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Tikkun Magazine is ...

... a vehicle for spreading a new consciousness. We call it a spiritual progressive worldview.

But what is that?

What do you mean by “spiritual”?

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

What's a Spiritual Progressive?

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

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

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A Revised Jewish Understanding of the State of Israel

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER | MARCH 3, 2023

JEWIS DID NOT RETURN TO PALESTINE IN ORDER to be oppressors or representatives of Western colonialism or cultural imperialism. Although it is true that some early Zionist leaders sought to portray their movement as a way to serve the interests of various Western states, and although many Jews who came brought with them a Western arrogance that made it possible for them to see Palestine as “a land without a people for a people without a land” and hence to virtually ignore the Palestinian people and its own cultural and historical rights, the vast majority of those who came were seeking refuge from the murderous ravages of Western anti-Semitism or from the oppressive discrimination that they experienced in Arab countries. The Ashkenazi Jews who shaped Israel in its early years were jumping from the burning buildings of Europe—and when they landed on the backs of Palestinians, unintentionally causing a great deal of pain to the people who already lived there, they were so transfixed with their own (much greater and more acute) pain that they couldn’t be bothered to notice that they were displacing and hurting others in the process of creating their own state. Just as Americans have resisted seeing themselves as settler-colonialists



Photo by Tanner Mardis on Unsplash

building a nation-state that depended on wiping out the Indigenous populations of North America, so it was possible for Jews seeking refuge to ignore the pain and injustice that were part of the process of building a Jewish state in Palestine.

Their insensitivity to the pain that they caused and their subsequent denial of the fact that in creating Israel they had simultaneously helped create a Palestinian people, most of whom were forced to live as refugees (and now, their many descendants still living as exiles and dreaming of “return” just as we Jews did for some 1800 plus years), was aided by the arrogance, stupidity, and anti-Semitism of Palestinian leaders and their Arab allies in neighboring states who dreamt of ridding the area of its Jews and who, much like the Herut “revisionists” who eventually came to run Israel in the past twenty years, consistently resorted to violence and intimidation to pursue their maximalist fantasies.

By the time Palestinians had come to their senses and acknowledged the reality of Israel and the necessity of accommodating to that reality if they were ever to find a way to establish even the most minimal self-determination in the land that had once belonged to their parents and grandparents, it was too late to undermine the powerful misperception of reality held by most Jews and Israelis that their state was likely to be wiped out any moment if they did not exercise the most powerful vigilance. Drenched in the memories of the Holocaust and in the internalized vision of themselves as inevitably powerless, Jews were unable to recognize that they had become the most powerful state in the region and among the top 20% of powerful countries in the world. They used this sense of imminent potential doom to justify the continuation of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza for over fifty years.

(A fuller account of evolution of the relationship between Israel and Palestine would include the impact of Western and US imperialism as fundamental forces encouraging these Israelis to do some of the dirty work that reflected Western interests, particularly around securing oil that was needed by the West both during the WWII and the decades afterward. That imperialism was another important factor in the way that it supported the most reactionary elements in the Zionist movement.).

Israel took a tragic direction by refusing to allow non-combatant Palestinians to return to their homes after winning its war against the invading Arab states. It compounded that choice in the 1967 war against Egypt and Syria and refusing to allow those conquered in the West Bank and Syria to create for themselves a Palestinian state, thus turning itself into an occupier that would begin to seek independence at a time when much of the world was celebrating liberation struggles throughout

much of the formally colonized states in Africa and Asia.

For a significant section of the world, Israel appeared to be a conqueror rather than a force for liberation. The occupation could only be maintained by what became an international scandal:

1. Violation of basic human rights of the occupied.
2. Systematic destruction of Palestinian homes.
3. Occupying Palestinian lands to allow expansion of West Bank settlements that had been created for the sole purpose of ensuring that no future accommodation with Palestinians could ever qualify for a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank (since, as many settlers argued, the land had been given to the Jewish people by God, hence precluding any rights to Palestinians).
4. Transformation of Israeli politics from a robust democracy into a system replete with verbal violence that sometimes spilled over into real violence (most notably, the assassination of prime minister Rabin because of his pursuit of peace and reconciliation with the Palestinian people).

The distortions in Israeli society required to enable the occupation to continue have been yet another dimension of the problem:

1. The pervasive racism towards Arabs manifested not only in the willingness to blame all Palestinians for the terrorist actions of a small minority but also in the willingness to treat all Israeli citizens of Palestinian descent as second-class citizens (e.g., in giving lesser amounts of financial assistance to East Jerusalem or to Israeli Palestinian towns than to Jewish towns).

2. The refusal to allocate adequate funds to rectify the social inequalities between Ashkenazi and Sephardic/Mizrachi Jews.
3. The willingness of both Labor and Likud political parties to make electoral deals with ultra-orthodox parties intent on using state power to enforce religious control over Israelis' personal lives and to grab disproportionate state revenues—in order that they could count on these religious parties to back whatever their engagement or disengagement plans in the West Bank.

One of the victims of these distortions has been Judaism itself. Judaism has always had within it two competing strands:

Love Judaism – a Judaism of love, social economic justice, and compassion that envisioned a world of peace and justice and affirmed the possibility of healing the world and transcending its violence and cruelty.

Settler-Judaism – a tendency to see the world as dominated by evil forces and to believe that only power over others could ultimately provide salvation for the Jewish people.

But today, when Jews are the rulers over an occupied people, or living in Western societies and in many cases living in the upper 20% of income or wealth holders, the supremacist ideas of Settler-Judaism create a religious ideology that can only appeal to those stuck in the sense that we are eternally vulnerable. For a new generation of Jews, bred in circumstances of power and success, a Judaism based on fear and demeaning of others, a Judaism used as a justification for every nuance of Israeli power and occupation, becomes a Judaism that has very little spiritual appeal. Ironically, Right-Wing Israelis demand of American Jews to be handmaidens to this distortion of Judaism. This is already causing a “crisis of continuity” as younger Jews seek spiritual insight outside

their inherited tradition (in many cases, they have never been taught about a Judaism of Love).

Love Judaism, which started with the Prophets and has reasserted itself in every significant age of Jewish life, insists that the God of Torah is really the Force of Healing and Transformation and that our task is not to sanctify existing power relations but to challenge them in the name of a vision of a world of peace and justice and caring for the stranger/the-other. Perhaps the greatest danger that Israel poses to the Jewish people is the extent to which it has helped Jews become cynical about their central tasks:

- to proclaim to the world the possibility of possibilities for a world based on love, generosity and caring for each other.
- to affirm the God of the universe as the Force that makes possible the breaking of the repetition compulsion—the tendency to do to others the violence and/or cruelty that was done to them.

If Israel is ever to be healed, it will only be when it is able to reject this slavish subordination to political realism and once again embrace the transformative spiritual message of renewal.

While Israel has had a right-wing government for much of the last 25 years, the government that took power in late 2022 has become a fascist government with little respect for the history and judicial processes of a democratic society. Writing in the first half of 2023, it seems hard to imagine what would create a society that resembled Israel's society before it began a path of domination and cruelty. It needs a serious and pervasive process of T'shuvah–Repentance. Israel's current policies have moved hundreds of thousands of Israelis into the streets in protest and other to be con-

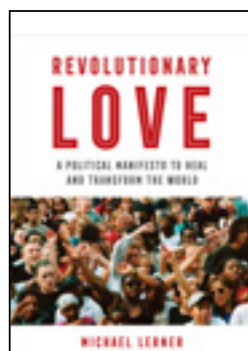
sidered moving elsewhere. Many passionate Zionists have begun to rethink and even reject the policies of conquest and insensitivity to the Palestinian people. Jews living in the Diaspora are beginning to understand that it is the policies of domination and disrespect of Palestinians that are undermining respect for Israel and providing an excuse (never legitimate) for antisemitism. I want to remind the readers of this article that the sins of Israel pale before the human rights sins of many other more powerful governments around the world, including China, Russia, the United States, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and many other states. For those of us that care about Israel, the fact that they're not the worst of human rights violators should not be used to forgive what the Israeli government is doing now. We should also recognize that the violence of the Israeli occupation will take decades for Palestinians to truly forgive. Just as it will likely take generations of Israelis to forgive the assault on Israeli citizens through acts of Palestinian terrorism.

We are aware that the present government of Israel and its policies against Palestinians for the past several decades do not embody the ethical and spiritual values of Judaism. For that reason, it is a mistake to think of Israel as a Jewish state when it is only a state that contains millions of Jews. Many of us have relatives or friends living in that state and many of those are as disappointed and angry that Israel claims to be a Jewish state while trampling on Jewish values, not to mention trampling on universal human values. This too can also change, but that transformation may be a long way away. Our task as Jews and our non-Jewish allies is to resolutely challenge the state of Israel just as we had to challenge the many destructive behaviors and wars of the United States. We need to change those religious practices that embody chauvinism, racism, and Jewish supremacy—all of which were developed when

Jews were powerless. Yet today, supremacist ideas in Judaism, in prayers, songs, and culture, need to be eradicated from our communities.

We invite Jews and our many non-Jewish allies throughout the world who share this perspective to join us in affirming the Love and Justice-Seeking essence of Judaism that has been a central part of what Judaism continues to offer the world. But that struggle will inevitably require for support for the larger global struggle against capitalism, imperialism, and other forms of domination.

We invite all people who share this perspective to join Tikkun and to celebrate the continuing possibility of a world transformed from the domination and power over others that are the principles of global capitalism, imperialism, and selfishness to a world of love and caring for each other and caring for the planet that is the essence of the world we seek. ●



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Repealing The Second Amendment: Widening Public Debate About Gun Rights

PAUL VON BLUM

ABOUT A DECADE AGO, MICHAEL LERNER published a piece in the Huff Post after a series of mass shootings in the United States. This was especially timely because of the monstrous tragedy of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting that occurred on December 14, 2012, in Newtown, Connecticut, where twenty-six people were gunned down, including twenty children between six and seven years old. He sensibly demanded a policy of no private ownership of guns of any sort. Likewise, he advocated that the police should not have guns, except in extremely limited circumstances. That was utopian then and it is now.

But it remains an extremely powerful and good idea. It won't happen, but utopian and aspira-

tional ideas need to reenter the public arena and become integral features of the discursive universe. Since 2012, we have had hundreds more mass shootings, all too many involving dead schoolchildren. These have not only involved handguns; far too often they have involved military-grade assault weapons. The details are grisly and I need not recount them here. Millions of people are justly appalled at gun violence and the truly repulsive fact that probably 400 million legal and illegal guns are owned in this country.

The same is true of police violence. Young men of color have been the most conspicuous victims of police shootings. These too have entered public consciousness and have generated massive protests throughout the nation

and the world. But despite some notable reforms, police officers and departments in large numbers remain out of control, and young (and older) people, especially those of color, remain potential targets of their firearm-based violence. That unfortunately includes officers and departments that have received some minimal training in racial and ethnic diversity and implicit bias. Such training often serves as a public relations cover that conceals the deeper racism that has permeated many police departments.

We have long had a toxic gun culture throughout our history. It was intensified substantially in 2008 when the United States Supreme Court, departing from precedent, decided in *District of Columbia v. Heller* that the Second Amendment of the Constitution conferred an individual right to keep and bear arms. The late Justice Antonin Scalia, one of the most conservative Justices, wrote the decision decided by a narrow 5-4 majority. Justice Scalia in fact engaged in what progressives call the “living Constitution,” seeing the document as valuable in adjusting to modern and contemporary circumstances. He did so despite his bogus reputation as an “originalist.” Instead, he dishonestly interpreted the living Constitution into a political agenda that supported the reactionary policies of the National Rifle Association and other extreme right-wing forces in America.

The late Justice John Paul Stevens wrote the dissenting opinion in the *Heller* case. There, he rightfully claimed that Scalia bestowed a dramatic upheaval in constitutional law. He argued that Scalia and his conservative colleagues ignored the militia preface to the Amendment (“A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state”), essentially eviscerating the real intention of the Second Amendment. Ironically, the minority actually read the Amendment correctly, providing a legitimate originalist view of the law.

Scalia’s phony originalism in *Heller* has had a huge, deleterious impact on both American behavior and public discourse. It has augmented the lethal gun culture by making it just about entirely “legal.” Antonin Scalia’s decision has encouraged numerous states to enact “open carry laws and to loosen or even eliminate gun control and restriction laws and regulations. We have seen the deadly results time and time again. He made the living Constitution into a blanket permission for the ensuing gun violence and carnage that has cost thousands of lives and shattered countless hopes and dreams.

The *Heller* decision, even more insidiously, has deeply affected how American politicians and ordinary citizens think and speak about gun rights. Even progressive figures now routinely say that they are, of course, in favor of the Second Amendment, but merely want to have more sensible gun regulations. That is the dominant, almost exclusive, form of discourse around guns today. It has led to minimal legislation and regulation that has done almost nothing to stem the epidemic of gun violence throughout the nation.

It’s fascinating yet chilling to see how this discourse plays out even in progressive audiences. Routinely, I discuss the issue in some of my UCLA classes. The majority of my students are equally horrified by the proliferation of mass shootings. They are generally progressive, applaud whatever gun legislation Democrats and some rational Republicans can get through, and hope that this epidemic is diminished by the time they graduate and have their own children in schools.

But when I remark that I think that the Second Amendment should be repealed, they almost gasp in response. Or they merely chuckle. I’m quick to add that I would accept the minority opinion in *Heller*, but that I would rather get rid of the gun issue by dispensing with the whole

Amendment entirely. I acknowledge that it won't happen (in my lifetime) and that it is utopian.

But like Michael Lerner's gun ideas previously, it shouldn't be. Even though it's unrealistic to demand to repeal the Second Amendment, it's time to move the idea into public discussion. It should be said and repeated. The Second Amendment is as obsolete as the Third Amendment. The only way to get people to think about issues is to initiate and repeat the discussion. Repetition works; it plants the seeds of critical inquiry, even if that inquiry takes a long time. If nothing else, it might cause a serious and long-overdue reconsideration of Antonin Scalia's successful application of semantic acrobatics when he wrote the Heller decision.

A contemporary parallel exists for this discursive strategy. Many legal commentators and others have proposed adding several justices to the Supreme Court in order to break the chokehold of the conservative majority. This is especially the case because the six members of that majority, especially Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, are using the Court to impose a narrow political and religious ideology. Increasing the number of justices has gotten more adherents, especially since the disgraceful decision in 2022 overruling *Roe v. Wade* seriously placed millions of women in jeopardy and eliminated their right to control their own bodies.

Alas, that plan is also unrealistic. It also won't happen in the present political climate. It is, however, being discussed and debated by many highly regarded commentators and others. It's also being discussed in various other forums, especially throughout social media platforms, chatrooms, and in numerous informal conversation settings. There's no reason why the repeal of the Second Amendment can't also be debated in a wide variety of circles and places.

Repealing the Second Amendment could conceivably be even more sweeping. As Michael Lerner urged, we should also be discussing how police officers should be severely limited in carrying guns. Too many police officers not only kill and maim innocent people, but also engage in serious domestic violence. Removing lethal weapons would reduce that horrific toll. Doubtless, some police officers are themselves wounded and killed by gunfire, but the de-escalation process must begin with law enforcement institutions.

Perhaps merely aspirational at the moment, it's again time to force this issue vigorously into the national conversation, at every level, from legislative bodies to academic halls, to the mass media, and to internet forums and chats and other forms of social media. Police have too long enjoyed a free pass in America; the Black Lives Matter George Floyd protests of 2020 and subsequent nonviolent activism eroded that sanctuary. It's more than time to push it open even further. Police power is too strong and extensively armed police power only makes matters worse, especially with vulnerable populations of color.

I have heard arguments for self-defense, including among progressive and leftist groups who claim that they need Second Amendment protection because it gives them the power to resist both government and corporate tyranny and neo-fascist terrorist groups now roaming freely throughout the country. On one level, the argument seems easy to dismiss. The government interests in America have overwhelming power, including firearms that include sophisticated lethal weaponry that would swiftly overpower any resistance attempts by progressive (or other) forces. Such weapons are available to support corporate power, the primary function of government in an advanced capitalist order.

The issue, however, is more complex. There is a long and honorable leftist American tradition of armed groups that have sought to resist internal terrorism. In African American history, for example, the Deacons for Defense and Justice existed to provide armed protection for civil rights groups that were threatened by white racist and by police in the Jim Crow South. The Black Panthers were also armed and sought to protect fellow members of the Black community. Today, leftist "Second Amendment" groups like The Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club, Redneck Revolt, the Socialist Rifle Association, the Trigger Warning Queer & Trans Gun Club, the Los Angeles Black Coyote Collective, among others, exist to provide armed resistance on behalf of marginalized communities.

It's hard not to sympathize with these groups; after all, their constituencies have been under attack. The problem, as previously, is that government forces have superior firepower and any armed conflicts will inevitably result in fatalities, disproportionately to members and supporters of these groups. And in any case, a formal repeal of the Second Amendment, by itself, is not a legal barrier to their activities. That Amendment, as foolishly interpreted by the Heller decision and especially as interpreted in subsequent decisions, prohibits most gun control legislation, but it wouldn't necessarily prohibit these groups from being armed in the absence of federal, state, or local laws that do so. My advocacy of repealing the Second Amendment, to be sure, also extends to enacting strong and effective laws at all levels of government to keep guns out of private hands

These progressive groups, I think, would be better off organizing and joining massive, systematic nonviolent modes of resistance, involving extensive and protracted civil disobedience if necessary. I'm not a pacifist. Self-defense is sometimes necessary, especially in a society careening frighteningly towards fascism. My ar-

gument is ambivalent. We live in perilous times. The specter of another Trump presidency, however unlikely, with all its attendant dangers of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and much more, including the increased deployment of government violence, causes me some hesitation.

Fascism is not embodied in one person. It has insidious cultural dimensions that exist regardless of the fate of one person, even though Donald Trump played a major role in bringing America's fascist tendencies to center stage. We should move to disarm rather than encourage smaller versions of the Civil War.

The same principle is applicable on the international level. The United States has a long and dishonorable history of using weapons to control others to "protect" itself and to convince a gullible public that using them is reasonable and just. This national obsession with force and violence also reflects a culture of toxic masculinity that has led to millions of deaths and incalculable destruction to marginalized people throughout the world. That should also be part of our urgent discourse. Too many human lives, and far too much human suffering, are at stake.



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

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People's Park and its Anti-War Legacy

BILL ROLLER



ON THE MORNING FOLLOWING THE DESTRUCTION of People's Park, I went to the site to bring some shoes I thought some people could use. I found one person—an unhoused woman, badly dressed and pitifully thin, rocking slowly in a chair amid the debris of cut redwoods. Her eyes closed, she seemed to be silently weeping—her breathing barely audible. She was grieving the loss of her home—a place she had been a part of. Without disturbing her, I left the shoes and departed.

For me, she represented the grief felt by those who loved the Park. In 1969, at the time of the student rebellion over saving the Park as a place for trees and flowers, I was a student living in Southern Indiana. I was aware that my generation's rage at the Vietnam War had spilled over into the capture of this small piece of land from the University. It was a symbolic act of "throwing our bodies on the machinery of society—corporations, government, and universities—that were hell-bent on feeding our US military aggression in foreign lands.

Anti-war protests were not uncommon in Berkeley at the time and war resisters across the country were inspired to initiate our own rebellions. We always knew that every day in Berkeley there would be anti-war actions, a fact that helped us overcome our own sense of helplessness as we opposed the war. Berkeley and its citizens became for us in middle America the city we could always anticipate challenging the unjust authorities who propagandized and led us into a series of violent foreign interventions in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the greater Middle East. This unrelenting parade of militarism and jingoism has continued into our own time and become a central factor in an economy increasingly centered on weapons manufacturing, focused as well in the investment portfolios of major corporations, and increased Pentagon funding of research grants at institutions of higher education. Where is the anti-war fervor that once aroused the citizens of Berkeley? Have all those anti-war activists gone away? I think not.

At least symbolically Berkeley remains the home of anti-war sentiment in America. Our ongoing support for Congresswoman Barbara Lee testifies to this. And yet, in what place is that sentiment remembered, celebrated, and nurtured?

I call for the establishment of an Anti-War Museum in our city that would become a mecca for scholars and ordinary citizens to visit and study the ways of peace. In the United States, we have many monuments to war. But nowhere do we have an institution—or building—dedicated to the research and remembrance of the many anti-war campaigns and leaders to be found in United States history. I believe only one city in the world has such an institution and museum archiving the history of war resistance—Berlin. Berkeley can be the second, paid for by citizen donations if not taxpayer dollars. There are still suitable open spaces in Berkeley to create such an institution. Then—in memory—Peoples Park would become as sacred a spot for anti-war protests in America as Lexington Green, Massachusetts, is for our hard-won freedom from British Colonialism and foreign aggression. May it be so.

And yet, there are those who say that memories of the anti-Vietnam war movement from 1964 to 1975 and the support it received from a majority of U.S. citizens by its end are simply expressions of nostalgia for a time gone by.

However, the real nostalgia is our current belief—enshrined by our current foreign policy establishment—that the Vietnam war was the “dark night of the American soul” that we passed successfully in order to be rededicated to an American Exceptionalism that says—despite the historical record—we are the shining example of democracy and freedom in the world and our foreign interventions are always motivated by our desire to spread the blessings of liberty to people in other lands. However,

Christian Appy, in his book, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, presents a different interpretation.

“The denial of crude imperial ambition has been a hallmark of American National Identity. The greater our power and wealth, the less we have acknowledged any selfish motives in our foreign relations.”

Christian Appy is the Director of the Ellsberg Initiative for Peace and Democracy at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (umass.edu/Ellsberg/leadership) with goals to make U.S. Foreign Policy more peaceful, democratic, and accountable to Congress and the public.

We the people deserve an anti-war museum that recalls the successes of past mobilizations and anticipates how new mobilizations can be organized in the future. That museum and archive can be in Berkeley.

This essay is dedicated to Daniel Ellsberg and his Initiative with the hope it will inspire other living monuments to our anti-war tradition in the United States. ●



BILL ROLLER is co-founder with his wife, Vivian Nelson, and President of the *Berkeley Group Therapy Education Foundation*, a non-profit organization dedicated to the education of the public in the purpose and value of group therapy and the development of comprehensive programs and

materials for the training of group psychotherapy professionals. He is author of more than 60 publications, including books, scientific articles, book chapters, videotapes, and a biography of Paul Shilder—a pioneer in group analysis and mentor to S.H. Foulkes. Most recent novel, *The Dead Are Dancing*, a story of moral injury.

Liberating Ourselves from the Wealth Supremacy Myth

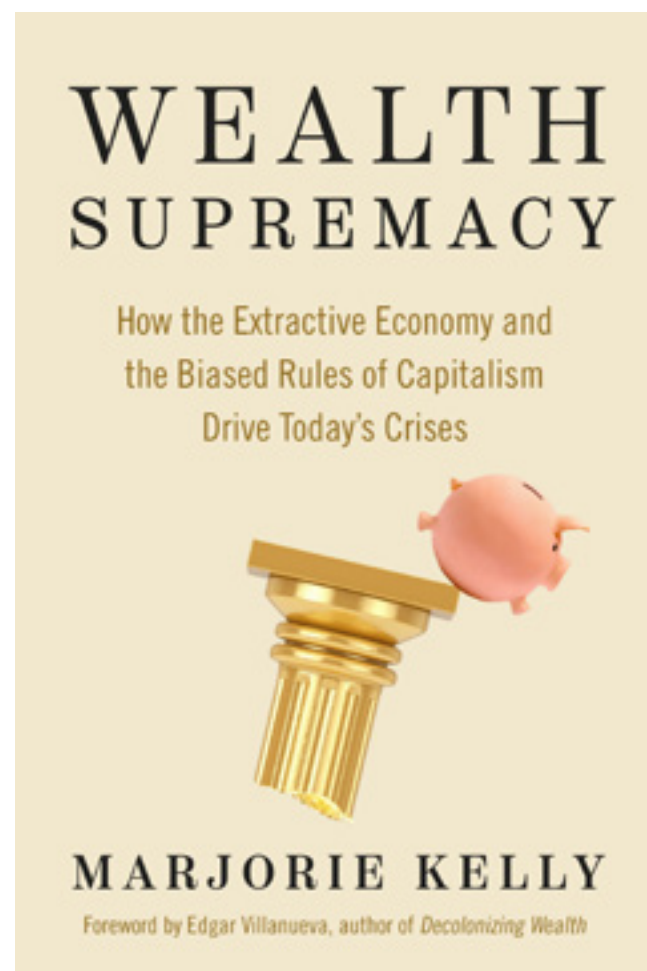
DAVID KORTEN

Review of *Wealth Supremacy: How the Extractive Economy and the Biased Rules of Capitalism Drive Today's Crises*, Marjorie Kelly, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2023.

KELLY'S BOOK APPEARS AT A MOMENT OF HUMAN awakening to the most successful and devastating financial scam in human history. It exposes ambiguities in our language that scammers have used to gain our acceptance of the idea that growing our money economy should be our defining global priority – a priority that primarily increases the financial assets of the world's already richest people. It then provides essential guidance for restoring economic sanity by changing our shared story regarding the purpose of the economy. That, in turn, can enable us to advance a transition to equitable cooperative worker/community ownership.

