultimately, this psalm and others like it help us reclaim not only our hope but also our power.

Another aspect of the psalms that is essential to our pursuit of ecological and human justice is the realm of wonder. The lines of these verses often evoke a rapt awe at the natural world. We who dedicate ourselves to environmental causes are accustomed to bemoaning the pollution and denigration of our environment. But for the psalms, nature stands as an ideal—a clear example of God’s providence and presence in our lives. More than that, the psalms envision a world in which our moral lives will one day approximate the clarity and beauty of nature. I believe that a return to a sense of wonder at the natural world is essential to our fight to preserve and rescue the planet, that we will succeed only when we combine a sense of the real dangers and threats with a wonder at the beauty that surrounds us.

Here is an excerpt from Psalm 104:

Stand in wonder, O my soul, before the Eternal.
Holy One, my God, you are vast beyond measure ...



Kabbalistic renderings of the psalms by artist Moshe Tzvi HaLevi Berger swirl across the walls of Jerusalem’s Museum of Psalms.

You stretch out the sky like a cloth,
rafters over water in the realms above ...

You send forth springs into rivers.
They flow between mountains;
you provide water to all beasts of the field ...

You cause grass to sprout up for the cattle,
crops for the labor of human hands,

bringing forth bread from the earth,
wine to delight the human heart—

Soon sinners will vanish from the earth,
the wrongful exist no more.

Stand in wonder, O my soul, before the Eternal.
Let my soul shine praises on God.

The word “sinners” may initially turn people off, but in Hebrew it really means those who have missed the mark. What this psalm envisions is a day when all people, under the influence and grandeur of nature, turn from ways of violence and greed. In Judaism, the soul is envisioned as “pure.” Every morning we have a traditional prayer thanking God for our soul and its original purity. The vision of the natural world expanding into our inner world, so prevalent in the psalms, is important to hold on to during these muddy and difficult times.

We need today, more than ever, to be stubbornly hopeful in our pursuit of justice—in the face of all evidence, scientific and otherwise, to quietly say, “I believe in the possibility of change.” Psalm 27 begins by addressing our fears and ends at a place of conviction. Here are the final lines:

Teach me, Source of Justice, your ways,
and lead me down the level plain
because of the dangers that surround me on every side.

Don't give me over to the breath of my fears.

For distortions have risen up in the name of truth,
they breathe out visions of destruction.

If only I could believe that I would see God's goodness
in the land of the living ...

Keep up your hope in God.
Strengthen your heart and sturdy it.
Keep up your hope in God.

Cynicism and burnout are so common among progressives that they have become virtually occupational hazards. That makes sense. We see the contradictions and disappointments so prevalent in our political, personal, and economic lives. As the psalmist says in Psalm 39, “And so it is futility, all human beliefs—Selah.” Cynicism is certainly a tempting conclusion to come to. The problem is that the world is not changed by cynicism. Cynicism too often translates into a failure to engage productively, a sidelining of oneself in the name of perfection.

But in the psalms, cynicism is never the final word. Let's look at Psalm 1, the first psalm in the Book of Psalms:

(continued on page 78)

A stylized illustration of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. Mary is depicted with a dark complexion, wearing a white headscarf and a red robe. The Christ Child is shown with a lighter complexion, wearing a white robe, and is being held by Mary. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color with faint, stylized text on the right side.

These are just a few of the questions taken on by authors in this ambitious special section on queer spirituality and politics. Jay Michaelson's cover story issues a dual challenge, urging conservative Jewish and Christian people to engage fully with LGBT claims, and calling on secular gay rights activists to consider the necessity of religious backing for successful civil rights campaigns.

The next eight pieces focus less on the traditional religious milieus, and more on religious and political innovation, or what Nichola Torbett's popular post on Tikkun Daily (tikkun.org/daily) last year called "The Radical Potential of Being Queer." Price gives a broad overview of LGBT activism and the resultant cultural/political shifts over the last sixty years. Starhawk tells how these radical developments played out in her Pagan community. Udis-Kessler and Lostroh question the wisdom of basing demands for acceptance on the argument that LGBT people "can't help" being who they are. Somerson reports on queer Jews responding to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Koyama cautions U.S. activists not to bolster imperialistic dynamics in responding to anti-gay repression in Uganda. Kolodny looks at how bisexuality expands the terms of gay politics and theology. Smith widens the lens further in looking at the radical challenge that queer thought and life present to imperialism, while Spade explores its challenge to capitalism.

U.S. attitudes toward homosexuality have undergone amazing transformations in recent decades, thanks in great part to innumerable acts of bravery as queer people publicly came out. LGBT people have supported each other for years with myriad acts of love, sex, writing, organizing, celebrating, marching, arguing, healing, service, and solidarity—what we at *Tikkun* would call a spiritual politics. Queer history provides a model for how society can change as we each find the courage to come out as loving, caring people, radically unable to live within the norms of a hierarchical, capitalist, violent world.



Ten Reasons Why Gay Rights Is a Religious Issue

by Jay Michaelson

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS THAT APPEAL TO RELIGION succeed. Those that do not, fail. Contrast the fates of the Civil Rights Act and the Equal Rights Amendment, or the way African American civil rights was understood before and after Dr. King's religious message. As both pollsters and election results continually remind us, mainstream Americans do not respond to arguments about constitutional rights and equality; they respond to moral arguments, shared values, and religion—unsurprisingly, since over 90 percent of Americans profess a belief in God.

The centrality of religion to civil rights discourse is amplified when the civil rights struggle questions a status quo largely supported by religion. We may no longer remember the musty religious arguments today, but the Bible was once used to enforce segregation as much as to oppose it. God placed the races on

different continents, segregationists said. God sanctioned slavery. Africans were heirs to the curse of Ham. And so on. Dr. King and his movement have so succeeded in their reframing of civil rights that these arguments may strike us today as bizarre. But just fifty years ago, they were preached from pulpits around the country.

Yet unlike the debate over African American civil rights, our current national debate regarding equal rights for sexual minorities (I will speak primarily here of gays and lesbians, though most of the arguments apply to gender minorities such as transgender persons as well—and I use the broad term “gay rights” to encompass all of these), has so far included religion on only the negative side of the argument. The Bible forbids homosexuality, we are told. Heterosexual marriage is at the core of God's design for the universe. Traditional (read: “religious”) values have been clear on this question for thousands of years.

Jay Michaelson is the author of Everything is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism and other books. He is also a columnist for the Forward, the Huffington Post, Zeek, and Reality Sandwich magazine, and director of Nehirim: GLBT Jewish Culture & Spirituality.

Liberals' overwhelming response to these claims has been to deflect them, to talk instead about equality or the separation of church and state. This has been a tragic mistake. God, family, and societal stability all matter more to more Americans than do equality or constitutional norms. Dr. King did not succeed because he invoked the Fourteenth Amendment; he succeeded because he invoked God. And so, unless we activists engage with religion in a serious and convincing way, we will not prevail in our struggle. "God versus Gay" has only one outcome.

Nor will we speak for the millions of LGBT Americans who are religious themselves. For us, "God versus Gay" is bad spirituality, as well as bad political tactics. Doubtless, many gay activists have justifiably relegated religion to the same mental basement as other repressive ideas. But the basement is just another closet. By perpetuating "God versus Gay," secular gay rights activists perpetuate this psychological oppression of religious gays, this spiritual schizophrenia that continues to harm and distort.

Fortunately, gay rights is a religious issue. Religious people should not be for gay rights despite their religions' teachings; they should be for gay rights because of them. For too long, we have allowed far-rightist forces to distort our religious teachings. Politically and spiritually, this has been disastrous. And contrary to the cries of the fearful, while there are indeed some religious arguments against equality for LGBT people, there are more of them in favor of it. Here are ten of them.

I. It Is Not Good to Be Alone

OPponents of same-sex marriage remind us that in Genesis, "it's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." But "Adam and Eve" is the solution to a problem: the existential crisis of aloneness. In fact, after the long series of good things God sees during the creation process, Adam's aloneness is the first thing that is not good (Gen. 2:18). It is the first natural condition which, the Bible tells us, is not to be left as is. Love, togetherness, mutual support—these are the essential qualities of the partnership God creates.

Religious and spiritual people, then, are faced with a fundamental religious imperative to heal loneliness where we find it and to insist on the importance of human relationship in so doing. What is different today is that, unlike five thousand, five hundred, or even fifty years ago, we now understand that sexual orientation is either genetically determined or determined so early in development as to be an essential, unchangeable aspect of the human soul. Thus, for millions of people around the world, to remedy this first, fundamental flaw of the human condition requires a same-sex relationship.

Of course, sexual orientation is a spectrum, not a binary, and for bisexuals and some others, there may be mutability. But a few bisexual experiences do not undermine a great many homosexual and heterosexual ones. For many people, the only way toward healing the split recognized in Genesis 2:18 is in a loving, same-sex relationship. Indeed, this is no doubt one reason that so many opponents of gay rights have insisted that sexual orientation must be changeable: because if it isn't, then the traditional,

homophobic interpretation of Scripture cannot be maintained. Of course, that is exactly my point.

2. God Loves Us and Does Not Want Us to Harm Ourselves

THE SUICIDE RATE AMONG GAY TEENAGERS IS ESTIMATED TO BE six times that of straight ones. Need we say more? Does this statistic not teach us both that sexuality is a trait, not a choice (it's odd to kill yourself because of a choice, no?), and that embracing sexual diversity is a religious imperative? What more do we need to know? Gay people exist, and some of them kill themselves because of the shame they feel.

Suicide is not, of course, the only form of harm gay people inflict upon themselves. The "closet" is another. As someone who lived in the closet for over a decade of my adult life, I can attest from personal experience that it is less a closet than a tomb. Constructed of lies, fear, and shame, it beats the soul down and alienates it not only from sexual expression but from all other forms of love as well, including authentic love of God. People in the closet are like the dead people in *The Sixth Sense*: they don't know that they're dead, and don't know the wounds they carry around. The closet is like a heavy weight around the neck, and sexual repression is a form of self-mutilation.

Of course, Christianity, Judaism, and other religions do ask us to curb our behavior, even behaviors we may really enjoy, such as wanton greed and selfishness (e.g., the kind evinced by some of our society's most famous celebrities). Sexuality, too, is regulated





Straight and gay clergy are wearing rainbows to show that their congregations welcome LGBT people: from left, Rev. Ken Martin, Rev. Dr. Yvette A. Flunder, and Rabbi Michael Lerner.

by these religious traditions, in very different ways: Some permit all forms of sexual behavior within marriage; others do not. Some see celibacy as an ideal; others do not. But nowhere do we find individuals required to forego all sexual intimacy, sexual expression, or romantic love. God does not ask us to be Isaac on the *akedah* or Christ on the cross; we are asked to curb our impulses, but not to destroy ourselves. Were homosexuality merely a form of licentiousness (as some suggest), then one could imagine it being prohibited by religious tradition. But homosexuality is not lust; it is a quality of the soul and a pathway to the most sacred forms of love.

Can a homosexual relationship be degraded? Yes. Can it be holy? Yes. Banning homosexuality because of its potential for “abuse” would be like banning heterosexuality because of prostitution. Religious people can and should debate how best the power of sexuality is to be understood according to their religious traditions, but to demand that an entire class of people completely repress, suppress, and mutilate their sexual drives is antithetical to the fundamental religious ideal that God loves us. A loving God could not want the closet.

3. Compassion Is Holy

SPIRITUAL PROGRESSIVES GENERALLY BELIEVE THAT, IN THE words of Richard Rorty, “cruelty is the worst thing we can do,” and that, conversely, to alleviate suffering is a religious mandate. Thus, even apart from the theistic principle that God loves us and does not want us to crush our basic personalities, there is the ethical principal that cruelty is wrong and compassion is holy.

In this regard, gay rights—being compassionate rather than cruel to GLBT people—is simply a further widening of the sphere of ethical consideration that has extended concern to people from other religious/ethnic groups, people from other “racial” backgrounds, women, people with disabilities, and others. Once, the feelings and experiences of these “others” were deemed irrelevant to religious concern. Today, just as we have reexamined our religious ideas in the light of the experiences of these groups, so too is a reexamination of traditional religious approaches to homosexuality warranted by the experiences of gay and lesbian people.

It may be objected that gender and ethnicity are biological,

whereas sexuality is still not known to be completely so. However, this objection fails for two reasons. First, as mentioned above, homosexuality is at least partly “natural,” genetically determined, and present in hundreds of animal species. Even if it is partly developmental, this natural element makes it more like race and gender, and less like moral choice. Second, whatever its origins, homosexuality is experienced by gays and lesbians as being essential to their souls, and that is what matters when it comes to compassion. Subjective feeling is not sufficient for moral consideration; a serial killer may experience murder as essential to his soul too. But combined with homosexuality’s capacity to bring love and holiness into life (unlike murder, bestiality, sexual abuse, and the other depravities to which my capacity to love is often analogized), its felt nature as essential to humanity means that compassion is invited, deserved, and required.

Homosexuality is real; this is all that is required of us to accept. It is not a mirage of choice or preference. And as such, as a real phenomenon, the religious question then becomes how we ought to respond to it: with repression or with love, with rejection or affirmation, with contempt or sanctification. All of these options and more are available within a traditional religious framework. But only the latter ones can be aligned with compassion.

4. Justice Is Holy

“JUSTICE, JUSTICE, SHALT THOU PURSUE” (DEUT. 16:20) HAS long been a watchword of spiritual progressives. Justice is holy; equality is holy; fairness is holy. These qualities, ethical monotheism tells us, matter to God. Discrimination is wrong. Fairness is right. There has been a tendency in contemporary political discourse to let the Right have God on their side, since we on the Left have liberalism, justice, and anti-discrimination on ours. This is outrageous. If the Bible is any guide at all, God is on the “side” of justice and fairness. It follows that denying same-sex couples the same benefits as opposite-sex couples is an offense to God.

Are there countervailing values that might outweigh the mandate for fairness? Perhaps, some might argue. But that does not remove the basic principle that fairness is holy and unfairness is a

sin, making injustice at best a necessary evil that would need to be justified by extremely pressing reasons. Gay rights is a religious issue because equality matters to God.

5. Because the Hebrew Bible Doesn't Say What the Right Says It Does

GAY RIGHTS IS ALSO A RELIGIOUS ISSUE BECAUSE ANTI-GAY forces are misrepresenting what the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament say, and thus distorting the word of God. This should be of concern to all religionists. It is what Jews call a *chillul hashem*, a profanation of the Name, to twist scripture beyond its meaning to justify cruelty and fear. Thus to the extent that is taking place in the cases of Leviticus and Romans, it is of concern to all religious people even apart from the experiences of gays.

The most important aspect of these “problem texts” is that they are ambiguous. For this reason, when we turn to them, we do so bearing in mind the insights of the first four arguments. How we read these ambiguous verses depends on the fundamental values we bring to bear on interpreting them. Thus my claim is not (and need not be) that these readings are the only ones possible—just that they are the only ones consonant with our fundamental religious values.

This is not the place for a detailed reading of Leviticus 18:22, but briefly, we can note three aspects of it. First, the verse only discusses men. At the very least, 50 percent of gay people (i.e., lesbians) are completely untouched by it. To suggest that Leviticus prohibits lesbianism has no basis either in traditional Jewish law or in the plain meaning of the verse. Second, the verse only discusses, at most, anal sex. Again, both the plain meaning of the verse and the Jewish interpretive tradition (e.g., Rashi) make clear that “the lyings of woman” means, in the case of two men, penetrative anal sex. Of course, there is a longstanding Jewish tradition to “build a fence around the Torah” and prohibit acts that, while themselves permissible, might lead to prohibited conduct. However, let’s not pretend that’s in the Torah; the verse itself prohibits, at most, anal sex. Third, whatever the prohibition is, it is of the same class—*toevah*—as remarriage (Deut. 24:4) and Egyptians eating with shepherds (Gen. 46:34). The only thing that is “abomination” about homosexuality is the word “abomination” itself, a total mistranslation that has no basis in Hebraic text.

6. Because the New Testament Doesn't Say What the Right Says It Does

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS ARE ALSO QUITE DIFFERENT FROM HOW anti-gay forces present them. Homosexuality is scarcely mentioned in the New Testament (surprisingly, given its cultural context) and never by Jesus. As many scholars have observed, the condemnation in Romans 1:26–27 has almost nothing to do with contemporary understandings of homosexuality. Those verses read: “For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women

and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.” First, “their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural” was understood by Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, and all other early Church Fathers as referring to anal sex, not lesbianism. Second, “men committing unseemly acts with men” is about pederasty rather than homosexuality—the latter Greek term is *arsen*, which refers to young men, not *aner*, which refers to adults. Third, the clause “for this reason” explains that these sexual acts are the consequences, not the causes, of wrongdoing, which Romans 1:19–25 makes clear, is the veneration of images and idols. Fourth, the verses after 27 make clear that the real problem is not “homosexuality” (a nineteenth-century concept) but passing judgment when one is guilty oneself.

These introductory points are, of course, just that. But the central point is that these texts can be read as anti-gay only by extrapolating them from their historical and textual contexts, distorting the meanings of their plain words, and, of course, blowing them completely out of proportion to the other 23,212 verses in the Hebrew Bible and 7,957 verses in the New Testament. None of the contemporary arguments against homosexuality—“untrammeled homosexuality can take over and destroy a social system,” according to the Family Research Council’s Paul Cameron; homosexuality “is a sickness, and it needs to be treated” according to Pat Robertson; or it will lead to “a breakdown in social organizations,” according to FRC’s Robert Knight—are present in these texts.

If we value the Bible, we should not let bigots hijack and



The Hebrew Bible actually says God loves all created beings, including shrimp and humans, but eating shellfish is prohibited while homosexuality, as such, is not. Hence this sign in a pro-gay rights rally.

distort it to justify their fears to themselves and others. (So too with the “sin of Sodom,” which both Jewish and Christian sources long regarded as greed or inhospitality.) Whatever these problematic texts mean, they do not mean what the bigots say, and religious people should defend our sacred texts.

7. Evolution of Religious Doctrine Is Healthy

NATURALLY, A PRO-GAY READING OF SCRIPTURE IS NOT THE ONLY possible one: one may choose to read Leviticus broadly, Romans expansively, and 1 Corinthians selectively. Even the search for the “plain meaning” of the texts is an act of interpretation. Thus the question is not whether to interpret Scripture but *how* to do so. And when one reflects on two thousand years of biblical interpretation, it is clear that our readings of the Bible have indeed evolved as the human race has evolved. We have read slavery out of the Old and New Testaments. We have changed how we understand Eve being a “help-meet” to Adam. Our rabbis and church fathers have even read troubling texts virtually out of existence.

This is all part of healthy religious development. Do we really want, as religionists, a hidebound faith that never changes? Is there a case in which fundamentalism and ultra-conservatism has led a religion to thrive? Movements of progression and regression, to be sure—but overall, religion evolves and that is why it remains vibrant. The plasticity of religious thought is as responsible for its durability as its commitment to core values is. For example, most of us no longer believe the world is 6,000 years old. If being religious depended upon such a view, we would be forced to abandon religion. Yet it does not.

Likewise in the case of homosexuality. To be sure, same-sex marriage is not found in the Bible. (Intermarriage and interracial marriage are, as in the cases of Moses and Solomon, as is a lasting covenant of love between David and Jonathan.) But the extension of the values of marriage—love, commitment, fidelity, trust, family—to same-sex couples is an adaptation of religious consciousness, not a rejection of it. For religion to endure, it needs both strong roots and expansive branches. Gay rights is the latest in a long line of moral questions to challenge religion and cause it to grow. This is a good thing.

8. Curbing Brutishness Is the Point

BUILDING ON POINT NUMBER SEVEN, THERE IS A SPECIFIC KIND of moral growth that gay rights brings about: a transcendence of traditional gender categories and primitive ideas about who men and women are. That these ideas are constructions of culture may be seen simply by traveling to places where men hold hands or women throw spears. But they are also particular kinds of constructions, which tend to reinforce a reductive view of brutish, mean men and delicate, wispy women dependent upon them.

Judaism and Christianity, in particular, have never held such primitive notions of gender in high regard. Goliath is not a Jewish hero; the lithe King David is. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.” Christian saints submit to the will of God, submit even to the sword, just as Christ himself gave his

life on the cross. While religion has all too often been allied with brute force, its directives and mandates point in the opposite direction: toward more gentleness and more curbing of our animal natures.

Acceptance of sexual diversity is, particularly for many heterosexually identified men, not unlike feminism in this regard: it is one more way to query and perhaps curb culturally or instinctually prescribed notions of masculinity, in a morally significant way. In the Bible, God does not endorse brutishness, but rather our aspiration to be better, kinder, and more like angels than animals. The embrace of sexual diversity is a valuable step forward along this path.

9. Because the Separation of Church and State Helps the Church

ONE REASON LIBERALS AVOID MAKING RELIGIOUS ARGUMENTS IN the public sphere is their deeply held belief in the separation of church and state. Generally, this is framed in terms of the neutrality or secularism of the public square and in terms of protecting our government and institutions from incursions by religion.

Yet one of the most memorable metaphors for this system, “a wall of separation” between church and state, was coined by Roger Williams in 1644 not to protect the pristine sphere of politics from pollution by religion, but to protect pure religion from corruption by politics. Williams called for “a hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world.” Indeed, for spiritual progressives, Williams’s warning is all the more powerful today. Many of us have sat in pews and watched our spiritual leaders espouse deeply troubling political views. We have watched how money and power have distorted churches, synagogues, and mosques. And we have seen how religion is often employed not as a check on human selfishness but as an aggrandizement to it.

Gay rights is a religious issue because its use as a political wedge issue has distorted church teaching and politicized religion. As we have seen in Iran, Israel, Ireland, and around the world, political power distorts religious life, leading to more competition, corruption, and outright venality on the part of our clerics. Of course, as individuals, we can and should allow our political choices to be informed by our religious views. But the baldly religious terms in which our current debate on homosexuality is being conducted distorts religion (as we have already seen) and involves the sacred too much with the profane. (Of course, my arguments here are susceptible to the same critique. However, my claim is that, if we are going to have a religious argument, it is political suicide for the argument to be religious on one side only.) For the good of religion, its leaders should stay out of political decisions involving power, coercion, and privilege.

10. Sexual Diversity Is a Beautiful Part of God’s Creation

I LEARNED IN PRIMARY SCHOOL THAT “GOD DON’T MAKE NO mistakes.” Reflecting on the existence of homosexuality in over 1,500 animal species and in every human (*continued on page 70*)

Christians Seeing Red: An Evangelical Perspective

by Jay Bakker

TO MANY IN MY FAITH, I'M A WALKING CONTRADICTION. I'm a Southern-bred evangelical Christian pastor and a "gay ally" (as straight advocates for the gay community are so awkwardly called). I believe what the Bible says. I believe that Jesus died on the cross. I believe he rose in three days. I believe that in doing so he forgave us our sins. And it is precisely *because of* these beliefs that I am compelled to stand up for my gay brothers and sisters in Christ.

In condemning homosexuality, evangelicals hide behind the defense that they're just "keeping it real." It's not their fault that they come off like callous jerks. They didn't make up the rules. It's God's Law, His will. "Look it up," they say. "It's right there in the Bible. Right there in black and white ..."