My association with and admiration for author Marjorie Kelly goes back to her days as the editor of *Business Ethics* magazine, which she founded in 1987. Her first book, *The Divine Right of Capital: Dethroning the Corporate Aristocracy* (2003) has my ringing endorsement on the front cover, "We have found our Thomas Paine for the new millennium."

Kelly, a previous contributor to *Tikkun*, is one of the important thinkers of our time. This, her latest book, is a seminal contribution to pushing



our thinking and understanding ever deeper into how big money is driving humans to self-extinction. Her distinctive experience deepens her insight into the deceptions that lull us into submission and what we must do to address them.

Early in *Wealth Supremacy*, Kelly introduces us to a deeply troubling statistic. In the 1950s, the days of the once strong U.S. middle class, financial assets in the United States were roughly equal to GDP (Gross Domestic Product). She

notes that now, by conservative estimates, U.S. financial assets are five times U.S. GDP. This financialization of the economy has allowed financial assets to grow far faster than actual productivity. And what is worse, these assets are very unequally distributed.

According to the U.S. Federal Reserve, in mid-2023 the richest 0.1 percent owned 12.8 percent. The poorest 50 percent of the U.S. population owned only 2.5 percent of total U.S. financial assets. This devastating inequality is by no means unique to the United States. It is global.

Kelly is telling us that rather than being devoted to providing a good life for the world's people, the global economy is now structured and managed primarily to grow the financial assets and power of those who already have financial assets and power far beyond any conceivable need or societal benefit.

Kelly points out that the current massive economic misdirection has been legitimated by two basic fallacies promoted by advocates of elite interests.

1. **Wealth Supremacy:** The fallacy that persons with significant financial assets are "worth" more and have contributed more than others.
2. **Capital Bias:** The fallacy that profit (including profit further enriching the already obscenely rich) is inherently good and should always grow. Costs of labor, an expense, should be minimized.

Kelly observes that public acceptance of these fallacies has led us to allow global financiers to control the global economy and game the system to grow their financial assets without requiring them to produce anything of real value. Their scams are facilitated by the ambiguity of the words "wealth" and "capital".

We routinely refer to money—a mere number—as wealth and capital. In fact, money is just a token of exchange that we use to obtain things of real value—including clean water, food, shelter, and much else—on which our lives depend. These tokens give status and power to those individuals who possess them. They contribute nothing in themselves to the well-being of society.

Of course, any nation with its own currency can easily print and distribute more money. That, however, will only result in inflation unless there is a corresponding increase in the goods and services produced and offered for sale.

The distorting growth of financial assets about which Kelly writes mostly enriches individuals who have no real need of more money. But they can use those assets to consolidate the power of the corporate monopolies they control and suppress wages while increasing the prices of consumer goods. All of this contributes to further increasing their profits and financial assets—the primary but rarely mentioned source of most current global inflation.

The fallacies grounded in ambiguities of language support an endless variety of financial scams that grow the financial assets of financial fraudsters while suppressing wages and growing the debts of working people. Many such scams are so complex that they are difficult to recognize, resist, and prohibit. Many involve various forms of counterfeiting financial assets, the most obvious of which would be cryptocurrencies. But the scams also include financial derivatives, hedge funds, private equity firms, predatory lenders, and more. Authors fill books with examples of these scams, as for example, *These are the Plunderers: How Private Equity Runs—and Wrecks—America*, by Gretchen Morgenson and Joshua Rosner.

It likely never occurs to many who profit from these scams that they are engaged in immoral

activity with devastating consequences for people and the living Earth. Many will insist that they have done nothing wrong because their actions are legal. Just because a scam is legal, however, doesn't mean it isn't a scam. Anything that contributes to reducing billions of people to lives of desperation and early death surely should be illegal. And legal reform is surely appropriate.

But, as Kelly argues, piecemeal legal reforms will ultimately be futile.

I have for years tried to sort out the details of how the various financial scams work so that I might help to explain and expose them to facilitate legal reforms. In reading *Wealth Supremacy*, I realized that Kelly is telling us that such piecemeal reforms are futile. The world of money is a world of illusion with numbers that appear and disappear like phantoms in the night. For every new law, the scammers will find ways around it.

Kelly calls us to look beyond incremental legal reforms. Better we focus our attention on exposing the fallacies of the currently dominant story that lead us to accept the scams as legitimate. Then attack the underlying structural defects through system transformation.

This brings us to the defining theme of Part III of *Wealth Supremacy*. In Part III, Kelly discusses pathways to equitable worker/community ownership that can secure a meaningful life for all people with no extremes of wealth and poverty. Kelly's point is simple. The purpose of any responsible business is to serve the people of the community in which it does business. Such a purpose is a far cry from exploiting workers, customers, small investors, and Earth to extract as much profit as possible to grow the fortunes of aspiring and actual billionaires.

Ownership is the critical variable. It must be equitably shared and reside in and work for the well-being of the community in which a busi-

ness operates. Call it economic democracy, an essential foundation of the political democracy to which we aspire and to which Tikkun readers have long been committed. An economy will work for the people only if ownership resides in people who care about and are dedicated to the well-being of their families and neighbors.

Kelly appropriately begins with the ownership of financial institutions. She reminds us of the days following WWII when our banks were small and local. Many of us back then relied for our financial needs on credit unions that we and our neighbors owned and managed to support affordable local housing and local businesses owned by local people to meet local needs. Such financial institutions are a model for a viable human future.

Those were the days of my growing up. My dad was a local businessman who regularly asserted that "If you are not in business to serve your customers [our neighbors], you have no business being in business." He meant it and he practiced it. He loved making a profit, but his greatest love was meeting the needs of his customers and providing his employees with good, secure family-wage jobs.

My Dad's sense of the purpose of his business is an extraordinary contrast to the current prevailing sense of the purpose of business. That purpose of ever-expanding profits to grow and maximize returns to major shareholders and top executives means that we can allow—even celebrate—such atrocities as billionaires enriching themselves by firing thousands of people with a sweep of their hand. In the immortal words of Gandhi, "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not everyone's greed."

Mentally healthy humans will go to great lengths to avoid inflicting pain on others, even to the extent of extreme self-sacrifice. Those who take pleasure in inflicting pain on others to grow personal financial assets are excep-

tions to the norm. Such individuals are properly confined to institutions dedicated to providing them with needed healing. They are the last people we want heading our most powerful institutions. A viable human future depends on a transformation from the imperial civilizations that have shaped human societies for some 5,000 years to the **ecological civilization** it is now within our means to create together. It will require the efforts of billions of people who care for the well-being of living Earth and all its people and other living beings. The barriers are daunting. *Wealth Supremacy* by Marjorie Kelly is an essential guide to making the deep institutional transformation necessary to create an economy that works for all. ●



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All Earth to Love

SARAH SHAPIRO

God gave all men all earth to love,
But since our hearts are small,
Ordained for each one spot should prove
Belovèd over all.

Rudyard Kipling

Hidden in the back of various cabinets through the years, as life has taken me from one country to another and from place to place, are stored for safekeeping three items given to me in childhood by my father, the writer and editor Norman Cousins: the originals of two black-and-white news photographs from 1963, taken a few moments apart at a meeting in the White House, and one scribbled-upon piece of paper, torn from a yellow legal pad and inscribed, “for Sara,” by the President of the United States.

Though the items are lodged securely in the back of my mind, on occasion I’ve forgotten where it is I last put them, invariably triggering a frantic searching through papers and drawers and files, to make sure they’re still in there, beyond children’s—and now grandchildren’s—inquisitive hands. In one photograph, we see my father looking happily down over John F. Kennedy’s shoulder as the President, at his desk in the Oval Office, signs the page of darkly-penciled-in doodles that my father had noticed him drawing during the meeting; and inscribes it—as my father has requested—to Norman’s little girl, back home in Connecticut.



Courtesy Sarah Shapiro

In the other one, a smiling JFK rises from his chair, paper in hand, and my father, in the background now, tips back his head with a joyful laugh. The gesture was characteristic; it didn’t take much, at any time, to make my father celebrate. But his laughter on this occasion was unique, and uniquely profound. For his labor of love—devotion and love for his family, and (without exaggeration) for human beings everywhere, and for the miraculous, tiny blue speck in the cosmos upon which we find ourselves—had at last borne fruit. After a year of painstakingly sensitive, complex negotiations for which my father had served as an intermediary, a historic agreement had been reached between President Kennedy and Russia’s Premier Nikita Khrushchev, to ban further nuclear testing in space, in the atmosphere, and underwater.

The treaty still had a long way to go; ratification in the US Senate was not going to be easy.

But for now they were jubilant.

The Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, or LTBT, was not the comprehensive agreement that my father had sought, especially in light of how close to nuclear war the two countries had come during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The fact that a ban on underground tests had not made it into the agreement meant that the signatories were left with lethal wiggle room, which would prove, indeed, to be a deadly loophole exploited—for the most part by Russia—for years to come.

But this was July 1963, and the Treaty, thought my father, was a good first step. It went as far as the two nations' leaders could go, at that juncture, without arousing overwhelming opposition from their respective militaries. And one of its most important achievements, he thought, was its impact on public perceptions. Nuclear weapons, nuclear proliferation, nuclear war....the topic tends to induce fatalism and resignation. *It's not in my hands*. But it was as a private citizen that my father had been involved, and the Limited Nuclear Test Ban to which he gave his all is, in fact, still in place. It was, he believed, each and every human being's personal responsibility to take care of this world. MAD—pop slang for Mutually Assured Destruction—doesn't have to come true. Global suicide is not inevitable.

Some other people, too, appear in those photographs, but it's only now, while writing this story, that I've realized something odd: in all the decades since I sat down at the table for breakfast one summer morning and found at my place two pictures of Daddy and a page full of scribbles, and looked up to see my mother standing there with a little smile, awaiting my response, I've never bothered to find out who those other men were. In the opinion of my inner child (who to this day is still in the majority on numerous issues) those other people weren't The Important Ones.

But for that matter, as I saw it, neither was I.

I was the baby in the family. It was a fact of life. Among my older sisters and their teenage friends, and among all the tall, often wrinkled adults from all around the world who passed through the guestroom in our Connecticut home, I took my unimportance for granted. And naturally I was resigned, as well, with equal parts wonder and anxiety, to my insignificance in the huge, indifferent, unsupervised universe, with all its thousands of stars and planets hanging around at random without explanation, in the emptiness of outer space.

When, in 1955, my father's magazine arranged for twenty-five young survivors of Hiroshima to be brought to the United States for plastic surgery and other medical treatments, my sense of helplessness turned sinister, and took deeper root. The Hiroshima Maidens, as they came to be called, had been scarred and disfigured and wounded in myriad ways, both visibly and invisibly, in the radioactive firestorm, and I assumed it was just a matter of time before it happened to us. I recall telling my father, with a child's plainspoken simplicity, that I knew I wouldn't live to age 20. I wouldn't get married, I said, or have children. The Bomb would fall before I grew up.

The Maidens were settled in various American homes for the duration of their treatment, their travel and hospitalizations having been sponsored, in response to my father's appeal for contributions, by subscribers to his magazine. Readers of his *Saturday Review* editorials shared his sense of personal responsibility for our country's having been the first to introduce nuclear war into world history, incognizant of its utterly unprecedented dangers, extreme dangers which would one day rebound upon our own People, and our children, and our children's children. With our scientific prowess, we had perverted the miraculous, infinitesimal building block of Creation into a weapon of war that could extinguish Creation.

"It is an atomic bomb," President Truman had announced proudly to the Nation upon Japan's surrender 13 hours after the A-Bomb was dropped. "It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the Sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East....The successful splitting of the atom" he said, has brought about "a new and revolutionary increase in destruction."

One of the Maidens settled with us, at our home in Connecticut, and stayed, becoming a member of our family. She was covered with burns from head to toe.

The Bomb wasn't some sort of distant rumor, or science fiction.

One cozy winter day, Shigeko and I were sitting dreamily before the fireplace when more to herself, perhaps, than to the little girl at her side, she said, "What you feel if you a small, small ant in that fire?"

We were gazing together into the flames.

"I was ant," said Shigeko.

It's my guess that like some of my father's other books having to do with nuclear weapons, *In Place of Folly*, written in 1961, didn't make it onto anyone's bestseller lists. People generally don't want to be told that

....there is no disagreement that poisonous strontium locates itself in human bone, where it is stored; that poisonous radioactive cesium locates itself primarily in human muscle; and that poisonous radioactive iodine has an affinity for the thyroid gland.... There is no disagreement about the fact that strontium 90 can produce bone cancers and leukemia in human beings; that cesium 137 can cause serious genetic damage; and that Iodine 131 can cause acute glandular disturbances.

As a direct result of nuclear tests, detectable quantities of strontium 90, cesium 137, and iodine 131 can now be found in virtually all foodstuffs. Among these foodstuffs, milk is considered of exceptional importance, both because it is a prime source of nourishment for children and because it serves as a collection center for poisonous radioactive strontium. Detectable traces of radioactive strontium, radioactive cesium, and radioactive iodine have found their way into the bodies of human beings all over the world.

Strontium 90, cesium 137, and iodine 131 are produced in nuclear explosions. These radioactive materials do not exist in nature. They are entirely man-made....Human beings did not have [these] in their bones or glands or muscles before the age of nuclear explosions. This is new hazard in human history, completely man-made and so far, extremely difficult to counteract....

All peoples are affected by the explosion of nuclear weapons, and not merely the people of the country conducting such experiments. There is no known way of confining the fallout to the nation setting off the bombs, nor is there any known way of cleansing the sky of radioactive garbage.

Permission from those affected has not been sought. Representation has not been offered to people whose crops were dusted with radioactive materials, whose cows have grazed on lands carrying a radioactive burden, whose children have drunk milk containing strontium 90 and cesium 137, whose leukemia rate has increased with the increase of radioactive materials in the air, and whose future carries a question mark to which no one has a precise answer. ...To a mother who has lost a child, the universe itself has suddenly become a void. The child is not a statistic. To the people of a country who learn that they now belong to the first

generation of men in human history to carry radioactive strontium in their bones, the stark indifference of testing nations is incomprehensible and outrageous.

A ban on nuclear testing, with machinery in place for verification and enforcement, represents the best chance of keeping nuclear weapons from becoming standard items in the arsenals of the world's nations.

I've never been sure if my father actually articulated the line, optimism is realism, or if it was a conviction conveyed through his deeds, by the way he lived. One can be excused for wondering how his gift for positive thinking, for which he's best remembered in relation to recovery from illness, can be reconciled with his incessant preoccupation with nuclear destruction.

I don't recall with which fascist ruler it was that my father was once talking, having been sent by the US government to try to persuade the man to discontinue whatever brutality it was that he was then committing (I think it had to do with a political prisoner) when the man got quiet for a moment. And with an almost child-like curiosity, he asked, "Why should I?"

Whereupon Daddy looked him in the eye and said, "Because it's the right thing to do."

And taken aback, the brute complied.

It was my mother who told me that story, the night Daddy died.

My father had too much experience, negotiating with tyrants, to be accused of naivete.

In November 1963, a month after the Treaty was ratified by the Senate, President Kennedy was assassinated. I remember my father's grief in that era, and remember how, with time, he willed himself to prevail over his despair. He resumed working towards a comprehensive test ban, although now neither America's new President, nor Russia's newly installed hardliner

(brought in to replace the ousted Khrushchev,) was welcoming his efforts.

In the summer of 1964, my sister and parents and I were on a plane leaving from Leningrad, where my father had chaired a conference between American and Russian writers, poets, and scientists, when suddenly, minutes after takeoff, Daddy fell ill. The illness quickly disabled him. It was strange, and prolonged. His doctors at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York didn't expect him to survive. He would later write in *Anatomy of an Illness* about the role of laughter in his recovery, but he chose not to divulge one of the details: his doctors had found in his body a bolus filled with streptococci, typical in cases of deliberate poisoning.

Were my father here now, I would ask him if his encounters included people in whom no inner spark of moral conscience could be uncovered. I'd ask him if the faith he demonstrated in the potential for goodness in every human being, was a pose he adopted for his noble purposes, to awaken whatever could be awakened in the other.

"No battle," he said, "is ever really lost."

Among his letters that I reread after his death was a handwritten penciled note: "All Earth to Love — possible title for book."

I once heard it said that every person climbs one ladder throughout his life, designed uniquely for that person and no other. The person climbs and falls, falls and climbs, and climbs again.

Recently, another version of this idea came my way: that if one is repeatedly faced throughout one's life by a particular challenge, then it's safe to assume that it's in this challenge that one's mission in life can be discerned.

My ladder can't be my father's ladder. Not only because he is he and I am I, and nobody's asking me to go talk to Putin, but because while I

do have faith in the fact of a Divine Purpose in our struggles here on earth, faith in mankind is not my forte.

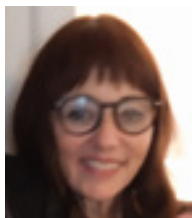
As nuclear-armed powers fight a brutal war in Ukraine, and as North Korea, which last exploded a nuclear test in 2017, brags of its nuclear arsenal...as China flexes its nuclear muscles... and Iran openly seeks to develop its nuclear capability, specifically with an eye on war with Israel, I miss my father. The Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty he worked so hard to negotiate still stands, but its full flowering which its signatories had in mind was cut down by the machinations of men.

My claim to fame is not that President Kennedy, who didn't know me, wrote my name and his on the same page, though his eloquently tense doodles are dear to me. It's that in my father's sweetest moment of joy and triumph, when for a fleeting interval his mission in life seemed close at hand, he remembered me.

Though he was by necessity that day far from home, his fatherly love planted itself in my mind and told me that I matter.

Though it's my family, my home, my country, that my mortal heart most loves, I want to do as my father said. I want to take my share of responsibility for the survival of our beloved world.

So I've written this story, and raised my small voice to the One in power. ●



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Courtesy Sarah Shapiro



Courtesy Sarah Shapiro

Interview with Matthew Fox: Essential Writings on Creation Spirituality

ANDREW HARVEY

INTERVIEW OF MATTHEW FOX BY ANDREW HARVEY regarding the New Book Matthew Fox: Essential Writings on Creation Spirituality (Orbis, 2022) edited by Charles Burack.

Andrew Harvey: Hello. It is a very great joy for me to be here with you to celebrate the extraordinary book that has just come out, Matthew Fox: Essential Writings on Creation Spirituality, with an excellent introduction by Charles Burack, who oversaw the book. Matthew, this book is essentially a compendium of everything that you have devoted your life to. You have been, for me, not just a very great friend and not just a great mentor, but you've been in your vast fierceness, your unified burning life, someone who constantly enkindles me and irradiates me and so many others, with the flames of your blazing charity.

The publication of this book, my friends, is far more than just a new book and spiritual event, it is nothing less than the distillation of a lifetime's passion for love and truth and justice. And it comes to us at a moment in our tragic and burning world when we need its clarity, its grounded joy, and its summons to sacred action on behalf of the whole glory of creation.

So thank you, Matt, so deeply from the bottom of my heart.

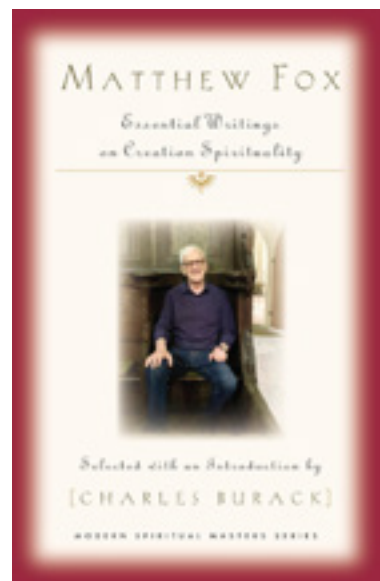
Matthew Fox: Thank you and congratulations on your new book, Love is Everything: A Year with Hadewijch of Antwerp, coming out just this very day, also a special moment.

Andrew Harvey: Hadewich invites us to listen to the great voices of the sacred feminine Christ which is returning.

Matthew Fox: Yes, and you are a perfect megaphone for that important shift in consciousness from the patriarchal version of the masculine to a balance of the healthy sacred feminine along with a healthy masculine, so this is a very special day and I might add that I was honored to write a very short Forward to that book as well, so I feel part of it.

Andrew Harvey: And what a wonderful way to begin, because one of the extraordinary contributions of your book is a new vision, both of the sacred feminine and the sacred masculine. This enables us to enter the sacred marriage of transcendence and Immanence that really does birth in us the fullness of who we can be and what the full vision of what the creation is.

One of the things you say, and it's such an arresting and thrilling formulation, is that we need to reimagine the sacred marriage as a fu-



sion of the Green Man and the Black Madonna and it came to me last night reading Hadewich how to reach and thank her for this extraordinary journey that I've been on. That the authentic sacred feminine is also a marriage of the green woman and the Black Madonna of Mary and Kali have someone totally in her being radiant with the freshness and vitality of what Hildegard of Bingen calls *viriditas* or "greening power." They align themselves with the fierce energy of compassion and the molten sacred energy for transformation of the world. So with your formulation you've changed the whole conversation.

But I want to begin by asking you. Where are we? This book is coming out in a terrifying moment for the whole human race.

Matthew Fox: That is true, of course, we are literally facing extinction, you know. People are acting up and acting out, and nations are doing so nations led by authoritarian leaders or authoritarian wannabe leaders and climate change, above all, is bearing down on us. Just this week, as you know, Europe set records everywhere for heat and, of course, where I live here in northern California, we've got the Yellowstone Park on fire like never before, and these wildfires are happening all around the world and hurricanes and floods that go with them and the droughts with all the implications for agriculture, so severe. And, of course, the melting of the glaciers and ice. Where will we be getting our water in the future? So this is truly a time to meditate on extinction, at the same time that we do what hope really is as defined by David Orr: "Hope is a verb with the sleeves rolled up."

We have to go to work, and that includes an inner work which, as you alluded to earlier, includes the balance of the sacred masculine and feminine, but it includes a lot of things and includes a renewed commitment to justice and to carrying on the fight whether we're talking

racial justice or economic justice or gender justice or eco-justice—all these issues are on the table.

And, of course, all this is familiar to readers of Tikkun magazine because Tikkun itself stands for a healing of the of the world and that is the Jewish understanding of redemption—it's not about some private salvation thing, where you get to heaven climbing on other people's backs—it's about the survival of the whole—of the Community, and today the Community is *homo sapiens'* version of humanity.

Let us include in our vision of humanity all these striking dangers that face us, but at the same time, we want to embrace what our strong points are as a species. Yes, we're discussing our shadow; that's not a surprise—it appears in 90% of the headlines of our papers and on the Internet every day, but also let us welcome, for example, the Webb telescope—what a marvelous accomplishment as a species! What other species has done this, that we can bring back into our living rooms and our personal computers the first galaxy and the first stars from 13.8 billion years ago? From way back then the very universe is speaking to us. Just that alone is an amazing accomplishment of our intelligence and our curiosity and our willingness to pursue it.

Of course, it was created by people from, I think, over 30 countries and thousands of scientists have contributed to it, so it shows that the human community with a guided and shared purpose can accomplish an awful lot. So we have to meditate on the good things that our species has brought forth, including the courage and wisdom of Gandhi or Mandela or King or Dorothy Day or Sojourner Truth or Isaiah and Jesus, and the other prophets of the world including Black Elk. Our species is such a mixed bag. Here we have the Pope going to Canada to confess the sins of the Catholic Church and indigenous children ripped from

their families and culture and put into white schools—a horrible, horrible story that is finally coming out. So we do have to pay attention to the suffering of the world and how are we going to contribute to healing it. And to survival if that's still possible given climate change. If we don't get honest about it and pull out of denial about what's really facing us, we will go extinct.

I think that among things we have things going for us is the return of the feminine and the women's movement has brought that forward and women scholarship for sure and like you say, the recovery of the great women mystics and mysticism itself, by men and women, is a real contribution to bringing forward to what has been a patriarchal era for thousands of years, bringing a balance back. Like Dorothy Soelle says, mysticism itself is the language for healthy religion and for feminism because it deconstructs the notion of simply a vertical relationship to an all-powerful divinity. So, our capacity for creativity cannot be underestimated—that's why I don't count our species out yet—we are capable of massive transformation, but it's got to begin in the inside it's got to begin with a revolution in values; and this, I think, is what mystics offer us and prophets the world over, and certainly Jesus was about that. So were the prophets who preceded him and those who have come after. So don't cut our species out yet if we can see that the handwriting is on the wall if we still have time. Scientists are saying we have seven years. If we still have time, we can change our ways profoundly out of necessity—I do think nothing moves the human species like necessity, and the necessity is there, so that's the kind of time we're living in and I think we have to dig deep into our souls.

Andrew Harvey: I totally agree with you.

There's a wonderful man named Stephen Jenkinson who says about this time we can either view it as an affliction or an assignment. And I think that's a very sacred distinction, if

you view it as an affliction and allow the horror and the chaos and the madness to drive you into either denial or paralysis, then you're missing the rugged great gift of a time like this, which is precisely what you talked about—the rugged great gift of a time like this, is that it can drive us deeper into our essence. To find that both deathless consciousness and a wholly new level of courage to step out in the middle of this gathering disaster to do everything we can, as wisely as we can to protect the creation, to honor equality, to stand up for harmony and justice in every realm and in every world.

And what's becoming clear to me, and I know it's always been clear to you, is that, if we can use this immense global dark night in that way, as an assignment, as an invitation to become the verb of hope with our sleeves rolled up, then we ourselves will be transformed—even transfigured—and the whole human race if it can meet this challenge in that way will go to the next level of our co creative capacity with the divine and a wholly new way of being and doing on every level could be established.

This also is being offered to us, on the one hand, the possibility, the real possibility of annihilation and on the other hand, the possibility of a massive birth of a new kind of human race chastened and humbled by tragedy but also awake to the assignment and willing under divine inspiration and divine grace to bring all of the best of what it's always had available into focus in sacred action and sacred creativity.

Matthew Fox: Well, very well said, and I think that it's really imperative that we of course, make a choice between, you say, affliction or assignment. The mystics often talk about the dark night of the soul as a school.

One thing that I think of these days is the Jupiter One space shot that was the first invention of humans ever to leave the solar system and that, when it looked back on its journey, it took

pictures of its journey and the earth was just this tiny dot in the universe. I think that perspective is so important, and I can't understand why it cannot convert every human on the planet, to see that. Because its perspective that this planet is absolutely singular—it's so unique. Now we may find other planets with life on them, but will we be able to communicate with them and will there be intelligent life there?

It's an interesting question and we hope so, but what matters now is that currently this planet Earth is the one that has come to a point where it can sing the praises of the universe that has been birthing for 13.8 billion years. And we know now it is 2 trillion galaxies big, each with hundreds of billions of stars, and on this particular planet we've got elephants and rain forests and giraffes and whales and bumble bees and butterflies and human beings, and I ask: What is it going to take for us to fall in love with this planet and act accordingly, enough to wake ourselves up and to get to work, to save the beauty of this planet, as it currently exists? I just think such an awareness is so important today because it puts into perspective our national ideologies and our warmongering, our revenge on others, our greed, our religious persecutions, and hatreds and projections and wars of the past.

It is part of everything you and I are saying that this is the next step of evolution is at our door. Either we're going to evolve rapidly and undergo deep transformation, or we will go the way of all our other brother and sister hominids such as the Neanderthal and the Denisovans and all these other extinct species we are finding evidence of today—I think they have counted 14 with more to come. We are the last ones standing, so we have to take that seriously and get moving and transforming.

Andrew Harvey: One source of hope—rugged hope—is that all evolutionary processes in nature do not proceed gradually, they come as a

result of a very extreme forced crisis. So that's one source of hope and the other sense of hope is something you once said to me, when we were walking in California, you said if we're capable, as we obviously are, of taking our own race and a great deal of nature to the brink of extinction—if we have that power—we also have the power within us to reverse that disaster because what we're being shown by the crisis is the staggering power our human agency has. And if we can turn, you said, to the sources of primordial wisdom and empowerment and drink from those sacred wells and see in the shining water of that well our true face and claim our human divinity, then who knows what we could be capable of.

So those two sources of hope remain open to us, and I want to use the second thing you said to point to one of the very great contributions of your work and the very great inspirations of this book.

Jung wrote in the Red Book something that just leapt off the pages in letters of fire, when I read it, because it summed up so much of what I've been doing and so much of what you've been doing because we have different works, but we in so many ways endeavored to do the same thing from the center of our own temperament. What Jung says is "salvation is the resolution of the task and the task is to restore the primordial ancient in the new so as to birth a new creation."

And when I read that, I understood why I had spent so many decades trying to understand and trying to live the ancient glory of Rumi, the ancient glory of Kabir, the vision of Transfiguration and Angelus Silesius, the stunning grandeur of Hadewich, because I knew that if I could truly enter into their world and, if I could truly bring back the immense treasures that I found in the world, a treasure far greater than modern spirituality or modern psychology or the very flatland vision of humanity that we live

with, then human beings would have available to them the primordially ancient in the disaster of, the new so that they could work with that restored glory to infuse themselves with truth and passion and stamina and nobility and birth a new world. And you have done exactly the same thing with Aquinas, with Meister Eckhart, with Hildegard of Bingen, and with Julian of Norwich. One of the really most inspiring parts of your book is the way in which your love for these tremendous pioneers of human divine life. And what they have given us and how relevant what they have given us to our time is.

So what I'm going to ask you is to do something very difficult, but I know if anybody can do it, you can.

And that is just to speak out of the heart of your love for each one of them and speak about what each one of them has to offer us right now for this journey either into extinction or evolution/transformation.

So let's start with Aquinas, why did Aquinas possess your heart, and so why did you spend so much time on him and what has he to give us now?

Matthew Fox: Before I address that, I would like to affirm your words from Carl Jung by citing these words of David Paladin, who is a native American artist who went through a profound rupture as a young man in a concentration camp during the Second World War. From this rupture, he became a real shaman and he echoes what you too are saying in his own words very wonderfully. Here is what he says, "all great truths are only myths that exist momentarily in the evolving greater consciousness. Like individuals, they die to be reborn fresh and glorious in the minds of each new age. They may bear resemblance to their forebears, but each brings with it new features of its own and seeks to find its place and meaning in the dancing dream that is the cosmos."

Andrew Harvey: Wonderful!. Such reinterpretation revives the ancient truths about life and wisdom.

Matthew Fox: The Bible with its powerful myths and its powerful stories is part of this inheritance, but we have to keep living it anew in every generation.

OK, so now Thomas Aquinas, why does he grab me so much? First of all, because he insisted on the importance of science for spirituality and for an authentic view of the world, and he paid a real price for that commitment. He abandoned 800 years of Platonistic theology in the Christian church in favor of Aristotle, and he tells us why—"because Aristotle does not denigrate matter." Platonism was very dualistic, and the Christian theologians who clung to Plato like St. Augustine and many more, were deeply dualistic. Augustine says, for example, that "spirit is whatever is not matter."

Aquinas was shocked by that and he said "spirit is the elan, the vitality, in everything"—a blade of grass, a tree, of course in us—it's everywhere. So that is a tremendous shift, and Aquinas kind of bore it alone, because the Church was so embedded then in the dualisms of the neo-Platonists that it couldn't rise above itself and really give credence to the theophany that creation is very good and therefore an original blessing. Beginning with goodness of creation is so Jewish—of course, Genesis does not begin with human sin but with cosmology and the goodness of creation.

Christian preachers leap in with both galoshes on eager to talk about sin. But the Bible begins with the whole of creation, not with the human and chapter one of Genesis is about the goodness, and the beauty of creation and it culminates when humans arrive at the end, (which we do in the current scientific creation story today). We arrive and then somehow it's all "very good" and "very beautiful."

Aquinas actually uses the terms “primal goodness” and “original goodness.” It’s amazing that I got condemned for the word “original blessing”, which simply means “original goodness.”

Andrew Harvey: They can’t stand the good news.

Matthew Fox: Indeed! This shows how impoverished patriarchal religion has become in our time that even two popes—not the present one—over 34 years called creation spirituality “dangerous and deviant.” The roof of the Vatican came off because I dared to write about original blessing. So Aquinas trusts nature and trusts human nature. His appreciation of our capacity for creativity and for our immense intelligence is astounding.

He also recognizes our shadow side, when he says “one human being can do more evil than all the other species put together.” And this is 800 years before Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot or Putin that he was saying these things, so the man was amazingly balanced and aware. He stepped out of the entire history really of Christian theology to interact with the greatest scientists he could find in the 13th century, who was tainted, if you will, because Aristotle was a pagan and he came to the West by way of Islam, because it was in Baghdad that they translated Aristotle into Latin and thereby ushered him into Europe through Spain. I just admire him for his intellectual courage and quest for truth. He says that “all truth, whoever utters it, comes from the Holy Spirit” and that “all traditions and all cultures have their prophets” and are seeking truth. So he is a deep ecumenist long before that term was invoked.

Aquinas also celebrates our human capacity for virtue, he says—this is just an amazing statement and I love it—“miracles are wonderful, but the biggest miracle of all is to live a life of virtue.” He’s not into some shaboom

zoom meaning of miracle changing life—just living life fully and virtuously—that’s the biggest miracle of all. I just love it because it’s so realistic, but it’s also challenging and, of course, he said that “a mistake about creation results in a mistake about God.” That so affirms the role of the scientists, those who are seeking for the truth about creation.

So it’s that nondualism that I love about Aquinas, and his bringing intellect and heart together and, of course, he also speaks grounded in the Jewish prophetic consciousness about the importance of justice. There is a reason why MLK jr. cited him in his iconic “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” for his insistence that human laws that violate the divine mandate of justice are not to be obeyed. Also, he is given credit for bringing the important value of the common good into Western jurisprudence (from Aristotle). He is grounded in Jewish consciousness and the Jewish prophets when he says that “truth and justice are the proper objects of the human heart.”

Andrew Harvey: Yes.

Matthew Fox: Truth does not come exclusively from the head but our hearts and intuition. Notice how he brings truth and justice together. You can’t have justice without truth, you need to get the facts, and you can’t have justice when denial reigns, you’ve got to bring truth out, and then there is this passion and the heart to support the quest for truth and the struggle for justice. And of course compassion—Aquinas says that “compassion is the fire that Jesus came to set on the earth.” And I think that says it all, you know.

Andrew Harvey: Absolutely. That’s at the heart of sacred activism, that’s at the heart of every kind of human creativity.

Matthew Fox: Yes, it is and it’s at the heart of all religions in the world.

Andrew Harvey: In the world absolutely.

Matthew Fox: The Dalai Lama says, “compassion, is my religion. You can do away with all religion but not with compassion.” And of course Jesus got his teachings from his Jewish tradition in which we are told, “compassion is the secret name of God.” And Jesus let the secret out of the bag saying, “Be compassionate like your Creator in heaven is compassionate.” And compassion is the most frequently used adjective for Allah in the Koran.

Andrew Harvey: And all the great Hindu sages and Taoist sages—this is the universal message.

Let me ask you about Eckhart because your work on him has been so magnificent and so inspiring to me. What is it in Eckhart that so thrills you and what do we need to drink from Eckhart’s well right now?

Matthew Fox: Of course, Eckhart stands on the shoulders of Aquinas. He was 15 when Aquinas died, and he had just entered the Dominican order.

During his entire life as a Dominican the Dominicans were fighting for Aquinas’s canonization because originally after he died he was condemned by three bishops, two of them at Oxford, your alma mater.

Andrew Harvey: I apologize for that.

Matthew Fox: Although Eckhart attended the University of Paris and taught there, it later became clear to him that the academic world was in decline. They burned a beguine, for example, Marguerette Porrette, at the stake in Paris and when that happened, he shortly afterward fled Paris and never returned. Instead, he went to Strasbourg and hung out with the beguines there which was a women’s movement and a great threat obviously to many people.

Pope John XXII, who ended up condemning Eckhart a week after he died, also condemned

the Beguines 17 different times! So that’s one thing alone I admire him for, that he was a feminist and he was standing with women, even when it was dangerous—that same pope said that any Franciscan or Dominican who hangs out with beguines will be kicked out of the priesthood. But that did not slow Eckhart down.

So Eckhart has this wonderful development of the divine feminine. He says, “what does God do all day long? God lies on a maternity bed giving birth.” He also develops an entire philosophy of the artist. He applies the annunciation story of the angel coming to Mary to give birth to all of us when he says, the artist is to be receptive of the Holy Spirit like Mary was and in that process we give birth.

And it was from Eckhart that I learned the four paths of creation spirituality which take us away from the three paths of Plotinus and Proclus, purgation, illumination and union, into a Jewish view of the world to the Via Positiva—awe, wonder and gratitude. The Via Negativa of silence and stillness and loss and suffering and grief. The Via Creativa, our creativity, which distinguishes us as the image of God, and we are called to co-create with divinity. And then to the Via Transformativa, which is the path of justice and healing, celebration and compassion.

Andrew Harvey: And all those powers that we’ve acquired are dedicated for the transformation of every aspect of life—politics, economics, art, education. Yes, the key isn’t it.

Matthew Fox: Absolutely and that is our divinization and how we divinize the world. That is tikkun, healing the world. He says God is needing to be born in us.

Andrew Harvey: When God is born in us and through us that’s how we become humble agents of the creativity of God that longs for

the transformation of everything into the living mirror of love and justice.

Matthew Fox: Exactly, and Eckhart has his brilliant sermon on compassion and he's talking about the soul of compassion and in that sermon and he says What the soul is no one knows. The soul is as ineffable as God is. He says we know a little bit about the soul when it goes out to do its work but not much, and then he says it would take supernatural knowledge to understand it. Finally, he declares that "the soul is where God works compassion, Amen." That's the last line of his sermon and I think everyone fainted in the Church, because what he is saying is that until we become agents of compassion, we don't have soul. Yes, we're not a full human being.

Andrew Harvey: Carolyn Myss makes the marvelous distinction, criticizing the New Age, between consciousness and conscience. She says everybody's talking about consciousness, but you don't actually have authentic consciousness without conscience, without the conscience that's born from compassion and the commitment to put your compassion into creative action in every part of your life—that's when you have real consciousness.

Matthew Fox: Good for her, good.

Andrew Harvey: And that's an authentic Jewish realization isn't it because—

Matthew Fox: Absolutely.

Andrew Harvey: True sages never speak about a private pursuit of liberation alone, they always know that the whole purpose of growing in God is to serve the people, with more nobility and humility and precision. And the creation also.

Matthew Fox: Yes. Eckhart says, "compassion means justice." Consider this one other statement from Eckhart also that we don't want

to leave behind. He says, "every creature is a word of God and a book about God....If I spent enough time with a caterpillar I'd never have to prepare a sermon because one caterpillar is so full of God." I think that's a marvelous way of grounding a creation spirituality, that every being is a theophany, a revelation of the divine and he's not alone there. Aquinas before him said, "revelation comes in two volumes— nature and the Bible." Not just the Bible contains revelation but nature too you see. That is creation spirituality and that is the wisdom tradition of Israel.

Andrew Harvey: And Rumi says something I feel every day, when I look at my cat. "Adore the beloved, and he will reveal to you that each creature that exists is one drop from his river of infinite beauty."

That's just the truth.

Matthew Fox: That is creation spirituality for sure.

Andrew Harvey: You have been working on Hildegard of Bingen for decades, and you have been instrumental in bringing Hildegard back for us and her great work and great paintings and vision.

Matthew Fox: Yes, well, I call Hildegard the grandmother of the Rhineland mystics because she was first in this lineage that we're naming as "creation spirituality" and being 12th century. Of course, she was a genius in music, as well as in science and healing and, as you say, she painted and wrote ten books, many of them on science of her day, one of them is devoted entirely to rocks and trees and crystals and so forth. And also works on healing the body and the psyche.

And she was a powerhouse and a prophet who wrote letters to the Emperor, the Pope, bishops archbishops and Abbots telling them to man up. She actually told the Emperor that

he was acting like a baby and should man up and work for justice. She told the pope he was surrounded by evil men who cackle in the night like hens.

Andrew Harvey: Nothing has changed.

Matthew Fox: Not a lot has changed. But she was fierce and was amazingly gifted of course but, again, as a woman, she was well aware that she was a second class citizen in society and the Church, but that did not stop her from accomplishing so much. For example, she was raised in in a Celtic monastery in Germany but when she became famous with her first book which took her 10 years to write and, by the way, inside her first book, there are 25 paintings and an opera, the oldest opera in the West by 300 years—of course, that's kind of Celtic too—think of the Book of Kells which also includes stunning art as well as letters and words. They do paint pictures as they write, I think that they are operating with both hemispheres of the brain and she picked up that idea in her training in the Celtic monastery.

When her book came out, it became so famous so rapidly that a lot of women wanted to come and study with Hildegard. (She lived in a bi gender monastery which was common among the Celts where men and women live together though in different parts of the building and get together for prayer and the rest.)

But the men wouldn't move over so, to make long story short, she up and left with all of her women nuns and started her own monastery which she designed. She was like the architect, for it, she hired hundreds of monks to build it for her, and then that got so full that she started a second monastery right across the river.

The fact that she didn't wait around and left is telling. We also have the letter from the Abbot to her after she left saying, "Come back, come back and bring the dowries with you!

Andrew Harvey: Dowries?

Matthew Fox: Dowries, yes. Nuns at that time brought dowries to the monastery with them. Hildegard's letter back to the abbot is all about justice and injustice so she felt she was very badly treated.

Andrew Harvey: Hildegard had an organic vision of the whole creation and the whole being's relationship to the whole creation and of the necessity of serving justice born naturally from that relationship.

Matthew Fox: Absolutely. She says that we live in a "web of creation" and that if humans out of our greed or arrogance or injustice rupture that web, "God will allow creation to punish humanity." She said, "the earth must not be injured, the earth must not be destroyed," and she talked often about "Mother Earth" who is "the mother of all for in her are the seeds of all." She has a beautiful poem about looking at the shining waters and so forth, and how God is present in the shining waters and in the "in the dew that causes the grasses to laugh," she says. She paints an erotic relationship between nature and God. The Creator is related to creation as lovers are related to each other, she insists.

She presents a whole new way of looking at ecology, one that is far beyond stewardship or even responsibility—it's about how we treat one another as lovers; humans, nature and God as lovers.

Andrew Harvey: This transforms your understanding too of what sacred action is because if you continue to think of sacred action as some kind of gloomy duty or some kind of painful service, you've missed what Hildegard and the great mystics of sacred activism are offering. You missed the rapture of lovemaking that comes from lovemaking to justice; just making justice is an erotic glory, it gives joy and gives passion.

Look at that speech of Martin Luther King, you know Hildegard talks about viriditas, the greening power of the Holy Spirit, that is a passionate life force that saturates and inebriates all things. But if you're Martin Luther King giving his speech about African Americans coming together, you see his whole body possessed by that viriditas, by that erotic hunger of love to see justice done.

So sacred action is not a duty—it's a flowing out of an essential lovemaking between us and each other and the whole creation and God in the viriditas or greening power in the whole creation. Isn't that one of Hildegard's great revelations?

Matthew Fox: Definitely. I have a chapter in my Original Blessing book called "erotic justice," and I think that's where wisdom comes in. The Book of Wisdom in the Bible says, "this is wisdom: to love life" and Audrey Lorde, in her brilliant essay on eros, reminds us that eros is the passion for living that we bring to whatever we do—whether making a table or writing a poem or making love; and certainly to justice making. To do justice is to seek balance and harmony and fairness, all that is, as you say, not merely a call to cold duty but an invitation to again live out a relationship of love and joy. It is biophilia trumping necrophilia as Erich Fromm used to ruminate about so much.

Andrew Harvey: Right, there are all kinds of joy that you cannot discover until you live them out in creative action.

Let's turn in these last moments of our time together to your latest love. I'm sure you've loved her a long time, but this wonderful book that you brought out two years ago on Julian of Norwich: *Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic... and Beyond*.

Why Julian, why did you devote yourself to Julian at that time, which was during the co-

vid epidemic, and we were talking a lot and I remember the absolute rapture you were having writing the book and that book communicates so much of the essence of everything that you have yourself striven for. She seems to me, having been so deeply moved by all of your work, that that particular book holds a very special place in my heart because it's just radiant with celebration and gratitude and joy. So what was it about Julian that ignited such a passionate inspiration in your soul?

Matthew Fox: Well, first is that she lived through the worst pandemic ever in Europe, the bubonic plague in the 14th century. She was seven years old when it first hit and then it kept coming back in waves her entire lifetime and she lived into her 80s. The plague killed between one out of two or one out of three people.

So it was terribly severe and of course they had no science and no vaccine or promise of vaccine and they had no clue where it came from, in fact, we didn't know until the early 20th century when the mystery was resolved in San Francisco. They finally found the answer that it was the fleas of rats that would jump into other rats and onto other people, but we didn't know that until the early 20th century.

The fact that she lived through that pandemic, a pandemic that Thomas Barry says destroyed creation spirituality in the West because it made Europeans so afraid of nature, tells us a lot about the dynamic behind Julian's writing. She was bravely going beyond the hysteria of her day and deepening the entire creation spirituality lineage in so doing. Before, you could trust nature, and there was a theophany or mystical experience with nature, but now there is fear and angst and preoccupation with death and hell and salvation.

If you look at Christian history since the 15th century, you realize that creation is no longer

in the forefront—redemption is along with a preoccupation with guilt and shame. Religion becomes all about redemption, which is all about how you stay out of hell, because people were so afraid because they saw hell on earth when they saw this disease—it was like AIDS on steroids. When you got it, you were usually dead in three or four days or even less, and your whole body turned full of puss and sores.. It was scary to people, but not to Julian, even though I think it's very likely she lost a child and her husband in the pandemic.

People responded with craziness to the pandemic. Many men joined flagellation clubs and went from village to village flagellating themselves because they laid the cause of the pandemic on their sins. Others created scapegoats including Jews, and much antisemitism arose in England, so much that many Jews fled to mainland Europe hoping the antisemitism would be less pronounced there (even though the pandemic was raging there as well).

Julian, however, did not choose to go down that rabbit hole of fear and hatred of nature and sin as cause of the pandemic and scapegoating and antisemitism at all—instead she opted for the goodness of nature. And in doing so, she represents the culmination of the creation spirituality lineage from Hildegard to Francis to Aquinas to Mechtilde of Magdeburg to Meister Eckhart. She is at the pinnacle of it, because in her day literally we lost the creation tradition and we went into religion as redemption instead of religion as gratitude for creation, which is its core meaning. Aquinas says, “the primary meaning of religion is a supreme gratitude and thankfulness” and he even says, “the first and primary meaning of salvation is to preserve things in the good.” To preserve things in the good is to confess that they are good. He also declares that the first thing we are grateful for on the Sabbath is “creation itself.”

Julian teaches that “God is the goodness in nature,” and “God is the Father and the Mother of nature” and “God is delighted to be our Father and God is delighted to be our Mother.” She develops a whole theology of the divine feminine and the motherhood of God more fully than any theologian up to the end of the 20th century. Not only is God the Creator mother (and father), but Christ too is a “mother,” she says, because he practiced feminine motherly virtues like compassion and taught us to do the same. She displays an amazing balance and, of course, she was the first woman to write a book in English,

That is significant, for she invented many words in English such as “oneing” which is her definition of the of the mystical experience (Thomas Aquinas used the word “ecstasy” a lot for that experience and Eckhart invented his own word, *Durchbruch* or “breakthrough.”) Julian also invented the word “enjoy” in English, which is an interesting word to have invented isn't it? She is consciously non-dualistic and says “God is in our sensuality” and “in our creation we were knit and oned to God [and] it is a precious oneing.” And “God has forged a glorious union between the soul and the body” and “God willed that we have a twofold nature; sensual and spiritual.” This is a long cry from Augustine's dualisms that have served patriarchy and empire building for so long.

Julia says “every human has a birthright of joy.” Thus we are born for joy and we were born from joy.

She is certainly turning her back in her way on original sin and dualistic mindsets, that of course keep patriarchy and empires going.

Andrew Harvey: She never speaks at all about original sin, she never goes on and on about how awful we are. She endlessly encourages us to find within us joy and the blessings that come from our essential divine nature.

Matthew Fox: Exactly. Her very definition of faith is panentheism when she says “faith is the trust that all things are in God and God is in all things.” She gets it right that the core meaning of faith is trust and not doctrines. She’s taking faith out of the arena of piles of doctrines into the arena of practice—to practice trust. And if we do practice it, amazing things come of that, but it’s not an easy journey and, of course, she was well aware of suffering all around her. But that’s what is astounding about her, that she lived a creation spirituality worldview in spite of all the despair around her and all the suffering around her. She knew there was something deeper and that depth has everything to do with the marriage of the divine goodness and creation. “The goodness in creation is God,” she wrote.

Andrew Harvey: That what a gorgeous sentence to end our time, and when you’re describing her you are also describing yourself because you’ve lived now eighty years, and you’ve lived through all the terrible and frightening transformations of these last years, but you have never lost that sacred joy that continues to inspire you to pull yourself out and I bless you for that.

I just want to thank you for everything you’ve given us and everything you’ve given us today, and to say to everyone who’s listening to this: Please, please make available to yourself Matthew’s new book, *Essential Writings of Creation Spirituality* which is a compendium of the gorgeous and grounded wisdom that he has pursued in one lifetime. It’s much more than a book, it’s a source of rugged hope, sacred energy and inspiration for real sacred action, and we all need it like oxygen. Thank you very, very much.