My response: we need to look to the Red. You know how, in many Bibles, Jesus's words are printed in red type so that they can be more easily distinguished from the rest? Well, when we're confronted with an issue as bitter and divisive as this—an issue that is literally tearing Christian families, congregations, and entire denominations in two—we've got to look to Jesus for answers. We've got to look beyond the black and white. We've got to look to the Red.

A friend of mine has a T-shirt that frames the issue nicely. The front of the T-shirt reads: "What did Jesus say about homosexuality? Answer on back." But when you turn around, the back is blank.

That's right: Jesus cared so much about homosexuality that he mentioned it exactly *zero* times. He thought it so central to his message of love, so fundamental to his mission of redeeming the world, that he never touched on the issue in the course of his entire public ministry. Yet, somehow, this single issue (and our response to it) has come to define Christianity in many people's minds.

For conservative Christians, homosexuality has become a rallying cry and recruitment tool. It's something to get the troops fired up about. For non-Christians, it is an equally blunt instrument: a single-issue indictment of the Church, one that makes a mockery

of all that Christian talk of love, forgiveness, and understanding.

What I love about the "answer on back" T-shirt is that it forces us to confront our misunderstanding of scripture and grapple with the sources of our ideas. Before seeing the back, people's minds scrawl all sorts of ungracious messages with their mental Sharpie pens (*Sinner ... Abomination ... Unnatural*). Then you see the bafflement on their faces when they're confronted with the fact that their savior didn't care enough about homosexuality to even mention it.

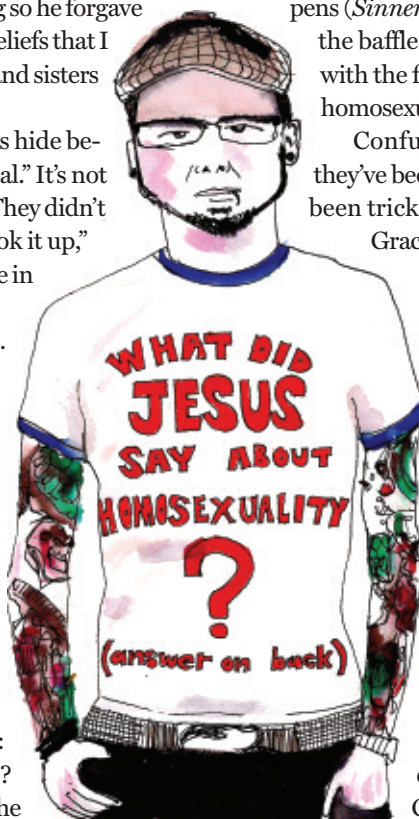
Confusion quickly turns to anger. People think they've been tricked. And in a way they're right—they've been tricked into compromising their faith and God's Grace for a lie.

Yes, there are a handful of scriptures, littered throughout the Bible, that *seem* to condemn homosexuality (note: properly understood and read in context, even these don't stand up). But Jesus didn't utter any of them, and they don't hold a candle to the inferno of Grace and love that burns through the better part of the Bible (both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament).

Looking to the Red can help us get past this identity crisis in the Christian Church. Just as former generations had to overcome their supposedly "God-endorsed" racist and sexist attitudes, so we have to overcome our narrow-mindedness on this issue in order to experience (and share) the full potential of God's love.

When we make people feel unwelcome in our faith community because of who they are and how they love, we miss the true meaning of Christianity. We get lost in the black and white. We place false limits on God's bigheartedness when we organize rallies against gay civil and religious rights. We violate God's Grace and the principle of unconditional acceptance when we persist in the ill-founded idea that gays could—or should—deny their orientation in order to belong to our churches.

When we deny Grace for others in these ways, we deny Christ and his sacrifice. And when we take the Christ out of Christianity we're left with a religion that isn't worthy of the name. ■



Jay Bakker (yes, that Bakker, as in the son of televangelists Jim and Tammy Faye) is the pastor of Revolution Church NYC, a ministry run out of a bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. You can find him online at www.RevolutionNYC.com.

Islam and Homosexuality

by Parvez Sharma

IN 2002 I BEGAN A LONG AND LONELY JOURNEY, DARING to visit some of the darkest corners of the taboo that permeates the consciousness of that unlikely character: the gay or lesbian Muslim. Now, in 2010, I am happy to report that the film that came out of that journey, *A Jihad for Love*, has been seen by an estimated eight million people in fifty-nine nations.

Lives have been and continue to be transformed. Questions continue to be asked. The answers are not always easy or available. I certainly speak with many of the contradictions of my own jihad or struggle intact, contradictions I find mirrored in the religious text I choose to follow—the Qur'an.

I write with fierce urgency because I realize now more than ever that some of our most bitter battles in this new decade of this new century will be fought on the front lines of religion.

The generations that will follow us will deal with the consequences of rising extremism in every faith. A very quick look into even our own fabric here in America, the profoundly religious and moralistic society we all live in, makes one realize that the gay marriage debate in this nation is fundamentally about the Church.

In making *A Jihad for Love*, I traveled to the very heart of orthodoxy and reached a conclusion that perhaps is not immediately appealing to all of you.

In my lifetime, I do not see Islam coming down with a uniform edict saying that homosexuality is permissible. But then again, a ruling of such a nature that would be acceptable to all Roman Catholics cannot be imagined as coming down from the Vatican either.

The case of Islam becomes further problematized because there is no single kind of Muslim. More than a billion Muslims inhabit this planet, and they inhabit geographic, linguistic, and cultural spaces that are enormously different. In fact, nothing in the religion can fall into the problematic monolith discussed most often in the media in Western societies. Sunni Islam in itself, being the religion of the majority, has four major schools of thought: the Hanafi, the Hanbali, the Maliki, and the Sha'afi. They have never quite agreed on what to do with "the homosexual." The Shias in Iran thrive on a culture of disagreement that permeates all of the corridors of learning, which always lead up to the holy city of Qom.

Let Us Prioritize People's Stories, Not Textual Debates

AS *A JIHAD FOR LOVE* EXPLAINS, THE QUR'AN APPEARS TO BE pretty specific about homosexuality, and debating context and



A still from Parvez Sharma's film, *A Jihad for Love*.

semantics is un-Islamic. Many scholars within Islam have also argued that the very *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, that the gay Imam from South Africa, Muhsin Hendricks, brings up eloquently at the end of the film, is not an option because the doors to that were closed in the seventh century. And some who have agreed with the premise of the need for *ijtihad* have also said the exercise is not available to every Muslim, but only to the most learned *alim* (men of learning) in the *Ummah* (worldwide community of Muslims).

This note of pessimism I strike, however, should be heard more as a note of caution as we rush into seeking solutions that are merely theological. For our times, history has seemingly been divided into an easy before-and-after narrative following September 11. Much is made every day in the media and in the countless books produced since of the need for an Islamic Reformation. As I traveled first to make and then to share my film, I realized that the process is ongoing and if anything, the moment for Islamic reformation is now. We are living it. The question that comes with that knowledge is whether the "problem of homosexuality" is or even needs to be on the front burner for the many debates that Muslims need to have.

Having met more imams and religious figures over the years than I can count on my fingers, I realize a few things. Theological bickering can often be counterproductive, especially when you engage in questions of context and language and especially when the

Parvez Sharma is a New York-based Muslim writer and filmmaker. He blogs regularly at www.ajihadforlove.blogspot.com and is the winner of the prestigious GLAAD media award for Outstanding Documentary in 2009. Portions of this article appeared in Parvez Sharma's foreword to *Islam and Homosexuality* (Praeger, 2010), edited by Samar Habib.

majority does believe that the book itself is the literal word of God.

Perhaps in that time of *Jahilliyah*, the pre-Islamic period of ignorance, even the troubled and unlettered Prophet of Islam—on hearing that first command, *Ikra*, which means “Recite,” from the angel Jibreel or Gabriel—did not comprehend the extent of the theological universe built with language in all of its contradiction and nuance. Clearly the Prophet did lay the foundations of an egalitarian system, and perhaps he truly did create the first ever written constitution, in the Meccan Constitution in the city formerly known as Yathrib.

However, within that constitution and certainly in the seemingly rigid theology that would follow his own lifetime, the language and the pronouncements were a product of the times.

Some progressive Muslim voices claim that the Prophet himself was a true man of his times. Islam, surprisingly, was laying forth a sexual and moral universe with rules and codes that had mostly been unavailable to the Jews, the Christians, and yes, the polytheists that inhabited Arabia 1,430 years ago. So while I have always believed that an egalitarian sexual revolution of immense proportions lay at the very heart of our religion’s birth, much of the advance made in those times for creating a framework for human sexuality was limited within the institutions of heterosexual marriage. And because of this and because of my knowledge of the contexts now created for those who dare to re-engage with the Qur’an through the lens of modernity and the many academic discourses thus provided, I do not feel that a purely theological solution to what I have earlier referred to as the problem of the homosexual is possible.

The theological debate that many within Islam have been engaged in for centuries often omits consideration of the impact religious rulings have on believers’ lives. Theology and the rules that bind it often ignore the human experience and refer to homosexuality as an object, a behavior, and a sin, without recognizing that sexual preference can be a major constituent of the religious self.

For this reason, in *A Jihad for Love*, my approach was, rather than engaging in theological bickering, to show the very human dilemmas faced by these remarkable Muslims. Only in telling their stories are we able to get past the theological damnation that they suffer. We, and indeed our religious leaders in any of the monotheistic religions, need to realize that words in our holy books can and often do leap off the page and have a very real effect on people’s lives.

I know, as a Muslim, that I am not supposed to “mess with the Qur’an.” But as a believer and a defender of my faith, I also feel that ideally the ultimate relationship lies between the individual and his or her God. But clearly we do not and have not lived in an ideal world.

How Religion Will Change

I HAVE TREADED A FINE LINE, IN THIS POST—SEPTEMBER 11 world, knowing that I need to be a defender of Islam and also critique what I think needs to change. And that leads to an ultimate and simple analysis for me: it is the “true believers” who will create reform within their religions. In Islam we have this concept of

hudood, or boundaries. The believers who work within the bounds of respect, a necessary discipline that faith imposes, will perhaps be the true harbingers of some kind of change. And the change will most definitely not be a uniform theological solution that represents all Muslims.

These are interesting times. In Europe and America, the fear of Muslims is a very real thing. Some Muslims at least claim that America’s first Muslim president has now been elected, despite Barack Obama’s self-identification as a Christian. In the streets of Cairo, for example, the discussion of Mr. Obama being a new beacon of hope for Muslims often ends with his middle name. And though this new president made his religious preference very clear in order to win the 2008 election in a deeply Christian nation, under Islam’s laws of patriarchy he would indeed be either a Muslim or an apostate. The latter is a title I have been familiar with, even though I remain mostly fatwa-free.



Top: *A Jihad for Love* profiles Imam Muhsin Hendricks, a thirty-seven-year-old gay Imam living in Johannesburg, South Africa, who is boldly taking on the orthodox Muslim traditions in which he was schooled. Bottom: Kiymet and Ferda, devout Sufi lesbians in Istanbul, Turkey, go on a pilgrimage together and talk about their lives and love.

I feel perhaps that in this new world we inhabit, there will eventually be a deeper understanding of what may need to be done in this new century in which “the problem of religion” is probably the single biggest challenge and issue for humanity.

For me the question of Islam, therefore, has in some ways been of greater interest than the question of homosexuality. There has always been the fundamental and even more profound disconnect of trying to be a defender of my faith, a *mujahid*, or one who is engaged in jihad. But my jihad of course is one of love. I dared to take on this title for my film after a considerable amount of thought and indeed after traveling to the very heart of my religion, which I now realize is as troubled at its core as any religion grappling with twenty-first-century issues with texts that are centuries old.

Current Debates about the Real Meaning of Jihad

IN EGYPT, THE VERY HEART OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT, WHERE I SPENT a considerable amount of time, I came across a debate that continues to rage today. I befriended several Arab journalists who were reporting on the work of Syed Imam al Sharif, also known as Dr. Fadl. He was one of the first members of al-Qaida’s top leadership council and had penned *The Essential Guide to Preparation* in Peshawar in 1988, and the book did become exactly that to a generation of violent jihadis, often tacitly supported by the United States, which was eager to liberate Afghanistan from Soviet occupation. He later wrote *The Compendium of the Pursuit of Divine Knowledge*. Ayman al-Zawahiri, to this day Osama bin Laden’s right hand man, praised the book as a victory from almighty God and even edited the thousand-page text to remove the barbed criticisms of the modern jihadi movements.

Dr. Fadl has been in an Egyptian prison since 2004 and has written a new work called *Rationalizing Jihad in Egypt and the World*. In it he proclaims, “We are prohibited from committing aggression, even if the enemies of Islam do that.” The book has shaken the very foundation of al-Qaida’s intellectual construction and (perceived) superiority. Ayman al-Zawahiri has been forced to react and a debate has raged in Arab society and its theological elite.

Dr. Fadl also said that September 11 has been a catastrophe for Muslims. Zawahiri was forced to react in a 200-page letter available online, but clearly the foundation of the violent ideologies that claim to

represent Islam had been shaken. Unfortunately not much of this debate, or indeed any of the debates in the Muslim worlds, are well reported in our media.

Because of Dr. Fadl’s work, I know that I have some sanction in claiming the word *jihad* as my own and taking it back to its original Arabic, literal meaning of a struggle, of a “struggle in the way of God.” Nothing has given me greater pleasure than watching “Western” audiences queue up outside innumerable box office windows asking for “two tickets for Jihad, please.” I feel that in my own small way I have contributed meaningfully to the discourse on Islam that will dominate the lives of at least a few generations. As a homosexual, however, I realize profoundly that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—all the religions of the book—will not be able to reconcile their theologies with their homosexuals in our lifetimes.

Why Solutions Have to Be Homegrown

PRIDE MARCHES OR THE RE-CREATION OF THE GAY GHETTOS OF the West will never be the solution in Tehran or in Islamabad.

I have witnessed the endless debates that diasporic Muslims engage in, within the cool air-conditioned corridors of Western academia, employing the languages of emancipation developed mostly in the West. In Cairo, in Delhi, or in Jakarta, the realities of life—beyond the taps that run dry or the power outages that punctuate days and nights—are completely different.

The limited and limiting languages of Western labels and constructs are just not an option. Being a recent transplant into the West myself, I have marveled at the need for constant labels and self-identification that many minorities in majority Caucasian societies have felt. I have seen just how profoundly the lines between the public and the private have been blurred in many of these nations and how little of that is still permissible “back home.” So from “person of color” (a disingenuous term, in my humble opinion) to L and G and B and T and Intersex and Queer and Two Spirit, I have realized that these categorizations perhaps serve their constituents in the West better than they ever would in the problematically labeled “third world.”

If anything, even a cursory look at Islam’s many histories reveals a dichotomous and simultaneous celebration of homosexuality and invisibility of the sexual life.

Much of that need for invisibility remains couched in the sanctity of the institution of heterosexual marriage and the centrality of the family unit. So for example, I can say with confidence that the majority of Muslims with same-sex desire in Muslim societies would choose to live within heterosexual marriages.

For that reason the solutions—if indeed there is a need for any—within “Islamic” cultures will need to come from the Muslims who inhabit them.

Indeed if there is to be a Jihad for Love at all, the mujahids will have to begin with a belief in the sanctity of the Qur’an and hopefully then find a way to move beyond the limits of theology. They will undoubtedly need to be Muslims. Will they be good Muslims or bad Muslims? And who gets to decide that? *That* has always been the question. ■

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Same-Sex Weddings, Hindu Traditions, and Modern India

by Ruth Vanita



OVER THE LAST THREE DECADES, INDIAN NEWSPAPERS have reported same-sex weddings and joint suicides taking place all over the country, both in urban and rural areas. Most of the couples are non-English-speaking young women from lower-income groups. Most of them are Hindus (not surprising since Hinduism is the majority religion in India); there have been a few Sikhs and Christians, and some interreligious as well as many inter-caste unions.

At first glance, this phenomenon might appear related to the push for gay marriage in the West, but in fact, it is not. None of these young women were connected to any movement for equality; most of them were not aware of terms like “gay” or “lesbian.” Many of them framed their desire to marry in terms drawn from traditional understandings of love and marriage, saying, for example, that they could not conceive of life without each other, and wanted to live and die together. The closest counterparts to these same-sex unions are heterosexual “love marriages” and joint suicides that are also regularly reported in the Indian press.

Modern Homophobia or Traditional Authoritarianism?

SAME-SEX DESIRE AND EVEN SEXUAL ACTIVITY HAVE BEEN represented and discussed in Indian literature for two millennia, often in a nonjudgmental and even celebratory manner, but a new virulent form of modern homophobia developed in India during the colonial period (more specifically after the decisive crushing of indigenous cultures, such as the urbane culture of Lucknow, following the revolt of 1857).

This homophobia was part of a more generalized attack on Indian sexual mores and practices undertaken by British missionaries as well as educationists. It is evident not only in the anti-sodomy law introduced by the British in the Indian Penal Code of 1860 (overturned by the Delhi High Court in 2009), but also in the deliberate heterosexualization of entire literary canons and genres (such as the Urdu *ghazal*, or love poem, which

gendered both lover and beloved as male). Saleem Kidwai and I explored this extensively in *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*.

Most Indian nationalists internalized this homophobia and came to view homosexuality as an unspeakable crime, even as they also attacked polygamy, courtesan culture, matriliney, polyandry, and other institutions that were seen as opposed to heterosexual monogamous marriage. Prior to this, homosexuality had never



Shakuntala composes a letter to her love, King Dushyanta. The ancient couple are a celebrated example of the *gandharva* marriage (love marriage), which is the form that gay and lesbian marriages typically take today in Hindu India. At top, Kama shoots the ascetic Shiva to make him fall in love with Parvati, a story that reflects the tensions between eroticism and asceticism in Hindu tradition.

Ruth Vanita, a professor at the University of Montana, former reader at Delhi University, and founding co-editor of *Manushi* from 1978 to 1990, is the author of several books and a well-known translator from Hindi to English. This article is an adaptation of her scholarly essay “Same-Sex Weddings, Hindu Traditions, and Modern India,” in “Special Issue on South Asian Feminisms,” eds. Firdous Azim, Nivedita Menon, Naila Kabeer, & Dina Siddiqui, *Feminist Review* 91 (2009): 47–60.

been considered unspeakable in Indian texts or religions.

The new silence surrounding homosexuality is one reason modern institutions such as the police force and educational as well as religious organizations today typically respond to same-sex unions with horror and even violence. However, I would argue that in contrast to these public institutions, most families respond to same-sex unions in the same authoritarian spirit with which they respond to disapproved heterosexual unions. Most Indian families tend to be suspicious of and resist love marriages of all kinds—not just cross-caste, cross-class, cross-religion, or international marriages but even eminently “suitable” marriages that they themselves might have arranged. The degree of resistance varies widely from family to family.

Female-female unions are always love unions. Hence families respond to them as they do to male-female love unions. Depending on family dynamics, the responses range from wholehearted acceptance to hesitant tolerance to virulent opposition. When female couples elope and marry in temples, their families often enlist the help of police to track them down and separate them. Such families usually invoke the law against abduction, which is also commonly used against eloping heterosexual couples.

The violent intervention of right-wing Hindu organizations has the effect of strengthening parental opposition and inhibiting traditional types of compromise. Thus, when nineteen-year-old Seeta attempted suicide by poisoning in Meerut in January 2006, because her bride, eighteen-year-old Vandana, whom she

had married in a Shiva temple, had been locked up in her parental home, the local activists of two right-wing organizations—the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Association) and the Shiv Sena—held a rally outside the district magistrate’s office. In an uncanny echo of the demonstrations at Matthew Shepard’s funeral, they also protested outside the hospital where Seeta lay battling for her life, shouting slogans like, “Stop perverse marriages, stop anti-social impulses,” according to *The Telegraph*. Both young women are from poor families and were workers in a hosiery factory.

It is important to remember that these same Hindu right-wing organizations are also opposed to cross-sex dating and romance. For over a decade, they have protested and attacked establishments that offer Valentine’s Day cards or gifts, threatening young heterosexual couples who go out together to celebrate.

Homophobia is thus only one aspect of their larger opposition to all forms of erotic love outside marriage, which they view as products of globalization, Western neo-imperialism, and market forces that commercialize sex. They forget that there is a tradition in Hinduism, dating back two millennia, of worshiping the god of love, Kamadeva, especially at spring festivals like Madanotsava, from which the modern festival of Holi, which has strong erotic overtones, descends.

Unapproved young couples (whether same-sex or heterosexual) are often violently separated and then pushed into family-arranged marriages. On the eve of such a marriage or following it, they often commit joint suicide. Lovers often perform private wedding rituals before killing themselves and leave behind notes that frame the suicide as a type of wedding in death. A typical example is that of high school teacher Ranu Mishra, 21, and college student Neetu Singh, 19, who consumed poison together in May 2005, when Ranu’s parents forcibly arranged her marriage to a man. Before taking poison, the women married each other privately, Neetu applying *sindoor* (vermilion) to the parting-line of Ranu’s hair. Application of *sindoor* is a common ritual in many Hindu weddings.

Compromise and Acceptance

NOT ALL FAMILIES OPPOSE LOVE MARRIAGE OR EVEN SAME-SEX marriage. Many families first resist and then accept a marriage, incorporating it into that flexible arena called “tradition.” Like families, Hindu priests, too, adopt a range of attitudes to love marriages, including same-sex love marriages. In North India, family-arranged weddings generally take place at home, while a wedding disapproved of by parents often takes place in a temple. Runaway heterosexual couples frequently get married in temples. Female couples have been marrying in temples all over the country, from the first such reported case in 1987 when two policewomen, Leela Namdeo and Urmila Srivastava, married in a temple in Bhopal in central India, to the present day. Many cases have been reported of families coming to accept same-sex unions and participating in, as well as arranging, wedding ceremonies for the couple.



The Hindu god Shiva is often represented as Ardhanarisvara, with a dual male and female nature. This sculpture is from the Elephanta Caves near Mumbai.

Hinduism and Democracy

THE LAW COURTS, THE MEDIA, AND SOME HINDU SPACES ARE the three forces that have proved most helpful to female couples (as well as heterosexual couples in cross-caste and cross-religion unions). Whenever female couples have managed to get past local police and appeal to the law, the courts have consistently upheld their right to live together. If the women have some economic resources and social support, they may then be able to live independently, without police harassment. However, if local communities or their families subsequently harass them, courts have not been able to offer timely protection. Nevertheless the courts' declaration that two women have a constitutional right to live together as consenting adults is important.

The national, English-language media have helped by generally portraying the women's feelings and relationships sympathetically, upholding their right to liberty, and also by bringing them to public attention, thereby putting them in touch with civil liberties and sexuality rights organizations, who have helped out some of them.

Hindu spaces, often seen by the Indian Left as irredeemably reactionary, have in fact often worked in tandem with these democratic institutions to support female couples. Both in India

and Nepal, many female couples have married in Hindu temples. The media, the women themselves, and their supporters have also used Hindu vocabulary and doctrine to legitimize these marriages. Among these doctrines are Hindu ideas of "love marriage."

Hindu Ideas of Love and Marriage

ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL HINDU SCRIPTURES LIST EIGHT TO twelve forms of marriage. The two best known today are family-arranged marriage and *gandharva vivaha*, marriage based on mutual love and attraction between two individuals. The Sanskrit term "gandharva" is routinely used in modern Indian texts, including popular cinema and newspapers, to indicate a marriage based on romantic love. Gandharva marriage is constituted by mutual consent and requires no witnesses, no officiant, and no parental consent.