Matthew Fox: And thank you for your work all these years, Andrew, and congratulations on

your new book that came out just today on the mystic of fire, Hadewijch. ●



REV. MATTHEW FOX, PHD, author, theologian, and activist priest, has been calling people of spirit and conscience into the Creation Spirituality lineage for over 50 years. His 40 books, lectures, retreats, and innovative education models have ignited an international movement to awaken people to be mystics and prophets, contemplative activists, who honor and defend the earth and work for justice. Seeking to establish a new pedagogy for learning spirituality that was grounded in an effort to reawaken the West to its own mystical traditions in such figures as Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart and the mysticism of Thomas Aquinas, as well as interacting with contemporary scientists who are also mystics, Fox founded the University of Creation Spirituality. His recent projects include *Order of the Sacred Earth* and *Daily Meditations with Matthew Fox* as well as *The Cosmic Mass*. Fox is recipient of the Abbey Courage of Conscience Peace Award, the Ghandi King Ikeda Award, the Tikkun National Ethics Award and other awards. His most recent books are: *Matthew Fox: Essential Writings on Creation Spirituality*; *Julian of Norwich: Wisdom in at Time of Pandemic—and Beyond*; and *The Tao of Thomas Aquinas: Fierce Wisdom for Hard Times*. Other books include *Original Blessing*; *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*; *A Spirituality Named Compassion*; *The Reinvention of Work*; and *Christian Mystics*. www.matthewfox.org. www.dailymeditationswithmatthewfox.org.



ANDREW HARVEY is an internationally acclaimed writer, poet, translator and mystical teacher. He is the author of over 40 books, including *Son of Man*, *The Hope*, *Love is Everything*, *Turn Me to Gold* and *Radical Regeneration* with Carolyn Baker. He has taught all over the world, given over 20 courses for the Shift Network and is the founder of the Institute for Sacred Activism.



The Spirit is in the Streets

Israeli Protesters Need a Bigger, Better Story

DAVID BERLIN | MAY 9, 2023

"The Zionist leadership was motivated by keen rationalism, shorn of any of the mystical elements typical of messianism. But by concluding that only human intervention would redeem the Jewish people, and that they must no longer wait for divine action, the Zionists actually secularized the notion of the Messiah."

Y. Melman, "The New Israelis" p110

HOW THE SIDES ARE DRAWN

1. From "passionate intensity" to secular-liberalism

My father, who was born in Jerusalem in 1926, rarely spoke of his past. When I asked him

about his WW2 experience in the British army, he mumbled something about the battle of El-Alamein adding that he was too young to fight. To his chagrin he became an errand boy. When he returned to Palestine, he was drafted into the Palmach, the elite forces of the Haganah. No details. Taciturn. The only exception to his life-long recalcitrance was the time I asked him about his feelings on the 14th of May, 1948, when Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel. Even then he hesitated and asked whether I did not have other things to do. I insisted and he relented. I recall that he sat me down at our kitchen table. He poured himself a full glass of cheap whisky and a thimbleful for me. He paused and, choosing his words carefully, said:

We were not at the Tel Aviv Museum where the Declaration was read. My unit was girding for war which we knew was in the offing. We were ill-equipped and anxious and as much as we were also ecstatic, we felt that Ben Gurion was playing to the gallery. He spoke as a prophet but not as a visionary. He declared the establishment of the State and gave it a name but did not say anything about the original vision which had everything to do with creating 'New [Humans]'—who would be authors of their own fate and equal participants in the work of shaping and forming the destiny of their nation and our species. Ben Gurion made it seem as though Jewish history was a circle, and that Jews were simply returning from a very long trip abroad. His presentation lacked a sense of the miraculous, the magic, the sense of divine intervention which was clearly embracing us all.

The late, great Viennese-Israeli thinker, Amos Elon, put my father's concerns more succinctly. He wrote that the myth which inspired the founders was all about the creation of a new and just society. "The new society as envisaged by the early pioneers, was to be another Eden, a Utopia never before seen on sea or land. The pioneers looked forward to the creation of a "New Man." A national renaissance, they felt, was meaningless without a structural renewal of society... As late as 1928, leading pioneers still considered the vision vastly more vital than the national ideal. When Nazism forced Zionism to become a straightforward rescue operation that clashed with British restrictions on immigration to Palestine, the emphasis began to change from vision to national issues. The vision has since been watering down."

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Ben Gurion consistently favored the national project over the moral principle. Moshe Dayan once claimed that Ben Gurion believed that "

anyone who approaches the moral aspect of the Zionist problem is no Zionist." (see Eldar & Zertal's " Lords of the Land" p 13-14).

In 1960, Prime Minister Ben Gurion ordered Israeli operatives to capture the architect of The Final Solution, Adolf Eichmann, and bring him to trial in Jerusalem. For five long months, survivors of the Holocaust were invited to tell their stories: excruciating, heartbreaking reports of senseless murder, torture, and unimaginable evil. But at the trial's end, even as Eichmann was ushered to the gallows, no one better understood the origins or the nature of anti-Semitism. The trial was televised and broadcasted internationally, but no one thought to ask Eichmann how it was that hatred or cold-blooded destiny could have gone so far out of control as to translate into the murder of millions of innocent people. At the end of the day what remained was not greater insight but a further dilution of the original vision which required a measure of forgetfulness, a clean break from the past, and perhaps a disdain for those who constituted bygone eras. No question that the exposure of Sabras (children of Jewish descent, born or raised in Palestine/ Israel) to the horrors of the Holocaust, sapped much of the extraordinary energy which realizing the original vision demands. How then, are we to understand why Eichmann was brought to trial rather than killed as was the "Butcher of Riga" who had also escaped to Argentina?

On April 23rd, 2023, Tom Hurwitz, whose father Leo Hurwitz directed the television coverage of the Eichmann trial, published a brief essay in the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*. Hurwitz claimed that the Eichmann trial was not about fascism or anti-Semitism, but an opportunity for Ben Gurion and the Jewish Agency to rebrand the Zionist movement: "While the early days of Zionism extolled muscular, self-sufficient pioneers" Hurwitz wrote, "that image had not aged well in the postwar world." Hur-

witz could have gone farther. He could have claimed that for Ben Gurion and for the Jewish Agency the idea of Israel as a nation-state, a Jewish homeland, and a refuge, had always trumped the vision which transcended the state—which defined the state as a place from which a new world order would someday arise. To Ben Gurion and to The Jewish Agency, this vision was anathema, noise, which only got in the way of a hard reality which had to be confronted each morning and every night.

★★

The history of dilution, which recounts how it happened that a vision originally considered a fire which could not be consumed or contained was re-defined as cliché and then evaporated into thin air, constitutes a large swath of Israeli history from which an indefinite number of milestones could be carved out. One could address the big wars and the small ones which focused Israelis on issues near at hand at the expense of the spark which became ever more remote. One could consider the effect of further immigration or the so-called “mahapakh” of 1977, which was when Menahem Begin’s Likud won the government from the Labor Party that had ruled the country since Independence. One could think about the gradual disassembly of a dozen public institutions—the paramilitary “gadna”, the kibbutzim and collective “moshavim” which held on to the vision longer than most. One could consider the abandonment of efforts to “secularize” religious holidays or the gradual defunding of the daily doses of positive ideology in schools and in after-school programs. One could take the measure of forces which undid the hegemonic rule of the Histadrut (national labor union) or consider the undoing of early insistence on Hebrew as the only tolerable mode of communication.

In such shapes and forms, all of the above became the turpentine which erased and defaced

the big dream and went on to refashion Israel so that it soon began to seem as a nation like any other—with its own thieves and prostitutes, its peculiar roster of issues, rhythms, rhymes, cacophony.

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All of this would perhaps be fine had the various players which constitute Israel’s internal mosaic respected the incoming liberal ideology and had the state respected the hundreds of subcultures which made their pallet on the country’s floor. Though very far from ideal, liberalism and secularism could have perhaps remained sustainable. Even if the state did not abide by its commitments to “foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants... to ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all of its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex,” even if the Israeli government did not “guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture,” as promised in the Declaration of Independence, still the state could be sustained, flourish and grow. So yes, violations of rights and pushbacks from various sectors would render the country more volatile and less governable than it would be otherwise. And yes, unjust treatment of minorities, most significantly of Arab minorities in Israel and in the West Bank would remain morally reprehensible and politically dangerous. But probably Israel would survive and prevail, perhaps only with further militarization.

But the hazy liberalism, the impossible electoral system which currently exists, cannot and most probably will not be able to ensure the future of the state my father and I fought for. This state, for better and worse, cannot persist against the extreme forces introduced into the system by one particular subculture which has gone to great distances to provide itself with a

vision, a mission, a calling as intense and fiery as the vision which made Israel possible in the first place.

The reclusive and insular Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel, could easily or perhaps not so easily, continue to coexist within the Israeli heterodox reality. Except for the occasional ridiculousness (e.g. funding Arafat) this community has removed itself sufficiently far as to constitute no real obstruction. Israel, in turn, has provided the Haredi community with freedom extraordinaire; with carte blanche exemptions from military service, with state funding for Yeshivas, with amazing health care, and on and on. But even as the Orthodox community has not challenged the liberal framework, it has given rise to a peninsula, an arm, an outgrowth which is now threatening to bring the roof down over everyone's head. This rather newly knitted movement has latched itself to the old-time religion and drew to it many of the Orthodox and swept all of Israeli society, sometimes kicking and screaming, into a great vortex, a downward spiral which may have no bottom.

2. The rise of "religious zionism"/ "Gush Emunim"

By hook and crook and by a hazy idea of redemption, this movement, which trades under the name "religious Zionism" but could just as easily be called "the settler movement," has filled the lacuna in which the old vision once resided. The movement was perhaps given its first shape in the late 19th century—by Rabbis Alkilai and Kalischer who attempted to weld the ancient religion to recent Zionist awakenings. But the most significant force came from another direction—from a visionary Rabbi of the old school who is remembered as simply "Ha Rav" (The Rabbi).

Abraham Isaac Kook, upon whom the great scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem, conferred the honorable status "the last Kab-

balist," was born in Latvia in 1865, the year that the American Civil War finally ended. He studied in the Volozhin Yeshiva and after spending WW1 in Britain, he reached Palestine, becoming the chief Rabbi of Jerusalem. In the early 20s, Kook published "Orot" which was deemed a sorcerer's book and forbidden to orthodox Jewry.

Kook wrote:

Secular Zionists may think they do it for political, national, or socialist reasons but in fact—the actual reason for them coming to resettle in Israel is a religious Jewish spark in their soul, planted by God. Without their knowledge, they are contributing to the divine scheme. The role of religious Zionists is to help seculars establish a Jewish state and turn the spark into a great light. They should show them that the real source of Zionism is Judaism and teach them Torah. In the end, they will understand that the laws of Torah are the key to true harmony that will be a light for the nations and bring salvation to the world.

("Religious Zionism"/ ideology/ Wikipedia)

Kook's writings, with elaboration by his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, became the marching orders for supplicants seeking to extend the State's borders to biblical proportions. Since September 1967, when Hanan Porat, a young paratrooper who would study at Kook's seminary, Merkaz HaRav in Jerusalem, hammered in the first stake of Kfar Etzion in the newly conquered territories, the religious Zionist movement has continuously expanded. It has constructed a social, political, and economic framework comparable and probably more efficient than the one constructed by the earlier guard. The movement has also attracted more than a fair share of madmen and insane murderers such as Dr. Baruch Goldstein, fascist politicians including Meir Kahana, and Yigal

Amir, who on the 4th November 1995 assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Kook's writing is central to the settler mindset and to the mindsets of hundreds of thousands of religious Zionists who have made their home outside but also inside the Green Line. By a circuitous route that winds and threads through Kahanism, Kook's doctrines have also shaped the very souls of Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich who now lead "Otsmah Yehudit" and The Nationalist Religious- Tkuma Party respectively. It is these two parties, in a coalition with an opportunistic Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, that control 64 seats in the 120 seat Knesset, Israel's parliament. And it is this coalition which must now face the music.

★★

This then is the way that the sides are drawn—a rock and a hard place. On the one side an *erev rav*—a vast array of very powerful Israelis, ex-generals and ex officio CEOs, bankers, union heads, scholars, high-tech prodigies, everyday Israelis who spill into the streets each week-end by the hundreds of thousands. On the other side, Rabbi Kook's disciples holding the Prime Minister in firm but perhaps voluntary head-lock, but also inspiring hundreds and thousands of sympathizers who are now hitting the pavement in support of their government. What we are getting is the great stand-off, Israel vs. Israel—the threat of a civil war.

It is possible to frame the stand-off differently, less histrionically, perhaps without the backstory and maybe without the theatre. One could try and understand what is going on, as so many have tried, as no more than opposition to the coalition's proposed judicial overhaul. On this view, the standoff could dissolve, should the Prime Minister back off the proposed legislation. To go with this option is probably to overstate the protesters' commitment to a court which has played its assigned

role of check on legislative powers rather tepidly. Haaretz journalist, Anshel Pfeffer, was surely correct when he claimed that "if the government pushing to reform the powers of the Supreme Court was not dominated by religious parties—Shas, United Torah Judaism, Religious Zionism, and Otzma Yehudit—the protest would be much more limited and basically consist of Meretz and a few Labor voters. And the only news organization covering the protests would be Haaretz." (March 10, 2023)

One could claim that the protesters are out to save democracy. But if this way of framing the protests is accepted, then it must come with a caveat stating that both the current Israeli electoral system and the proportional representation which currently granted seats in the Knesset to ten parties, favors the Religious Zionist/Hardi community. So if secular-liberal Israelis are said to be advocating for "democracy" it must be that they are also and at the same time advocating for major system-wide reform. Otherwise, they are shooting themselves in the foot.

To frame the protests as a secular uprising is closer to the truth, except that secularism and liberalism lack sufficient passionate intensity to hold together this leaderless movement. Does it make sense to suggest that the great force which keeps drawing people into the streets is fear of theocracy or, on the other hand, an ineluctable commitment to a halachic state? Is this the rock and the hard place? Can fear which is negative hold back the positive, messianic movement? At a recent event held at President Herzog's residence, the Jerusalem Post's senior commentator and Fellow at the Hartmann Institute, Amotz Asa-El, argued that each of the past 12 civil wars in Israel ended 80 years of sovereignty. His point was a warning. Israel at 75 is coming close to the watermark which has sealed its fate in the past. Can disaster be averted? Could one not see in and

around the tensions developing in the streets, an opportunity to attain greater stability, more intensity, and freedom? Is it possible to imagine that the struggle which may, of course, be negotiated away, should not be negotiated away; that Israelis should seize the moment, form the momentum and shape it into a ladder capable of reaching beyond itself? The religious Zionist movement won't take such an initiative. Only the protesters will do that. But to do that they must drop the demand for a country that is like all others and opt instead for the original vision which called on Israel to become "Or Lagoyim", (Light unto Nations). They must ask themselves how to re-imagine the social, political, economic, and religious institutions so as to promote the gradual emergence of citizens who are Human Beings before they are anything else. To sustain such efforts they

must commit to Tikkun Olam, the Big Fix, an orientation which goes forward on the first law of ecology which is the assumption that everything is connected to everything else and to solve one big problem requires solving all of them. ●



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Palestinian-Jewish Solidarity Statement

TIKKUN | BEYT TIKKUN

WITHIN DAYS OF THE HORRIFIC ATTACK by Hamas and Israel's punishing response, Rabbi Cat Zavis reached out to Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian Human Rights Lawyer, Rabbi Esther Azar, an Arab Jewish rabbi and trauma specialist, and Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun Magazine* to write a joint statement in response to the unfolding horrors in Israel/Palestine. We published our statement on October 12th and immediately received positive responses from around the world.

As of mid-December, over 7,000 people of diverse racial, gender, ethnic, religious, and national identities have signed our statement. We are grateful that calls for a permanent ceasefire have expanded across the globe.

Our statement stands as a testament to the power of Jews and Palestinians joining together to speak truth, challenge injustice, and advocate for a more loving and just world. In addition to the demands in our statement, we call for the immediate release of Israelis held in Gaza and Palestinians held in Israel.

What follows is our joint statement. You can read it and add your name by [clicking here](http://www.tikkun.org/urgent-action-israel-palestine/). www.tikkun.org/urgent-action-israel-palestine/

PALESTINIAN-JEWISH SOLIDARITY

This statement is written and signed by Palestinians, Jews, and others who are committed to holding complex truths and striving to overcome polarization. We feel the pain of our people, identify with their pain, and need to work together to uplift our shared humanity.

The unfolding horror in Israel and Gaza is an escalation of decades of state-sanctioned violence by Israel against Palestinians. We condemn the horrific actions of Hamas against Israeli civilians. We likewise condemn Israel's unbridled bombing and cutting off access to all basic needs, including food, water, electricity, and medical care. Attacks on Palestinian and Israeli civilians are repugnant.

Israeli violence against Palestinians has been intentionally hidden, slow, and steady. Contrary to what the media is reporting, this attack was not unprovoked. The Israeli and American governments have worked together to suppress and deny the inhumane acts against Palestinians that have led to this moment. There are Palestinians and Jews who have been raising red flags and warning about this inevitable outcome for decades, only to be dismissed and ignored.

The world's failure to challenge Israel's ongoing occupation, apartheid, and unbridled violence by settlers and soldiers in the West Bank provides the context for what is happening now. The recent Israeli government's escalation of violence, encroachment of Al Aqsa Mosque, and its 16-year siege of Gaza has led to the current explosion.

We repeat: the brutality of Hamas' attack on Israeli civilians is unjustified.

As we watch the violent attacks and rallying of xenophobia on both sides, we are broken-hearted. Although it feels like a time to stand with "our people," we know this is a time to come together. This is a time of great suffering for all; a time of painful emotions. It is only by recognizing our shared fears and our shared tears that we will find our way through this nightmare. It is a struggle we need to undertake jointly.

When we fall back into our separate and distinct identities we risk becoming part of the problem, not the solution. Both peoples suffer from ongoing trauma. We are all on high alert. The fear is palpable. And it is easy for us to objectify the 'other.'

We seek a third path that neither perpetuates a xenophobic response nor sustains an unjust status quo. This moment calls us to slow down, sit with the pain and complexity, and grapple with our discomfort. It is a moment for digging deep, seeing across differences, and remembering our deep yearning for peace and justice. It is only through compassion and empathy that we will find a different way.

We recognize and uplift the humanity of all peoples in Israel/Palestine.

We call for an immediate ceasefire from Hamas and Israel.

We demand that basic needs be provided to Gazans.

We demand that the United States provide only humanitarian support to Israel and Gaza.

We support the creation of a movement that recognizes and affirms the humanity, dignity, and desire of both peoples to live in peace through reconciliation and justice. ●



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Netanyahu and Amalek: Amalek and the Modern State of Israel

ARIEL GOLD



YOU MUST 'REMEMBER WHAT AMALEK HAS done to you," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admonished on October 28, announcing the "second phase," a ground invasion, of Israel's war in Gaza.

Amalek, in the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible), is a nation that ambushed the Israelites making their way to the Promised Land. Following the attack, which they were able to beat back, God instructed that they must never forget and must wage an eternal war until no trace of Amalek's existence remains. Generations later, King Saul killed all but the Amalekite king, whose descendent, Haman, generations after that, in the story of Purim, plotted to kill all the Jews in Persia.

Netanyahu is notoriously secular in his private life. But, ever the shrewd politician, scripture is his language of choice to sell his war to Jewish supremacists in Israel and right-wing Evangelicals in the U.S.

The victims of Hamas' vile October 7 attack come from what is referred to as the "Gaza envelope." Heavy with kibbutzim (intentional collectives, traditionally based around agriculture), its [residents](#) are known for being secular and left-leaning.

Asked if losing his parents in Hamas's terror attack had affected his political views, Maoz Inon, [pleaded](#) not for revenge but a reassessment of basing security "on military might."

Likewise, Yotam Kipnis in [eulogizing for his father](#), said "We will not stay silent while the cannons roar, and we won't forget that Dad loved peace. He wasn't willing to serve in the territories. Do not write my father's name on a missile, he wouldn't have wanted that."

Tom Godo, whose son lived and died in Kibbutz Kissufim, [blamed the Netanyahu administration](#): "The fingers that pulled the trigger and murdered, the hands that held the knives that stabbed and beheaded and slashed were the loyal and determined emissaries of the accursed, messianic and corrupt government [of Israel]."

Even after spending 16 hostages in Gaza, eighty-five-year-old peace activist [Yocheved Lifshitz](#) retained her belief in reconciliation. Upon being transferred to the Red Cross, she took the hand of her Hamas handler and bade him "Shalom," (peace).

It's not the families of those murdered on October 7, nor the families of the hostages who have been sleeping in tents outside the

military headquarters in Tel Aviv **demanding** all Palestinian political prisoners be released in exchange for their loved ones Netanyahu is invoking Amalek to, but the ideological descendants of Kach.

The religious-nationalist **Kach party** was founded in 1971 by Brooklyn-born Rabbi Meir Kahane who argued for “the immediate transfer of the Arabs,” whom he referred to as “dogs.” In 1984, the one time his party secured a single seat in the Knesset, Kahane introduced legislation to ban all Jewish-Gentile marriages and sexual relations and revoke the Israeli citizenship of non-Jews.

The Kach party was so violently racist that it was **prohibited** from running in Israel’s next election, banned entirely in 1994, and defined as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

In what could be perceived as another iteration of Amalek, in 2019, Kahane follower Itamar Ben Gvir formed the Jewish Power party, an ideological offshoot of Kach. Merging with other far-right fundamentalist parties to form **Religious Zionism**, in 2022, they won the third-largest share of Israel’s parliament seats. This is the audience Netanyahu is addressing, but not only them.

On October 8, the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), which **claims** to represent millions, sent out an email stating that Hamas’ attack, “was not launched due to grievances over the Israeli ‘occupation’ or any real dangers to the al-Aqsa mosque. Rather, it was driven by the ancient “Spirit of Amalek.”

On October 24, Christians United for Israel, which boasts a membership of over 10 million, raised \$25 million in **a single night** in support of Israel (they raised and donated \$100 million over the week). Standing beside CUFI’s Pastor John Hagee, who in 2008 **referred** to Hitler as a “hunter” sent by God “to help Jews reach

the promised land,” was Israeli Ambassador to Israel Gilan Erdad.

Given their **belief** that when enough Jews have populated their modern state, the apocalypse will come, and “**a sea of [Jewish and Muslim] human blood**” will fill the land, it’s hard to think of Evangelical Zionist support for Israel as a heartfelt commitment to the protection of the Jewish people. Despite that, amid **declining** Jewish-American support for Israel, especially among young Jews, Israel has for years been **courting** Evangelical support. However, **polls** are finding the support of young Evangelicals is also rapidly declining, dropping from 75% to 34% between 2018 and 2021.

Religious nationalism may be soaring in Israel, but that’s not the trend in America. Some people of faith, like **Adam Strater**, the senior Jewish educator for Georgia Hillels, are even reclaiming the story of Amalek as a model for Jews to reject “the evil impulse,” described in the Zohar (3:160a) and “make the moral choice to reorient the tradition towards a shared sense of solidarity, and ultimately, liberation.” Given the rapidly climbing toll of death in Gaza – over 9,000 people killed already – these changes could not be more welcome or come soon enough. ●



ARIEL GOLD is the executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation–USA, the oldest interfaith organization in the country.

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Hamas's Horrific Miscalculation & Israel's Horrific Response

MARK LEVINE

I WILL NOT SOON FORGET THAT MORNING — MY morning — of October 7. I woke up and, still bleary-eyed, scrolled on Facebook just to see the latest from friends. What I saw instead was various photos and artwork of hanggliders and kites flying towards the sun and bulldozers breaking through a fence. I recognized these as somehow referencing Palestine and likely Gaza, and my immediate thought was, “My God, they’ve finally done it. They broke out of Gaza. The real ‘March of Return’ has begun.”

For those who don’t know about it, the “Great March of Return” was a massive but largely symbolic march by Palestinians to the heavily policed border zones encircling and imprisoning Gaza in 2018-19 to remind the world of Gaza’s present plight and roots in the expul-

sion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes in what became Israel in 1948. Israeli forces, as always, responded with massive force, killing almost 300 people and injured over 10 thousand. My Palestinian friends in Gaza, where I’ve worked as a journalist and researcher for almost thirty years, had long talked about such a march, but until 2018 Hamas largely prevented it, because a massive act of anti-colonial civil disobedience was simply not on brand, not something they knew how to manage or control. Indeed, it called Hamas’s entire modus operandi of spectacular attacks on civilians into question. But the pressure of almost two decades of siege proved too much and ultimately Hamas had little choice but to let it happen, and then largely stood by as Israel responded in its usual manner.

Using a bulldozer, the symbol of the Israeli occupation, to break through an ostensibly impregnable security fence was seemingly brilliant. Still, as I made my coffee and tried to wake up my eyes, I feared for the marchers I presumed were streaming through the fence (as an early image showed, many with bicycles), and hoped they might be joined by Israeli peace activists, as had occurred at many marches in the West Bank (there were many solidarity activities with Israeli and Gazan activists, but joint actions were impossible given the 17-year border closure) and get a few kilometers into Israel before the IDF stopped and began arresting them, or worse.

When I came back to my phone a half hour later, however, new images began appearing, this time photos of Israelis with Hebrew text underneath, including a photo of a brilliant young postdoc named Haim Katsman, whom I'd informally advised during his doctoral research at the University of Washington. My first thought was that he'd just won a prize for his work or got hired somewhere, but when I read the Hebrew it became clear that the photo was a memorial, not a celebration. It also became clear that Haim had been murdered in an unprecedented Hamas attack on Israeli civilians and soldiers in the vicinity of Gaza that was still unfolding, and whose extent was just becoming clear. And then my heart sank. Suddenly, the meaning of the gliders, kites, and bulldozers became clear. They didn't symbolize broad hopes for freedom, or a mass civil disobedience action. They indicated the launching of an unprecedented war by Hamas against Israel – indeed, against any Israeli they could find, including one of the most anti-occupation activists I'd ever met, Haim Katsman. The beginning of a total war.

I quickly put up a post in tribute to Haim, and other peace activists I knew who'd been killed or kidnapped, and hoped – although I knew

better – that it wouldn't be the first of an unending stream of tributes to Israeli and Palestinian friends, colleagues, and comrades lost to violence in the coming period.

At that moment, as the numbers of Israeli dead and kidnapped seemed to double by the hour and images and videos posted by Hamas of their attacks began to circulate, I also knew what was coming: an unprecedented Israeli response that would likely decimate Gaza, kill tens of thousands of people, and potentially lead to the forced flight of hundreds of thousands of inhabitants across the border to Egypt. This was in fact a long held and well-known Israeli goal, if an unrealizable one under normal circumstances: if enough Gazans could be forced out of the Strip, Israel could annex the entirety of the Occupied Territories and even give Palestinians some form of citizenship without tipping the demographic balance in their favor. End of Palestine, end of conflict (what would happen to "Greater Israel" in the long term was rarely considered by advocates of this plan). Israel has long claimed "Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity" for peace; the Netanyahu government would not let this opportunity pass to change the balance of people, and forces, permanently, especially after suffering such a horrific and humiliating attack by a group it openly bragged about having bought off with Qatari largesse.

None of the artwork produced in real time of and by Palestinians depicting them gliding and bulldozing towards the sun, towards freedom, included weapons. They were almost hallucinatory in their impressionism. Perhaps it's because the artists implicitly understood that the guns would not bring freedom, but only mass death on all sides, and could not bear to include them. Or perhaps the artists of the first images didn't know what was happening when they made the art (the first images of people streaming through the fence showed them with

bicycles and backpacks, not AK-47s or RPGs). Either way, the absence was telling, and in fact out of character with the traditional revolutionary aesthetic of Palestinian resistance art. Indeed, in previous hang glider attacks (which usually occurred from Lebanese soil), the artwork clearly included AK-47s held by the hang gliders. Leila Khaled, the most (in)famous Palestinian freedom fighter/terrorist outside Yasser Arafat, was almost never depicted without her AK or her keffiyeh. Arafat himself famously came to the UN "with an olive branch and a gun."

But these were the days when Palestinians still enjoyed the support of the Soviet Union and other supposedly "anti-colonial" regimes like Saddam, Ghaddafi, or Assad. The AK was still a near universal symbol of liberation struggles globally, the great equalizer against the far more sophisticated weaponry of the imperialist or (neo)colonial oppressors. Their absence said a lot about the lack of imagination amongst all sides today. Palestinians have been using non-violence civil resistance for decades to slow down the relentless occupation. Most everyone who's led that movement has been imprisoned, exiled, or killed. To this day, every day, they continue such struggles, now largely out of view of the world as Israel has managed much more successfully to prevent Israeli and international activists from joining these actions as they did in the past, enabling far more force to be deployed against them in return.

At the same time, Hamas has never seen militant non-violence as a useful tool. It's simply outside the movement's extremely limited worldview and way of thinking and being. I interviewed spokesman Ghazi Hamad in Gaza in 2003, during the wave of suicide bombings that completely derailed the al-Aqsa Intifada. When I asked him point-black why Hamas relied entirely on a tactic that only succeeded in getting more Palestinians killed, more homes

bulldozed, and more land expropriated, he shrugged and responded, "We know the violence doesn't work, but we don't know what else to do."

In the ensuing two decades, needless to say, Hamas didn't bother to make up for lost time learning new tactics, never mind a different overall strategy (we can compare Hamas to the anarchist Kurds of Rojava, who have sent scores of activists to study the strategy and revolutionary culture of the Zapatistas). Indeed, after it took control of Gaza in 2006, Hamas forces regularly prevented non-violent protests from occurring. When young Gazans marched to Erez checkpoint, it was Hamas gunmen who stopped them from getting close, not Israeli forces. When Gazans tried to organize new youth-led movements for change, it was often Hamas that harassed the activists and forced many of them into exile. The movement retained its singular vision of spectacular confrontations with Israel, even as it coordinated with Israel to maintain some semblance of peace, punctuated by occasional spasms of rocket-fire that would lead to Israel's "mowing the lawn" in response, destroying a few neighborhoods and killing a couple of thousand people. Acceptable casualties for both "sides," apparently, to maintain a status quo that kept Hamas in power and on the money train from the Gulf arriving on schedule—even as successive Israeli governments openly declared paying off Hamas was the best strategy to keep Palestinians divided and foreclose any possibility of a two-state solution.

Well, no one's bothering to mow the lawn today. Hamas's October 7 attack was one of the worst acts of terrorism in half a century, joining September 11 as a date that will live in infamy not just in Israel but in the West, which saw the echoes of bin Laden, and ISIS in the live-streamed indiscriminate mass murder of civilians (and hundreds of soldiers as well).

Whatever the rationality behind and justifying it in the minds of Hamas leaders and fighters (interviews with Hamas leaders in the Arab media report the movement feared an Israeli takeover of the al-Aqsa compound was imminent, among other fears) this action could only be interpreted as the start of a total war, a no holds barred conflict where any remaining respect for International Humanitarian Law and human rights, for civilian lives and safety, would be buried beneath rivers of blood and piles of rubble and corpses. Activists have long complained that Israel has used and abused International Law to its advantage. We were all about to find out what happens when it doesn't even bother to pay lip service to it.

Here's the thing about total war: when the "gloves come off," when all rules of engagement are removed, the stronger side usually wins, and genocide begins to come into view. If Israel's historic response to Palestinian attacks has been on the order of a 10-1 ratio of dead, and far more injured, October 7 would surely skew that number even more. 15 or 20 to 1 was more likely, and as the days have turned to weeks and now nearly a month, the meaning of that ratio becomes clear with a humanitarian catastrophe that even seasoned conflict zone reporters, UN personnel and diplomats, who are used to seeing such carnage, are having trouble finding the words to describe.

At the same time, the fact that in the days after October 7 Israel initiated the single most successful land-grab since 1967 in the Bedouin areas of the West Bank that Israel has long coveted and refused to give Palestinians any control over, reminds us that in the end Gaza has always served as both distraction and tool; the real prize has always remained East Jerusalem and the West Bank heartlands of "Biblical Israel;" whenever violence in and from Gaza has flared, land seizures almost always occur along with it.

As Israel's response continues unabated I fear that Israel-Palestine has entered its total war phase, a World War II in miniature, with the goal of each side being to kill enough civilians on the other side to force surrender or at least a negotiated settlement closer to one's acceptable terms.

The horrible calculus of total war is that the more violence either side suffers, the more it will have to use violence in response to justify its dead. And Israel has a lot more firepower than Palestinians, a massive strategic advantage, and now a seemingly existential reason to throw any semblance of respect for international law to the wind. And the West, sensing this is a defining "us-and-them" moment, is taking Israel's side, not just against Hamas, or even all Palestinians, but against anyone, including their own citizens, who challenges the official policy of unquestioned support for whatever force Israel uses to destroy any Palestinian opposition.

Irvine, CA, October 28, 2023. A version of this essay was presented at UC Irvine's "Ask a UCI Professor About Gaza" Teach-In on October 30, 2023. ●



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Palestinian-Jewish Let Israel Vote; Let Gaza Vote

RABBI ARTHUR WASKOW, PH.D.

In the Bible's first semi-mythic story of what we now call the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Abraham dies decades after he has endangered the lives of his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. His two sons come together to mourn and bury their dangerous father. As a result, Isaac goes to live at Ishmael's well. Reconciliation!

"From the tears of grief spring up the well-spring waters of peace and reconciliation."
(Gen. 25: 7-11)

This story is intended to be a teaching of spiritual transformation. Can it be applied today to the aftermath of war, to politics, to existential fears among both peoples?

Gaza is governed by a political party that has three subdivisions, each often able to act on its own. The military wing did that on October 7, with disastrous and disgusting results. As a body, Hamas is anti-democratic at home and its military is willing to commit atrocities of killing Israeli civilians, captive-taking of civilians, and worse.

In Israel barely five weeks ago, hundreds of thousands of citizens had joined during a period of nine months in mass civil disobedience



against a regime they called anti-democratic, racist, and corrupt. The regime refused to budge on its plans to end the independent judiciary.

But then came the Hamas attack with all its atrocities – to which the Netanyahu government and his whole Occupation regime had been utterly blind, through its arrogant contempt toward Hamas and its obsession with Iran as Israel's worst enemy. (Netanyahu had even channeled money to Hamas so that it would break the unity of Palestinian nationalism.)

Israeli society's anger at its own government's crucial failure was soon drowned out by the atrocious total war against the people of Gaza, under the guise of destroying Hamas. But that response and a world-wide revulsion at the resulting body count in Gaza — the tears of grief and chants of anger — have begun to open up two new possibilities:

LET ISRAEL VOTE, LET GAZA VOTE

This will not be easy, on either side.

On the Israeli side, the Resistance needs to reconstitute itself with six new planks in its platform and perhaps, while pursuing its civil-disobedience campaign, also setting up a new broad-based political party:

1. Netanyahu and his whole national-security leadership failed Israel at the hour of its greatest need, and must be replaced at once;
2. There must be a shared release of Palestinians held in Israeli prisoners in exchange for all captives taken by the Hamas attack;
3. The only way to eliminate Hamas or some renamed substitute is not with an Israeli reoccupation of Gaza but with a UN-supervised election;
4. Israel commits itself to agreement on a treaty with a Palestine on the West Bank and Gaza, if Gaza elects a government committed to that result;
5. Agreement to greatly expand the list of non-military goods that can be traded by Gaza with Israel and the world.
6. Elections in Israel by Tu B'Shvat, ReBirthday of the Tree of Life— January 24, 2024

In Gaza, the goal should also be an election as soon as possible. Hamas has done much to destroy all alternative political forces that might welcome a peace-oriented Israeli government. Even with the military arm of Hamas gone or seriously weakened there would have to be a UN-sponsored commission to oversee social and political as well as physical and medical rebuilding, to let democratic life re-awaken. It is barely possible that non-military remnants of Hamas will join in such a democratic reconstruction.

As that process grows from seed to sprout, a political grouping should be encouraged that is critical of the military wing of Hamas for helping the ultra-right-wing regime in Israel bring disaster on Gaza and that promises to negotiate in full dignity with a new Israeli government for a peace-committed sovereign Palestine. Perhaps a pro-Palestinian country like Brazil could supervise such an effort. Israeli troops and police would have to withdraw.

The election campaign itself and the election could be supervised by a UN Peacekeeping Force made up of troops from at least one country friendly to Israel (Germany?) and at least one friendly to Palestine (Brazil?).

It might or might not be wise for all political parties that register for this election to be required to affirm the obligations of a UN Member to refrain from attacks on other countries.

This prescription for peace may sound utopian. Perhaps it is. But the shock to both societies has been so profound – forcing both to face too many deaths – that perhaps a transformative moment will soon arrive, bringing others in the two societies to power. ●



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Prayers of Peace for Palestine and Israel

NEJOUD AL-YAGOUT

IN A REGION WHICH CONDITIONS US THAT THE Palestinian cause is an Arab and Muslim cause, my political ideals were pretty much thrust upon me. I grew up believing in these ideals but fortunately outgrew them when I realized I was polarizing the world and complicit in a matrix of divisiveness. This is not to say I no longer support the Palestinian cause, but that I no longer see the situation from only an Arab and Muslim perspective. I now see it through a more expansive lens, a lens in which I am not a Kuwaiti or an Arab or a Muslim, but a human being.

The most pressing political crisis in the region, one which seems never-ending, is the Palestinian cause. Of course, seeing only images of Israeli soldiers pointing machine guns at children, arresting juveniles, pushing elderly people and women, storming Al Aqsa Mosque, reducing buildings to rubble, displacing families, implementing legislation of undeniable apartheid, dehumanizing Palestinians at checkpoints, it was easy to stand with Palestine. And yet, I couldn't shake off the silent whisper of compassion toward Israelis that was taking hold of me when I realized that for years Jews had been ostracized, killed, condemned, and kicked out of one land after another.

What was wrong with me? I asked myself. How can I embrace the enemy? Was I a traitor? And then I asked myself: A traitor to who? Who was I betraying? Was I betraying Palestinians? Kuwaitis? Arabs? Muslims? Then I realized: If



we are all one family, then I am betraying all of us when I take sides. If I align myself to an ideology, an ideology of us vs. them, I am only betraying myself.

I tried reading history. Arguably, as I researched, it was difficult not to take the side of Palestine, because of the Nakba (and consequent denial of the Nakba), and the treatment of Palestinians which continues up to today. And watching footage of a bus of entitled settlers coming to choose which house they would occupy in already occupied territories was visceral. Also, Palestine is under occupation and Gaza, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights of Syria have not been returned since the 1967 six-day war. Such factors made it difficult for me not to take sides. And yet...

Just as I was repulsed by Israeli soldiers for killing unarmed Palestinian children, teenagers, and adults, I was appalled by Palestinians who murdered Israelis in bars and restaurants and malls. I was appalled by Palestinians calling

those who killed innocent Israeli or Jewish civilians martyrs and cheering the deaths of victims. And today I am appalled by the Hamas incursion into Israel. And I am appalled by anyone who supports taking civilians hostage, parading a disrobed woman's body in the back of a jeep while passerby spit on her, taking the elderly and babies hostage, killing families and a dog, raiding a kibbutz, and burning it to the ground. And just as I am heartbroken that Jews chant hate toward Palestinians and Muslims, I am just as saddened when Palestinians chant death to Jews and Israelis. Just as I am revolted by Israel encroaching upon the land of Palestinians, it terrorizes me to know that if Palestinians (and a few other countries) were as powerful as Israel, they would wipe Israel off the entire map (and are proud to admit doing so). As I am equally shocked by what both sides inflict on the other, I take a step back. And dare I say it: I pray for peace in both countries.

I pray for peace in a region that hides behind religion to justify its hatred. Whether Jew or Christian or Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist or whatever religion we hail from, we can no longer afford to use religion as an excuse to harm others. And Muslims who shout "Allahu Akbar" during their rampages are making a mockery of God. God radiates compassion, mercy, and divine love. Nothing, not even colonization, occupation, or an invasion justifies killing civilians, taking them hostage, and threatening to execute them. This is not religion or resistance. This is murder and hatred disguised as a cause. And anyone who supports this madness, regardless of which side they take, is as guilty as the resistance fighters and soldiers who continue to massacre and dehumanize the "other." Nobody should utter: I stand with... Because standing with one side galvanizes enmity and renders those who perpetrate war crimes blameless. Standing with one country at the expense of the other robs the world of opportunities to forge diplomatic ties and peace. Be-

sides, both Israel and Palestine have committed blatant war crimes (regardless of who the original perpetrator of the conflict was or is). Saying the so-called "enemy" deserves it because of years of persecution only keeps both countries stuck in a quagmire of war and revenge and fear and high states of alert and misery for both populations. Supporting resistance is dangerous because the anger and hatred that are carried while brandishing a weapon only results in bloodshed, the raping of women and the killing children and babies as we have seen time and time again throughout history. How is that ever justifiable? Ever?

Every country and people has the right to defend itself, as many supporters of violence will insist. But defending oneself can take the form of nonviolent resistance and peace. Only peace breeds peace. As far back as 494 BC, when the plebeians left the city and refused to work in order for amends to be made by the Roman consuls, and up to Gandhi's pledge of "ahimsa," nonviolent resistance has succeeded and will continue to succeed. Because war and violent resistance only creates more divisiveness and horrific retaliation.

In the same way that nobody wants to see Israeli soldiers raid Gaza and the West Bank, and kill families and children, how can anyone claim to be elated seeing the Hamas incursion into Israel in which peaceful festival goers were shot at point blank? Where is our humanity? If we shudder at murder, we should condemn it on all sides. We should never revel when an "enemy" is slaughtered.

Human beings create borders and then fight to the death to defend them. In any case, regardless of what many Arabs hope, Israel is not going away. For peace to become a reality, and for Israelis and Arabs to live side by side, we have no choice but to root for both. As Arabs, we can continue to support Palestine but should also insist on peace and give a plat-

form to the many initiatives of Palestinians and Israelis who are coming together to work for peace. And Israelis and Zionists should extend the Abrahamic Accord first and foremost to Palestine and then to other countries which are considered their enemies.

We tried resistance. We tried retaliation. Nothing has worked. Pro-Palestinian or Pro-Israeli protests have only increased extremism and nationalism on both sides. We will never change anything until we recognize the hate that lurks beneath which needs to be alchemized into love. Love is the only solution we have never tried! We must coexist and teach our youth to accept one another rather than educate them to hate. We must begin to root for peace.

It's time to root for both Palestine and Israel and wish for a peaceful future rather than rejoicing at recurring images of bloodshed and artillery. Enough! ●



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Mira Zaki

The Elephant in the Room

Ten Years as an Idol-Worshiper

OMRI NAVOT

I kneel before a statue of Ganesh, staring into the eyes of the elephant-headed god, tears welling up in my own. We're at "Dance Church," an ecstatic queer dance party in a yoga studio, with trippy music and heady conversation pulsing behind us. Overcome with grief, I take refuge in this corner to—I don't know what—to pray, I suppose. Breathing deep, I feel into my troubles. I'm thirty-one and my life is a mess. I'm devastated by a recent breakup; I abandoned my career as an animator to try and finish a novel, which is going nowhere; I'm out of work, living alone, and contemplating suicide, lonely and heartbroken in New York City.

I've never prayed before. I don't even believe in God. But before the statue, all else fades and my thoughts take on a crystal-clear quality, soothing and steady, as if channeling Ganesh, The Remover of Obstacles. *Your life is so good right now. You are finding your voice, your path, and your community. You will finish that novel. You will love again. You will learn to heal yourself and others. You have risked much and suffered losses, but you are on your way.*

I reside in the comfort of his message, surprised by its clarity and wisdom, even as I recognize it as my own. Desperation wanes,

opening up to a glimmer of trust in something bigger than me. My breath fuller and head lighter, I return to the dance floor, sweating out my joy and sorrow.

* * *

Soon after that party I purchased a Ganesh idol for my home, consecrating a relationship with the god that had started in my yoga training. Years of yoga opened me up profoundly, revealing the anger and anxiety lurking in my body, calming my nerves and leading me towards a fuller, more courageous life. I'd read the Bhagavad Gita, learned about The Nature of Being, and cultivated a meditation habit. My studies and contemplations always came back to a central lesson—to love myself—which became my most important reminder.

In my yoga teacher training, while we learned the invocation to Ganesh, *Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha*, one young woman sat aside silently. An observant Jew, she declined to participate in chants that invoked a pagan deity. It hadn't occurred to me, a secular Jew, that chanting might violate a commandment. I was born in Israel and given the biblical name Omri. Hebrew was my mother tongue. My family dipped apples in honey and lit Shabbat candles, but we never went to synagogue or tolerated belief

in God. We were scientists and intellectuals, descendants of Holocaust survivors, and immigrants to America. My father had instilled in us a revulsion for religion, for religion led to his parents' persecution. I internalized these ideas: God was nonsense, faith was foolery, and traditions were stubborn vestiges of our ancestors' archaic ways.

Yet a personal spirituality was bubbling up within me, longing to express itself. I made space for the Ganesh idol on my meditation shelf, next to a collection of crystals, incenses, and oils. The shelf was now an altar, and I felt an awesome humility, inviting a god into my home. Soon, Ganesh was joined by a candle in devotion to Hecate, an owl to honor Athena, and a small statue of Horace, the Egyptian falcon god. I delighted in choosing my favorite deities from different cultures, as if hosting dinner party guests from far-flung corners of the world: here's a Babylonian underworld goddess next to a Greek sky god, a Celtic faerie spirit flitting between them. Curating my neopagan practice in this way was a privilege; after my family was exiled by genocide and displaced by migration, I landed in the dominant culture in an age of globalism, free to access a variety of traditions. Questions of appropriation gave me pause, but I chose to work with foreign deities because that was the only path I saw towards spiritual well-being. In my private rituals I'd enter a meditative trance and convene a council, calling each guide in turn for their particular attributes: strength, creativity, justice, healing, protection—which were in fact aspects of my higher self reflected in divine figures. Ganesh, as is his place in Hindu tradition, always held the first seat, called in before any others.

Pagan practices helped me survive depression and even thrive, blossoming as a yogi, writing daily, and connecting with the radical faeries, a community of queer healers, artists, and activists. As my personal pantheon grew, I never

paused to consider why I hadn't made room for Judaism on my shelf.

While I was exploring Buddhist and pagan spirituality, my twin sister developed an affinity for our birth religion. She and I were deeply connected, entering the world together, sharing a room through our teenage years, and trying to make sense of growing up in a foreign country. In young adulthood, my sister suffered from panic attacks, and eventually returned to live in Israel, finding her way to the teachings of our people. Her panic attacks subsided as she leaned into Judaism, and she became more stable, healthy, and grateful to be alive. Her journey ignited my own curiosity.

At age thirty-four, I signed up for an Introduction to Judaism course, hoping to gain a basic understanding and reconcile my ancestry with my spirituality. Learning customs that my parents never passed down, I rearranged my room, turning my altar to the east so I could meditate facing Jerusalem. I purchased a traditional wool tallis as a meditation shroud, even as I continued to sit in a Zen style. I bought a copy of the Torah, which sat on my nightstand next to Alan Watts, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Diamond Sutra.

But one feature of Judaism wouldn't reconcile so easily: the injunction against idol worship. I studied the Exodus verses in which God hands down the second commandment—*Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image*—and wondered, why did He so despise idolatry? Why, when the wandering Hebrews bowed before the golden calf, did Moses and Aaron respond by slaughtering three thousand of their brethren? The text provided little insight, except to say that He was a jealous God, which left me scratching my head. Why was the All-Powerful-All-Knowing beholden to jealousy, that ugliest of emotions, if there were no other gods besides Him?

Confounded, I turned to modern discourses, which tended toward the idea that any image of our infinite God was an insult to God's fundamentally unknowable nature. While I liked that notion philosophically, it didn't explain the sheer hatred and gross violence that befell idol worshipers in the Bible. I was left with only an anthropological answer: As a matter of politics and self-preservation, the ancient Hebrews' ruling class had codified their power with patriarchal monotheism, outlawing the worship of foreign gods and goddesses to preserve their own authority. They took extreme measures to root out the beliefs of neighboring pagan tribes, lest they face extinction by assimilation. I concluded that the second commandment was born of overprotectiveness and ethnocentrism, part of Jew's pathological identification as a "chosen" yet perpetually victimized race. This was a direct affront to my democratic values, that we belong to a global community of equals. I was a human first and a Jew second (or third or fourth, after my queerness and my nationality).

The more I studied Judaism, the more it turned me off. The first two books of The Bible aggrandized deceit, theft, and rape. Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people was rooted in a deep-seated xenophobia, as ancient as the Bible itself. Jewish orthodoxy rejected queer and gender nonconforming people, casting us outside its strict gender binary. In all these ways, Judaism drew hard lines between "us" and "them," upsetting my desire for open-mindedness. Most of all, I resented the limits Judaism imposed on my spiritual life. I wanted my religion to guide me into mystery, to open a direct portal to spirit, not mediated by rigid traditions, nor hidden in the rabbit hole of rabbinical discourse. I envied the universal, unconditional love that Christians got through Christ, or the promise of enlightenment that Buddhists had in the Eightfold Path.

While I grew disaffected by Judaism, my sister leaned further in, affiliating herself with the Chabad-Lubavitch orthodox sect. I made efforts to meet her where she was, accompanying her to Yom Kippur services at 770 Eastern Parkway, the Lubavitch central synagogue, when she visited Brooklyn. I stuck out like a gentile, wearing jeans and earrings in a sea of black hats and beards, forced to sit separately from my sister. After services, a Chabad emissary lectured me on faith, pressuring me to wrap tefillin on my arm, while my sister smiled with expectation. I did it to humor her, but the arcane ritual repelled me, and at the end of the night I was happy to return home to my altar and my idols.

When she, in turn, visited my apartment, she gasped at my Ganesh statue, murmuring "*Avodah Zarah*" and shielding her face. I was relieved she didn't notice the statue of Horace. What would she have thought if she saw me venerating a god of Egypt, our enslavers?

By age thirty-six, I gave myself permission to step back from Judaism. The next time a Chabad emissary stopped me on the street and asked, "Are you Jewish?" I said no. Though I was relieved to have avoided his shenanigans, a sharp guilt disquieted my heart. For even as I hated Judaism, I was still Jewish, and had betrayed myself by lying.