Gandharva marriages are often celebrated with truncated or symbolic Hindu rituals such as an exchange of garlands or walking around a fire together. Hindu sacred texts debate the status of gandharva marriage; while it has a lower status in law books, some texts consider it a superior form. For example, the fourth-century *Kamasutra* (III.V. 29-30), which is a sacred text, states that gandharva is the best form of marriage because it is based on mutual attraction (*anuraga*). Perhaps the most famous gandharva marriage from an ancient text is that of Shakuntala; the story highlights both the pleasures and the risks of gandharva marriage as the hero, who weds the heroine with a ring but without witnesses, disowns her when she gets pregnant by him but is unable to produce the ring.

While many homosexually inclined individuals in India signal their difference by refusing to enter family-arranged marriages, the female couples who marry choose a path that may be both more difficult or may be easier, depending on their particular family dynamics. When they declare that they will marry each other, they are perceived as choosing a somewhat unusual but nevertheless comprehensible form of gandharva marriage.

Many Hindu texts insist that everyone has a duty to marry and have children. If one renounces the world, one may be freed of this duty, but not otherwise. It is this social dharma that powerful family members invoke to bully the individual into submission.

However, this doctrine of social dharma has always been in conflict with the doctrine of individual dharma (in the sense of the law of one's being), which is inseparable from the doctrine of rebirth. An individual is reborn in order to work through attachments from previous births and thus move towards freedom from attachment, which enables liberation from the cycle of rebirth. This urge to work through one's attachments constitutes individual dharma; it is inborn and cannot be erased. If an attachment is forcibly suppressed in one lifetime, the individual will be reborn with the same attachment in the next life.

Repeatedly, in Hindu narrative, authority figures who oppose an individual's passionate love are compelled to give in when they realize that this love is irresistible. As (continued on page 70)



Lesbian couple Baljit Kaur, 21, (right) and Rajwinder Kaur, 20, (left) celebrate their marriage in Amritsar, India, in June 2007. Same-sex marriages are seen as unusual but comprehensible—thanks to the *gandharva* tradition—by Hindus today.

NARINDER NANU/
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Two Spirit Activism: Mending the Sacred Hoop

by Richard (Anguksuar) LaFortune

FOR MANY NATIVE PEOPLE IN THIS HEMISPHERE, the past forty or so years have been a season of recovery and revitalization. With the rekindling of pride and the exercise of ancestral domain, following centuries of imposed violence and poverty, Indigenous people here and around the globe were acknowledged by the world community with the passage in 2007 of the United Nations International Declaration of Indigenous Rights. The ratification was decades in the making. Canada and the United States may follow the lead of Australia and New Zealand, which reversed their negative votes, to make the Assembly's action unanimous.

About twenty years before the Quincentennial observations in 1992, there was one LGBT Native organization in the United States and one in Vancouver, followed in the mid-1980s by a group in Winnipeg. Now we have approximately fifteen organizations and groups in the United States and another dozen in Canada—this does not include Central or South America. Our organizing has been rooted in cultural and spiritual practice, according to principles and beliefs both common and inherent to our many hundreds of ethnically distinct tribes. Early explorers and adventurers from Europe were outraged by the fact that many Two Spirit people (who might be called gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender in American English) among Indigenous cultures were persons of standing and rank in their communities. They were targeted at the beginning for extermination, particularly by the Spanish, from Florida to California.

Five centuries later, we are revitalizing sacred teachings, rebuilding communities and networks through our languages, through our ceremonies, and by working shoulder to shoulder within our communities. We could accomplish little if we did not have the support of our elders and medicine people. The transformation from introduced homophobia to mutual respect has taken decades of patient work, as we all recall at the same time, slowly, that Two Spirit people have a place in the circle. Some people have referred to this global process as the Mending of the Sacred Hoop, or of the Circle of Life.

At nearly the beginning of our most energized international



Native leaders Joey Criddle and Sewella Mike take part in the 20th International Two Spirit Gathering in Minnesota.

organizing efforts, HIV began simultaneously to impact our communities at a staggering level—just as we were beginning to quietly recover our place among our peoples. The recovery took place because we remembered. All we had to do was help other people to remember too. Our societies and cultures had delved deeply with inquiry for thousands of years into questions about social structure and spiritual and physical well-being. Some of it has been documented, some of it has not.

Our roles are now sometimes adapted to the expectations of prevalent society, wherever we may live and in whichever hemisphere. But there are many who continue to fulfill the role of Two Spirit—an androgynous person. Today, some are greatly respected in their communities, but many others suffer violence and worse.

We are maturing slowly, as all large communities of people do over time (when we're fortunate), over thousands of years at a time; and we can see a day when we are once again different—and not different. In a good way. ■

Anguksuar has been organizing and administering Native human service and culture programs for thirty years, and for the past six years has served as national director of Two Spirit Press Room. He also directs the Fred Martinez Project.

Coming Home to Who We Are: Buddhist Spiritual Practice and Transformation

by Larry Yang

The ache for Home lies in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.
—Maya Angelou

AS A YOUNG ASIAN AMERICAN BOY LIVING IN A mainstream Philadelphia suburb, I experienced many events of discrimination and racism that I did not know how to handle in my little life. I distinctly recall having the thought that if it is this difficult to be a person of color in the world, I am never going to be gay. And the closet door to my identity slammed shut and was padlocked for decades afterwards.

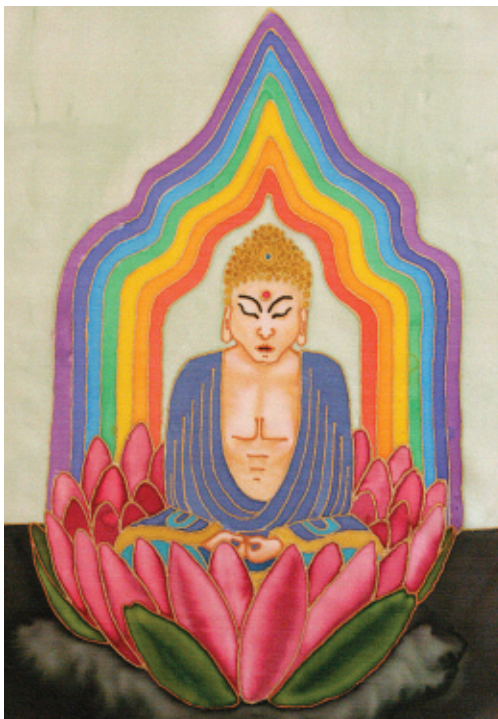
For people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or same-gender-loving, the feeling that we belong in this life is not so simple for us. When external conditions of our society create conditions of exclusion or even enmity and violence, life is painful. There can be a deep internalization of the harmful aspects of our larger unconscious culture. External oppression can lead to our own self-hatred, self-judgment, self-harm, self-denial—this is more suffering. This is the truth of the Buddha's First Noble Truth.

In mainstream society, with all of its unconsciousness, even the “most liberating” teachings sometimes cannot be absorbed without the right conditions. Creating the external and internal conditions that allow the teachings to land deeply into our experience is critical for spiritual growth. This is the beauty of the refuge of *Sangha* (community), which the Buddha said was an indispensable part of our path.

Here's how one participant from an LGBTQ Buddhist retreat described the power of an affirming spiritual community:

I am old enough that when I came of age being queer was still listed as a mental disorder. Boys in my Los Angeles high school used to boast of going to Hollywood and “rolling queers.” With a very few precious exceptions, sex

was something desperate and dangerous, done with someone you didn't know. Nowhere I looked—nowhere—were there any positive messages or role models. In the retreat last weekend, I experienced a momentary thawing of my frozen heart that I am quite sure would not have happened anywhere else. It was so beautiful to me to be in the company of other gay men, each having humbly come to practice. This huge lump of unprocessed pain began to move.



For many LGBTQ people, it is rare to find a safe community. Finding a community to belong to—finding refuge and safety in a supportive environment—is so critical to the deepening of a spiritual practice. If we are only dealing with survival issues, we are defended and cannot let all of our life into our awareness.

In accessing a true experience of belonging, we can begin to relax and allow life to unfold however it may. We begin to relax into the awareness of how our life is, just as it is, and begin to experience more fully that the life we are living is so much more—so much grander—than how others define us to be. And eventually, through our progressive exploration with loving-kindness, com-

passion, and attention, we begin to realize that we are *also* so much more than who we think ourselves to be. Spiritual practice and spiritual faith, regardless of lineage or tradition, fill a deep human need to reach for and experience something greater than one's own limited experience of the world.

Our mindfulness practice invites us into living this fullest potential—to observe, experience, and feel who we really are in this lifetime. Philosophical debates over whether sexual orientation is included in the Pali Canon (Theravadan Buddhist scriptures), or whether being LGBTQ is a skillful or unskillful way of living in the

Larry Yang teaches meditation nationally. He has practiced in the United States and Asia and was ordained as a Buddhist monk. He teaches at both Spirit Rock and East Bay Meditation Centers and trains future dharma leaders.

world are all ancillary and ultimately irrelevant distractions from the core experience of “Who are we?” They are similar to the gender oppression and diminishment of women in how the Buddha’s teachings have historically been passed down to us by a patriarchal order.

When we live our lives with as much awareness and authenticity as we can, regardless of the external circumstances of our lives, we begin to have the confidence that we totally belong wherever we are. We experience a spiritual home that cannot be taken away from us, and it is a sense of home that we can bring with us wherever we go, no matter what shows up in our lives.

It is from that expansive experience of being an integral and indispensable piece of humanity that each of us can be most effective in our goals to transform the worldly conditions that create suffering, abuse, injustice, violence, and oppression. Our personal and our collective freedom is not dependent upon external conditions of the world. Freedom in our minds and hearts is not dependent upon whether life is fair or not. Freedom is the ability to move through difficulty, pain, and trauma with kindness in our hearts and wisdom in our minds.

As Gandhi, Audre Lorde, and Thich Nhat Hanh have all said, we need to be the change that we see for the world. One of the great living Burmese meditation masters, Sayadaw U Pandita, puts it this way:

Practicing Mindfulness means building peaceful little worlds within each of those who practice. Without peace in our little worlds, crying out for peace in the Big world with clenched fists and raised arms is something to think about.

This invitation into spiritual practice is a profound experience. It is being rooted in the sense of being here, belonging here—with here changing all the time, changing as the present moment changes. It is the invitation to be with and rest in the present moment. It is this sense of belonging that invites us into the experience of being part of the universal family—the family that excludes none, the family of all of life. There is a grand and spacious sense that no one can oppress, that no one can take away—our dharma practice is cultivating this sense of belonging to and transforming the world ... for the collective freedom of us all. ■

It’s Time to Heal a Mega-Church Psychosis

by Yvette A. Flunder

SOME TIME AGO, I WAS COPIED ON AN EMAIL FROM AN alleged member of a well-known mega-church in the Washington, D.C., area. The email identified by name those church members thought to be same-gender-loving (it used another term). The message gave great detail as to the church members’ attendance at parties, where they lived and with whom, their miscellaneous sexual proclivities, and where they served in the work of the church. The email requested that these individuals be taken down from their volunteer jobs. As a result the pastor convened a meeting of those named in the email and polled them to determine who among them were seeking help to be free from a same-gender-loving “lifestyle.” There have been numerous follow-up emails from folks named in the original email that are defensive, threatening, and angry. Several have decided to leave the church after many years of faithful membership.

What a tragedy—but the reality facing this church is not unusual. It is indicative of a psychosis that permeates many churches with regard to the presence and involvement of

same-gender-loving (SGL) people, who have great love for God and for their church communities.

Psychosis Defined

THE INSTITUTIONAL PSYCHOSIS I SPEAK OF ARISES WHEN SGL people contribute to their own oppression by continuing to support churches that oppress them and are complicit in structures that support homophobia, homohatred, and hetero-privilege and that encourage internalized homophobia (similar to battered spouse syndrome). It arises when church leaders seek to define themselves as “straight” by embarrassing their SGL parishioners and publicly dehumanizing them.

Sources of the Problem

MANY SGL PEOPLE END UP CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR OWN oppression because they have a need for the anonymity available in a big church and a need to identify with perceived success (mega-church). Other causes include feeling “real church” is

Rev. Dr. Yvette Flunder is the presiding bishop of the Fellowship, a multi-denominational gathering of 110 pastors and Christian leaders representing 56 churches and faith-based organizations. She is the senior pastor of City of Refuge UCC.



Congregants at the City of Refuge United Church of Christ, founded by Bishop Flunder, raise their hands in prayer. The author urges mega-churches and other faith-based groups to join her church in affirming and welcoming all persons, regardless of orientation.

validated by traditional church leadership (male pastor and pastor's wife) and pageantry, the benefit of assumed heterosexuality or ambiguous sexuality, and perceived commitments or loyalty to family. For those SGL persons who benefit financially from the church, secrecy seems to also be an economic imperative. Public ridicule of SGL people may often be a church's effort to hide the reality of the presence of SGL people.

Destructive Effects

THIS SICKNESS HAS RESULTED IN THE DESTRUCTION OF SELF-esteem, as well as in open vicious attacks against the personhood of countless individuals and their families. It has produced self-inflicted theological and physical violence, duplicity and inauthentic leadership (some leaders are themselves SGL or bisexual), loss of valuable members, lack of focus on other vital justice issues, and ministry destruction. This psychosis also causes destructive acts, including irresponsible sexual behaviors complicated by secrecy and an inability to form and sustain lasting, healthy, authentic relationships.

Are there many churches like the one described above? Certainly! There are numerous examples of churches disproportionately populated by SGL sisters and brothers, who are not only bereft of affirmation, but who also live in an atmosphere of continual debasement, degradation, and fear of exposure. This grim situation leads to suicide, disenfranchisement from the church, addictions, and other self-destructive behaviors. The light that is being cast on this disparity is no accident; it is the active will of God, which must be acknowledged and embraced.

This oppression is not making SGL people straight. It is just driving SGL people further underground. The real questions are these: What actions are necessary to move churches beyond toleration to acceptance and affirmation and eventually to celebration of the SGL community and their extraordinary contributions to the Christian community? What is the alternative for those who cannot wait for change to occur? And what is the responsibility of SGL people to participate in their own freedom?

I would suggest the following as **action items** for SGL people and their allies to consider and use to frame discussions regarding relationship and involvement in churches and faith-based communities. Let us develop and promote the following:

1. Faithful support for affirming churches and faith-based organizations.
2. Education regarding a theology of full inclusion of SGL persons in the life of the church.
3. Active involvement in inclusive theological education of family and friends.
4. Active involvement in inclusive theological education of churches and faith communities.
5. Education regarding human sexuality.
6. Commitment to ethical behaviors that include honesty, authenticity, and truth-telling.
7. Confrontation when misinformation, destructive comments, oppressive theology, or dehumanization occurs.

It is time to move beyond avoidance and commence the dialogue necessary to heal this painful breach. It is time for change. ■

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Stern College: Gender Transition and Jewish Ethics

by Joy Ladin

IN 2003, AS A BEARDED, KIPPAH- AND TZITZIT-WEARING man, I joined the faculty of Stern College. In spring 2007, after receiving tenure, I informed my dean that I would return the next semester as a woman. Stern is part of Yeshiva University, modern Orthodox Judaism's premiere institution of higher learning, and Orthodox Judaism, like most traditional religions, classifies the things transsexuals do to fit our bodies to our souls as sins. As someone born male, my sins included wearing women's clothing and taking hormones that destroyed my fertility. I was also violating customs and conceptions of gender that are held to with religious conviction by many Orthodox Jews.

I was sure that coming out as trans would end my employment by Yeshiva University, but after months when I was forbidden to set foot on campus, the unthinkable happened. When my Lambda attorneys demanded that I be allowed to return to teaching, the university said yes. We spent the summer negotiating the conditions of my return—including which bathrooms I would be permitted to use. Finally, September arrived. After years of shame and hiding, I was finally going to stand before my students and colleagues as the person I knew myself to be. More importantly, after millennia of intolerance, an institution representing Orthodox Judaism was about to welcome an openly transgender employee.

As I walked through the halls, I kept waiting for something to happen—for my transition to matter to someone. It didn't. Teachers rushed to and from classes, students talked on cell phones and swayed back and forth in prayer. I wasn't something to stare at; I was just another middle-aged woman going about her business.

But to the *New York Post*, I was news. The article was splashed across page three:

Literature Professor Joy Ladin, formerly known as Jay Ladin, 47, showed up for her first day of school sporting pink lipstick, a tight purple shirt and a flirty black skirt.... Many at the Jewish university are horrified by the presence of the transgender professor.

Conservative Orthodox Reactions

THE UNIVERSITY MAINTAINED OFFICIAL SILENCE ABOUT ME, BUT the *Post* found a faculty member who was willing to voice

Orthodox "horror" at my presence: Rabbi Moshe Tendler, who, as the *Post* noted, is "a senior dean at Yeshiva's rabbinical school and a professor of biology and medical ethics." Rabbi Tendler didn't mince words: "He's not a woman. He's a male with enlarged breasts ... He's a person who represents a kind of amorality which runs counter to everything Yeshiva University stands for." Rabbi Tendler's comments suggest a startling (for a professor of biology and medical ethics) ignorance of the complexities of gender and, as a number of Orthodox commentators noted, violate Jewish laws that require that individuals be spoken of with respect and compassion. But Rabbi Tendler's impolitic remarks express feelings that are alive and well in the Orthodox world—feelings that are a fact of life for transgendered Jews living in Orthodox communities, and which must be acknowledged in any meaningful dialogue about gender identity issues and Judaism.

Gender identity is so central to traditional Judaism that it is more or less impossible for traditional Jewish communities to accommodate those who aren't simply male or female. I can't even participate in a traditional Jewish religious service, where men and women sit separately, without identifying myself as male or female. Such concerns aren't limited to the Orthodox world. They are mirrored in feminist debates over whether transwomen should be welcomed at women-only events, groups, and spaces.

But Rabbi Tendler isn't only worried about what I am; he is worried about what I mean. Gender is a language through which we communicate ourselves to others. For Rabbi Tendler, my presentation of myself as female didn't say that I was a woman—it said that I "represent a kind of amorality," that I reject the very categories that enable us to order and judge reality. Male and female, light and dark, good and evil—such absolute distinctions are the basis of traditional moralities. If, as my transition proclaims, a man can "be" a woman, then there *are* no stable, fixed categories, and thus no basis for moral judgment.

Never underestimate the power of a tight purple shirt and a flirty black skirt.

I've agonized over the moral implications of transsexuality more than Rabbi Tendler ever will. For decades, not a day passed when I didn't feel the secret shame of presenting myself as someone I knew I wasn't. I tried to be a good boy and man—I did my homework, took out the garbage, and stayed faithful to my wife for a quarter-century. But every time I presented myself as a man, I

Joy Ladin, David and Ruth Gottesman Professor of English at Stern College of Yeshiva University, is the author of four books of poetry, including the recent Transmigration and Psalms, and numerous essays.

knew I was lying. The gender language that proclaimed me a good guy, from my perspective, meant that I was a phony, a coward, a betrayer of the deepest truths about myself.

Transition didn't resolve the moral paradox of transsexuality; it simply reversed the terms. Once I began living as a woman, I was being honest and brave, living the only life I could embrace in gratitude and joy—but I was also destroying my marriage and my family, bringing grief and agony to those I loved.

According to Rabbi Tendler, Judaism cannot help me with these moral problems, because to be a transsexual is to be automatically excommunicated: "There is just no leeway in Jewish law for a transsexual.... There is no niche where he can hide out as a female without being in massive violation of Torah law, Torah ethics and Torah morality." Of course, Rabbi Tendler misunderstands transsexuality—transsexuality is a sense of identity, and since Jewish law governs actions rather than feelings, no legal "leeway" is required to be transsexual. And I certainly wouldn't have returned to Yeshiva if I were trying to "hide out as a female." But Rabbi Tendler's claims that transsexuality is incompatible with Judaism raise a serious and—for devout, trans Jews—agonizing possibility: the possibility that to become whole in terms of gender identity, we have to amputate ourselves from our religion, our faith communities, our God.

Is Rabbi Tendler right? Does Judaism's three-millennia-old tradition have no wisdom to offer Jews like me?

Hillel on Self and Moral Responsibility

ONE OF JUDAISM'S MOST FAMOUS SAGES, RABBI HILLEL, SPOKE directly to the ethical and existential dilemmas that surround transsexuality: "If I am not for myself," Rabbi Hillel asked, "who will be? If I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?"

Hillel's widely quoted questions press us to confront the uncomfortable but universal fact that none of us simply are; we have to become ourselves, not once, but throughout our lives. Becoming is scary, difficult, painful; I avoided it as long as I could, and when my gender crisis forced me to become myself or die, I felt utterly lost. It wasn't hard to learn how to act like and be seen as a woman, but I didn't want to simply "act like" and "be seen as." I'd done that all my life. After decades of being a persona, I wanted to become a person.

And so, like generations of Jews before me, I turned to Rabbi Hillel. His questions transformed what seemed to me metaphysical impossibilities—turning lies into truth, nonbeing into being, manhood into womanhood—into concrete choices. "If I am not for myself, who will be?" Hillel didn't have to know anything about transsexuality to know that the answer to that is "no one." No one expected me, needed me, or wanted me to become myself. In fact, my wife and three children needed me not to become myself. My journey toward becoming a person could only begin a radical act of being-for-myself—an act that seemed selfish, solipsistic, even psychotic, for I would have to be for a self that didn't yet exist. But Hillel showed me, in the plainest possible terms, that if I wasn't for myself, my self would never be.



"If not now, when?" by Shoshannah Brombacher. The artist writes: "Rabbi Hillel stands in the middle of the picture, arguing and gesturing about his sayings, with the letters of his aphorism literally narrowing down on him. The word *matay* (when) is repeated twice under the feet of Hillel, one smaller than the other, meaning that if you do not act now and keep postponing, the chance you will act and be successful will become smaller and smaller."

But Hillel also taught me that "If I am for myself alone, what am I?" People become who they are with and through other people. Gender identity—my sense of myself as female—was a private matter of being for myself. But being a woman is much more than a sense of being female. "Woman" designates a social status, the achievement of an identity in the world. When I was for myself alone, what was I? A wish, a longing, a disappointment. If I wanted to become a woman, I had to remake myself in the eyes of others, to be for and with them as the self I felt driven to become.

But Hillel's question is more than a call to come out of the closet. It is also a demand that we take responsibility for the consequences, to others, of our becoming. If I am not for myself alone, if I need others to become (*continued on page 71*)

The Transformative Promise of Queer Politics

by Alana Yu-lan Price

THE LIEUTENANT HAS HANDCUFFED HIMSELF TO THE White House fence. Defiant in his camouflage fatigues and black beret, his arms outstretched against the black iron barrier, he protests the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Images of the gay soldier soon pepper the blogosphere and reel across TV news shows, quickly becoming a symbol of gay activists' growing impatience and frustration with the Obama administration.

The March 18 protest action of Lt. Dan Choi—an army linguist facing pending discharge following his decision to come out as gay on Rachel Maddow's popular news show on MSNBC—and of discharged Capt. Jim Pietrangelo, who also locked himself to the fence, followed a rally against the military's ban on openly gay service members. Choi and five other service members were arrested for cuffing themselves to the fence once again on April 20, and six others again on May 2.