Jews can be Jewish in a multitude of ways, but we can never become un-Jewish, even if we wish it, even if we declare it, even if we violate every last commandment. What did that make me? I settled on a middling answer: "I'm a Jew by ethnicity, not by religion." The wool tallis I had purchased as a meditation shroud ended up giving me an allergic reaction, and I gave it away to a friend.

It would be years before I realized that this—wrestling with identity, questioning God, searching, tearing oneself away—was part and

parcel with being Jewish. All along, I was another wandering Jew.

* * *

I keep finding my spirituality in nature and art, in queer community, movement, and breath. I visit temples venerating Ganesh and Buddha. I seek out chanting circles, sitting lotus-style and singing Kirtan—Hindu devotionals. At a Jaya Lakshmi concert, I take a hit of weed and let the high vibes sweep me into trance. The singer's voice paints the room with light, unleashing tidal waves of color in my mind. We chant a song for each deity: Ganesh's Om Gam Ganapataye enraptures me in a lighthearted embrace; Saraswati's Om Shreem Hreem Saraswati Namaha fills me with sweet gratitude; Kali's Adya Kalika Parame overwhelms me with terrifying might. I decide to reach out to the one deity I've never been able to contact. I call in the Jewish God, and hear an awful roar, "I am the God above gods!" He's angry with me for sitting in Kirtan, daring to call Him alongside foreign deities. Quaking in fear, I hold strong, asking to know and understand Him. He repeats the phrase, but now he's a court jester with googley eyes, doing cartwheels and sticking out his tongue, mocking my fear, or mocking himself. "I am tthe God above Godssth! I am tthe GOD ABOVE GODSSTH!!" He's the world's most frightening clown, and I have no idea what game he's playing.

I'd never had a vision of the Jewish God apart from the childish picture of a white-bearded old man. I'd never engaged with Him the way I'd called Ganesh or Hecate. Here I'd attempted access and met a volatile, evasive response. I spoke to friends about the unsettling encounter, laughing at its absurdity while feeling no small amount of fear. Talking or meditating about it gave me solace, but no answers. Unlike with Ganesh, I had no image to latch onto, not even a name—and that, of course, was the point. This God left a calling card with

no contact information. I tried "Hashem" and "Yahweh," I tried "The God Above gods," but prayers left me cold and unmoved. There were no voices in my head, no ecstatic shudders or eruptions of wisdom.

I followed my curiosity to Reconstructionist and queer-friendly synagogues. I found brief delight in blessing the Hannukah candles. I eked out bits of wisdom from the Passover Haggadah. These practices were fine, but they didn't satisfy my need for deep connection, like pagan practices did. Still, my position—that I was an ethnic Jew with no religious ties—was no longer tenable. Clearly I was Jewish, and I was a spiritual being—could I be a Jewish spiritual being?

My family history raised the stakes on this question. When the Nazis persecuted my grandparents, they didn't draw distinctions between religion and ethnicity. Inheriting that trauma, my father taught me that religion wasn't worth the suffering it brought. Was his atheism clean logic, or a capitulation to our oppressors? I knew my own resistance to Judaism was colored by internalized antisemitism, and I was a crossroads—own my ancestral identity, or distance myself further from it?

My unresolved questions led me back to the Torah, figuring the source text deserved a through reading, cover to cover. Surprisingly I enjoyed Genesis and Exodus, appreciating the ugly truths in depictions of rape and thievery, and finding archetypes in the sweeping stories. Even Leviticus delighted me (a vegetarian!) with its depictions of animal sacrifice. The blood and guts! The smell of death! God Himself was pleased by the odor of burning meat? Fascinating! My own ancestors splattered entrails on the temple walls? Sexy! And perhaps a little pagan?

Then I got to Deuteronomy, the final and most terrifying book of the Torah, which said in no uncertain terms that idolaters were reprehensible traitors:

Your brother might say, 'Let us go and worship other gods.' . . . Do not show him loving-kindness or hide him. You must kill him. Kill him with stones.

That passage shook me speechless. In my nightmares, my own sister killed me for my transgressions. I pictured her hands around my neck, strangling me, or piercing my heart with a knife. I was a worshiper of the golden calf, slaughtered for his wrong devotion. I was Esau, a brother cast away for being different. I was Omri, a once-powerful king reviled for his sins of assimilation.

The Torah gave me an ultimatum: You can have your idols, or your Jewishness. But you can't have both.

I'd done my due diligence. I read the entire Torah, hoping to redeem Judaism. What I found instead was a commandment to kill one's own brother. And for what? For following his spiritual curiosity? The evidence was overwhelming: despite its rich history, Judaism was an odious tradition that condoned murder, patriarchy, and war. I was done with it.

* * *

In my 40th year I celebrate Beltane, my favorite high holy day, with my chosen family of radical faeries. We gather in the woods for a grand two-day ritual, celebrating love and nature, frolicking in spring's new blossoms, and setting our intentions for prosperity. On Beltane Eve, we congregate in the Dead Faerie Circle, home to the ashes of queer ancestors from the AIDS years and since. We tell stories and shed tears for those we've lost. My friend, a spirited young Jewish woman, kneels over a set of twigs arranged in the shape of a six-pointed star.

"Would you like to pay respect to our gay Jewish ancestors?" she asks me.

I decline her invitation. We ought to honor all ancestors, not privilege those in our ethnic cohort. And do I even have any gay Jewish ancestors? Statistically, they must have been there hiding, struggling with same-sex attractions in their Hungarian villages. But I don't want to go there; Judaism is once more intruding on my pagan bliss. "I'm a self-hating Jew," I explain, with equal parts derision and pride, fully expecting that my friend will share my disdain for our loathsome religion.

Instead, she's appalled. She respects Judaism, and identifies with it proudly. "It's my purpose in life to love all aspects of myself," she says. "I can never be a self-hating anything." With my own words reflected back at me, "self-hating," I realize that I've violated the first, most fundamental lesson of my spiritual journey. In that moment it becomes clear that I may no longer deny my Judaism; I must make peace with this identity I had not chosen and could not discard.

With renewed solidarity, I remember I'm not the first Jew to face such questions, but only one in a long history of self-denial, self-questioning, and even self-hatred. Like so many before me, I had inherited the destiny of Jacob, who wrestled with God on his wandering path, receiving the name Israel, he-who-wrestles-with-God. In my attempts to reject Judaism, I had gone and done the most Jewish thing one could do.

Night falls and the crowd clears, but I stay at the Dead Faerie Circle, kneeling before a waist-high rock adorned with animal skulls, feathers, candles, and crystals. Faeries have laid fresh flowers all around, as well as statues and illustrations, tokens to great Goddesses: Lakshmi, Hecate, Aphrodite, and Mother Mary. The idols give me comfort, but they're distant and dis-

connected, for they are not mine. In prayer I ask, “These other Gods and Goddesses, they give their worshipers a direct, easy path. What about me, a Jew? What avenues does my God offer?” I receive a quick, clear response: Everything except the graven images. Lifting my eyes, I discover the vast negative space around the idols. The feathers. The crystals, the flowers. That imposing, majestic goat skull, lit by flickering candles. The wind itself, animating the whispering leaves. The moon above, its graceful luminance. My own tears and the beating of my heart. It’s all fair game. But you must never deign to know.

I see firsthand what I’d suspected: God is everywhere. Any claim of solid understanding, any attempt to delimit God, must be false. Jewish worship is a sacred process of getting closer to a profound immensity that can never be known. The more we approach, the more we glimpse, the more we understand we’ll never see the full face of that mystery. My pagan idols are beautiful portraits—specific expres-

sions of divinity—but by definition they leave out the infinity of God.

After that gathering, my practice of calling in pagan deities fades away. Though I maintain a deep respect for Ganesh and mythology in general, I take the idols off my altar. I keep all I’ve learned from them, and redirect my spirituality towards meditation, movement, and devotion to the all-that-is. Ganesh is no longer a physical presence in my life, but he’s still an aspect of the whole, and I know how to call upon his wisdom without naming him. ●



OMRI NAVOT is a Brooklyn-based writer and community leader. Their sci-fi rock musical “Paradise Lost in Space” has been performed in New York City, Vermont, and Tennessee. Their personal essays have appeared in RFD (Radical Faerie Digest) and the Risk! Storytelling Podcast.

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Blaming Ourselves is Tearing Us Apart

A Balm for Jewish Infighting and Extremism

RICHARD S. STERN, PHD

JEWS WHO ARE THE PROBLEM

ON NOVEMBER 1ST I RAN A WORKSHOP AT our synagogue titled “How to Connect with Other Jews, Even When They Are Wrong and Their Views Will Lead to Catastrophe.”

Though the title is tongue-in-cheek, the underlying predicament is serious: We Jews can be very hard on one another. Through the decades, and especially since October 7th, we [lock antlers](#) with each other about Israel-Palestine and about [how best to fight antisemitism](#). We have been known to [attack our own](#) with a rather pointed intensity, even sometimes threatening a kind of [excommunication](#) from the Tribe. There are [rifts and even cut-offs within families](#) and between lifelong friends — and at a time when we most need the mutual support, comfort, and understanding of fellow Jews. And as our ingroup attacks fester, American and Israeli democracy fall deeper in peril.

On October 8th, I called my best college buddy, to connect and find a salve for our ashen hearts. And we did...for about two minutes — until I forced us on to Netanyahu, terrorism, and competing definitions of antisemitism. The

emotional temperature skyrocketed. We soon hung up, in despair, and more isolated and hurt than when we began, my stomach in knots. I had blown it.

I propose here no solution to the current heart-breaking war. Instead, I offer a shift in perspective designed to help us, together, find the best solutions, now and in the future.



THE BETTER ANGELS OF MY DISCIPLINE

Over the last 40 years, I have been listening closely to Jews of many political and religious stripes — listening deeply to my patients and,

less formally but still with my clinical psychologist's ear, to family, friends, and political allies and adversaries. The very sort of listening I and so many of us have failed to do, especially after October 7th.

I have also tried to keep to the discipline of listening to myself with curiosity and love. What I find in myself and other Jews is not always pretty. Still, as Robert Birdwell movingly explored in these pages, the [bravery to examine the shadow makes us bigger](#) and can provide a path toward some liberation and clarity.

In my career, I have been particularly interested in getting to the core drivers of the most extreme views on the Jewish spectrum. I believe that extremism powered by unconscious shame is exacerbating painful infighting among the Jewish people — and splintering our psyches.

My own political views often differ viscerally from those of my patients and friends. My mouth has become a bit bloody more than once for all my tongue biting. I have tried to keep to the discipline of remembering with compassion that all Jews are struggling for security in a dangerous world, want what is best for the Jewish people, and are often stuck in a middle, impossible spot. Too often we have been victims of centuries of "[choiceless choices](#)" — ethical no-win situations.

At times, we Jews have even to a degree unwittingly internalized that most awful antisemitic canard of all: that the Jews are responsible for their own plight — that we have brought our persecution upon ourselves. I wish to explore here how this self-blame can lead to ruptures, polarization, and extremism within the Jewish community. And perhaps how, by making conscious the unconscious, we can right the ship and move toward genuine justice and safety.

OUR RIGHT WING

From right-wing Jews, I hear a valuing of the bravery to fight for the safety and flourishing of the Jewish people, to proudly and unapologetically stand up for our rights and existence. These values resonate very deeply with me.

For many of the most extreme right-wing Jews there is a kind of disgust for anything that smacks of appeasement. Last year, from a right-wing Jewish patient born in Soviet Russia: "I know a dictator when I see one. But Netanyahu is our tough-guy and fights for us." The psychologist's question is, then: "And what would be the most extreme terrible outcome if you supported a peace party?" Here he hung his head and replied "More Israelis would die. I could never live with myself. The world would see us as sniveling weaklings. It even crosses my mind that I'd be hated by *Jews* everywhere.... it's almost like I'd have the blood of those dead Israelis on my own hands."

At the site of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp marking International Holocaust Memorial Day in 2010, [Benjamin Netanyahu said](#) "I promise, as head of the Jewish state, that *never again will we allow* the hand of evil to sever the life of our people and our state" [italics mine]. *The Times of Israel* [quotes Meir Kahane](#) as having said "...we will *never again* let this happen to us...Last time, the Jews behaved like sheep" [italics mine].

A key posture is revealed in the words "let" or "allow." The unconscious subtext of some versions of the motto "Never Again" is to subtly suggest that we — [to our shame!](#) — are partly responsible for the centuries of pogroms, stake burnings, and expulsions, culminating in the Shoah: that we went like lambs to the slaughter. That we have our own blood on our hands.

In classical analytic terms, this is an example of reaction formation: the converting of unwanted or dangerous thoughts, feelings, or impulses into their opposites. At times, this blame-the-

Jews posture is projected on the polar opposite wing of our ingroup: “it’s the damned anti-Zionist appeasers that are the cause of our troubles.”

The writer and artist Eli Valley and others have even argued that the farthest right-wing Jewish position is based on [stereotypes](#) of diaspora, appeasing Jews as weakling victims — in contrast to the muscled macho-tough superhero Israelis. In this exaggerated view, Sabras can derisively see Holocaust survivors as soap.

The most jingoistic extremists (in Israel, the U.S., and elsewhere) see themselves as unapologetic “Proud Boys.” This extreme right-wing nationalism often betrays and is a reaction formation [against hidden unconscious shame](#).

At times, deep within the quintessentially right-wing fear that we will be betrayed by our so-called neighbors and allies — that they will not fight for or hide us — lies the fear that we ourselves would chicken out. I had a nightmare in the months after the 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh. I am attending a *simcha* (celebration) at synagogue. An armed attacker with military fatigues bursts into the service. He is in his 60s and not terribly fit. I think about rushing the guy — maybe I can tackle him. At least, if I can draw his fire, others can escape. But I lie there hiding under a pew, hyperventilating, paralyzed, terrified — and burdened with the thought that my cowardice caused the death of my family and congregation.

OUR LEFT WING

From left-wing Jews, I notice a kind of parallel and opposite process. I hear authentic good will toward the stranger and dedication to the pursuit of justice as core driving forces. There is intense valuing of the courage to speak out in

the face of injustice against any group — to be on the right side of history. These values also resonate very deeply with me. I am interested here in finding any unintentionally disallowed shame or self-blame in the subtext — particularly among the most extreme leftist Jewish groups. The psychologist’s question is then: “what do you worry could happen if you and the Jews did not pursue justice in this way?”

I have a younger anti-Zionist Jewish friend who has been involved with Democratic Socialists of America. She has told me that, after her parents vacationed in Israel, she had needed to cut off contact with them. “My grandma used to talk about a *shanda fur die goyim* (shame in front of the non-Jews). That’s what my parents are. I’m not even sure what it means to be a Jew anymore if we go against our values like this.”

Two weeks after the Hamas massacre and well into the Israeli shelling campaign I was interviewing this young friend while she was taking a walk — and she apologized for talking softly. The psychologist in me asked, “What could happen if you talked too loudly — how does that thought go?” “I know it’s not rational, but walking in my lefty neighborhood I feel a bit afraid that a neighbor might hear me and think I was pro-Israel — and verbally or even physically confront me.”

The subtext here admits a kind of dual loyalty libel: that every American Jew can be held accountable for every act of the Israeli state. This implies that no Jews are civilians and that all Jews are combatants and therefore the legitimate targets of verbal attack or worse.

Though I am not a far lefty anymore, this sort of shame, hiding, and fear is not unfamiliar to me. Throughout my 20’s I was attracted to dressing down and slumming it. Underneath this paltry attempt at virtue signaling is some shame for having been raised with advantages. As Reb Lerner has suggested, I had gotten lost

in identity politics in a way that [blamed myself](#). The unconscious thought is “maybe my family really have been parasitic, capitalist Jews. With how I was raised, I don’t want to be taken for an intolerant greedy Jew.”

I now realize that part of the underlying subtext, especially in extreme strains of our left wing, is the trope that we Jews are playing into the hands of antisemites by enacting the worst stereotypes of Jews. That we are bloodthirsty, ruthless, power- and money-hungry, international warmongers. That we are bringing antisemitism upon ourselves with these qualities.

Here the assimilationist “*sha, shtil* (shhh, quiet) — do not anger the goyim” instinct is aroused. I can fit in — like the main character in the movie *Zelig* — and be one of the “good” Jews. Perhaps part of the subtext of “not in my name” is the fear that my name will go on a list of Jews for angry *goyim* to target. The fight for justice can, at times, be driven by shame for appearing to have more power and wealth than others; we try to absolve ourselves and deflect the anger of the less fortunate.

INFIGHTING, SHAME, AND THE STRUCTURE OF ANTISEMITISM

Without question, left- and right-wing Jews are driven at the bottom by the same superordinate goal that all Jews hold dear: individual and collective survival and thriving of the Jewish people. Yet when unconscious fear leads to shame, leads to anger — in this case turned toward our own tribe and even ourselves — we can head in the wrong direction, toward a [Jew vs. Jew](#) quagmire.

In my roughly five thousand hours of listening to Jewish patients, I have rarely met a Jew who, like myself in 2018, is not haunted by a version of the choiceless choices our people have faced

for ages. Whether in the background or foreground, awake or in dreams, we are too often faced with intrusive ethically and strategically insoluble scenarios. What would I do when push comes to shove and the Proud Boys, Brownshirts, Vichy French, Polish collaborators, Cossacks, Inquisitors, or Crusaders are at the door or gates? Would I have the courage or presence of mind to do the right thing — hide others, fight, bargain? But too often there is no morally clear or strategically predictable “right thing.”

Today, so many of us are faced with similar in-your-face dilemmas, if not with lower stakes. At our jobs and campuses, we have palpable *shpilkes* (pins and needles) regarding “do I speak up or stay silent about Israel/Palestine, given the risk of shunning, verbal attack, blacklisting, firing?” How visible should I be as a Jew? Too often we worry that the attack or marginalization might come from other Jews.

Whether the tired old trope of international Jewish conspiracy and power or its opposite — that we went like lambs to the slaughter — these subtextual themes tear us apart. The sort of unconscious projection and reaction formation I have described here sometimes results in polarization, splitting, and ingroup hatred — [the narcissism of small differences](#) on steroids. As [social psychologists have argued](#), negative ingroup evaluations may be overly intense for derogated groups. [Shame-based narratives are often used to advance a radicalized identity](#) within an established ingroup. One need only mention the name of Yigal Amir to be reminded where this can lead. In 1995, Amir, a right-wing religious extremist Israeli Jew, assassinated then incumbent Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin — and in some ways with him, the beating heart of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Perhaps the primary slogan of the German Nazis was “The Jews are the Cause of Our Misfortune.” This mantra is manifestly a primitive

sort of projection of the truth: that the German Nazis were the cause of our – we Jews’ – misfortune. The risk with infighting and primitive projection of shame among the Jewish people is that we can internalize this falsehood: we are the cause of our own misfortune. We can blame one another — the damned spineless anti-Zionists or the ultranationalist, bellicose settler movement — for our misfortune.

We can forget that insults, forced conversion, expulsions, and extermination camps did not happen because of anything we did. It was never because we were too quiescent or too aggressive but rather because of the age-old deeply ingrained structure of antisemitism — [a fundamental element of the Western mind](#) that leaves Jews as a convenient scapegoat, forced into the [middle role](#), into choiceless choices, into dilemmas and [gray zones](#) with no ethical solutions.

This is not to say that Jews now and in the past lack any agency or power whatsoever – a lachrymose view [some have rightly criticized](#) as dehumanizing and disempowering to Jews. Of course, we Jews are not *merely* the victims of history. Yet, as Michael Lerner has argued, all human choices are made in the context of [social arrangements](#) that “constrain our ability to imagine alternatives.”

Certainly, we have important decisions to make – decisions with consequences, especially after October 7th. I believe that healing from excessive infighting and unconscious shame might clarify our vision of the most ethical and strategic path ahead.

Furthermore, I do not wish to blame any Jew for holding an extreme position – I can feel the logic of both security and justice in my *kishkes* (gut) — or to shame any of us for unconscious self-blame. I have struggled to be kind to myself – a powerful route to become conscious of hidden shame. My hope is that we

will repair a portion of the severe extremism that has fractured our people and made us less safe. Regarding the centuries of antisemitism, maybe we have nothing to repent for. There is no shame anywhere along the strategic spectrum from accommodationism to fighting back – and hence no need to make penance by rigidly vilifying the opposite approach. There is no need to argue that we should never again let this happen to us, because we never did let it happen to us. Antisemitism is not and never was our doing.

A BALM FOR INFIGHTING

I certainly do not know the best way forward for Israeli or American Jews in the current horrifying and desperate mess. I suggest that when we Jews find ourselves [attacking other Jews](#) with a special venom, unconscious shame and primitive projection may be playing a role.

Our synagogue’s values statement emphasizes the importance of *Mahloket L’shem Shamayim* (Conflict for the Sake of Heaven) – in this context, aspiring to honor points of disagreement, maximize humility, and engage in open-minded listening.

To this end, with humility I offer an array of tools for connection among Jews. Keep to the practice of a sacred [I-Thou](#) posture. Seek to understand rather than convince. You need not agree in order to empathically grasp the humanity of your fellow. Courageously find compassion and even affection for Jews with differing views. Listen first and allow yourself to be moved. Remember that at bottom we all want safety for our people and are too often stuck in ethical and strategic choiceless choices. Ask “what’s your worst fear?” Identify, invite, and tolerate *Thou’s* anger, resentment, fear, and blame. Attend to bonding and ethical concepts, such as trust, care, isolation, shame, and safety. With kindness, explore your own unconscious

self-blame. Bravely cultivate a genuine sense of pride in yourself, in your political sub-group, and in your people as a whole. These are challenging but learnable skills; cultivating them takes practice.

I hope we can acknowledge and assuage some self-blame, and integrate both pride and introspection, both strength and empathy, so that we will be better able to see the way forward to security and justice for *Klal Yisrael*, the entire Jewish people. This might begin with the discipline of the sacred mitzvah (commandment) of *Ahavat Yisrael*: love and compassion for the Jewish people – every single one. ●



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The *Fiddler* and the Self-Hating Jew

DANIEL KUSHNER

"**G**OLDE, DARLING, I HAD TO SEE YOU BEFORE I left because I have such news for you," Yente, the matchmaker, says to Golde, placing a basket of apples on a wooden table. Golde looks at me, rolling her eyes. The matchmaker *always* has news for us. Yente goes on, "All my life I've dreamed of going to *one place* and now I'll walk, I'll crawl, I'll get there. Every year at Passover what do we say? Next year in Jerusalem. Next year in the Holy Land."

"You're going to the Holy Land?" Golde asks, standing up. We both know Yente is too frail to survive such a journey with nothing but the clothes on her back. But she isn't shaken.

"And you know why? In my sleep, my husband, my Aaron, came to me and said: 'Yente, go to the Holy Land.' So, somehow or other," Yente continues, walking off to face the wilderness, "I'll get to the Holy Land."

I grab the edge of my cart, uncomfortable, which isn't in the script. But this line never sat right with me. The whole scene didn't. It was supposed to be 1905, a time of *kopeks* and *shmatas* and news spread on horseback, but mention of the Holy Land snaps me back to the odious present. Bit by bit, the edge of the stage becomes clearer. The lights seem more artificial. Until finally, I am no longer Motel the tailor at all.



Photo by Joan Marcus

I look at Yente. I have the urge to stop her, to convince her to go anywhere else. But Motel does not know what happens to the Holy Land. He does not know what path our people chose to take. So eight times a week, I let Yente go, reckoning with what became of her dream of Zion.

This malaise of mine was a product of the times. I was cast as Motel in the national tour of *Fiddler on the Roof* in June 2021, just a few weeks after the eruption of a brutal war in Israel-Palestine that left 260 Palestinians and 13 Israelis dead. Conflicts like these had long passed me by unnoticed, reduced by Jewish elders and institutions to a simple clash between "terrorists" and the "righteous" Israeli government. But once I entered college, I learned another story. In a History class on refugees, I learned that there are currently over 6 million registered Palestinian refugees, though some estimates have that number closer to 11 million. Many of them live in abject poverty in one of the 68 refugee camps outside Israel, unable to return back home ever since Israelis forced them out in 1948. This shocked me. How could Israel, championed as the only "true" democracy in the Middle East, deny so many Palestinians access to their ancestral homeland? And how could Zionists let that happen?

Zionism has dug itself deep into contemporary American Judaism, such that it's become hard to tell where one begins and the other ends. Our longing for Zion feels pure, baked into Jewish holidays, traditions, and histories. It's how we are raised. It's the songs we sing in synagogue. It's why we say "next year in Jerusalem." But Zionism is more than just an ancient, religious connection to the land: it is the pursuit of a nationalist Jewish state. In 2021, I watched as this vision of Zion played out and invoked ancient values in the name of something ugly, something that invaded mosques and burned homes and bombed residential buildings.

So I began speaking out, posting on social media and engaging in conversations with Jews and non-Jews alike. I wanted the people—specifically the Jewish people—in my life to see the conflict how I saw it, to separate the state of Israel from the ancient land it was on and the religion it protected.