In an age of gay and lesbian activism characterized most visibly by highly respectable inside-the-Beltway efforts to convince lawmakers of gay couples' acceptability to the mainstream, the soldiers' edgy direct actions sparked a flash of recognition and perhaps delight in leftist activists yearning for a revival of the high-profile, militant, grassroots actions associated with the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in the 1980s and Queer Nation in the 1990s.

But the flash faded fast. Here's why: even though the protesters' edgy tactics mirror the tactics of radical groups of decades past, the goal of the action fits neatly within the conservative, assimilationist aims articulated by mainstream LGBT lobby groups. Soldiers chaining themselves to the White House fence may on the surface resemble the ACT UP members who disrupted the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour's* live broadcast back in January 1991 by chaining themselves to Robert MacNeil's desk with signs declaring "The AIDS Crisis Is Not Over." But whereas the ACT UP activists were fighting for their lives in the face of homophobic societal inaction on AIDS, Choi and his compatriots are fighting for a nearly opposite goal: the right to participate in an institution that is killing people in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in wars that most progressive activists consider unjust. What a change from the 1960s and 1970s, when gay liberation was closely entwined with the broader, anti-militaristic vision of the New Left.



In a bold protest against "don't ask, don't tell," gay soldier Lt. Dan Choi chains himself to the White House railings. The tactic at first recalls that of radical gay liberation activists, but the goal—expanding the military's labor pool—is difficult for many on the left to celebrate.

The story of Lt. Choi's protest action is a useful entry point into a discussion of the current trajectory of gay and lesbian organizing because it emblemizes one major reality of the post-Proposition 8, Obama-era activist moment: the widespread sense of urgency and upsurge of grassroots mobilizations, including direct actions like Choi's, in pursuit of the assimilationist (rather than radically transformative) goals of inclusion in the military, inclusion in the institution of marriage, and fuller inclusion in the national workforce via federal nondiscrimination legislation.

I definitely don't mean to suggest that the current moment is devoid of radically visionary activism; in fact, several of the organizers I interviewed—as well as grassroots activists published in this issue of *Tikkun*, such as Dean Spade, founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and INCITE! cofounder Andrea Smith—argue that a simultaneous but less visible upsurge of radical grassroots work is also under way. Far from the modest, assimilationist agenda of D.C.-based lobby groups such as the

Alana Yu-lan Price is assistant editor of Tikkun and web editor of Tikkun Daily (tikkun.org/daily). Previously she freelanced, edited international news articles for distribution to alternative weeklies in the United States, and researched public benefits policies.

Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the agenda of these small grass-roots groups includes work on the interlocking issues of violence and discrimination against queer and trans people, the exploitation endured by all within the global economic system, the neoliberal drift toward the privatization of formerly public institutions and resources, the growth of the prison system and the mass incarceration of black and Latino youth, homelessness, and the criminalization of immigrants. I will touch on the transformative promise of this radical, multi-issue work later, but first I want to fill in the picture I have sketched of the mainstream gay and lesbian movement and give it some historical context.

Historical Trends in LGBT Activism

BACK IN 2000, RESPECTED HISTORIAN JOHN D'EMILIO, who also served as founding director of the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in the mid-1990s, wrote an essay that sought to characterize, in broad strokes, the historical shifts in the core outlook and strategic approach of the gay and lesbian movement from the early 1950s to the start of the twenty-first century. Of course this schematic overview of history unavoidably glosses over many complexities, but it still offers a useful vision of the broad dynamics of gay and lesbian organizing. The piece, "Cycles of Change, Questions of Strategy," identifies the following phases, which I have summarized and combined with information on trans organizing drawn from scholar Susan Stryker's research:

- **Give Us a Hearing** (1950s through mid-to-late 1960s): Activists facing homophobia and invisibility in laws, institutions, and social life, struggle "to break the consensus that viewed homosexuality as dangerous, deviant, and wrong." Transgender people and cross-dressers contend with ordinances against cross-dressing, which cities started passing in the 1840s. The first organized transgender group, the Society for Equality in Dress, is founded in 1952.
- **Here We Are** (early 1970s through mid-to-late 1980s): In an attempt to constitute a gay and lesbian collectivity following the energizing June 1969 Stonewall Riots against police violence—in which drag queens and trans people of color played a major role—activists emphasize the importance of coming out of the closet in their efforts to build community and establish a solid movement constituency through the creation of gay bookstores, hotlines, health clinics, churches, synagogues, etc. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people organize pride parades and work to repeal sodomy statutes, win protections against discrimination, and counter police harassment in order to make openly gay identity possible. Trans people organize support groups, newsletters, and health centers, often facing hostility from the gay community. The Combahee River Collective, a black feminist lesbian group in Boston, releases its influential statement on the interlocking systems of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression" and develops a form of integrated analysis and practice that continues to inspire radical activists today.
- **AIDS Activism** (mid-1980s to early 1990s): AIDS tears through gay communities in the United States. More than 41,000 known U.S. AIDS deaths occur in 1993 alone. Gays and lesbians work together in desperation, engaging in "spirited public advocacy to combat the epidemic and the discrimination entwined with it." ACT UP uses confrontational direct action tactics. A diverse array of AIDS activist groups accomplish a ban on discrimination against people with HIV, make medications more affordable, and counter prejudice and misinformation through public education. A coalition of trans and gay activists gradually strengthens. Transgender Nation, an activist group in San Francisco, forces local queer groups to respond to trans concerns and organizes a demonstration at the 1993 annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association to protest the pathologization of transgender identity.
- **Let Us In** (starting in the early 1990s): Efforts shift toward a demand for inclusion in mainstream society and the institutions associated with family, school, and work. Lesbian and gay adoption and co-parenting rights, gay marriage, the creation of safe spaces in schools, inclusion in the military, and national antidiscrimination legislation all rise to the fore. As Stryker



"Pieta" by Matthew Wetlaufer, who worked with Queer Nation and ACT UP in the 1990s.

notes, another “let us in” occurs as well: a push by transgender activists for recognition of the contributions they have been making all along, and a call for gay activists to pay more attention to trans issues. During this period some intersex activists also begin to seek recognition and inclusion in the LGBT movement. In 1993 the Intersex Society of North America is founded to support and advocate for people with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t fit the typical parameters of female or male, particularly seeking to prevent unwanted and invasive sexual surgeries. Though intersex activists sometimes have found it useful to coalition with queer and trans groups, the “LGBTI” lumping does not always make sense, because many intersex people see intersex issues as a medical condition rather than an identity category.



“Noah’s Gay Wedding Cruise” by Paul Richmond. Whose world will marriage equality transform? Here Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi, Elton John and David Furnish, Rosie O’Donnell and Kelli Carpenter, and the cowboys from Brokeback Mountain revel in a festival of gay marriage. Acutely absent from this vision of bliss: queer immigrants, homeless trans youth, poor and working-class gays and lesbians, and LGBT inmates.

When I asked D’Emilio how he would characterize the present moment in relation to his schematic, he said the “new phase of post-Prop. 8, post-election-of-Barack-Obama, resurgent activism, which revolves around the theme of equality, is still very much in the mold of ‘we want in’ or ‘we want access’ or ‘we want the rights that all should have’”—there hasn’t been a twist in sensibility significant enough to demarcate a new era. But “what is new at this moment,” he added, “is the renewed, widespread sense of outrage and frustration which may not have been there or as overtly there a few years ago,” and which has sparked an upsurge of grassroots activism and organizing energy. “There’s certainly a new emotional tone of impatience,” he said. “I’m thinking ‘we want this now’ would be the new catchphrase, if there is something new.” He observed that some of the urgency of the present moment resulted from the shock of the 2008 passage of Proposition 8, a California ballot initiative that rewrote the state constitution to ban gay marriage. The loss of the right to marry in California has provoked much more outrage than the adoption of barriers to gay marriage in states that never allowed it.

A Cultural Sea Change

SWEEPING CHANGES IN THE VISIBILITY AND ACCEPTANCE OF GAY, lesbian, and bisexual (and to a significant but lesser extent, trans) people have occurred since the “out of the closet” movement of the 1970s. I’m not just talking about Ellen DeGeneres’s earth-shattering “coming-out” episode in 1997 and the flurry of sympathetic gay and lesbian sitcom characters and

pop culture celebrities that have since entered the public eye. I’m also talking about the shifts that created the conditions of my own life.

As a child in the 1980s, I attended an elementary school with a handful of “out” teachers and administrators in Madison, Wisconsin, a city well known for its liberal culture. Some of my classmates’ parents were out as bisexual, lesbian, and gay. Only one or two adults in my immediate community ever made overtly homophobic comments, though the topic of homosexuality certainly made some awkward or uncomfortable. As an adult I am part of communities of queer people comfortable with adapting to friends’ transitions from one gender to another, social circles in which babies are growing up using the gender-neutral subject pronoun “z” and possessive pronoun “hir” (or a new, singular use of “they/their”) for genderqueer people who prefer them, and professional environments in which there is no fear of losing employment due to sexual orientation or gender identity. What a far cry from the era of the Stonewall Riots.

Obviously my life experiences are not the norm throughout the United States, but the generational shift in attitudes concerning homosexuality and non-normative gender presentations means the arc of history is bending in this direction. When I asked Tim Stewart-Winter, a historian of modern U.S. politics and sexuality, about the dynamics of the current moment, he noted that the percent of people in the United States who say they know a gay person is the highest it has ever

been (58 percent, according to a 2009 *USA Today*/Gallup poll), and there's a high correlation between knowing you know a gay person and supporting gay rights.

At the present moment, same-sex marriage is legal in five states and the District of Columbia. And in 2007, our society passed an employment nondiscrimination milestone: the majority of people in the U.S. now live in cities or states in which they can't legally be fired for being gay, thanks to local laws that have been passed in the absence of a national Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

A Sea Change in Religion

LGBT RIGHTS ACTIVISTS HAVE ALSO WON MAJOR VICTORIES IN the realm of institutionalized religion, simultaneously struggling to reject or reinterpret religious texts used to support homophobia and to win acceptance as participants and leaders in their religious communities.

Some Christian denominations are facing full-scale splits because so many of their adherents support the ordination of openly gay people. In 2008, several years after the Episcopal Church consecrated Gene Robinson, its first openly gay bishop, Episcopalians watched conservative adherents break away to form a rival church. And in 2009 the 4.6 million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church of America rocked the mainline Protestant world by voting to allow people in committed same-sex relationships to serve as clergy.

Meanwhile Muslim groups such as Al-Fatiha have organized conferences and led debates on the merits of establishing a gay mosque. Al-Fatiha grew out of a listserv for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning Muslims founded in 1997 by Alam Faisal, an activist in Washington, D.C., and it went on to create chapters in the United States and internationally. Queer Muslim blogs and message boards have spread like wildfire, creating space for new conversations and communities to develop. The documentary *A Jihad for Love* has sparked further engagement with the issue as well.

Within Judaism, openly gay, lesbian, bi, and trans people can now be ordained in the Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Renewal branches. *Tikkun* assisted in this struggle for inclusion by challenging the Jewish Theological Seminary's anti-gay ordination stance and, more broadly, calling on the Jewish community to support LGBT rights, recalling how Jews and gays were both forced into the concentration camps of Europe. Anti-gay sentiment remains strong in Orthodox circles, but even there some attitudes are shifting. Back in 1993, when we published an article entitled "Gayness and God: Wrestlings of a Gay Orthodox Rabbi," the essay's author, Rabbi Steven Greenberg, insisted on remaining anonymous. Eleven years later, he wrote under his own name: "The Orthodox community is just beginning to seriously address the question of gay and lesbian inclusion. The most important catalyst for change has been the documentary film, *Trembling Before G-d*, released in the fall of 2001, in which seven characters struggle with their homosexuality and their love of Jewish tradition."



Current Landscape of Mainstream LGBT Activism

THESE DAYS MARRIAGE EQUALITY, EMPLOYMENT NONDISCRIMINATION, and the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell" are major priorities of Washington-based advocacy groups such as the HRC, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Lambda Legal, and the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Improving the media portrayal of LGBT people is a major focus of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). Meanwhile the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network helps students build gay-straight alliances (more than 4,000 have been registered so far) and works to end student bullying and harassment. HIV/AIDS issues and religion-based homophobia are additional areas of concern for the National Black Justice Coalition, while the National Center for Transgender Equality fights anti-trans violence and discrimination, including the frequent violence and denial of medical care endured by trans people in prison. The 200,000-member national network of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) coordinates with its D.C. office to mobilize support for national bills; it has recently been putting grassroots pressure on lawmakers to ban employment discrimination and to prohibit anti-gay and anti-trans discrimination in adoption and foster care placements. Dozens of LGBT groups associated with different ethnic groups, groups for disabled queer people, and LGBT religious groups have also sprung up.

Many of the smaller D.C.-based advocacy groups pursue less assimilationist goals than those of the high-profile HRC, but with their smaller size and budgets, their influence is comparatively weak. Widely accused by grassroots activists (*continued on page 71*)

Queerness in the Contemporary Goddess Movement

by Starhawk

BELTANE, MAY DAY, IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT celebrations in the Pagan year. This year I danced around a traditional Maypole with my friends in Reclaiming, a Wiccan/Pagan tradition with a commitment to political engagement as one aspect of our spiritual path. We twined the colored ribbons, sang, danced, drummed, and raised ecstatic energy to celebrate sexuality, creativity, community, fertility, and sustainability—queer, straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, women, men, transgender folks, children, flowers, birds, and a few dogs, all together.

Our Maypole ritual reflects the evolution of our thinking about gender.

When we began the revival of the Goddess movement in the seventies, many of us were drawn to Wicca as a surviving religious tradition that had strong female images of deity. The historical persecution of Witches, we realized, was a societal attack on sexuality and a mass silencing of women's voices and truth. The Goddess religions honored sexuality, saw nature and the body as sacred—and that sounded good to us!

At that time, our teachers and other Witches and Pagans often saw the world as a cosmic play of duality, with spiritual and material energies poised in dynamic tension between male and female poles. Heterosexual imagery was embedded in symbols and woven into ceremony. The Maypole was a giant phallus, impregnating a female earth.

Feminists challenged those myths. Teachers such as Z. Budapest, who founded the feminist Susan B. Anthony Coven Number One, and scholars such as Marija Gimbutas brought back the knowledge of ancient Women's Mysteries. Women's circles and spaces were places of deep healing and empowerment. Men's circles taught our brothers to draw support from one another instead of always seeking it from women.

But what happens when the lines between “woman” and “man” become fluid? In the seventies and eighties, the feminist community sometimes split in bitter arguments over whether transgender women were “real women.” Today, younger folks are more likely to question whether women really exist as such, or whether gender as a whole is a restrictive lens through which to view the world.

In Reclaiming, we had many lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and



transgender folks from the beginning. Beltane was often a center of controversy. How could the cock/womb imagery of the Maypole speak to us when our own sexuality was much more fluid? Were we not deifying heterosexuality as the norm? Yet we all loved the Maypole and the wild, wacky, tangled ribbon dance.

A true religious symbol can support many different interpretations. Over time—and after many, many arguments!—we shifted our ritual away from polarity to invoke five aspects of the burgeoning life force: creativity, sexuality, fertility, community, and sustainability. My story for children, “The Goddess Blesses All Forms of Love” (printed in *Circle Round*), reinterprets the Maypole ribbons to represent all the different forms of loving sexual expression and all the multiplicities of gender.

Many people, in and out of Reclaiming, are delving deeply into Queer Mysteries, working with pantheons of queer gods, developing rituals, myths, and sanctuaries. The Radical Faeries have, for decades, practiced their own wild rites. In Britain, the Queer Pagan Camp welcomes hundreds each summer to celebrate ceremony together.

In a world where women as a whole are still oppressed, we can't just jettison the categories. But queer spirit invites us all to look at the world in a different way, to stretch our imaginations and push the edges of possibility. ■

Starhawk is the author of eleven books, including The Fifth Sacred Thing, The Earth Path, and her latest, The Last Wild Witch. She lectures worldwide and teaches courses in permaculture, activism, and spirituality. Her website is www.starhawk.org.

The Hands of the Holy:

Re-Envisioning LGBT Welcome in Faith Communities

by Amanda Udis-Kessler and Phoebe Lostroh

IT'S TIME TO DEVELOP NEW, COMPELLING ARGUMENTS about why faith communities should eagerly welcome and fully include LGBT people—arguments not based on the claim that people “can’t help” being lesbian or gay.

Many Christian denominations and some strands of Judaism remain resistant to full inclusion. One major factor for this may be that they do not find the “no choice” argument compelling. This in turn may be because many Christians and some Jews still find ex-gay narratives convincing despite the movement’s larger social discrediting.

Moreover, despite claims about “gay genes” and other deterministic elements of sexual identity, both scientific and social scientific evidence suggest that sexual identity is more flexible over time, for more people, than fits neatly into the “no choice” paradigm. Consider Alfred Kinsey’s findings, or the presence of situational male homosexuality in settings like prisons. It is one thing to experience one’s sexuality as a given and quite another to demonstrate that homosexuality is biologically determined. The extent of sexual fluidity over individual lives, throughout history, and across societies suggests that there is no clearly definable biological homosexuality trait; therefore, there is no deterministic causal explanation of homosexuality.

Yet another problem with the “no choice” argument is that it does not provide a solid foundation for welcoming and fully including bisexual people, some of whom would say there are elements of choice in their sexuality.

It will take courageous work on the part of many people to build new religious models of inclusion; ideas such as the following may represent a jumping-off point. If developed further, such ideas may be invigorating to those of us on the side of a human welcome that matches our understanding of the Holy’s welcome.

The Jewish commitment to healing the world acknowledges

that the Holy has no hands but ours. All of our hands are needed to repair what is broken, just as all of our insights are needed to solve the problems we face, all of our spiritual wisdom is needed to strengthen us for the work ahead, and all of our blessings are needed to hallow the work and the world. LGBT people should be eagerly welcomed into faith communities because our hands are ready to carry out repairs, our insights and wisdom are at the

world’s disposal, and our blessings are as sturdy as anyone else’s. How we came to our sexuality does not matter. How we practice our generosity, compassion, humility, and gratitude does.

Encounters with the Holy are always a product of their times; we meet the sacred from our particular social circumstances. In a society that too easily veers toward the disconnected, isolated, and individualistic, we need to encounter a G-d of connection, intimacy, and extravagance, one who is more concerned with our ability to love than with how body parts mix and match. Faith communities should welcome LGBT people as part of a rigorous commitment to the best of what love means.

We are also beset by fundamentalisms on all sides and deeply need

reminders that the Holy not only does new things but specifically lifts up and cherishes new people, ever expanding the circle of sacredness. LGBT people have often been understood, not merely as nonreligious, but as the antithesis of all that is good about religion. Faith communities should energetically invite LGBT people in order to signal their commitment to religion that grows and changes, always in the direction of enlarging the circle.

Ultimately, the “no choice” argument is defensive. We need to envision and develop proactive approaches that honor our religious yearnings and the sacred gifts we can bring, and that jettison defensiveness for the openheartedness that is our birthright and our hope. ■



*Amanda Udis-Kessler, a sociologist, is entering seminary for the Unitarian Universalist ministry. She has published widely on bisexuality, social inequality, and LGBT religious issues, including the book *Queer Inclusion* in the United Methodist Church. Phoebe Lostroh, a molecular geneticist at Colorado College, has written on “sexy science” and on problems with the “gay gene” theory, among other topics.*

The Intersection of Anti-Occupation and Queer Jewish Organizing

by Wendy Elisheva Somerson

NEAR THE END OF THE ANTI-OCCUPATION PASSOVER Seder held by Jewish Voice for Peace in Seattle this spring, I looked around at my community of more than one hundred queer Jews and friends and felt an internal shift. After leading the concluding prayer, I told everybody that only six years ago, I didn't know any other radical Jews with whom to celebrate *Pesach*. This year, I felt like I was taking a deep nourishing breath after years of shallow breathing. As a queer Jew who is deeply critical of the Israeli government and deeply inspired by Jewish ritual, my desire for both political and spiritual fulfillment was finally being met.

This experience highlighted for me how important it is for radical Jews to create alternative spiritual and political spaces, instead of begging to be let into Jewish institutional spaces that offer us inclusion only when we leave our anti-Occupation politics behind. Similar to how Jewish mainstream organizations welcome us as long as we toe the line on Israel, mainstream GLBT organizations represent us only if we validate heteronormative institutions such

as marriage, militarism, and the prison industrial complex. In both movements, we need to create spaces outside of institutions that help us envision a world in which we want to live.

Our chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) provides a model of queer activism grounded in resistance to institutions that promote militarism and state violence. Queer-identified folks make up the majority of JVP-Seattle, which tries to think beyond mainstream Jewish notions of what is "in our best interest" as Jews. We aim to use our Jewish and queer histories of struggle and resistance to become allies to other oppressed groups, including Palestinians.

Refusing to let mainstream Jewish groups speak for us, we reject the disingenuous ways pro-Occupation groups use the notion of Israel as a "gay-friendly oasis" in the Middle East to divert attention away from Israel's brutal occupation of Palestine. As queer Jews, we will not allow the notion of our supposed safety as both Jews and queers to blind us to the oppression of others.

As queers, we also hold a broad vision of what is in our "best interests" and insist on working from the intersection of queerness with other identities. Mainstream GLBT rights organizations increasingly clamor for GLBT folks to be let into heteronormative mainstream institutions by pouring their energy and resources into legalizing gay marriage, passing hate crimes legislation, and insisting on our "right" to serve in the military. Instead of knocking on the doors of these notoriously oppressive and homophobic institutions, where so many folks experience abuse, we need to start creating alternative ways to validate relationships, create accountability, and challenge nationalist militarism within our communities.

Challenging a Pro-Occupation Rally

THE SUMMER OF 2006 WAS DIFFICULT FOR MANY JEWS IN Seattle, both because of escalating aggression by the Israeli government against Gaza and Lebanon and because of shootings at the Jewish Federation. At a Stand with Israel rally that summer, one week prior to the shootings, a handful of queer Jews brought an alternative voice to the unconditional support for Israeli military aggression. On a hot summer day, we entered the park with signs that said, "As a Jew, I cannot support bombing civilians" and "Judaism taught me to question the justification of war for peace." When we tried to join the rally, we were (*continued on page 72*)



Police prevented Jewish protestors from joining a pro-Israel rally. "Finally, several of us just walked into the rally and sat under a tree with our signs," writes Wendy Somerson (right).

Wendy Elisheva Somerson is a queer Jew who helped found JVP-Seattle. In addition to writing, she metal-smiths, makes art, and cavorts with other radical Jews. Her work has appeared in *Bitch* and other publications.

The Uganda Controversy: Solidarity vs. Imperialism in LGBT Organizing

by Emi Koyama

EARLIER THIS YEAR, I ATTENDED A U.S. RALLY AGAINST proposed legislation in Uganda that would make homosexuality a capital offense. The legislation had been reportedly inspired by evangelical Christian leaders from the United States, and it was receiving a great deal of critical attention from Western media and governments at the time.

The rally was organized in Beaverton, Oregon, by members of local high school gay-straight alliances. It brought together hundreds of students and dozens of adults, including several elected officials and their representatives. It was encouraging to see so many youth advocating for human rights for all, but seeing their handmade “youth power” signs made me feel uneasy. If the rally were to have any impact on the Ugandan legislation or the U.S. response to it, it was imperialist power—not youth power—that would accomplish that.