But as I criticized Zionism and advocated for Palestinian rights, I found myself at the pointy end of a Jewish pitchfork. Not only did other Jewish people disagree with me, but they saw something wrong with me, too. To some, my activism was hate speech. To others, it was antisemitism or proof that I was a "self-hating Jew." These reactions were alarming, because by framing my politics as incompatible with my Judaism, other Jews had twisted what it means to be Jewish. In centering a commitment to Israel over anything else, Zionists had redefined Judaism and pushed me outside of it. As if overnight, the Jewish spaces I had known all my life seemed to have no room for me. And worse than that, it felt that Judaism itself had no room for me, either.

Right at this moment when I felt the least aligned with Judaism, I was cast in the most Jewish musical in existence. Written in 1964, *Fiddler on the Roof* has taken on a life of its own,

occupying a permanent spot in any synagogue's DVD collection. And it's clear why. Not only is *Fiddler's* music catchy and story compelling, but it is also one of the few representations of shtetl history. Telling the story of Tevye, a Jewish dairyman living in a shtetl in Russia in 1905, *Fiddler* does not shy away from displaying long-standing Jewish traditions, ceremonies, and thought patterns. Because of this, *Fiddler* has become a chance for Ashkenazi Jews to imagine the lives of our ancestors, to draw a straight line between the past and present. That has been crucial for my own Jewish identity, because like many of my Jewish friends, I don't know how most of my ancestors lived before immigrating to America or why they came. So in a way, the story of *Fiddler* has become their story, too. It has transcended fiction and become more like history, a myth that feels too personal to be fiction.

Fiddler's excellence has not only cemented it as a staple of Jewish culture, but also as a window into Jewish life for many non-Jews. *Fiddler* became the first musical to reach 3,000 performances on Broadway, and tens of millions of people have engaged with it since then. It has been made into an Oscar-winning film, revived five times on Broadway and five times on the West End, translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, Japanese, German, and French, and toured all around the world.

So by performing in *Fiddler*, it felt like I was signing up to be a Jewish ambassador, a mascot of the faith that even the faith did not seem to want. Thinking about that swelled nerves, and so did thinking about joining a company of Jewish actors. I didn't know what they'd think of me, or how I'd feel engaging with Jewish themes that my politics (supposedly) opposed. So when rehearsals began, I decided to throw myself into the world of *Fiddler*, hoping it would distract me from the discomforts of the real world.

Theatre has always been an escape of mine, but it was particularly easy to get lost in the shtetl of Anatevka. The script is a particularly exemplary one, so layered with wit and heart and musicality. But it was more than that. *Fiddler* was a feeling, that sweet whiff of nostalgia. It brought back memories of Hebrew school mornings, of dinners at my grandparent's house, of challah and Kedem, of shabbos nights at summer camp and cookies at kiddush luncheons. It was an escape, a chance to go back in time, to live amongst my ancestors and be reacquainted with their struggles.

And their struggles were grand. At the end of the musical, the Jewish people of Anatevka are kicked out of their homes for seemingly no reason at all, given three days to pack up everything they own. And though the Russian Constable says he "does not know why" the Jews must leave, anyone watching knows precisely why: because of their identity, their difference. While the real history varies slightly from the musical, Jews living in shtetls at the turn of the 20th century truly faced widespread antisemitism and violent pogroms. After enduring such persecution, it is clear why these Jews dreamed of a place where they could finally feel safe. But in 2023, as I watch the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) invade the Al-Aqsa mosque, beating worshippers and frightening children, it is clear that their dream has gone awry. Every day I am forced to see our people on the other side of the power dynamic that *Fiddler* warns us about, inflicting the same conditions we once had to endure onto Palestinians. And that's hard. It's hard to see a "Jewish state," and Judaism itself, associated with occupation and war and discrimination, because like every Jew, I know the flavor of bigotry all too well. As *Fiddler* reminds us, it wasn't too long ago that we were the subject of such persecution.

How quickly we have forgotten.

In that way, *Fiddler* resolved my feelings of

internal displacement. Eight times a week, on stages across the country, I got to immerse myself in traditions through song, misquoted Torah excerpts, shabbos prayers and candles, weddings and *chuppahs* and bottle dancers and bickering. I got to honor my ancestors' memories, donning their clothes and reciting their prayers. Even as the endless violence in Israel brought on feelings of shame, *Fiddler* brought on feelings of pride: pride in our culture, pride in our values, pride in our history. Because that history reminds us of the importance of standing by the persecuted, whether they look like us or not. It reminds us to thread our community together, rather than rip its seams apart. It reminds us to live our fullest lives as Jewish people, but not at the expense of others.

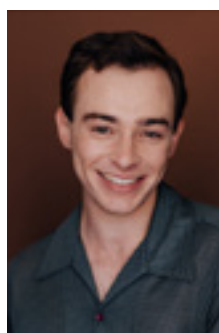
To me, that is precisely what being Jewish means. That is our tradition. That is what keeps the *Fiddler* from falling off his roof.

And it was Yente, surprisingly, who reminded me of that.

"I'll get to the Holy Land," she promises me as she leaves the stage, lifting a single, crooked finger. She smiles at the sky. "And then, when I'm laid to rest, I can lie with the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel...."

Then she pauses, thinking for just a moment, before she shrugs, charting a new course forward for us all.

"...if there's room." ●



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The Torah of the Broken Banana

My Preschooler's Big Feelings Teach Me How to Face a Heartbreaking World



RABBI SHOSHANA MEIRA FRIEDMAN

A FRIEND OF MINE (I'LL CALL HER REBECCA) Lately, my preschool son has been teaching me how to live wisely in these harrowing times, in which so much of our collective life hangs in the balance.

It started with a bedtime banana.

Each evening, we cuddle together in the arms of a giant stuffed teddy bear while I read to him. Our soft light glows on each page. His body is deliciously heavy against mine. He munches his bedtime banana snack. We are safe and whole amidst the tumult and wreckage of the nation and the world.

The other night, when he peeled the banana, it broke in half.

He doesn't like it when his banana breaks.

He took a moment to register what had happened, then wailed: "I WANT A DIFFERENT BANANA!"

Life is hard enough for a tired young child without their comfort food spontaneously self-destructing. I would have been happy to get

him another banana and eat the broken one myself. The trouble was...

"We're all out of bananas, my love," I said quietly. "This is the only one we have."

"I. Want. A. Different. BANANA!" he screamed. He still thinks I am omnipotent, able to summon a banana where there is none. He thinks he just needs to convince me to try harder. "PLEASE, Mama, PLEASE!"

As he sobbed in my lap, his rage eventually morphed into sorrow. His body softened. His tears in moments like these are not whiny. They are not grabby. They are tears of existential longing. He wanted a different banana, and we had none.

Holding him, I realized I knew just how he felt.

After a recent slew of terrifying mass shootings, I had screamed and hit the couch after putting my son to bed. I had cried out in anguish to God. I wanted to go back in time. I wanted God to fix it all. I wanted a different world.

The trouble was...

"We're all out of worlds, my love," God said quietly. "This is the only one we have."

I hate this. And like my son, in the heat of fury I do not buy it one bit. I secretly believe another world is hiding in the kitchen, and that God is holding out on me. If I wail loud enough, or pledge to be the perfect activist, I am sure God will get up and find that world – the one where democracy is flourishing, children are safe in school, and Exxon never sowed murderous doubt on climate science. A different world has to be there, buried under the half-finished boxes of crackers, or peeking out from under the potatoes.

As I rocked my crying child, I thought about how Western culture wants us to repress, sugarcoat, or rush grief and how Jewish tradition teaches differently. Our liturgy gives voice to a heartbroken longing for justice and redemption. Our holiday cycle gifts us with Tisha B'Av, a day of communal mourning for the brokenness of the world. Our death and mourning rituals carve out time and space for loved ones to fully feel their sorrow. Even in the midst of the greatest Jewish joy – a wedding – we break a glass to honor sadness. Our ancestors knew we needed to express our broken hearts if we were to have any chance of finding joy. They knew grieving is a form of prayer and even service. Yet, as modern adults, it is so hard to honor our emotional pain with healthy expression.

What astounds me about my son's heartbreak is that he always finds his way through if we do not interrupt him. It may take a while, but his cry will quiet. He will draw a big breath. If you pay attention, you can perceive a miniscule shake of his body, the final residue of upset falling away. You can practically see the neural pathways being laid down, such shining cobblestone streets of emotional intelligence: My feelings move through me. I survive my heartbreak. I do not teach him these truths – he lives into them. All I do is teach him he is not alone.

The night of the broken banana, it took him a full hour to work through the feelings. Exhausted but finally calm, he had ultimately announced, "Oh! What I really wanted was a bagel."

Sometimes redemption looks like rearranging your inner furniture so that what you have is what you wanted all along.

A few weeks after the broken banana, I found myself beating the couch in rage again when, as a woman who has had an abortion, as a climate activist, and as a mother afraid of gun violence, the Supreme Court took protections that were imminently precious to my soul and broke them to pieces, tossing us all further from democracy and closer to climate and humanitarian catastrophes.

But I remembered my son's process and allowed my rage to morph into sorrow.

Soon I felt a familiar and numinous presence holding me, as sure as arms around a crying child. I can't sense this presence when I'm angry, but I can when I'm sad, because in my sorrow I soften and can feel what is outside the hard shell of my fury. And it turns out that just outside is a presence holding me, just like I hold my son. Call it God. Call it Love. Call it a giant cosmic teddy bear. I just know I was not alone.

Heartbreak looks so scary from the outside every single time, like dark and treacherous waters. Every time all I want to do is run away. But when I finally let myself slip under its waves, I discover that the waters are healing, and I am buoyant. I remember I need to swim here every once in a while, accompanied by a luminous mothering presence, or I become stiff and useless back on shore.

When I dried my eyes, the Supreme Court rulings still stood and there was plenty of work to be done. Letting myself grieve doesn't directly

change the world, but it changes me. It cleans me out so I can show up for what comes next. It gives me strength.

Unlike my preschooler, I can choose when and where to have my meltdowns. But if I am tempted to bottle up my feelings for too long, my son reminds me not to. As sure as I teach him, he teaches me: My feelings move through me. I survive my heartbreak. Small children dive into anger and grief multiple times a day. If we let them – and we must – they release it all and emerge ready to play again.

This is the Torah of the Broken Banana: Our hearts are sure to break, but each time we allow ourselves to fully grieve, we learn their brokenness will not break us. Each time we move the feelings through our bodies, we free up mental and emotional space to keep fighting for a better world – and to simply keep living with sweetness and joy.

The next morning, I went to the grocery store and bought a bunch of old bananas. My son and I mashed them up, and soon the smell of banana bread filled the kitchen.

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Cognoscenti, Tablet Magazine, Rooted & Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), and will appear in the forthcoming anthology from CCAR Press: The Sacred Earth: Jewish Perspectives on Our Planet. Her first picture book, The Tide Is Rising: A Climate Movement Anthem is forthcoming (Beaming Books, 2025). She is at work on a memoir. More at rabbishoshana.com.

Hiding in Plain Sight Equality in the Wilderness

RABBI JILL HAUSMAN

LAST YEAR, AS I WAS READING THE TORAH portion Vayakel, toward the end of the book of Exodus, I realized that it is a feminist portion. The commandment to kindle no fire on Shabbat meant that women had a cessation of labor on Shabbat and didn't have to cook. What a wonderful gift! But it wasn't until I came across a bit of commentary on the subject of property that a truly amazing realization came to me: that the wilderness experience was an egalitarian one for women.

The puzzle came together piece by piece. The Talmud (Ketubot 47b) states that "a husband is obligated to provide his wife with sustenance, redemption from captivity, and burial. The Sages taught in a Baraita (a teaching outside the Mishna or Oral Law): "The Rabbis instituted that a husband must provide his wife with her sustenance in exchange for his rights to her earnings." In other words, a husband must support a wife. As we know, manna descended each day, except on Shabbat, to everyone equally, during the forty years of the wilderness experience. Husbands were not supporting wives in the wilderness. Wives had their own food. Moreover, women in the wilderness had their own property.

Exodus (3:22) tells us that each Israelite woman in Egypt was to "borrow from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold, and clothing." Also, God told Moses to "Tell the people to borrow, each man from his neighbor and each woman from hers,



John D. Batten, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

objects of silver and gold" (11:2). Thus women possessed their own gold, silver, and garments after their departure from Egypt, and they donated these objects for the building of the Tabernacle, the portable place of worship in the wilderness. In fact, the Torah relates that women were the leaders in these donations: "the men came along with the women, all who were willing of heart brought brooches, earrings, rings, and pendants: gold objects of all kinds" (35:22). The famous 13th Century Spanish Torah commentator Nachmanides agreed, saying, "the women came first and the men followed."

The women also donated one other important item for the Tabernacle. Exodus 38:8 states that the women donated their copper mirrors for the laver and its stand, which was positioned just outside the Tent of Meeting that housed

the great Menorah, the Table for Showbread, the Incense Altar, and the Holy Ark, containing the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. The laver was a large copper bowl which held water for washing, and was used by the priests.

We know that in the ancient world, obtaining water was a woman's task. Abraham's servant Eliezer went to a well to find a wife for Isaac, and that Rebecca drew water for him and for his camels. Jacob met Rachel at a well, where she came to water her father Laban's flock of sheep; and Moses met Zipporah, his future wife, and her sisters at a well in Midian, where they were watering their father's sheep. In the book of Samuel, Saul encountered young women on their way to draw water (9:11). This tradition has persisted even now, in places where running water in homes does not exist.

While working at an internship in the US State Department one summer, I heard a story about this. Several decades ago, aid workers had gone to a location in Africa where plumbing was primitive or non-existent. The aid workers set about bringing indoor plumbing and running water to homes in a rural village. Rather than being thrilled with this new system, the women were devastated. Going to the well was their social time with other women. It was their chance to talk to each other, exchange information, and be with their friends. The convenience of running water took away their social life.

This social life of women is just what the Torah describes. The Laver and its stand were made, "from the mirrors of the women who congregated at the entrance of the tent of meeting (38:8)." We now have a total picture of true equality in the wilderness. Women received their own food from Heaven. They were not only responsible for donating much of the material used to build the Tabernacle, and incidentally, also spun the colored yarns and goat hair with which the fabrics of the Tabernacle

were made; they were employed in drawing water for the priests each day, meeting at the laver outside the centrally located Tent of Meeting, not only to "visit" their former mirrors but also to be with other women. They were as independent as the society and mores of their time would allow, having property, occupation, and status in the society. This egalitarian experience in the wilderness was hiding in the Torah in plain sight. It just took a bit of vision, and putting together the pieces of the puzzle, to see it. ●



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The Golden Medinah A Name as Contested Territory

ZAHAVA FELDSTEIN

WHEN PEOPLE HEAR MY NAME, THEY find it beautiful. They ask “Where does it come from?” and I tell them, “It’s Hebrew.” “Golden, like Goldilocks,” I translate, and now they think they know exactly who I am. Often, if, later, we become friends and they are happy and exclaim, “Oh my God, you’re *Golden*!” I mutter, “I know,” because they’ve forgotten that’s what my name, *Zahava*, means.

An Israeli looks up when I introduce myself. Perhaps Zahava reminds them of a Shabbat sunset in Jerusalem. “That’s an old name,” they smile, like I just presented to their lips—and their *neshamas*—the honor of singing the name of a grandmother, the zealous type, the kind who returned to Jerusalem before the rest. Like Golda Meir, maybe. Or perhaps my name means the grandmother even before, the one who did not follow her daughter to the Promised Land, the one who perished in Poland, who was never known again. Except, “That’s an old name,” and perhaps it was hers, and perhaps I am her.

I am not her. We inherit our names, in Judaism. We inherit the trauma of the Diaspora of our people, Pogroms and Inquisition and Holocaust. Our religious holidays commemorate the

destructions of our people; we are resolute and intelligent, but fearful. And in that fear, I am now told: “You inherit Jerusalem.” My *birthright*, which God promised to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob. It is a land “flowing with milk and honey,” God said, and so they say to me. But my name is not a sunset in Jerusalem, nor does it honor the City of Gold.

In Israel, they sing a song, a song which at one point battled to be the national anthem: “*Yerhsulayaim shel Zahav*,” Jerusalem of Gold. In its tune lives the sorrowful remembrance of a 2,000 year exile, and a celebration of return. In the Diaspora, pulsating voices now adopt the same tune, renewed by a Vicarious Return. Even across an ocean, I hear the cry: *Birthright*.

No, I am not her. My name is Talmud; I am the books of law, because while the flaws of its authors concern me, they at least expected readers to challenge them. Demanded it, really. “Ask good questions, challenge authority,” my father—a rabbi—instructed me each day as he dropped me off at school. *Ask good questions, challenge authority*: these were the words of the medieval rabbis—the scholars and redactors of Talmud—and of every rabbi I respect ordained since. The Birthright promised to me has nothing at all to do with land.



Sharon Feldstein @sharonfeldsteinart

I am not her, because my name is an archive of immigration, but not of *Aliyah*. My ancestors were told, "In America, the streets are filled with gold." So they sailed to Ellis Island, and not to Jerusalem. They named their daughter Goldie, after the streets of gold, and not the streets of milk, or the streets of honey. "The Golden *Medinah*, that's how they saw America," my Dad explains when I ask him. "A nation with gold pouring from its streets, a good home."

But the streets of the tenement did not pour gold. Poverty reminded my great-grandmother's parents every day of their misfortune, and of her misnaming—"Goldie." Her name contradicted itself—her identity a bridge between Hope and Failure. Then the Holocaust arrived. American Jews, dumbfounded, 'safe' in America, now wondered, and hoped. Their streets seemed quite more Golden than those back in Europe.

Her name is Goldie, and mine is the Hebrew. On my birth certificate exists the contradiction of my identity, for my name comes from both an admiration for the Golden Medinah (the United States) and for Jewish identity erroneously entangled with the State of Israel. My name is a battle between living with conscience, or living with fear; a Jew in the home or a Jew returned home; a Jewish Diaspora or a Jewish Homeland. And while the language of my name may, to you, suggest that I believe in God, or in religion, or love Israel with every ounce of my soul, my form of Golden derived from hopeful miners dragging chisels West, towards California, not East. I do not pray to the East anymore, towards Jerusalem. I do not pray.

In the house of my father, we used to sit, eyes rolling at him as he stood, King of the Seder, a rabbi dutifully retelling the Exodus and four hundred years of Israelite servitude, and—*Baruch Hashem*—the Ten Plagues that set us free! "They tried to kill us, but we survived, let's eat!" my brothers joked, the same joke, ev-

ery year; at Purim and Channuka and Shemini Atzeret and every other Jewish holiday wherein we weren't repenting or starving ourselves for our sins. "The only happy holidays in Judaism are Israeli, anyway," I argue over Shabbat dinner. My dad disagrees, and he refrains: "You sound like Larry David. Is Rosh Hashanah a sad holiday?" I can't answer; it is for me.

In twelfth grade, I flew to Israel. We traveled for five weeks; following Eilat, we went to Poland; following Poland, we joined *Gadna*. In Gadna, we donned the uniform, learned to shoot Israeli weapons, stood at attention to Israeli commanders, lived on an Israeli military base, and—for one week—joined the ranks of the Israeli Defense Force. But I am not her. My name does not verify my allegiance to Zionism; if anything it confuses it. I do not wish to be the golden sunset of Jerusalem, nor do I admire the "golden" streets of North America. Golden for whom? This question is true of both countries.

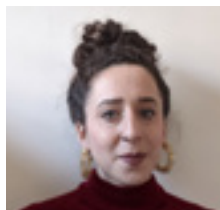
Of the British Mandate my teachers taught, "What a miracle! That the United Nations gave Israel to the Jews!" "You see," they would explain, "there was never a Palestine. It's a name, that's all! Invented out of thin air, by the British! Never existed!" I tried to listen to the rabbis, I tried to ask. But every time my teachers answered, "The Occupation isn't real. Palestinians don't exist." Again and again. Jews do not feel safe in either place though, that is the kicker. Our fear continues. People say we are not safe in Israel because we are not yet meant to be there, or because the region does not like us, or because the *New York Times* is biased, or because it is not our land.

Now my Jewish school teachers hear I've learned more. Now they know I disagree. I proclaim on Facebook, "I have evolved." They comment, urging me: "Don't accept the Palestinian Perspective," like it's a choice of belief. They think, "What a failure we have committed:

a student, a Jew, fallen to propaganda!" But I am not her; the Jewish community raised me so well, I beat their system.

The emails I sent to Jewish leaders (most left unanswered), the letters to rabbis (no one hired me after), the unpublished drafts ("too radical"), scared those same institutions that—years ago—created me. In my prose, the same halakhah used to justify the Jewish narrative describing the inevitability of our Return—of trauma, oppression, erasure—in fact grounded my opposition. I asked: What is our right to oppress others as history has oppressed us?

Please do not blame me for not knowing for so long; many American Jews are not told, and so we do not know our complicity. Please do not blame me for not knowing for so long; I no longer care what God says. Please do not blame me for not knowing; I am trying to learn myself. I am trying to understand my name. ●



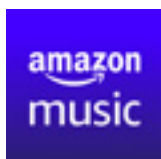
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My American Violence

ROBERT BIRDWELL

When I contemplate the violence of American life today—the hate speech, the mass shootings, even the feeling that the people whose cars swarm my own at rush hour are close to the edge, pounding their steering wheels and shouting curses I cannot hear (as my infant son sits in the back seat)—I don't know where to begin, and I fear where it will end, so I have to start with my own violence: my history of hatred in thought, word, and deed.

* * *

In the loneliest time of my boyhood, when I suspected I was far stranger than anyone else in my little Christian school class, when I was passing from elementary to junior high, I learned the consolations of hate. It was not that I didn't know it was wrong to hate. But when I belittled other boys I felt better, strangely more normal. Okay with myself. I was not randomly cruel, but strategically so, targeting those, I judged, who were even less secure than myself.

There was a boy whose parents were divorced. His father was a Jew and his mother had sent him to Christian school. He played the drums, which was much cooler, I thought, than playing the trumpet, my chosen instrument. I envied his air of reckless confidence, and so one day I insulted him and threatened him, grabbed him by the shirt. We were standing in the band room, on a day we had a substitute teacher, and I remember he didn't strike back. Holding his shirt in my hands, I looked in his eyes. When



I saw his fear and his passivity—his vulnerability—I felt bad, as if only his reaction, some further perceived insolence, might have made my attack feel justified. Perhaps he had never had anyone else grab him like this, so he wasn't primed, as was I, to fight back. I remember this episode in connection with recent attacks on synagogues; the memory is especially acute now that I, in the process of conversion to Judaism with my family, now attend one.

Another episode of violence recurs to me. I thought of this again recently when a transgender woman shot up a Christian elementary school in my home state, where she had been mistreated as a child. In this episode, I joined in the ridicule against another boy who seemed strange to me. I didn't know what "queer" was, but I knew this boy was strange. Yet he was maddeningly indifferent to all of us at recess who played football, absorbed instead in books. When we lobbed an insult at him, he replied with hissing or quacking. I didn't get why, but this made me even more furious. Perhaps he was telling us we were acting like animals, and he would respond in kind. Yet he said no word in his defense, as this was beneath his dignity. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I felt my own dignity was at stake, and this attack on his dignity had not gone as planned.

I remember, too, a thin, darker-skinned boy, ethnically ambiguous, who always had a smile on his face and was unafraid to smile, even at girls. Tall and nimble, he was good at basketball. He scared me, as I was afraid to do what

he did, to speak with the girls I had crushes on. I wondered if this boy was laughing at me. I spoke harshly to him, and when I shoved him on the basketball court during PE class, I remember how light his tall body felt against my hand. Again, he didn't react, and later I recall our becoming friends. We never spoke of the earlier fight; we must both have been afraid to do so.

There were two Black boys in my class. They were the only definitely Black kids I remember at our East Tennessee school in the years I attended at the end of the twentieth century.

One was well-liked, a class clown, which put him in competition with me, I thought, because I liked to cut up, too. He was pudgy, and I really did think he was a clown. I did not speak to him but regarded him with suspicion. The other Black boy was thin and serious, a hard look in his eye. I don't recall his name, but he seemed angry and fiercely poised. I remember his straight spine and starched clothes. I envied his evident self-respect. Much later, when I was in college, I ran into another boy with whom I was friends in elementary and middle school. He related, chuckling, how I used to say the n-word: "At least I'm not a n—," I would say. He also repeated to me some strange notions about Black people's sexuality that I had told him. Hearing my childhood friend, I was mortified, of course; but more significantly, I was surprised. I did not remember saying those things or learning those things. I was able to remember the bullying of the others, but I did not remember the racial slurs I had used.

I do remember that neither boy stayed long at our elementary school; I believe both were gone after a year or two. That happened about thirty years after the fall of Jim Crow, but my behavior is the same as the behavior of the students who jeered and spat on the Little Rock Nine in 1957. Or even closer to home, in Clinton Tennessee (at the high school I would have

attended had I not gone to a private, Christian school), is the same as the violence inflicted by white supremacists who rioted and bombed the school in protest of court-ordered desegregation.

As I type this, I feel a little weak; the very shame of it causes me to withdraw from myself. This shame is important, a point to which I will return. For years I did not speak about these memories, and gaps in memories, because of shame. I was not brought up to be cruel or hateful; I was brought up to be nice, good, religious. And so whatever I did that did not fit into the categories nice, good, or religious, were forgotten or swathed in the silence of shame.