Students who were among the featured speakers at the rally generally kept their messages positive, insisting that to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Ugandans was to support Uganda as a whole. But many elected officials who spoke, either in person or by proxy, strayed away from this sentiment, often invoking language laden with colonialist implications such as “barbaric” and “uncivilized” to mock Ugandan leaders. Such comments are not just offensive, but counterproductive, since they echo the self-serving justifications for colonial conquests in the name of Christian salvation or Enlightenment.

Worse, a number of them called for economic sanctions against Uganda in the event the legislation were to pass, and received big applause for it. The threat of economic sanctions is effective, but very problematic: if deployed, sanctions could lead to the collapse of social order in a country like Uganda, endangering many more lives of LGBT Ugandans than the legislation itself would. And yet, none of the speakers opposed the sanction or even voiced a concern or caution.

Speaker after speaker repeated the cliché that we must be “the voice for the voiceless” or “stand up for those who can’t stand up for themselves.” But LGBT Ugandans are not simply voiceless, faceless victims: there actually is an LGBT rights group in Uganda, whose members have held press conferences in its capital city of Kampala, fiercely and proudly announcing their sexual and gender identities. They do not need Western LGBT activists to speak for them; we need to listen to their

voices and help amplify them so that others will hear them.

I do not question that there is a need for transnational alliances and collaborations to advance the rights of sexual and gender minorities everywhere. Western LGBT and human rights activists can, for example, confront American right-wing leaders who travel to countries like Uganda in an effort to spread their version of “family values” around the globe (although it would be an insult to presume that Ugandan politicians aren’t capable of being homophobic without the aid of American hate-mongers) and provide financial and moral support to locals fighting for justice in their own communities and regions. But there needs to be more awareness about the historical, economic, and political context in which we live, or else our engagement will become indistinguishable from the forceful, imperialist imposition of Western values and views on the rest of the world. ■



Ugandan gay rights activist David Cato, here in Kampala in December 2009, became an activist after he was beaten up four times, arrested twice, fired from his teaching job, and outed in the press.

Emi Koyama is putting the Emi back in feminism at <http://eminism.org>.

Dismantling Hierarchy, Queering Society

by Andrea Smith

QUEER POLITICS CALLS us to go beyond a simple toleration for gay and lesbian communities to address how heteropatriarchy structures white supremacy, capitalism, and settler colonialism. By heteropatriarchy, I mean the way our society is fundamentally based on male dominance—a dominance inherently built on a gender binary system that presumes heterosexuality as a social norm.

To examine how heteropatriarchy is the building block of U.S. empire, we can turn to the writings of the Christian Right. For example, Prison Fellowship founder Charles Colson makes a connection between homosexuality and the nation-state in his analysis of the war on terror, claiming that one of the causes of terrorism is same-sex marriage:

Marriage is the traditional building block of human society, intended both to unite couples and bring children into the world ... There is a natural moral order for the family ... The family, led by a married mother and father, is the best available structure for both child-rearing and cultural health. Marriage is not a private institution designed solely for the individual gratification of its participants. If we fail to enact a Federal Marriage Amendment, we can expect not just more family breakdown, but also more criminals behind bars and more chaos in our streets. It's like handing moral weapons of mass destruction to those who would use America's



The long history of fluid gender in Native Two Spirit communities (photo of a Navajo Two Spirit couple at top) informs work done by groups such as the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, led by Jessica Yee, who headlines on this Carleton event poster (bottom). The network “integrates queer analysis, indigenous feminism, and decolonization into its organizing praxis.”

depravity to recruit more snipers, more highjackers, and more suicide bombers.

When radical Islamists see American women abusing Muslim men, as they did in the Abu Ghraib prison, and when they see news coverage of same-sex couples being “married” in U.S. towns, we make our kind of freedom abhorrent—the kind they see as a blot on Allah’s creation. [We must preserve traditional marriage in order to] protect the United States from those who would use our depravity to destroy us.

The implicit assumption in this analysis is that the traditional heterosexual family is the building block of empire. Colson is linking the well-being of U.S. empire to the well-being of the heteropatriarchal family.

Heteropatriarchy is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural. Just as the patriarchs rule the family, the elites of the nation-state rule their citizens. For instance, prior to colonization many Native communities were not only nonpatriarchal, they were not socially hierarchical, generally speaking. Consequently, when colonists first came to this land they saw the necessity of instilling patriarchy in Native communities because they realized that indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy.

Patriarchy in turn rests on a gender-binary system; hence it is not a coincidence that colonizers also targeted indigenous peoples who did not fit within this binary

Andrea Smith is the author of Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances (Duke, 2008). She teaches at UC Riverside.

model. Many Native communities had multiple genders—some Native scholars are now even arguing that their communities may not have been gendered at all prior to colonization—although gender systems among Native communities varied.

Gender violence is a primary tool of colonialism and white supremacy. Colonizers did not just kill off indigenous peoples in this land—Native massacres were also accompanied by sexual mutilation and rape. The goal of colonialism is not just to kill colonized peoples—it's also to destroy their sense of being people. It is through sexual violence that a colonizing group attempts to render a colonized people as inherently rapable, their lands inherently invadable, and their resources inherently extractable. A queer analytic highlights the fact that colonialism operates through patriarchy.

Another reality that a queer activist approach reveals is that even social justice groups often rely on a politics of normalization. Queer politics has expanded our understanding of identity politics by not presuming fixed categories of people, but rather looking at how these identity categories can normalize who is acceptable and who is unacceptable, even within social justice movements. It has also demonstrated that many peoples can become “queered” in our society—that is, regardless of sexual/gender identity, they can become marked as inherently perverse and hence unworthy of social concern (such as sex workers, prisoners, “terrorists,” etc.). We often organize around those peoples who seem most “normal” or acceptable to the mainstream. Or we engage in an identity politics that is based on a vision of racial, cultural, or political purity that sidelines all those who deviate from the revolutionary “norm.”

Because we have not challenged our society's sexist hierarchy (which, as I have explained, fundamentally privileges maleness and presumes heterosexuality), we have deeply internalized the notion that social hierarchy is natural and inevitable, thus undermining our ability to create movements for social change that do not replicate the structures of domination that we seek to eradicate. Whether it is the neocolonial middle managers of the nonprofit industrial complex or the revolutionary vanguard elite, the assumption is that patriarchs of any gender are required to manage and police the revolutionary family. Any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy. Rather, as political scientist Cathy Cohen contends, such struggles will maintain colonialism based on a politics of secondary marginalization in which the most elite members of these groups

will further their aspirations on the backs of those most marginalized within the community.

Fortunately, many indigenous and racial justice movements are beginning to see that addressing heteropatriarchy is essential to dismantling settler colonialism and white supremacy. The Native Youth Sexual Health Network, led by Jessica Yee, integrates queer analysis, indigenous feminism, and decolonization into its organizing praxis. Incite!, a national activist group led by radical feminists of color, similarly addresses the linkages between gender violence, heteropatriarchy, and state violence. And queer-of-color organizations such as the Audre Lorde Project have rejected centrist political approaches that demand accommodation from the state; rather, they seek to “queer” the state itself.

This queer interrogation of the “normal” is also present in more conservative communities. I see one such thread in evangelical circles—the emergent movement (or perhaps more broadly, the new evangelical movement). By describing the emergent movement as a queering of evangelicalism, I don't necessarily mean that it offers an open critique of homophobia (although some emergent church leaders such as Brian McClaren *have* spoken out against homophobia). Rather, I see this movement as challenging of normalizing logics within evangelicalism. This movement has sought to challenge the meaning of evangelicalism as being based on doctrinal correctness, and instead to imagine it a more open-ended ongoing theological conversation. Certainly the Obama presidential campaign has inspired many evangelicals—even though they may hold conservative positions on homosexuality or abortion

—to call for a politics that is more open-ended and engaged with larger social justice struggles. Perhaps because of this trend, evangelical leader John Stackhouse recently complained that the biggest change in evangelicalism is “the collapse of the Christian consensus against homosexual marriage.” Unfortunately, many leftist organizers tend to dismiss or ignore these openings within evangelicalism, but at their own peril. Social transformation happens only through sustained dialogue with people across social, cultural, and political divides.

As I have shown here, I believe queer politics offers both a politics and a method for furthering social transformation. It is a politics that addresses how heteropatriarchy serves to naturalize all other social hierarchies, such as white supremacy and settler colonialism. It is also a method that organizes around a critique of the “normal” (in society as a whole or in social movements) and engages in open-ended, flexible, and ever-changing strategies for liberation. ■



Detail from “Jesus Appears to His Friends” by Doug Blanchard. The author describes the emergent movement as a “queering of evangelicalism.” Blanchard’s twenty-four-panel series, “The Passion of Christ,” portrays Jesus as a gay man.

Bisexuality—Theology and Politics

by Debra Kolodny

REGARDLESS OF THE STRUCTURE, RITUALS, AND principles of our path, and whatever the Divine name to whom we offer our prayers, bisexual and transgender people of faith live consciously and continually in the place where the twain meet.

Blessed with the capacity for our intimate relationships to transcend the socially constructed boundary of gender identity (masculine/feminine) as well as the biologically constructed boundary of sex (male/female), bisexual people embody and can therefore integrate and constructively deploy powerful theological insights that take others years to cultivate through practice.

Living fully into our destiny as *b'tzelem Elohim* (created in the image of a G!d who exists beyond and includes all gender identities, and who intimately and passionately loves every human regardless of gender identity) grants us access during everyday consciousness to the spiritual truth that souls are not bounded by mundane matters such as genitalia. As a result of this deep knowing, which many spiritual traditions hold as a goal of daily meditation and prayer, qualities like boundless compassion and appreciation of universal truths in the face of chaos, complexity, and even violence can be cultivated with greater ease. This, of course, can lead to a life of devoted service to people quite different from oneself or of mediating and healing conflict, helping transform unhealthy or even dangerous patterns in families, organizations, or nation states.

Despite these positive possibilities, our ability to seemingly choose the sex of our partner has made bisexuals the scapegoats of people who fear abundant possibility. Sadly, even the most tolerant and welcoming heterosexual ally has been known to challenge the decision to be in a same-sex relationship, knowing that as bisexual people we are capable of partnering with

someone of another gender. Ironically, this is the height of homophobia! Failing to see worth in every soul-to-soul partnering, this position explicitly declares that if you can “help it,” loving someone of the same gender is not valid, is not holy, is not defensible.

The unfortunate framing of the lesbian and gay civil rights movement fed this paradigm and unwittingly fostered a degree of biphobia that still resonates in political, social, and spiritual contexts. Throughout the 1990s, the movement argued that sexual orientation was immutable—it could not change—and

therefore was subject to the highest possible protection against discrimination. The immutability argument was chosen because it had been successful in securing and protecting rights based on race and gender under the Fourteenth Amendment in decades past. In addition, the 1986 Supreme Court decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which upheld a Georgia sodomy law, seemed to have closed the door on using constitutional privacy arguments to end discrimination based on sexual orientation.

An unfortunate side effect of the “immutability” argument was that it opened the door for the sentiment that if gay people *could* be straight they certainly *would* be, they just couldn't help it—thereby seeing sexual orientations as similar to congenital illness. And of course, it lifted bisexuality up as the sacrificial lamb in the struggle, for bisexuals

seemed to be able to choose, and if they *can* choose, they should, and they should choose to be heterosexual or suffer the consequences.

But does the red herring of choice really hold up under scrutiny?

With people of all orientations, serendipity, fate, hormones, emotions, and spirit interact in a wildly unpredictable dance resulting in attraction, courtship, and partnering. None of us feels



Debra Kolodny, a daily practitioner of taiji and meditation, is an active lay leader at Fabrangen; student rabbi of Pnai HaSadeh in Silver Spring, MD; and the executive director of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal.

particularly in control of any of those factors! We meet and fall in love with those who catch our eye, make our heart rate quicken, share our interests, make us laugh, smell right, “get” our quirks, and most often, whose culturally deemed level of attractiveness is about the same as our own. Is that exercising choice or accepting that fate/Spirit/God or luck operate through our attractions and we respond with delight and appreciation when it does?

More importantly, it is spiritually unsupportable to make *lack of choice* the criterion for social acceptance or legal rights. Even if choice did come into play, why should chosen attractions between consenting adults be less honored than other choices that are legally protected? The Constitution protects our rights to practice religion freely and to associate freely. Are we genetically Christian or Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, Pagan, Taoist, Bahai? Sometimes we stay in the path of our bloodline, but often we don’t. We play out our spiritual proclivities in the environments we feel called to, welcomed by, at home in. Sometimes faith is challenged and we leave. Religious conversion is accepted as appropriate and in some faiths, like many

streams of Christianity, it is a critical component of the faith to bring in converts. Clearly we can accept, protect, and respect a core aspect of one’s identity when one isn’t “born that way.”

Thankfully, time bore out this truth in the legal arena. The privacy argument in *Bowers v. Hardwick* was ultimately re-deemed in 2003 when the Court overruled its 1986 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*. Stating that “*Bowers* was not correct when it was decided, and it is not correct today,” the court created a legal opening for a spiritual truth: love and love-making between consenting adult souls honors the soul’s boundlessness and therefore its holiness.

Indigenous traditions have long known this, identifying a role of the highest spiritual order for the person who loves someone of the same gender. Called gatekeepers by the Dagara of West Africa and berdache or Two Spirit by many Native Americans, these people were born into a special destiny, often shamans and revered leaders. May we catch up with these cultures, speedily and in our day. ■

It’s So Queer to Give Away Money

by Dean Spade

IN RECENT YEARS, WE’VE WITNESSED AN INCREASE IN media, legislative, and judicial activity surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage. It’s an issue that has prominently featured images of upper-class, white, professional gay and lesbian couples. “Gay politics” has been defined most visibly as concerning whether couples like these can be legally recognized as co-parents, can inherit each other’s wealth, and can share health benefits from each other’s jobs.

While this sort of gay politics has been growing more visible, a different queer politics, focused on racial and economic justice and grassroots activism, has been growing stronger. Queer and trans people concerned about the growing wealth divide in the United States, the stagnation of wages, the increase in immigration enforcement and imprisonment, and the U.S. government’s assault on poor people and people of color, both domestically and internationally, have been organizing. The activists and organizations leading this work have reframed queer politics and queer activism. They have declared that property rights associated with marriage and access to military service are not the greatest needs of the most vulnerable queer and trans people. They have been working on police brutality, welfare rights, immigration, health care access,

foster care, criminalization, and other key issues facing queer and trans poor people and people of color.

At the same time, they have been redefining what activism should look like. Many have raised concerns about how the professionalization of queer and trans activism has changed its messages and its demands. Starting in the 1980s, the emerging “gay and lesbian rights” organizations, led mostly by white lawyers, business people, and other professionals, have produced the new agenda that has focused on the needs and concerns of gay and lesbian people with class privilege, often explicitly cutting out people of color, immigrants, trans people, people with disabilities, and poor people.

Those working to build a grassroots movement focused on the intertwined, intersecting priorities of racial and economic justice and queer and trans issues have observed that this work’s agenda is often narrowed by its quest for philanthropic support. These activists have been developing grassroots fundraising strategies focused on raising money from communities directly affected by the work and their allies in order to build organizations that are accountable first and foremost to those communities rather than to wealthy donors or foundations. These organizations are seeking

Dean Spade is an assistant professor at the Seattle University School of Law and the founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. His first book is forthcoming from South End Press in Spring 2011.

to build participatory, democratic movement infrastructure rather than elite, funder-driven agendas implemented by professional staff. Many are looking to social movements that have used membership models, including membership dues, to engage mass mobilization.

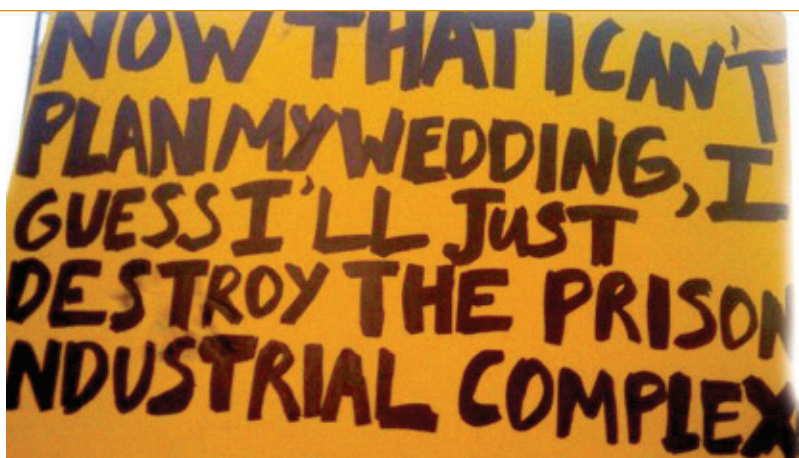
This grassroots racial-and-economic-justice-focused queer and trans politics, while less visible than the same-sex marriage debate, is making significant strides. It has won measures of increased accountability from the larger, wealthier gay and lesbian rights organizations and foundations, many of which are starting to roll out “racial justice” programming. It has also won meaningful law and policy victories and developed coalitional alliances with enormous political potential. This work, including the increased focus on grassroots fundraising and on examining race and class privilege in movement organizations, has led to important conversations about the personal politics of wealth redistribution.

Many people are talking and thinking about what it means to practice our politics in our own day-to-day lives when it comes to complex questions about money, security, consumption, and community. As we fight for a world in which all people have what they need, in which people need not make decisions based on fear of falling to the bottom, how do we apply those principles to our daily lives and decisions? How do our ideas about healing, care, redistribution, and interdependence relate to the feelings of scarcity, greed, and desire that living in capitalism cultivates inside us?

The Taboos, Fear, and Shame ... Around Having, Discussing, and Sharing Money

THESE QUESTIONS ARE DIFFICULT BECAUSE ADDRESSING THEM requires us to break taboos, to invent new community norms, and to struggle against tendencies toward judgment and shame. Many people are taught that it is rude or inappropriate to talk about money, especially how much money people make or have and what they do with it. Many people also feel overwhelmed by the violence of capitalism and the enormity of poverty. This overwhelm can lead to feeling immobilized by guilt about their own role in the system and their fear of being judged if they talk about it. Under these conditions, it is very hard to form an analysis, supported by friends and allies, about the impacts of our own behaviors. It can be hard to develop a meaningful approach to bringing our principles to life in our daily decisions rather than just reacting out of fear. In order to take the risk of making decisions that depart from cultural norms, we all need to feel like we have support, like we won't be bearing the risk of doing things differently by ourselves.

Luckily, queer and trans communities have some practice at this kind of work. We have long critiqued powerful shame-inducing norms about sexual practices, family structures, appearance, and behavior. We have celebrated sexual desires, gender expressions, and relationships that are marked as abnormal, criminal, or pathological by our cultures. We have done this despite disapproval from our families, vulnerability, and significant loss of security. We have felt the excitement of entering a queer space where we can see ways of life that are hidden or despised played up and celebrated, where we can exist for a moment



in an alternative world, in which the most beautiful people are those reaching most daringly away from norms, even mocking them, bolstered by the enthusiasm and support of an audience thrilled by the defiance.

So many of the explosive alternatives offered by social movements of the 1960s and 1970s—those interventions that declared the personal political and that invited people to see the role of patriarchy, colonialism, white supremacy, and ableism in shaping their own consciousnesses, their daily behaviors and choices, and their most intimate practices—made the impact they did because so many people undertook this critique together and co-developed both their analysis and their alternative practices in community.

How Alternatives Are Built

MANY OF US ARE INCREASINGLY BUILDING A CONVERSATION IN queer and trans and other activist spaces about what personal practices of wealth redistribution might look like. This conversation addresses a range of topics. People are talking about consumer practices: how can we assess what kinds of desires constitute needs in a culture permeated with advertising that tells us to base our self-worth on what we possess? High-tech gadgets designed to constantly distract and entertain us and also extend our work hours are rolled out weekly, wrapped in promises that we can all be smarter, more popular, and more efficient—how do we resist the message to buy, buy, buy?

We are also talking about practice related to risk and vulnerability. In a culture with a decreasing safety net, there is enormous fear-based pressure to save for retirement, unemployment, disability, children, and other life changes. A system that individualizes risk encourages people to look out for themselves alone and steel themselves against harm, knowing that they may face vulnerability alone. What kinds of structures would our communities need to put in place together so that we could trust that we would be cared for and that hoarding does not make the world safer for us? How can our queer and trans histories with caring for loved ones with AIDS, supporting youth abandoned by their families, and supporting queer and trans elders offer models?

We are also talking about giving away money. For some of us, that is about becoming monthly sustainers of grassroots organizations that focus on racial and economic justice, giving \$20 or \$100 or \$1,000 a month from our paychecks. For others, it is about breaking the taboo of talking about trust funds and inheritances, facing off with family members who are *(continued on page 74)*

Culture

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[BOOKS]

The Second American Revolution

ONLY THE SUPER-RICH CAN SAVE US!

by Ralph Nader

Seven Stories Press, 2009

Review by Charles Derber

RALPH NADER HAS WRITTEN an entirely unexpected story of a second American Revolution orchestrated and financed by aging billionaires such as Warren Buffett, Ted Turner, and Yoko Ono and carried out by millions of mobilized mainstream Americans and a patriotic parrot named Polly. The Second Revolution is against the King Georges of corporate America who rule the country with their lobbyists on K Street and handmaidens in Congress. The masses triumph, take back the country, rein in the corporations, and begin a more authentic democratic American experiment.

But such a triumph of a people's movement is utterly *impossible*, right?

For most Americans, including most on the Left, system change has become a pipe dream. The truth is that we have become cynical and no longer believe we can transform the capitalist U.S. hegemon. System change is now considered a utopian conceit. Leftist intellectuals have become complicit in this new fatalism, writing endless books and articles critiquing current policies but offering (with some exceptions, as in this magazine) almost nothing about how to imagine and create a revolutionary transformation.

Ironically, it's primarily the far Right that has persevered with a utopian politics and a celebration of intellectuals who unabashedly offer a revolutionary system

change. Think only of Ayn Rand, whose utopias, such as the *Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, continue to be read by millions on the Right. Right-wing populist movements, such as the Tea Party, thrive on such unreasonable flights of utopian imagination, rejecting pragmatism for hyper-conservative and anti-systemic idealism, even where it appears to violate their own interests. They may not get all they want, but by demanding the impossible, they can plausibly get more of what is possible.

The U.S. Left used to have its own utopian sensibility, and Nader has now resurrected it. In 1888, at the peak of the Gilded Age, Massachusetts lawyer Edward Bellamy published *Looking Backwards*, a visionary socialist novel that sold one million hardcover books to the mass public. It had authoritarian elements that—as with many utopian visions—could conceivably create dystopia rather than utopia. But Bellamy's utopian best seller spawned a new breed of leftist intellectuals who did not find it silly to paint pictures of a world beyond greed, predatory finance, and robber-baron capitalism. And Bellamy spurred cooperativist, socialist, and radical



labor movements that promoted previously unimaginable progressive reform.

The fading of the radical, utopian U.S. Left in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has gone largely without notice. Established intellectuals in the Beltway and New York highbrow literary circles live happily in this new world of hegemonic pragmatism, and leftist

intellectuals, mainly ensconced in comfortable academic positions, have, for the most part, reconciled themselves to it. In his blistering 1960s critique—titled *American Power and the New Mandarins*—Noam Chomsky was one of the first to headline the extreme seriousness of this collapse of intellectual vision and courage.

Historian Russell Jacoby has described the intelligentsia's capitulation as one of the great tragic chapters in intellectual history. In books such as *The Last Intellectuals* and *The End of Utopia*, Jacoby ferociously attacks leftist intelligentsia for abandoning the radical imagination. Radical imagination, after all, is not a path toward tenure. The professionalization of the leftist intelligentsia in the university has undercut the temperament and intellectual capacity to even conceive a different world.

Chomsky and Jacoby both hint at the larger historical tragedy: the potential disappearance of the U.S. Left, itself. For what is the Left if not the carrier of the vision of what is impossible today? The Left exists to transform the very sense of possibility—as Tom Hayden has said, the radicalism of today is the common sense of tomorrow.

With his new book, Ralph Nader—always the iconoclast and visionary—has created a new genre. Nader breaks completely with the prevailing pessimistic pragmatism, writing of the revolution that might not seem so out of reach if only we believed in its possibility.

Nader hammers out this fable on his typewriter in the frenzied passion that Jack Kerouac made famous in his iconic novel, *On the Road*. Nader kept writing at night, sometimes by candlelight, to write more than 700 pages, finishing the novel in a few months. Nader was driven by the urgency of the task: to rekindle optimism and possibility in a dying Left and to bring the message to a wider public that the Left has largely abandoned.

Reviews thus far have focused heavily on Nader's notion that the very rich might ironically become the saviors of democracy. This does not seem entirely far-fetched, not only because people in the book, such as Turner and George Soros, do have deep concern about the corporate hijacking of democracy, but also because the recent Supreme Court ruling that frees corporations to spend unlimited amounts on campaigns may indeed require progressives to look to billionaires for resources. Some of the billionaires are beginning to contact Nader for meetings.

But the reviewers' focus on the billionaires is misleading. First, it is ultimately the masses who carry out the revolution in Nader's novel, with the billionaires providing the seed money and helping orchestrate the strategy. Nader knows that civic activism by ordinary Americans is the only force that will change the world—and such grassroots activism gets vast attention in the book. Second, the agents of change are secondary to his real message: the urgency of collectively cultivating a visionary consciousness and gut-level belief in transformative change, and then committing ourselves to making

radical system change in the real world.

If this seems to blur utopia and pragmatism, one need only look at Nader himself, who probably knows as much as Rahm Emmanuel about how Washington lobbyists, congressional committees, and presidents actually operate. What makes Nader remarkable is that he has refused to compromise utopian ideals while totally engaging the real world over the last five decades and delivering some of the most important changes from the Left in America in the last century.

Nader's blending of utopianism and pragmatism makes the book a genuine creative leap in genre and substance. Some of the most interesting parts are on nitty-gritty subjects such as how health insurance companies operate to cheat customers and manipulate congressional committees; I re-read these parts several times. These real-world insights would stand on their own as powerful analyses even outside of the larger utopian narrative.

But it is the insistence on leftist utopianism and transcendence of pragmatic pessimism that is the real story. How many leftist books leave you feeling hopeful, even optimistic? How many offer you a picture of a new world that inspires you to act? *Tikkun* readers will, of course, think about Michael Lerner's work and that of other *Tikkun* writers. But they are the exception. While inspiring so many, they have also been widely critiqued, even in parts of the Left, for their "unreasonable" idealism and utopianism.

Nader has understood that until leftist writers and readers and activists can integrate a systemic critique of capitalism with a compelling vision of change, the U.S. Left will decline faster than it has in recent decades. For it is utopian sensibilities—impossible ideals that we refuse to sacrifice—that fuel movements and create change. In Europe, Marxist socialists did not get socialist utopias. But by imagining revolutionary change, they did create social democratic societies more humane and peaceful than our own.

In the absence of such leftist utopianism, we will only sink further into despair and provide the opening for the

rightist utopianism that fuels movements such as the Tea Party. Therein lies the dystopia which has become the only reality for too many Americans and, sadly, too many on the Left. ■

Charles Derber, professor of sociology at Boston College, has just published Greed to Green: Solving Climate Change and Remaking the Economy.

WHY THE PROPAGANDA?

A LETHAL OBSESSION: ANTI-SEMITISM FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE GLOBAL JIHAD

by Robert S. Wistrich

Random House, 2010

Review by Milton Viorst

AS AN ADMIRER OF ROBERT S. Wistrich, I picked up this huge book of nearly 1200 pages with anticipation. I had read the author's earlier work, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, and found it careful, intelligent, and fair, as well as more manageable in size. It had won the Austrian State Prize for History, which in my judgment it merited. Wistrich taught me much about the social mix that existed during the era when the seeds of Zionism were sprouting.

My own research on Zionism made me particularly interested in Wistrich's account of the relationship between Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, and Dr. Moritz Gudemann, the chief rabbi of Vienna and an early supporter who later turned on Herzl. Like most Viennese Jews, Gudemann was an assimilationist who genuinely believed, despite the riptide of anti-Semitism, that Jews had a most hopeful future in Europe. He denounced Herzl for giving up the struggle against anti-Semitism at home to urge Jews "to grow vegetables in Palestine."

But Gudemann also argued that a nationalist Jewish state—"based on cannon and bayonets"—was likely to be as warlike and intolerant as the increasingly belligerent states of Christian Europe. It was a prescient observation, unique to Gudemann I believe, and a warning that Jewish

nationalism contained serious dangers. Wistrich is the only writer I know who considered it important enough to publish.

So I looked forward to Wistrich's providing a fresh and original—or at least thoughtful—treatment of anti-Semitism in *A Lethal Obsession*. I forgave him for misleading me by promising to examine “antiquity,” when in fact only a few pages predate modern times. I also overlooked his blooper on “the emancipation of Jews in Israel/Palestine from Muslim rule by 1948” when he knows, of course, that the last Muslims to rule Palestine were the Turks, whose empire fell in 1918; it was Britain that yielded power to the Jews in 1948. More discouraging was that little of the information in the book was fresh; much of it read as if Wistrich did research in front of the computer, consulting Google. But what troubled me most was his pervasive lack of detachment from the problem throughout his swollen narrative.

It seemed to me as if something had happened to Wistrich, the scholar, since the publication of *The Jews of Vienna* two decades ago. His bio says that, after some years of teaching at English universities, he is now a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a very distinguished institution. What alarmed me, however, was Wistrich's journey from scholarship to propaganda. *A Lethal Obsession* reads as if it had been sponsored by AIPAC or Likud or, at times, even the Jewish Defense League.

I don't quarrel with Wistrich's theme. It emerges from his observation that Zionism did not succeed, as Herzl had predicted, in abolishing anti-Semitism—or, to use the nineteenth-century euphemism, solving the “Jewish Question.” Whatever Zionism's achievements, it also offered anti-Semites a new target: “Israel itself,” Wistrich writes, “would gradually emerge as the new ‘Jewish Question.’”

But Wistrich grotesquely overstates the case, denying that the hostility Israel has faced since its creation has anything to do with conflicting nationalisms. The

wars, he says, are not confrontations between states that can negotiate rationally. What fuels the conflict is anti-Semitism and its derivative, the Arabs' refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist. Indeed, we know that anti-Semitism is still present in the world and Israel's enemies have been intransigent, unwise, and certainly ungenerous. But what Wistrich would have us believe is that, in the bloody history of Palestine, Israel is as pure as Anne Frank facing the storm troopers and that any prospect of its settling the conflict by retreating from Israel's hard-line positions is a total, even an evil, delusion.

Wistrich asserts with a sneer that many critics of Israel

attribute the dramatic rise in global anti-Semitism, especially since 2000, to Israeli occupation of the territories acquired in the 1967 war. They point to oppressive treatment of the Palestinians and alleged crimes against humanity, atrocities or systematic infringement of human rights to explain the widespread hatred of Israel. This explanation is doubtless attractive to those blinded to Arab wrongs or who are unaware of the long history of anti-Semitism.

As one of those critics of Israel, I am neither blinded to Arab wrongs nor unaware of anti-Semitism's long

history. But Wistrich and his fellow right-wingers choose simply to dismiss Israeli policy as a factor. At its founding sixty-two years ago, Israel enjoyed a reservoir of human sympathy that covered much of the earth. That reservoir is now nearly empty. Readily conceding anti-Semitism and Arab failures, I am deeply pained by the denial of reality that permits the Jewish State—and many of its citizens, as well as diaspora Jews—to find justification not only in outrageous behavior but also in the pursuit of policies that, as I see them, place Israel's existence in permanent jeopardy.

It saddens me further that Wistrich is

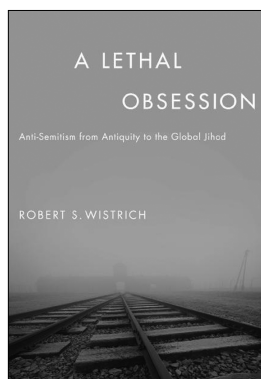
so intolerant of Jews who propose to reach out to reconcile with the traditional foe that he accuses us—dredging up a cliché that should embarrass him—of being “self-hating Jews.” How does Wistrich presume to know that we're self-hating? Because we don't think as he does? Is he claiming to be our therapist? I recognize his right to take a position different from ours but not to vilify our motives, much less our psyches. I acknowledge his concern for the Jews, but I also insist he acknowledge ours.

After all, if there was ever a self-hating Jew, it was Theodor Herzl. As an adolescent, he yearned to be a Prussian aristocrat. In his twenties, he urged Jews to read the works of anti-Semitic thinkers to learn more about themselves. His diary is sprinkled with denigrating comments about Jews' noses. He even wrote a play called *The New Ghetto*, in which he hurled contempt at Jews for money-grubbing—mainly the Jews of his own social class. It took Herzl a while to recognize that the anti-Semitism around him was a danger to all Jews, and when he did he called for the creation of a state as a refuge for the beleaguered.

Wistrich has not paid attention to Herzl's plea for a refuge, much less to Gudemann's warning about Jewish nationalism. Instead, he has taken his stand with extremists who have redefined Zionism to rationalize Israel's rule over its neighbors—a rationalization that Herzl could not possibly have imagined.

Wistrich is correct, as his title suggests, that over much of history—or, at least, European history—anti-Semitism has been both lethal and an obsession. But there are many books on anti-Semitism, and surely in a work purporting to be as ambitious as this one, he has a scholarly duty to examine it with a scalpel rather than a bludgeon.

He might recall that in our own time, Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, has made a serious effort to come to grips with its shameful involvement with anti-Semitism. Even if its success has been imperfect, the effort has had positive results. As for the Arabs, they have never been as anti-Semitic as the Christians of Europe. I would think even



Wistrich can discern a difference between the Holocaust and the social bias to which Jews were subject—in dress and taxation, for example—while living in Arab lands.

As for the quarrels of the last hundred years, we Jews have our perspective and the Arabs have theirs, but we cannot simply dismiss theirs as unwarranted. Seeing all of Israel's problems within a framework of mindless anti-Semitism, as Wistrich does, is to embrace a phantom, feeding self-pity and self-delusion. I fear that, without greater discernment, the "lethal obsession" of which he writes may well turn out to be not just our enemies' but our own. ■

Milton Viorst has written about the Middle East for most of the past half-century. He is currently writing a book on the evolution of the idea of Zionism.

PROPHETIC COURAGE IN AN IMPERIAL AGE

THE MAN WHO KNEW GOD:
DECODING JEREMIAH

by Mordecai Schreiber

Lexington Books, 2010

Review by Barry L. Schwartz

SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH, Abraham Joshua Heschel gave an interview with NBC News correspondent Carl Stern for the television show *The Eternal Light*. Heschel talked extensively about the ancient prophets of Israel. His description of prophets as those who combine "a very deep love, a very powerful dissent, painful rebuke, with unwavering hope," captures the essence of the prophetic persona better than anything I have ever come across.

Heschel went on to explain how writing a book on the prophets changed his life. He explained how he was compelled to go beyond the comfort of academia "to be

involved in the affairs of man, in the affairs of suffering man." Then he added, "And I would like to say that one of the saddest things about contemporary life in America is that the prophets are unknown. No one knows the prophets."

Not much has changed in the three-and-a-half decades since Heschel's death. As Rabbi David Polish recently lamented:

We are, of course, the people of the Book. But truth be told, the fact that we are "of the Book" does not mean we necessarily read the book. There are whole parts of our own scripture that are virtually alien to most of us—even the most learned. Most Jews who hear the snatches of the Prophets that are included in our worship services as *haftarot* seem to lose focus as they are being read. We regard them as sacred, but they do not fully make sense to us.

Take Jeremiah, for example. How much do we really know about him? To read him straight through is tough—maybe not quite as hard as Ezekiel, but trying and disorienting nonetheless. Yet it is our loss. Jeremiah's life story is compelling, and his powerful challenge to domestic hubris and colonial imperialism resonates in our age: "See, you are relying on illusions that are of no avail. Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely ... and then come and stand before Me in this House, which bears my name and say, we are safe?" (7:8–10)

Books like Mordecai Schreiber's *The Man Who Knew God: Decoding Jeremiah* are important because they clue us in on what we are missing. Schreiber's series of essays may lack a coherent whole; I don't think he offers a compelling biography of the prophet. Some of his re-created scenes feel contrived, and his concluding homilies pedantic. However, the author does an admirable job of elucidating the remarkable historical significance of the prophet for Jews and Christians. Among his salient points:

- Jeremiah was the pioneer of pure monotheistic Judaism.
- Jeremiah was the first proponent of individual (vs. communal) ethical accountability.
- Jeremiah was the pivotal teacher of Torah to the masses.
- Jeremiah was the historical model for Jesus' suffering servant ethos.

Yet when all is said and done, what strikes us most deeply in our *kishkas* about Jeremiah is his resolve in the face of suffering and his true embodiment of prophetic courage. Jeremiah would have none of the pseudo-religious revivals sweeping his country. He decried hypocrisy at every level and paid for it in years of emotional torment, scorn, imprisonment, and exile. The personal cost is hard to fathom; Schreiber even posits that Jeremiah broke with his own father and never married due to his relentless pursuit of the truth. Through it all, he did have his loyal disciple and scribe Baruch ben Neriah by his side. He told Baruch to keep writing. And that is why Jeremiah, a pariah in his own day, lives for the ages. ■

Barry L. Schwartz is a rabbi, author, and activist. His latest book, Judaism's Great Debates, will be published next year.

[FILM]

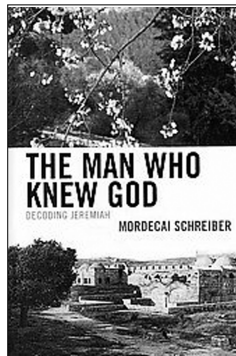
COLLATERAL HEALING

BUDRUS

Just Vision, 2010

Review by Michael Nagler

SEE THIS FILM. THIS IS NOW the second great documentary on Palestinian/Israeli nonviolence by the same team at Just Vision that made *Encounter Point*. *Budrus* sold out every screening at the recent Tribeca Film Festival in New York where Arab, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim community leaders, academics, journalists, and celebrities attended, including filmmaker Michael Moore. It won the Special Jury Mention. Reviews and media coverage in outlets



including ABC News, *The Jewish Week*, Al Jazeera International and Arabic, Channel 10 in Israel, *The Washington Post*, and *The Nation* have been dazzling.

Budrus is the inspiring story of a non-violent campaign that worked: activists forced the Israeli government to stop driving the “separation barrier” (aka apartheid wall) around six small West Bank villages. The barrier would have imposed even more than the usual humiliation and hardship; to add insult to injury, in the village of Budrus it would have plowed through a cemetery and cut residents off from their ancient olive trees—from their livelihood and contact with the earth.

But it failed. After ten months of almost daily confrontation with the IDF soldiers (including eventually the special border forces) who were sent out to declare the fields a “closed military zone,” and after fifty-five planned demonstrations, the wall was rerouted almost to the Green Line.

The film focuses on community leader Ayed Morrar, a soft-spoken but extremely determined organizer who kept things moving ahead with patience and impressive skill, along with his courageous daughter, Iltezam.

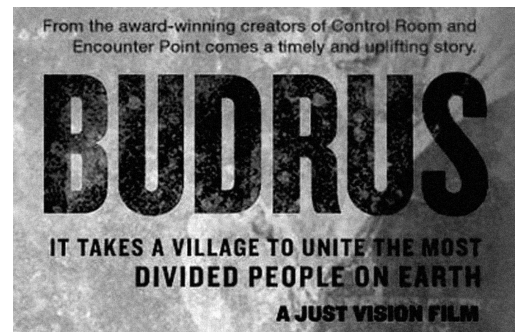
There is “collateral healing” whenever nonviolence is practiced; just as, inevitably, there is collateral damage in war. In the first intifada, which was largely nonviolent with some lapses, urban dwellers created a whole network of services independent of Israeli help or authority: clandestine schools, food systems, and the care of neighbors’ children when their parents were taken off to jail—the infrastructure of “beloved community.” In the Budrus Satyagraha, as the film rightly emphasizes, it was the “heart unity” (to use Gandhi’s term) between men, who started the action, and women (who were brought into the campaign by Iltezam and then her father just as they had been by Gandhi in South Africa), not to mention between Hamas and Fatah, and most impressively, between Palestinians and Israelis. In remote Budrus there were many whose only contact with Israelis when the campaign began had been with soldiers; now, as peace-loving Israeli citizens stood by their

side, they learned that Jews can be their sisters and brothers.

The film provides an eye-opening glimpse of the power of nonviolence. It also gives a vivid picture, though there is no attempt to rub it in, of what occupation has done to the Jewish people. I will not dwell on that point, however.

Here are the things to watch out for in order to draw the deepest insights about nonviolent action from the film:

- The Hamas buy-in to the struggle was couched, as you might expect, in purely strategic terms: “If we use violence, the demonstrations won’t last long; but with peaceful means, we could get international support.” There is nothing wrong with strategic nonviolence, *provided* you don’t think that this minimalist commitment will give you the full power of nonviolence itself; and provided that if you do not achieve your goal, you don’t go away saying, “nonviolence failed; we better go back to armed struggle.”
- While principled nonviolence is pursued whether outsiders appear likely to help or not, it is true that nonviolent insurrections have rarely succeeded without at least some attention from the international community. A stirring part of the film is the arrival of the South African delegation.
- A successful nonviolent movement against determined opposition requires three ingredients that the one at Budrus possessed: a just cause, *determination* or “relentless persistence,” and the refusal to *dehumanize* the opponent (see the glossary in the resources section of our mettacenter.org website for all these terms).
- A successful nonviolent movement does not need a Gandhi, but it usually needs *some* leadership, like that of Ayed Morrar.
- Nonviolent movements also need some way to control dissident elements who try to use violence within the movement: among Palestinians, it is the *shebab* (young men) with their stones, while among U.S. activists it is the “Black Block” with bricks, as in Seattle.
- Nonviolence doesn’t always “work”



(get you exactly what you want), but it always does good work that makes the world a better place, often in ways you hadn’t thought of. This crucial point was expressed by producer Ronit Avni at the showing I attended in San Francisco: that the wonderful uniting at Budrus of disparate elements within Palestinian society, a development that will make them much stronger for any future challenge, came not so much from a common enemy as from a higher goal.

Don’t miss this film. ■

Michael Nagler is professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, founder and president of the Metta Center for Nonviolence Education (www.mettacenter.org), and author of The Search for a Nonviolent Future.

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HA'RAV KOOK*(continued from page 28)*

It's the good that I desire,
Its broad expanses entrance me,
Its lips, its roses, I kiss,
Its glorious vision exalts me.

Absolute good, without limitation,
Without end, constriction or boundary,
That does not separate from anyone alive,
And with its love fixes everything broken.

Good for me, good for all,
Good without evil or fear,
Good full of pleasure for all,
Full of tranquility, without anxiety.

Good forever, good right now,
Good for every people and nation,
For all who seek for the good and not for the bad,
And the light and the delight, as the One is there.

(Naftshee Takshiv Shiro/My Soul Will Hear Its Song, page 18)

Tov le kol aam ve'aam (good for every people and nation) ...

Bemhera BeYamenu (may it be soon and in our days). ■

WHY GAY RIGHTS IS A RELIGIOUS ISSUE*(continued from page 38)*

culture around the world, then, one pauses to wonder and speculate as to the particular gifts of gayness. Evolutionarily, some have speculated that homosexual individuals, who presumably do not procreate, care for the good of the group. Socially, LGBT people have often taken roles as artists, healers, and shamans, in forms both profound and absurd ("Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" is, one might say, capitalist shamanism). Spiritually, some in the gay community have sought particularly gay modes of relating to spirituality as liminal, "third sex" individuals who reflect on conventional constructions of gender from a fortunate place beyond them. And intellectually, we have every reason to expect that the liberation of sexual minorities will add as much to our cultural life as did the liberation of women—more perspectives, more questions, more complications, and thus

more life.

However we understand the gifts of homosexuality, accepting sexual diversity leads to an appreciation of the gorgeous mosaic of God's erotic creation. Emerging as we still are from centuries of oppression, gay people have only begun to inquire into the unique gifts they bring to humanity. Yet the basic notion that sexual diversity is part of God's manifestation in the world, not a deviation from it, informs how we appreciate those who express their gender and sexuality in ways different from our own. Informs—and inspires.

These are but ten reasons—there are many more—why full equality for sexual minorities should be seen not as some accommodation of religion to a secular norm, but as a religious value itself. They are intended to be public reasons, that is, reasons that can be explored and discussed objectively regardless of our personal experience. But if there is an eleventh reason I would add, it would be of necessity a "private" one: that every religious sinew in my body leans in the direction of liberation, love, and holiness. I have known life as a closeted gay man, and so I have the experience that many of my interlocutors do not. They presume, on television and online, to know me better than I do. They tell me that what I know of my soul is incorrect, that really I am making a wrong choice and turning astray.

But I, like other gay religious people, know that they have it exactly backwards. When my soul turns toward God, it turns toward more love, enduring bonds, and the fulfillment of human potential—and those are precisely the qualities engendered by loving and holy sexual expression, homo, bi, or hetero. When I doubt myself and turn to the side of fear and repression (and its inevitable shadow, lashing out in lust), I feel the eclipse of God in my heart and in my body. I feel a terrible coldness creep over me, and an alienation that is not unlike the loneliness Dante describes in hell.

I cannot extrapolate public norms from these subjective experiences. But insofar as the discerning mind and open heart can ever be relied upon, I know in which direction sanctity lies. Of love, there is no doubt. ■

SAME-SEX WEDDINGS AND HINDU TRADITIONS*(continued from page 45)*

the eleventh-century Sanskrit *Kathasaritsagara* story-cycle states, in the context of an intense male-male attraction at first sight: "*Vakti janmaantarapritim manah snihyadakaaranam*" (Affection that arises in the heart without a cause speaks of love persisting from a former birth).

While modern Hindu families' initial response to socially disapproved love affairs, cross-sex or same-sex, tends to spring from the perspective of outraged social dharma, the second perspective—that of individual dharma—often creeps in and helps families adjust and compromise with the couple.

Beginnings of Doctrinal Debate

APART FROM THE MORE POPULAR VIEWS of love based in Hindu doctrine, there are also specifically religious views expressed by priests and teachers in modern India that consciously draw upon ideas derived from ancient texts. In her 1977 book, *The World of Homosexuals*, mathematician Shakuntala Devi recorded an interview with Srinivasa Raghavachariar, Sanskrit scholar and priest of the major Vaishnava temple at Srirangam in South India. Sri Raghavachariar, himself married and the father of thirteen children, said that same-sex lovers must have been cross-sex lovers in a former life. The sex may change but the soul remains the same in subsequent incarnations, hence the power of love impels these souls to seek one another.

In 2002, I talked to a Shaiva priest from India who conducted the wedding of two Tamil Brahman women in Seattle. He explained that when the women requested him to officiate at their wedding he thought hard about it and, although he realized that other priests in his lineage might disagree with him, he concluded, on the basis of Hindu scriptures, that "marriage is a union of spirits, and the spirit is not male or female."

The beginnings of a debate were evident at the Kumbha Mela in 2004, when Rajiv Malik, a reporter for *Hinduism Today*, asked several Hindu swamis gathered there for their opinion of same-sex marriage. The swamis disagreed even with

others from their own lineages who were present. The answers ranged from Swami Avdheshananda's condemnation of same-sex marriage as unnatural and unheard-of, to Mahant Ram Puri's remark: "There is a principle in all Hindu law that local always has precedence.... I do not think that this is something that is decided on a theoretical level," according to Malik's article "Discussions on Dharma." He went on to point out that Hinduism has "a hundred million authorities."

Unlike some other religions, Hinduism has not one but thousands of sacred texts. If a line disapproving of same-sex unions can be found in one text, a story celebrating it can be found in another. Modern Hindu right-wing organizations are attempting to stamp out this diversity by imposing a uniform authoritarian version, with little scriptural backing, from above. The range of practices and community responses around female-female unions is just one small example demonstrating the ultimate futility of this attempt.

The swami's understanding of Hindu law coincides with that of legal historians, because custom in all schools of Hindu law does in fact take precedence over written laws. This principle was recognized even by the British rulers and is enshrined in post-independence law, such as the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, which recognizes as valid any marriage performed by a ceremony customary in one of the partners' communities, regardless of whether a license is obtained or the marriage registered with the state. In my book *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West*, I argue that same-sex marriages performed by customary ceremony and with community participation are legal under the provisions of the Hindu Marriage Act, even if the state refuses to recognize them.

In 2004, I interviewed Swami Bodhananda Saraswati, a Vedanta teacher, on the question of same-sex unions, and he said, "There is no official position in Hinduism. From a spiritual or even ethical standpoint, we don't find anything wrong in it. We don't look at the body or the memories; we always look at everyone as spirit." ■

JEWISH ETHICS

(continued from page 51)

myself, then I cannot ignore the pain that results from my becoming. For most of my life, I tried to be for others without being for myself—to be the man others needed me to be, to suppress and deny the woman I felt I was. Once I began to transition, I wanted desperately to do the opposite, to insist that after all my years of self-denial, others' feelings didn't matter. Hillel's question forced me to recognize that people I love were in anguish as a consequence of my transition, and unless I acknowledged their anguish, I would be for myself alone. If I wanted to become a real person and not someone acting like a woman, I had to be true to their feelings as I was to my own.

For most of my life, it seemed that the answer to "If not now, when?" was "never." My certainty that I would never really exist was so complete that I couldn't even imagine a process of becoming. In my fantasies, I simply found myself in a magical now in which I was suddenly a girl or woman—fantasies I expected to come true the moment I made the difficult commitment to transition. But transition didn't magically transport me from life as an imitation man to life as a real woman. As Hillel's questions taught me, the "now" in which we become ourselves must be created over and over as we make, each moment, the sometimes agonizing decisions, choices, and commitments to ourselves and others.

Transsexuals' lives may seem strange to those who do not have to struggle to reconcile the gender of their psyches with the sex of their bodies, but we embody the questions Hillel poses to everyone: How can we become our truest selves? How can we place ourselves in meaningful, moral relationship to others? And if not now, when? ■

QUEER POLITICS

(continued from page 55)

of prioritizing its own perpetuation and turning its back on poor and working-class gay men and lesbians, the HRC also infuriated trans activists nationwide in 2007 by going back on its promise not to promote legislation that protects only against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, not gender identity. Under intense pressure, the HRC eventually agreed to once again back only an Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) that includes protections for transgender people. LGBT activists now report that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has given them some reason to hope for a vote on a trans-inclusive ENDA before the end of this year.

Limitations of the Current Mainstream Activist Model

THE CURRENT STRATEGIC APPROACH OF the most influential mainstream LGBT groups limits their scope and effectiveness in various ways. John D'Emilio said the movement's current focus on goals that will likely require a Supreme Court victory to achieve (marriage equality) or that require congressional action (military inclusion and national antidiscrimination legislation) renders the recent upswell in grassroots energy much less effective than it could be in affecting local institutions and laws—and less effective than it was in the Stonewall era and during the height of AIDS activism, when the focus included many locally achievable goals.

"There is all this wonderful energy at the grassroots level," D'Emilio said. "But what they're campaigning for in this 'get equal' effort is not well matched to the energy." He added that his dream would be for younger activists to instead fight for comprehensive sex ed programs "about body, reproductive functions, emotions, and physical desire, and sexually transmitted diseases.... If that were part of the curriculum of what children received in school, it would be hard for homophobia to reproduce itself."

Another serious limitation of the mainstream gay and lesbian agenda, from a progressive/radical perspective, is the tendency to imagine and pursue LGBT

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priorities as separate from issues of poverty, immigration, health care, homelessness, and corporate power. These issues are of course materially entwined in the lives of queer people in poverty, queer immigrants, and queer people of color. But they are also intertwined more broadly—it is hard to imagine making truly transformative gains against one type of oppression without simultaneously attending to how it interlocks with the others.

Visions of Radically Transformative, Multi-Issue Queer Activism

WHAT MIGHT A TRULY TRANSFORMATIVE queer and trans movement look like? In an essay published in 2000 and titled “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” political scientist Cathy Cohen described her initial hope that “queer politics” would constitute “a new political direction and agenda, one that does not focus on integration into dominant structures but instead seeks to transform the basic fabric and hierarchies that allow systems of oppression to persist and operate efficiently.” Looking back to the insights of the Combahee River Collective, she concluded that queer politics had failed to incorporate an adequate analysis of the roles that race, class, and gender play in defining people’s relations to “dominant and normalizing power.”

She ended her essay with a call for a process of movement-building “rooted not in our shared history or identity, but in our shared marginal relationship to dominant power that normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges.” Intergenerational groups of activists, often including many in their teens, twenties, and thirties, are taking up that call.

Against Equality, an editorial collective focused on critiquing mainstream gay and lesbian politics, has become one hub for those interested in a more radical, multi-issue approach. “We are committed to dislodging the centrality of equality rhetoric and challenging the demand for inclusion in the institution of marriage, the U.S. military, and the prison industrial complex via hate crimes legislation,” the group’s mission statement reads. “We want to reinvigorate the queer political imagination with fantastic possibility.” Its logo is a yellow more-than sign on a blue background—a

play on the HRC’s ubiquitous equal sign logo that communicates the group’s desire to transform society in a way that benefits everyone rather than merely to seek legal equality for gays within a damaging societal system.

Yasmin Nair, a member of the editorial collective who is also an activist with Gender Justice United for Societal Transformation, said the latter group is doing exciting work of this sort in Chicago, simultaneously fighting for anti-bullying initiatives in schools and against the neoliberal privatization and semi-privatization of the city’s public schools. The issues are intertwined because the main idea proposed in response to bullying was the creation of a new “pride campus”—a semi-privatized refuge for LGBT students facing bullying. Instead the group has been pushing for the entire public school system to initiate an anti-bullying program.

Nair has observed a growing momentum of this sort of organizing in recent years and expressed hope about its power. “There is something about being queer and on the left that can actually be transformative,” she said. “It’s not purely a personal issue around marriage, it’s not simply asking for safety from the state or putting our fellow people in prison, it’s not about fighting for the U.S. It includes a radical rethinking of what makes for a just world.” ■

ANTI-OCCUPATION AND QUEER ORGANIZING

(continued from page 58)

stopped by the police. We were told we couldn’t enter the rally with our signs, yet most folks in the rally carried signs, just ones with different messages. It was increasingly frustrating to be told that we were welcome at the rally only if we left part of ourselves behind.

The police didn’t know how to deal with us because we were *Jewish* protesters. They were told to keep protesters out, but many of us had been invited to the rally by our congregations. Did we belong inside or outside? Finally, several of us just walked into the rally and sat under a tree with our signs. The police left us alone, but various folks at the rally were infuriated by our presence: some insisted that we leave; some tried to talk with us; many yelled at us, calling us traitors and self-hating Jews. We were told that if we lived in an Arab country, they would cut off our heads for being “homosexual.” Some teenage boys wanted to stand next to us with signs that said “I’m with stupid” and take our pictures. It was overwhelming and sad for all of us; I had just started to develop connections in a local GLBT-friendly synagogue, which helped sponsor the rally, and I felt the immediate effect of this political rift.



“On a beautiful sunny day near Lake Washington, we led a Tashlich L’Tzedek—a social justice casting-off ceremony. We decided to cast off the sins of the Occupation, naming each sin as we threw our rocks into the lake.”

When the rally came to an end, we stood on a hill near the exit singing peace songs in Hebrew, which proved to be our most effective strategy. As folks left the rally, they saw queer Jews with pro-justice signs, but they *heard* us singing songs with which they were very familiar. Glancing up at us, they could no longer pretend we were only outsiders, and many of them unconsciously starting singing the songs. Singing “*Loy Yisa Goi*,” I felt connected to my fellow protesters and rooted in the Jewish tradition of challenging the status quo. It was a small glimpse into the power of creating a Jewish cultural space to call our own.

The Impact of Anti-Semitic Violence

JUST FIVE DAYS LATER, WHEN I WAS OUT of town on vacation, I got a call from a friend who told me that an armed man had entered the Jewish Federation in Seattle and shot six women who worked there. Killing one and wounding five, he said that he was “angry at Israel.” Shocked and disoriented, I kept hearing from my Jewish friends in Seattle about how upset, scared, and isolated they felt.

Devastated by the shootings, I was also scared to publicly mourn the anti-Semitism that led to the shootings, for fear that our mourning would be used to promote Israeli nationalism.

The rally and the shootings seem intimately connected. The Stand with Israel rally demonstrates the attempts of mainstream Jewish communities to provide one unified outlook on Israel—one that is sadly based on fear. Many of us grew up hearing about our Jewish history of trauma and persecution and believing that our personal safety depended on the safety of the State of Israel. Unable to recognize our relative security and privilege, particularly in Israel and the United States, many of us can only see our vulnerability as Jews, not the vulnerability of Palestinians in the current Middle East.

Holding onto fear so tightly, some Jews hear *any* questioning of the Israeli government’s actions as anti-Semitic. Some of us believe that we need the State of Israel as a safe space when anti-Semitism rears its head. An incident such as the shootings simply reaffirms this need for many Jews.

Many non-Jews, angry at Israel’s brutal occupation of Palestine, blame all Jews for the actions of the Israeli government and do not recognize the Jewish history of persecution that led to the formation of the State of Israel.

Countering the Occupation and Anti-Semitism

DURING THE HIGH HOLY DAYS THAT autumn, the Seattle chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace held a ceremony to help build awareness about the complicated intersection of anti-Semitism and anti-Occupation work. On a beautiful sunny day near Lake Washington, we led a *Tashlich L’Tzedek*—a social justice casting-off ceremony. We decided to cast off the sins of the Occupation, naming each sin as we threw our rocks into the lake.

During the second half of the ceremony, non-Jewish allies led other non-Jews in casting off the sins of anti-Semitism, including ignorance about Jewish history and historical trauma, not speaking up against anti-Semitism, and equating all Jews with the policies of the Israeli government.

By linking the two portions of the ceremony, we were making a connection between the struggle to end the Occupation and the struggle against anti-Semitism. Supporters of the Israeli government use any insensitivity toward Jews to discredit the anti-Occupation movement and justify the continued oppression of Palestinians. If anti-Occupation activists start taking anti-Semitism seriously, we can support anti-Occupation work by refusing to give pro-Occupation groups ammunition. When Jews see folks taking anti-Semitism seriously within the Palestine solidarity movement, more Jews will feel encouraged to join our movement.

In this way we acknowledged anti-Semitism and how the shootings affected us, while speaking out against the Occupation. We created our own space that combined political commitment with spiritual ritual and healing.

Informing Queer Activism

THE LESSON FOR QUEER STRUGGLES IS that our safety and desire for belonging as queers should not rest on the oppression

of others. Rather than insisting on our right to the benefits that come with legal marriage, we should insist that everybody should have access to health care, immigration, and economic rights, regardless of their relationship status. Challenging state intrusion into our relationships, we need to build relationships that exist outside of the traditional nuclear family. Known for our creativity, queers have historically constructed a wide variety of relationship models, *chosen* families, and countercultural practices, but this creativity gets lost in the model of inclusion that says, “We’re just like you, except for our sexuality.”

What happens if we use our queerness as a site of resistance to multiple forms of oppression, not just homophobia in isolation? While hate crime laws do not deter crimes against targeted groups, they do subject perpetrators to higher mandatory sentences and thus increase the power of the prison industrial complex, which has never been known for its fair treatment of queers or other marginalized groups. If we can start to create alternative systems of accountability and justice in our communities that do not rely on prisons and policing, we will be able to envision what justice might look like outside of a police state. We can also work toward creating more economic opportunities and demilitarizing our society, so that many poor and younger folks of color do not have to keep risking their lives for U.S. militarism that perpetuates horrific violence around the world, including the Middle East.

As we refuse to let the mainstream Jewish and LGBTQ organizations speak for us and define our identities, we are simultaneously building and envisioning an alternative world where we do not rely solely on our individual access to privilege to keep us safe, but also on our solidarity with each other. ■

BEQUESTS FOR TIKKUN

Put us in your will!
Sad to say, someday each of us
will die, but the spirit of *Tikkun*
should be kept alive.

IT'S SO QUEER TO GIVE MONEY AWAY

(continued from page 64)

terrified by the idea of a child or grandchild who is refusing their birthright wealth out of a recognition that the inheritance system sustains wealth disparity and that all wealth is stolen. People often need significant community support to take those steps, just as we do when we come out as queer or trans.

These and other conversations are vitally important—but not because we naively believe they are all that is required to end wealth and poverty. The systemic conditions that produce capitalism and its violence are not going to be resolved just by my monthly donations or by someone else giving away a trust fund. However, these practices are also not separate from systemic change. They are about building resources for our resistance movements, and they are about doing the difficult emotional work of examining internalized capitalism. We know that the personal is political, both because material realities are composed of our collective practices, and because broad-based transformation often emerges from experiments taken up at the local level.

In 2008, Tyrone Boucher and I started a blog called Enough (enoughenough.org) that aims to create a space for cross-class dialogue about the personal politics of wealth redistribution. Contributors have shared their experiences and experiments, ranging from choosing to sell a house at below-market value to prevent gentrification, to throwing dinner parties aimed at building this conversation within a social scene, to confronting family about plans to give away inherited wealth. Many contributors have been inspired by the work of Resource Generation, an organization that works with young people with wealth on these issues, and its book, *Classified*, which is an excellent resource. To see examples of the emerging queer and trans racial and economic justice work, check out the Audre Lorde Project (alp.org), FIERCE! (fiercenyc.org), the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (srlp.org), and Queers for Economic Justice (q4ej.org). ■

BDS

(continued from page 20)

of corporate bad actors. So if *Tikkun's* question to J Street is, "Would J Street support efforts to frame socially responsible investing guidelines for universities and other pension funds and other things that would sweep up in it military contractors that supply countries including Israel?" then my answer is that we might consider that, if it is not framed in a resolution that seems to suggest that in the Israel/Palestine struggle one side's right and one side's wrong. Then it's a different context and that's all I was saying.

LG: I think the Presbyterians were trying to do that, actually.

JBA: There are two things on the table. One is that issue of whether this is framed as just about Israel or about socially responsible investing. And the other is whether or not the strategy itself is going to be effective.

Effectiveness is something that has come up in this conversation and just needs to be looked at by activists who want to see an end to the Occupation, who want freedom and justice for the Palestinians. It is my view, and J Street's view, that this is just not going to be effective. I don't think this approach will help us reach and find a sympathetic ear with enough

Israelis and with enough Jewish Americans to actually change direction.

I think the more that this BDS voice gets louder and louder, then, as Maya said, people in Israel are going to get more and more defensive about it. I just don't think that this is creating an atmosphere that's conducive to opening up to compromise and sacrifice for peace. I hope we all accept Israel's right to exist, I *hope* we accept its right to self-defense, I hope we understand that the history of this conflict is very complex and it's not just one side doing bad things and one innocent victim. In this conflict everybody is a victim and everybody has done bad things, and we can only focus on going forward and how we are going to be effective. And I don't think that's by a movement that really just is one-sided.

ML: Would you say, Jeremy, that there is another tactic you would recommend to people who have been deeply concerned about these issues and who would on the one hand want to support J Street and its work inside the Beltway, but would also want to be doing work in the country as a whole outside J Street and on campuses and in communities where the level of upset about what Israel is doing is growing? Would you recommend some other strategy that those people should be engaged in?



Some peace activists believe that we will have less credibility in challenging the Israel lobby in Congress, above, if the movement focuses on BDS rather than building more effective political coalitions.

JBA: Well, I think what has been missing in American politics and in the American discussion about all this is a strong voice that is really recognizing that this conflict and the resolution of the conflict are a serious American interest, that the resolution is in the best interests of the Israeli people and in the best interests of the Palestinian people, and we need to create a positive movement that shows as much strength as possible, that says we want this conflict to end and we want the U.S. to weigh in and we want a just and viable resolution to this conflict. And I think that kind of a positive message—we are beginning to refer to this as building a community of yes against the chorus of no—that's the kind of messaging that I think will help Israelis to say yes, it is time to end this conflict, it is time for us to move on with our lives, it is time for the Palestinians to have a state. That's the positive movement and messaging we need to be creating.

ML: OK, great—who was it who wanted to speak? Maya, was that you?

MW: As an Israeli, I can tell you that many Israelis don't really believe that they are going to have much impact in changing our government, and I think many Americans also feel similarly, because it seems sort of far from you, and from an individual and their everyday life. And something like consuming differently or divesting from something that your community is invested in or just not buying certain products is, in a sense, a very personal action you can take in your everyday life that can be effective. And also, specifically I would argue as Jews, don't you think, Jeremy, that maybe it is exactly our place to create a call for BDS that is, you could say positive, that doesn't use words like boycott but rather economic activism or responsible consumerism or responsible investment, and says as Jews, "Not in our name. This is not what we want."

JBA: The question is a political question. This requires political action and political leadership. The decisions to be made here are not going to be made by United Technologies and they're not going to be made by the Berkeley Board of Governors. The decisions are going to be made by the prime minister of Israel and the president of the United States and the

head of the PLO. Those are the actors that have it within their power to make these decisions, so the movement to be built is a political movement. The movement is to say we must end this conflict and we want political leadership that will do that, and I think that's a positive outlet and that's what we're trying to build, to say a majority of Jewish Americans want the president of the United States to act firmly and assertively and proactively now to help end this conflict, and that's where the majority of our community is actually at.

And to build a movement that has a positive message. I think it's important to have that movement led by people who can say, "I'm happy to say I'm a Zionist. I believe in the concept of a Jewish home. The only way that Zionism succeeds is if you have a Palestinian state. The only way that Zionism will continue to be a place, a movement, an ideology that has any validity at all is if there is a two-state solution with recognized borders."

MW: In theory it sounds really nice to build a positive movement, but let's face it: the majority of Israelis, though, I would argue, do suffer greatly. We, as Israelis, suffer from this Occupation; being a soldier is terrible, and everything you go through in the army. But the average Israeli doesn't feel right now like our situation is that bad.

I can and do live in Jerusalem comfortably. I have no fear of terror attacks, I have no fear of my life whatsoever, and I'm comfortable. The Occupation is really comfortable for so many Israelis, and so many people are profiting from it, and the Israeli society is becoming more fascist and more racist. It's really concerning me. There was just a poll showing that a third of Israeli teenagers thought that the Israeli Arabs, as in Palestinians who *are* Israeli citizens, shouldn't even vote. I mean, it's not looking good in our society and I'm honestly wondering, what's in it for the average Israeli to want to change anything? This Occupation, it's pretty comfortable for us right now. We haven't had a terror attack in ages.

ML: One of the arguments that has been made against BDS is that it increases the level of paranoia in Israel, and that that paranoia is one of the major reasons

why Israelis are not moving towards some kind of peace settlement. But Maya's counterargument is that in actual fact, when the United States tries to put pressure on Israel to change its policies the same paranoia emerges—from a country that has had a long history with Israel and still continues its support. The moment the U.S. tries to pressure Israel, the same level of paranoia emerges as would emerge from a BDS strategy. So that the problem of paranoia will be there no matter which way one goes in trying to change Israeli policy, be it BDS or be it the J Street/*Tikkun* strategy of building enough popular support in the U.S. for our government to play a more powerful role in pushing Israel toward peace, that is, to act in its own best interest and the best interest of the U.S. and the best interest of global peace and security.

JBA: Don't forget the truism that even paranoids do have enemies. I think there is a real need for addressing security as part of this end-of-conflict. And one of the ways in which it—the concept that we have to end this in a two-state solution—is best sold to the Israeli public is with a firm international commitment to Israel's security. And it is only when Israel feels that there will not be 40,000 missiles in the West Bank aimed at Ben-Gurion Airport and ready to go at a moment's notice will they feel that they have the security to actually give up the West Bank. I think the U.S., the Europeans, the UN—they all have a very large role to play in providing that sense of security.

So again I go back to what has been somewhat dismissed in this conversation as naiveté, but I believe is the only realistic option, which is that we've got to do this through love and not anger. And I think the way in which you create an environment for the Israeli public and the American Jewish community and then ultimately for American politics to have this happen is when there isn't any question at all about America's commitment to Israel's security, to providing those security guarantees so that if it does make the compromises and gives up the land and makes the deal, that it knows that it's going to have American guarantees of security. And that's what the president and I

think the Congress and others have to do in order to answer the paranoia.

RV: I want to go back to what it was like to be living in Tel Aviv during the Gaza War, when you could walk the streets and you would never ever know that a war was happening. People were in their cafes: “Hi, how’s it going?” “Everything’s great.”

Everything was “just fine” at the same time that people were being killed, the phosphorus bombs were dropping—all the terrible things that Israel did during that offensive. One of the things that I took from that experience is that Israelis are already at a place where they feel justified in using a level of military force that should be absolutely unacceptable to all of us internationally who care about such things. We have to look at some other ways, as Maya said, of making them feel that this is not OK. So far, the American government in its quest for peace has not had the willingness to put any consequences on Israel, and Israel therefore keeps on doing what it’s doing: building settlements, tightening its grip on the Occupation, continuing the siege of Gaza, treating its own Palestinian citizens like a fifth column.

I agree with Jeremy that we need to be strategic and that there is ultimately going to be a political solution, absolutely. But I think there’s room for all different kinds of strategies to get us to that point, where people in the U.S. and in Israel will embrace a fair political solution. We need to do congressional pressure, and I think we need to do different forms of BDS.

Part of the reason that BDS will be effective is because the discussions it generates provide a good public education opportunity, so that people can start to understand the collusion between large corporations and the Israeli government and the role of the American government. There have been some small victories so far in the BDS movement in terms of consequences being put on companies that are supporting the Occupation, and it’s true that we won’t know whether it’ll be a success until it happens, but that certainly doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try them.

JBA: I share the view of somebody at

the very beginning who said that it’s so important that we have this discussion in a civil way. I think that the Jewish community as a whole is making a huge mistake by creating any sort of content-based guidelines for either events or funding that keep some people out of the discussion—sometimes it’s J Street, sometimes it’s you guys—but it is inappropriate for a community to keep this discussion quiet. It’s a very important function *Tikkun* is providing in giving this a place to happen and some publicity, and I hope that it is part of a broader discussion in the community as a whole about how to end the Occupation, how to achieve peace and security for Israel and for the Palestinians, and how to achieve a sense of justice and an end to this conflict. Because this is a terrible stain on the Jewish people. It’s a terrible stain on our history. And we must bring it to an end for the sake of Israel and for the American Jewish community.

LG: Insha’Allah.

ML: I want to say that people in the *Tikkun* community were at some of the debates that took place around the BDS resolution in Berkeley. And they reported hearing or being personally emotionally assaulted by others there supporting the divestment resolution, who said to them literally these words: “Dirty Jew” and “You Jews have blood on your hands.” Things that made them feel that the BDS movement was aligning with those in the Palestinian world or in other worlds that were willing to make generalized statements against Jews, not just criticism of Israeli policies. So I’m wondering if there’s any kind of guideline that any of you have for what is acceptable or what is not acceptable in the way of allies in this struggle, and how do you separate yourself from those who move on a slippery slope in the direction of anti-Semitism?

RV: I personally was not at the Berkeley hearings, but my colleagues Cecile Surasky and Sydney Levy were at both hearings the entire night, the entire twelve-hour nights of both hearings, and both of them said quite clearly that they never heard a single anti-Semitic word during the entire course of the hearing. Secondly, we in JVP have guidelines that

are in our mission statement—we are against anti-Semitism, against anti-Arab bigotry and anti-Muslim bigotry, and we call it out any time we hear it; it’s not acceptable. Any of those forms of bigotry are absolutely unacceptable and we do not work with people who express anything like that. And in the particular case of Berkeley, nothing like that was heard whatsoever. The behavior of the folks from Students for Justice in Palestine was absolutely impeccable in that regard.

LG: I have had direct experiences when I’m talking, in a variety of settings, where the conversation has slipped into what I would call anti-Semitic language, such as the use of the words “Jewish Lobby,” which I consider to be an anti-Semitic term. And there is a way that “Zionism” is sometimes used as an anti-Semitic term. I find that sometimes these terms are used unconsciously and sometimes they are meant to hurt.

And like Rebecca, I’m sure like all of us, we have to continually have the conversation to define our terms and what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. It is a rather messy situation. That is true. But we cannot turn away from the call to justice and responding to injustice because there are some bad actors in our midst. *Ad’raba*, on the contrary, Jewish involvement in a solidarity struggle helps to reduce a climate of anti-Semitism, because otherwise we would be entirely absent. It is in relationship with us that people’s hearts and minds are changed. I have been in countless, and I mean countless, situations in which I am the first Jewish person that a Palestinian has met that was not wearing an Israeli Army uniform, and that has made a difference.

RV: In addition to the importance of those kinds of conversations and us being very vigilant around anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry, we also need to have a discussion about Jewish privilege, because one of the dynamics at the Berkeley hearing was that a portion of the Jewish community in Berkeley was saying that they felt uncomfortable because of this divestment resolution, and as Maya said there is an element of discomfort when you hear things that

are difficult to hear. But that level of discomfort was used as an argument for Berkeley not to divest from American military suppliers that were actually implementing the Occupation and so that Palestinian students, for example, certainly also felt very uncomfortable at the fact that their university was supporting the occupation of their own lands, but that was devalued compared with the Jewish experience of feeling discomfort. I think it's very important that at the same time that we are vigilant about anti-Semitism, we also have a discussion about Jewish privilege in these sorts of forums.

ML: As you probably know, with my house having been defaced by right-wing Zionists I am very uncomfortable with those in the Jewish world who label anybody who's critical of Israel as an anti-Semite, and in response to those attacks I have insisted that this should be a moment in which the Jewish community comes out against violent language including inciting language, incitement-to-violence language, like labeling people who support BDS as automatically anti-Semitic, and I have made the point to the Jewish community that if we are to declare anti-Semitic those who engage in nonviolent strategies, even strategies we disagree with, about trying to change Israel, then the whole term anti-Semitism loses its meaning.

LG: Thank you for that. ■

OYL

(continued from page 25)

freedom schools, mass mobilizations, vital vigils).

It took concerted action by Congress, as well as many local governmental and private bodies, to end racial segregation and to make sure that African American communities were included in the American political process. Just so, it will take concerted congressional action—as well as many actions by local and state governments and by “private” bodies such as businesses, religious congregations, labor unions, and PTAs—to go beyond the dangers that the over-burning of fossil fuels now pose to our country and our planet.

Let us turn to the Jewish fast day of Tisha B'Av (July 19-20 this year). It commemorates the destruction of two Holy Temples in Jerusalem—one by the Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE and one by the Roman Empire in 70 CE. In the rabbinic tradition, that disastrous day was also the day when *Mashiach* (Messiah) was born—born but hidden away because humanity was not yet ready to usher in the Messianic Days of peace, justice, healing.

So Tisha B'Av is a day of both grief and hope.

I propose celebrating it in a new way. For many of us in this generation, the Holy Temple is not just in Jerusalem but is the whole round planet. Earth. In danger of destruction, and begging us both to grieve and to give birth to a planetary community that actually treats the whole web of life with respect.

So we could draw on the spiritual depths of Tisha B'Av in a politically activist way: “praying with our arms and legs.”

We could address our grief as we watch disasters like the Gulf oil blowout, the droughts that are destroying large parts of Africa, the melting snows and glaciers. And we could hold high the vision of a planetary community (Birthing of Mashiach) that is also part of the tradition of Tisha B'Av.

In order to draw on large numbers of people who might not be able to take part on a regular work day, public events to do this might be held on Sunday, July 18, in Washington, D.C., and perhaps in many communities throughout the country (and beyond).

In regard to Washington: imagine a gathering of anywhere between fifty and one thousand Jews (and others if they feel so moved) at either or both the Capitol and White House, reading all or part of *Eicha* (the Book of Lamentations), interspersed with *Kinot* (laments) for the earth. (Tamara Cohen, who is the Barbara Bick Memorial Fellow of the Shalom Center, is working on a liturgy for Tisha B'Av that will focus on the endangered earth as Holy Temple.)

There should also be time for hope—for singing songs, for kids as well as grownups to paint pictures of the decent future, and for other joyful expressions of

Mashiach-time.

Depending on what is happening at that time earth wise on the Gulf Coast, in the Senate, etc., the Tisha B'Av gatherings could put forth specific demands/proposals for healing the earth. Demands like:

- Prohibiting any further oil-well drilling off the coasts of the United States.
- Insisting that Congress plan step-by-step for the shift from coal to wind and solar power for generating electricity in America, in a ten-year time frame.
- Setting the Chanukah standard for using oil by 2020—one day's oil meeting eight days' needs, as the story of Chanukah says happened when the Maccabees rededicated the Temple.

The Shalom Center will provide the new earth-centered Tisha B'Av liturgy to those who are ready to do this in their own locales, perhaps at politically sensitive places like EPA offices or BP installations, or perhaps in their own congregations.

And if there is a “critical mass” of Washingtonians who will join in doing this, the Shalom Center will be glad to send out information on this, inviting people from say, New York City to Virginia, to come to D.C.

Some participants in D.C. (or elsewhere) might feel moved to do nonviolent civil disobedience, others not. Some might observe the full twenty-four-hour Tisha B'Av fast from food and water, others not. Some might extend the no-food part of the fast beyond Tisha B'Av. Some might want to visit specific congressional representatives.

I suggest this as a model for similar actions that might be undertaken by varied American communities—actions like proclaiming our independence from fossil-fuel domination and damage on Independence Day, July 4. Like focusing the fast of Ramadan on learning self-restraint in our urge to gobble up the earth's abundance. Like renewing and transforming the meaning of Labor Day.

Please write me at: awaskow@shalomctr.org to let me know what you think of this possibility, what you would want to add to it, how you would want to change it, and what you yourself would bring to make it real. ■

SPEAKING OUR PAIN

(continued from page 32)

Blessed are those who walked
not influenced by the guilty,

who in the path without purpose did not linger;
in the dwellings of scorners did not long dwell.

They are consumed with the teaching of God
and meditate on divine wisdom both day and night.

They will be like a tree transplanted along
a breach in the river
that yields fruit at its appointed season

and whose leaves never cease to produce;
all their labor streams forth to fruition.

Not so with those who act wrongly.
They are like chaff carried by changes in wind.

The wrongful will not stand in the light of justice,
nor the purposeless in gathered testimony of the true
of heart.

Because God attends to the road of the righteous
and the road of the wrongful is covered with weeds.

What this psalm reminds us, apart from the potentially polarizing categories of right and wrong, is that to act rightly in the world is itself to live a life of blessing. This is entirely independent of outward success or failure. We need to change the world. That is certainly and desperately true. But in the meantime, we have the psalms. Take another look. You may be strengthened and surprised. ■

★ TRANSLATORS WANTED ★

Would you or someone you know volunteer to translate *Tikkun* articles into Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Hebrew, Russian, Japanese, Farsi, or any other language? We have no money for this project, but we believe that the *Tikkun* perspective would interest many non-English speakers. If we had translations of our most important articles, we'd create a multilingual section on our website to make our articles more widely accessible.

LETTERS

(continued from page 5)

Tony Klug Responds:

DR. EISENSTEIN'S WORK WITH HIS Palestinian Arab patients, not to mention his Israeli Jewish patients, is commendable. However, that has nothing to do with the matter of whether Israeli government policies and behavior toward the Palestinians is contributing to an upsurge in global anti-Semitism. Reducing the issue to a personal level, caricaturing the arguments and resorting to sarcasm are not an answer. They are just another way of evading the vital questions, an indulgence we can no longer afford when the stakes are so high, not just for Israel and the Palestinians but for Jews around the world.

RABBI LERNER'S EMAIL ON FORGIVENESS

[Editor's note: if you are not getting Rabbi Lerner's emails, send an email to natalie@tikkun.org and give her your address, phone number, and email address—you can sign up for free to receive letters from Rabbi Lerner and digests from our blog, tikkun.org/daily.]

YOUR EMAIL ON FORGIVENESS CAME at an opportune moment, when I was really triggered and angry with my daughter. I understand everything below and not only practice it but preach it. Still, when something happens that touches the live wire attached to the fuse inside me, my body responds and my mind co-responds, and I just want to scream nasty, mean, vicious things, which then cause me to cry. It's like the wounds and defenses just go haywire inside me.

I'm no saint, no matter how much Compassionate Listening I teach, practice, and preach. I'm human. There must be something one can do with the feelings of complete hot, searing pain?

I work with teen cancer survivors and patients lately. They're told to be positive. The myths abound about not being positive—you can cause the cancer to come back, you can make it worse, you might have caused it in the first place—these are harmful and there is a tyranny of positivity that pervades planet

cancer; it doesn't give room for these beautiful people to scream in anger, pain, and frustration and know that all their expressions are not only valid and worthwhile but release pent-up feelings.

I realize that ultimately and essentially we don't want to point our anger, bitterness, and hatred at others—but we need to express it, not just paste it down with positivity. I agree with you and all the wise souls you quote that positivity and forgiveness are crucial to our health and the health of the planet earth, I just wanted to voice this other side as well.

LINDA WOLF
Swannanoa, NC

DON'T GIVE UP ON OBAMA!

YOU HAVE IT A BIT WRONG (IN YOUR September/October 2009 editorial "Has President Obama Abandoned You and His Own Vision of the Caring Society?"). *Obama has given up on us.* He uses us. He and his administration are similar to the new regime in Orwell's *Animal Farm*. He defends failure as if it were a success. Do you think he has the potential for being an FDR? Where is his Eleanor? His world is the world of business and politics as usual. He thinks his power and wealth will protect his innocent girls from environmental disaster. His heart is not soft, but some of his words are. His actions are hard and bloody and ignorant and full of Bush. Yes, he is eloquent, even when he talks about "good wars" and Predator drones that kill so impersonally. And it is not just about war crimes and human rights abuses; he does not love or care for the earth and all the beauty of creation. Does he think oil is more important than the health and well being of the ocean?

Obama's heart and motivation are very different than yours, Rabbi Lerner, and those of *Tikkun*. All that Obama does, he does without heartfulness. He is not a benevolent, altruistic compassionate conservator. Be careful!

DANIEL SCHWARTZ
Albuquerque, NM

The Well

I

What we climb down into is the echo
of ourselves on the well shaft stairs winding
back up to meet us. But more than that too,
a reckoning that brings us down

through the hard middle of things, my ranting foul
and overblown rebounding off rock walls
in gutturals and growls. And as the world blows up
beyond us, we overhear Citizen Cope

leaking from our girls' headphones,
There's a battle goin' on way down south of Babylon—
setting up its own reverberations

climbing to meet us stumbling down the spiral stair
to the pool so clear that at the final turn
we almost step off into the water.

2

Soldiers no longer soldiers, their camouflage
spread out to dry on bushes and trees,
they lie down in the field, stripped naked
to the sun. Good bones, good bodies,

they look ready to get wrecked,
letting it all hang out in the heart-wound
throbbing late nights in the discotheque.
What wouldn't love do to run mouth and hand

over that tanning, sweating flesh?
Just think how it happens between me and you,
swimming up through the clearest water

to offer us a promise like the promise
of the saint who claimed one sip would cure
the wounded before a sword ran him through.

3

The pool stirs top to bottom, the coin tumbles
down atmosphere by atmosphere
until the stairs swim out from under
turning my steps weightless—how not to feel

the judgement disguised in uniform in the street,
both timorous and deliberate,
as if all the bloodied heart could do
in its necropolis of gestures

was wander among tomb pictures
half-effaced by smoke and mildew.
But when I see your face, its perplexed stare

floating next to mine, I know we've gone too far
ever to turn back—and feel such fatal buoyancy
that blind faith in our fear makes me walk on air.

— Tom Sleigh



Excerpts from a Diary

BY JOSH KORNBLUTH

March 28, 1964: Father has been acting quite secretive this week—I think he’s obsessed with hiding the afikomen so I can’t find it this time. Last year he seemed disappointed that I found it so quickly—also, that I wasn’t so thrilled with my present, a simple yo-yo that I felt unsuitable for a sophisticated five-year-old such as myself.

March 29, 1964: Afikomen still not found! I have been over every square inch of our apartment. Father looking smug; Mother worried that I haven’t slept. Where did he hide it? And why make this so difficult? Perhaps he’s sprung for a really fancy present this year, and wants me to truly *earn* it? Ah—I think I know where it may be: in his wallet!

March 30, 1964: No afikomen in Father’s wallet—but did find a scrap of paper with a phone number. A lead!?

March 31, 1964: The woman who answered the phone at that number claimed to have no insight into the location of the afikomen, but she sounded nervous.

April 1, 1964: At dinner last night, I asked Father about the woman at that phone number. He acted evasive and refused to answer. Mother seemed upset. I

worry that this afikomen situation is creating tension in their marriage.

May 26, 1964: Father still has not returned from his latest business trip. Mother won’t tell me why, and spends much of her time crying in the bedroom. Looking back on my own actions, I fear that I may have overreacted last year in expressing my disappointment about the yo-yo. This, in turn, might have motivated Father to make this year’s present so extravagant that it threw the household finances into chaos—thus the need for him to extend the business trip. In the meantime, I have expanded my afikomen search to our entire building.

June 11, 1964: It has been a week now since I ran away from home. A rabbi on my boxcar told me that the deadline for finding the afikomen is actually midnight on the day of the Seder—which, if true, would render moot my entire quest. I suspect, however, that this “rabbi” may really be just a hobo with a big beard.

February 6, 1987: After all these years of crisscrossing the fifty states, I have met many fascinating people—not the least of whom, of course, is my lovely wife, Lucille. It was with a tear in my eye that I left her the note this morning

explaining that, if I am to be any kind of father to our little Mickey and Stella, I must finally solve this mystery that has been haunting me for so long. My current thinking is to start at the South Pole and work my way north.

May 11, 2010: My Norwegian neighbors alerted me to the presence of a “suspicious” man who had been lurking nearby, just across the fjord. Turns out he’s a private investigator hired by my parents to track me down. Father is gravely ill, has returned to live with Mother in his final days, and now wishes to set eyes on me again before he dies. My fifth wife, Lisbet, urges me to go—as my obvious distress at this turn of events, exacerbated by my lifelong failure to find the afikomen, can only continue to upset little Knut and Kamilla.

June 1, 2010: How bittersweet life can be! I ran into my childhood apartment, hugged Mother, and rushed over to Father’s bedside. As he drew his final breaths, he seemed incapable of speech—but with his watery eyes conveyed great emotion as I kept asking him, “Where did you put it, Papa? Where?” He just shook his head, over and over—until his eyelids fluttered and then closed forever. Eventually rigor mortis set in, and I heard a crunching sound. After some strenuous prying, I found matzah crumbs in his right hand; in his left hand, a yo-yo. ■



The afikomen is a piece of matzah hidden during the first part of a Seder that must be eaten before the last part of the Seder. It is traditionally found by the children and returned in exchange for some gift or reward.

Josh Kornbluth is a monologist who lives in Berkeley with his wife and son and their cornsnake, Snakey. His latest solo show is Andy Warhol: Good for the Jews? You can follow his doings at JoshKornbluth.com.

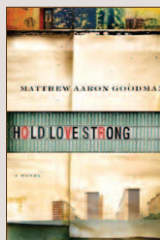
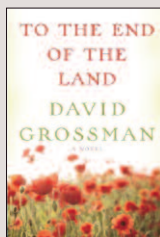
TO THE END OF THE LAND

David Grossman
Knopf 2010

HOLD LOVE STRONG

Matthew Aaron Goodman
Touchstone, 2009

THE GENRE OF THE NOVEL HAS A UNIQUE CAPACITY TO unpack social reality as it manifests in the consciousness of ordinary human beings living through horrendous times. David Grossman and Matthew Aaron Goodman are magnificent craftsmen, pulling us into worlds that we thought we'd be better not to know about, and yet doing it in a way that enlightens, surprises, and makes accessible the pain and joy that human beings experience in the intricacies of daily life.



David Grossman will have difficulty surpassing his 2002 book *See Under: Love*, the powerful story of a young child making sense of the Holocaust. But his new work, *To The End of the Land*, is certainly a strong complement, focused on the pain of a mother whose son has now extended his service in the Israeli army for one more month in a war that neither believe in and against people whom they do not wish to oppress. Having lost his own son in the last week of Israel's counterproductive (not to mention immoral) assault on Lebanon in 2007, Grossman writes with the deepest understanding of the way that the struggle with their neighbors distorts and permeates the consciousness of Israelis.

Matthew Aaron Goodman tells the amazing story of a young boy, born into poverty to a thirteen-year-old mother and thirty-year-old grandmother. Growing up in "the projects" of New York City, he struggles to make sense of his life and to move beyond the hurt and pain that surround him. Reading this story makes clear the utter wrongheadedness of those who describe African American life in poverty as pathology or who attempt to demonize the "culture of poverty." Nuanced, complex, at moments painful, but ultimately redemptive, this is a novel that should be required reading for every high school student in America (and for the rest of us as well).

THE VEGETARIAN SHABBAT COOKBOOK

Roberta Kalechofsky & Roberta Schiff
Micah Publications, 2010

HERE'S A VEGAN COOKBOOK THAT STARTS OFF BY TEACHING that "the institution of the Sabbath is the most successful social revolution in human history." The authors skillfully link this revolution to the (we hope) soon-to-come vegetarian revolution, based not only on human sympathy for animals but also on an argument now endorsed by the Sierra Club and the Union of Concerned Scientists: that livestock does enormous damage to the environment, so meat-based diets are environmentally unsustainable. Beyond all this, this cookbook is an excellent introduction to vegan cooking. You don't have to be Jewish to delight in the dishes it teaches the reader to make.

**EYES WIDE OPEN: CULTIVATING DISCERNMENT ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH**

Mariana Caplan
Sounds True, 2009

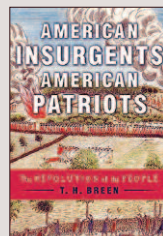


MARIANA CAPLAN, WHO TEACHES AT THE CALIFORNIA Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, has gone through a long journey of spiritual growth. In this remarkable book she shares much wisdom about the pitfalls facing serious spiritual seekers. Teaching us to cultivate discernment, to understand the foibles and distortions we are likely to encounter in spiritual teachers, she urges both a gentle firmness and compassion for others and ourselves on this path. She is alert to the dangers of what she calls "spiritually transmitted disease"—a disease involving the negation of women and dismissal of feminine wisdom; the sexual or financial corruption of some spiritual teachers; fast-food spirituality; the confusions of ego and how it gets protected by spiritual forms that supposedly lead to transcending of ego; group mind thinking; and much else.

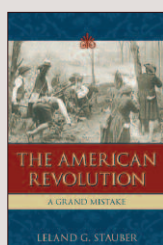
Though framed as a warning to keep our eyes wide open, Caplan's book is actually a deep rethinking of contemporary spirituality that will be as useful for those with a long history of spiritual practice as for those who have kept away from the spiritual world on the assumption that it was flaky or intellectually and psychologically unsophisticated. Though written in an accessible, almost "self-help" kind of way, Caplan's book offers profound spiritual wisdom.

AMERICAN INSURGENTS, AMERICAN PATRIOTS: THE REVOLUTION OF THE PEOPLE

T.H. Breen
Hill and Wang, 2010

**THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: A GRAND MISTAKE**

Leland G. Stauber
Prometheus Books, 2009



T. H. BREEN RETELLS THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF AMERICA, highlighting the important role of "ordinary people in support of other Americans" that "marked the end of an imperial order." The Americans "were not unlike so many oppressed people throughout the world who have taken up arms in defense of what they regard as their just rights." Breen regrets that in the contemporary world so many Americans have begun to adopt the point of view of the imperial officials, forgetting that our U.S. history began in challenging the legitimacy of the occupying regime.

Leland Stauber is more intent on seeing the story from the standpoint of its outcome, which was far from that envisioned by the insurgents who, according to Breen, "imagined the creation of a new, more equitable national government that would work for the common good." Stauber emphasizes the importance of those who were trying to avoid a war at the time or to curtail it through negotiations, and who might, had they prevailed, have obtained a very different outcome: an America that remained part of Britain and emerged as an independent country decades later, not through an overt war but through the kind of diplomatic process that led to the creation of Canada. The Canadian model proves a striking alternative for Stauber, who imagines that slavery could have been less violently uprooted had the United States remained part of the British empire while Britain itself was nonviolently rejecting slavery and imposing anti-slavery regimes elsewhere. A parliamentary system and a government empowered to actually solve national problems and less easily subordinated to corporate capitalist power might have been one of the consequences of this path.

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