Shame has covered those things I did and said, and I said and did them because, deep within me, from the very first, I felt shame. The authorities in my life—parents and teachers and ministers and other older, wiser people—had given me a nice, good, religious template that did not apply to me. To be violent (to say and do hateful things) was as close to self-affirmation I could do. Not feeling I was good enough, I sought to tear others down.

I do not know to what extent the insecurity, hatred, and shame I felt was typical; but I do know it is typical of the history of White people in America (Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*). I also know that, for whatever reason, the color line, the racism, the invidious distinctions I drew between myself and other boys mirror the various racial and class fractures of American history. These are the fractures that have thwarted people from working together to establish a more just union. That's an uncanny, remarkable fact, somewhat thrilling. It casts a different light on the hatred and shame that I inherited by being White, male, and American. The effects aren't only violent but redemptive. They are not secret shames but the basis of public good and transformation.

Ralph Ellison wrote, "In the beginning was not the shadow but the act" (304): by this he contrasted the foundational acts of American racial violence with the shadows, the representations, that persist into the present. The metaphor might be pushed further, complemented by the Jungian sense of shadow: the echo of the violence of the past is disavowed in the shadows of some, like me, whose ancestors established the violence.

Those of you reading this who struggle with some internal form of hatred—and I'm not just appealing to White readers here but anyone in this strife-ridden nation or world—you can learn to see this struggle as a blessing. For it's you who have been given the means to redeem the soul of America.

Recently the news reported that the debate about gun violence had returned to its accustomed equilibrium—its impasse—where conservatives advocate for mental health reform and liberals for gun control reform. To extend the metaphor of mental health and control, I imagine Democrats and Republicans as two partners showing up for couples counseling. One says the other's behavior is the problem. The other person needs to change, not me. I don't have the issue here; the only issue would be me backing down, compromising on my moral principles, my truth. And I'm going to stand my ground.

And each party harbors the comfortable feeling that the other won't budge, either. There is comfort in this bloody status quo; at least it is predictable.

Meanwhile, we, the public, may be scared and outraged, but the political theater makes good reality TV.

* * *

As a child, I soon learned that hateful speech and hateful action were not acceptable in

school, and certainly not beyond it. I learned to suppress and channel my resentments. By high school, I was known as a very nice boy, a straight-A student, pious. That piety, being an act and a refusal of the shadow, was agonizing and would not last long. I found reasons to doubt my conservative religious ideology, and by the time I entered the university I found I was left without any beliefs at all; a void opened in my mind. More than that, I felt a gulf between myself and every other person.

The conservatism of my youth had been reduced to a mere negation: an individualism that held I was all right, so long as I didn't harm another; and an indifference to anyone I didn't count as part of my community.

A vivid memory emerges from the fog of my first depression, as I sat alone in my dorm room and the US military invaded Iraq, the fall of 2003. A pollster called on the landline with a survey measuring youth political involvement, and I was grateful to hear a young woman's voice on the other end of the line: *Do you vote?* *She asked. Do you belong to a political party? Are you politically active?* A series of questions to which I repeated No. After the phone conversation I felt a hollowness I hadn't known was there, and then an even deeper depression.

A year later, a strange force within me had jerked me from my depression. This was called mania, I would learn from the psychologist at the Student Health Center, but for me it manifested immediately as an insane caring about life. (In denying my deep hatreds, I had also closed myself off from love.) Mania for me meant buttonholing everyone I passed as I walked down the streets around Fort Sanders and downtown Knoxville; it was exuberant passion for sex; and a political awakening in which I read the Communist Manifesto on the campus mall to passersby, and preached, at the top of my lungs, against the war and George W. Bush, who was seeking a second term. Mania

was indeed insanity, and it led to a night in jail, lost jobs, flunked classes, and quite a few painful, ephemeral romances.

Yet my soul, my concern for things and people beyond my own self, had come alive. The psychotherapist R. D. Laing saw mental illness as a process that must not simply be suppressed by medication (though I concede sometimes medication is necessary); it is a voyage that must be carried out until one returns home.

Though I understand and “accept the diagnosis” of bipolar disorder, and, as for most people with such a diagnosis, I have had to take medicine, it has been largely up to me to understand its spiritual meaning, how it fits into who I am. For me, the upsurge of depression and mania in my early twenties was my soul’s way of saying that it would not be complicit or complacent in what Jacques Lacan called the “normal neurosis” of life: that commonsense insanity that included my moral indifference to people I didn’t consider a part of my community, and that considered my obligation to my neighbor to consist in not openly harming them.

That indifference, for me, was not colorblind: it was the same phenomenon that Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., described as the “value gap” between White people and Black people, or people of color more generally: “the idea that in America white lives have always mattered more than the lives of others” (7). Glaude, in his 2020 meditation *Begin Again*, writes that James Baldwin “insisted that we see the connection between the disaster of our interior lives and the mess of a country that believed, for some odd reason, that if you were white you mattered more than others” (xxv).

* * *

Following two years of cycling from mania to depression, I arrived for a week in a suicidal depression at the same hospital where, twenty-

three years before, I had been born.

It was April 2007. Time slowed down inside the behavioral health ward. There were only a few things on the schedule: get up at six am for medicine; go to the dining hall at seven for breakfast; go to the TV room at ten for group therapy; go back to the dining hall at twelve for lunch, and then a long, yawning afternoon ...

Arriving early to group therapy, I joined the other patients watching the news about the Virginia Tech Massacre, thirty-two dead plus the gunman. I saw pictures of the disheveled young man who had executed all those fellow students. Somehow, to my horror, I identified with him. I felt that I had enacted the violence, and I felt guilt I dared not tell the others in the therapy group.

Now, during that deep depression I had some crazy notions. For instance, I blamed myself for causing the stench that seemed to be emanating from the air conditioning unit. This was a delusion. Wasn’t my identification with the Virginia Tech shooter delusional, too? Yes, perhaps, but I had been violent towards other boys as a boy. And who knows what consequences that kind of violence can have? I don’t know whether it had a lasting long-term hurt. We have seen recent massacres of young people who have snapped and enacted random vengeance on the people or institutions they perceived caused their pain. Further, prior to entering the hospital I had been planning an even greater violence: ending my own life, and I had been reminded by a minister to whom I confessed my desire how devastating that violence would have been to my family and my friends. I had checked into the hospital in order to avert that violence.

Freud, writing of the loss of self-esteem that accompanies depression, or what in his time was known as melancholia, notes the delusional aspect of this loss, yet he also highlights

its unique insight: the person suffering “has a keener eye for the truth than others who are not melancholic” (156). I could admit things to myself about myself at that moment that I have rarely been able to in my “sane” states of mind. It was in the hospital, late at night, when I could not sleep, that I remembered the racism of my youth. It was also in the hospital that I was forced to accept that I would need to take medicine; and, more significantly, that I was forced to decide what I would do with my life. A condition of my release from the behavioral health ward was that I decide on a profession: and it was this choice that led me to the graduate school where I met my wife.

* * *

After President John F. Kennedy’s assassination, Malcolm X notoriously commented that the killing was a matter of “the chickens coming home to roost” (Cone). By this he suggested that America had put out a great deal of violence in the world, and now the violence spectacularly returns on the most prominent perpetrator of it. My wife recently suggested that the increased violence of recent years is a kind of karmic effect like the one that Malcolm X was talking about.

I take it that the violence we see today has its roots in the hearts of those whose ancestors created a society based not only on ideals of equality and self-government but of the peculiar notions that those made in the image of God, and stewards of an earth that belongs only to God, are somehow ranked into a racial and gendered hierarchy of worth, some naturally deserving more of that world than others. Those notions and consequent behavior that sets us against one another and gets us comparing ourselves to one another—these are some very old roots of our violence.

I would have no such ideas were it not for my wife. When we first met, I would have

been horrified to even discuss my violence of thought, word, and deed with her. I was too full of shame. Furthermore, White people barely confess their racism to one another; they are too ashamed. But they certainly don’t confess their racism to Black people. My wife is Black. Yet, as we are both human, and we love each other, our marriage has given me a place to see my own truth and to allow myself to be healed, or to continue in the process of healing.

When, at the beginning of my relationship with my wife, I shunned self-confrontation with the racism of my past, it seemed too much for me to countenance: that I would harbor fear, judgment, false assumptions about the people to which my wife belonged. Love and hatred seemed to be closely intertwined. But it is no mystery, for self-love and self-hatred have always existed in fierce opposition inside of me.

Again, I don’t know if my experience reflects the private or unconscious life or shadow or unspoken histories of any of my readers—you, for instance. But I do know that in our society we are hemmed about with a thousand prohibitions on what can be said and what cannot be said, what questions can be asked and what cannot be asked, what is good and what is bad, and who is good and bad. It becomes dangerous to acknowledge to the extent that we human beings—not just the deplorable ones, but the respectable ones—are capable of hate and violence as surely as we are capable of grace and love and giving. Increasingly, we live in a social media simulacrum of ourselves. It’s hard to see ourselves clearly. We should not confess our negativity in order to feel bad about ourselves or to desperately seek reassurance but to love ourselves, to accept our full humanity, and grow past the ill we feel towards one another.

* * *

We are not supposed to talk about mental illness, racism, or bullying, except in pious ways of saying that these are social problems that need to be addressed. It's much riskier to own these marks of negativity. Yet they are the shadow of our violent society.

These are not strictly "personal" issues nor "systemic" but both: the ways we allow the system to block our ability to love. Ralph Ellison, no sentimentalist, saw the task of his writing to be a way of fighting through illusions to return to "that condition of man's being at home in the world, which is called love, and which we term democracy" ("Brave Words," 154).

A problem with the way we talk about hatred—racism, transphobia, misogyny, or hysteria towards immigrants and refugees, or what have you; the violence of thought, of word, of deed—is that we assume it's an evil that must be isolated, decried, exposed, and expelled. The community must be purified through an irreversible ceremony of scapegoating: a cancellation. This is no more an antidote to the hatred that ails us than imprisonment is a cure for crime. We must rather see what the hatred is teaching us about ourselves and our neighbors. And we mustn't negate that hatred (or worse, pretend it's not there, that it only exists in our neighbors, not ourselves). Rather, we must hold the hatred to the light and look closely at it, discover the fissures and soft parts and wounds that mark it, then we must transform the hatred into something us. See where it went wrong, and make it right.

* * *

Given my admittedly idiosyncratic experience, what would I recommend to those struggling to overcome racism, misogyny, homophobia, and evil thoughts about other people?

Certainly, it's important to educate ourselves, especially to read history and examine how these evil thoughts and feelings came about.

For instance, reading Howard Zinn's classic *People's History of the United States* on the various divide-and-conquer strategies that sever groups from one another was very helpful for me. Reading Henry Louis Gates's recent work *Stony the Road*, which shows how racist representations of Black peoples were used, especially following the end of Reconstruction, to exclude them from democracy, was also illuminating.

Educating oneself at least helps us change beliefs, especially conscious ones, and the new beliefs touch on redemptive possibilities. To read history means to discover the moments when our current world was created but a different one might have been—moments like the Second Great Awakening, which might have integrated worshippers across the color line, but largely didn't (see Tisby), or the contributions of Black Reconstruction that might have transformed democracy, but was abandoned and, for a long time, dismissed or forgotten (see Du Bois). It's both heartbreaking and heartening that there was nothing inevitable in our violent past of settler colonialism or chattel slavery.

But violent ideas touch us more deeply than our conscious minds, psychotherapist Resmaa Menakem argues. What he calls "white body supremacy" is trapped not merely in false ideas that we try to scrub from our minds and our speech but also in the trauma our very bodies contain, and even inherit. Menakem's book *My Grandmother's Hands* provides a therapeutic process for different groups—Whites, Blacks, even the police—to work through what he calls racialized trauma. He cautions that this working-through of racialized trauma is a process that is necessary to undergo prior to engaging with one another in community, lest re-traumatizing occur.

While this is true, self-reflection is a waystation on the path towards community. One cannot ultimately overcome violence—and I want to

be clear I haven't arrived at this point—without relationships of love, of friendship, or what Jeffrey Stout called “relationships of mutual accountability.” “All real living,” Martin Buber wrote, “is meeting” (11). We must learn to love one another without assumption or judgment, with openness and courage.

It's important to explore, whether in a group or through techniques of introspection, what it is in ourselves that gives hateful or violent thoughts their weight, their pull or purchase. For me, tipped off by a strong strain that runs through the writings of James Baldwin, the pull to judge others has been a lack of self-love. When we love ourselves, there is no reason why we should bother with hating our neighbor. In fact, as is often remarked, “love your neighbor as yourself,” that central tenet of monotheism, is dependent on your ability to love yourself.

I would stress, if my limited experience is an indication, that we don't emerge from the cave of our prejudices into a gentle illumination where everything is soft, clear, and lovely ever after. Rather, the light is dazzling; in my marriage, for instance, I make mistakes and get defensive or angry to cover my shame; and it usually takes too long for me to regain my senses and remember that my purpose is love, not self-assurance.

The work of making a democracy, a multiracial one committed to the flourishing of all, Ellison suggests, contains the same kind of difficulty of making a marriage work: and no marriage can survive without love as well as a measure of unity across differences, rooted in respect. Though the US is not “exceptional” in the old imperialist sense, it is so in its very averageness, its bringing together of peoples and desires from across the globe. In this sense the world looks to us with skepticism and hope that we can abandon our violence and open our hearts.

* * *

When I look at the great social movements of American history, I am struck by a few qualities of them: first, they are carried out primarily by those with a stake in the movement. The major movers and shakers of the civil rights movement were Black people; the major activists of the feminist movement were women; the major players in the AIM movement (American Indian Movement) were Native; the great leaders of queer movements were queer, etc. This is not to discount the importance of allies, particularly in a movement like abolition, where many of those primary rebels against the system were still enslaved and did not have the freedom to fight against it. But it is to note that the conviction that these actors felt hardly moved beyond the actors themselves. They were able to achieve much by moral suasion, by media pressure, by political coalition, etc., yet often their demands were met, to an extent, without fundamentally altering the hearts and minds of others who are not involved in the movement.

In *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant characterize the effect of the civil rights movement as a thoroughgoing “politicization of the social.” So many apparently marginal groups were energized, catalyzed to fight for recognition, rights, full citizenship, etc. And we see such movements being extended further with immigrant, transgender, and other groups today.

However, in a sense, the saturating effects of the sixties movements were radically incomplete. They have not reached many people, particularly many White people, in our bones. Although the movements have created, and continue to create, institutional and legal and systemic shifts, the system is quite stubborn because most people's hearts and minds have not been deeply affected. That's why what's needed in the United States, and the world over, is a *moral*, even a spiritual, change, to

rise to the level of the demands for political change. Some activists, such as the Rev. Dr. William Barber, in foregrounding the moral aspect of the “third reconstruction,” have seen that we need change at the level of the heart if we are possibly to see a time of healing, of reparation, of justice, of fulfilling the promises of America. Reconstruction cannot happen without repentance. We can’t want or wait for lack of ways to repair this world—they are as wonderfully various as our souls. So I’m challenging whoever reads this essay to see how they contribute, or have contributed, to the violence that is happening now. I’m not saying this to shame anyone or make them feel bad. It’s actually quite empowering to know that we’re responsible for what we see on the news. Instead of wringing our hands, we can rewrite the script. ●



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That Autumn was Bullet Proof

MATTHEW LIPPMAN

I am crying now.

Who isn't?

I took down the sukkah walls. The blue tarps.

Then I cut the gourds from their strings.

The autumn leaves blew around my feet and I said *hello leaves*.

They said *goodbye*.

The sukkah heals the world

and when you take it down

you keep one in your body so when your body meets the world

someone feels better.

You keep one in your pocket

so when you give it to the person at the bus stop who is weeping

they will continue to weep.

I am in the car crying.

Taylor Swift is on the stereo.

My Tears Ricochet. They do.

They bounce all over the highway like bullets into road signs.

I don't like bullets.

Once I believed the sukkah walls were bullet proof.

That autumn was bullet proof

but now nothing is bullet proof.

That is why I am crying in the classroom this morning.

The books fall off the shelves

and no one wants to read anymore.

Especially not the kids.

Some of them have family in the war zone.

Do you know what a sukkah is?

You eat in it and shake the lulav to celebrate the sweetness of the harvest.

It's the harvest that heals the world.

The death of crops so you can eat in winter.

Every time I take down the sukkah walls it says *hello*.



Jr Korpa on Unsplash

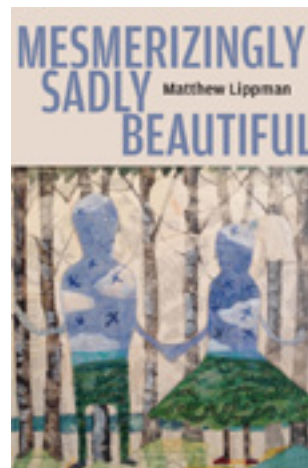
Every time I hear Taylor Swift I think of Natalie and I weep.
She's my daughter who knows all the lyrics to the sukkah.
She sings, *We gather stones, never knowing what they'll mean/
Some to throw, some to make a diamond ring.*
Some days Taylor Swift is the sukkah of the world.
Some days it is just you and me.

I am crying now in the middle of the sky.
I am the sukkah of the world and so are you.
I don't know how I got here.
The clouds blow around my feet.
Hello clouds, I say.
They say, *Don't look down if you are scared.*
I am scared but I have no choice.
I look down.

I am crying again, here in the parking lot.
It's a Dunkin Donuts parking lot of the world.
There is coffee for everyone.
There are glazed donuts for everyone.
Everyone is here, crying, in the war zone,
in the comfort zone,
in the zone of harmony and dissonance
that is the sukkah of the world
and the walls are trying hard
to keep all the bullets out. ●

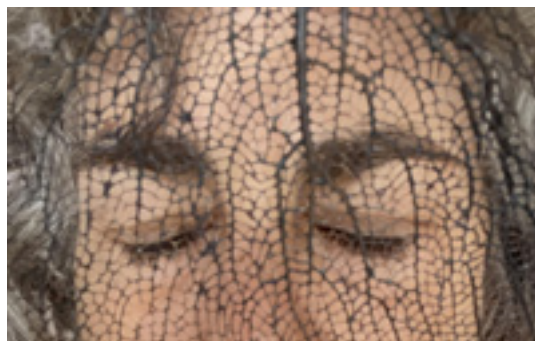
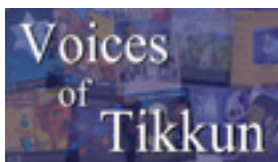


MATTHEW LIPPMAN, the recipient of the 2018 Levis Prize for his book *Mesmerizingly Sadly Beautiful* (2020), published by Four Way Books, is the author of six poetry collections. His next collection, *We Are All Sleeping With Our Sneakers On*, will be published by Four Way Books in 2024.



I Was Someone's They and They Were Mine

AMY SHIMSHON-SANTO



Amy Shimshon-Santo

I was they and they were them.
 They is so much simpler than a someone.
 They this, they that.
 They are looking for a reaction.
 They are trying to trigger you.
 They could not give a shit if you are alive or dead.
 They are butchers.
 They were high on opiates.
 They cut off her foot, his hand.
 They bound them together before they struck the match.
 They have made the choice, us or them.
 They bomb civilians.
 They destroy a hospital.
 They are buried in the rubble.
 They have no bread or water.
 They must be rescued immediately.
 They may not make it through the night.
 They have written their children's names on their wrists.
 They want the aid to enter.
 They want the bombing to cease.
 They are in tense negotiations.
 They are brokering a deal.
 They want all hostages released immediately.
 They are mad at what the released hostages said.
 They want him to resign.
 They met with the United Nations.
 They were warned not to meet with the United Nations.
 They are negotiating their release.
 They were murdered in the bombings.
 They are relatives.
 They are counting the dead, making estimates.
 They are a numeric quantity of cadavers.
 They identify the burnt cadavers by their dental records.
 They are using DNA sampling to determine who they are.
 They are covered with fabric before burial.
 They are buried in mass graves.
 They are in mourning.
 They have not slept for weeks.
 They are afraid to speak aloud in their own languages.
 They tell their children not to speak when they go outside.
 They want to be invisible.
 They are not at all alike.
 They are siblings.

They are being translated.
 They are watching different news feeds.
 They are seeing different images.
 They are in danger.
 They didn't include you in their statement.
 They wanted to burn the house down.
 They wanted to hear music.
 They wanted a place to be.
 They wanted to grow vegetables.
 They bombed the city center.
 They wanted to grow old.
 They can't identify them from ashes.
 They are buried beneath concrete.
 They want to find their loved ones.
 They want to bring them back.
 They do not want vengeance in their name.
 They want dignity.
 They want to be safe.
 They have a corrupt and tyrannical government.
 They have a corrupt and tyrannical government.
 They have disrupted any hopes for peace.
 They want us to believe in a them. ●



AMY SHIMSHON-SANTO is based in Los Angeles and has immediate family in the Southwest, the Middle East, and South America. Her art and community work nourish inclusive cultural ecologies for planetary justice. She was in Tel Aviv on October 7 supporting an exhibition of her mother's artwork. Her mother was born in Jerusalem in 1932 in British Mandate Palestine. www.amyshimshon.com

3 Poems by ire'ne lara silva

the pain of the body is sacred

we talk about dignity
and we talk about choices

we talk about medication
and we talk about surgery

we talk about what is likely
and we talk about what isn't

we learn new phrases like
breakthrough pain

we learn to count hours
between permitted doses

i see things i hadn't seen
before—red flesh, white bone

i see pain beyond all bearing
and wonder that it can be survived

what i learned all those years ago
was that the pain of the body is sacred

it is a sacred thing to witness this
to hold all of this in my heart

how the body is wounded
how the body falters
how the body heals
how the body weeps
how the body breaks
how the body is a ruin

how we cared for the body of the one we loved
how we poured love into the body of the one we loved
how even at the end it was hard to remove our hands
to let go of their hands to not touch their face
to not think *i didn't know it would be so soon*

we didn't know
that all of it was sacred



Mohammad Emami on Unsplash

my mother would say

mis muertitos
'my dead'
in the diminutive

claiming all her dead with
unfaded undimmed unending
love and affection

i say when anyone
will listen that she taught me
how to mourn

as if she knew she
would leave me when i was young
as if she knew i would have much to mourn

or perhaps it was because
i was the first child born
after her mother died

i don't know the dates
sometimes i wonder if i floated
in tears and not amniotic fluid

she taught me by
remembering and remembering
her own mother

what her mother loved
how her mother spoke
what her mother believed

and i knew how to mourn
my own mother how it was less
pain and more love to remember

to speak all the time of what
she loved and what she said and
what she taught me

my mother knew no distant
way to think of her ancestors
or her beloved dead

i think she would have had
compassion for those who are
awkward in the face of grief

awkward because
grief hasn't yet visited them
or because they weren't taught

and they don't know
or cannot accept that death
is not the opposite of life

only the next part
the next world
the doorway we'll all enter

no one taught me
to fear death and i never
learned it on my own

i wonder now
now because i spend days
all my days in contemplation

if this a form of meditation
this remembering the dead
who are gone

but also not gone
to mourn and mourn deeply
in all directions in time

i cannot make new memories
with *mis muertitos*
but it crosses my mind all the time

they would have loved this
this would have made them laugh
and this would have made them weep

as fiercely as i might laugh or live
what do i call this
new way of walking

this sense that
every other step is in the
next world not this one

it isn't that they are with me
it's that part of me
is already with them

descanso

i notice them everywhere i go. i always have. today on the same street i saw three of them. different sizes. one not much more than a cross with plastic red and white roses. one covered in blue flowers and a wooden slat with a name and a date. and one with only slightly sun-faded star-and heart-shaped balloons. four bouquets of plastic flowers. mardi gras beads. a sunshine yellow cross with *blessed* written in turquoise paint.

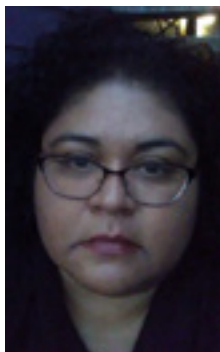
when i see them i don't cross myself like i do when i pass by cemeteries and graveyard. i don't know what to call that fractional moment of acknowledgment which is me all at once crossing myself and sending a prayer and thinking of the deceased and thinking of the mourners and a small salutation to Death Herself. but all of that happens in a flash which is neither sad nor afraid but is real.

i think of how it makes sense to mark the place of loss with flowers and balloons and bright colors. how that sends a continuous burst of love to their lost one. how it must be a way to begin to heal the rip of sudden death. perhaps a painful death. and how acknowledging the loss hurts less than passing by that place and seeing nothing to mark where it happened.

what i have discovered in these months of loss is that the descanso for his loss is not necessarily where his body rests now. it's not even the place where he left this life. it doesn't matter where i am or where i go. i carry his descanso with me. everywhere i go. i carry it in my chest. here in my chest where his leaving left a hole so big there was hardly enough flesh to keep me together.

here in my chest is where i bring all the flowers. where i leave all the brightly ribboned memories. all the silver medallitas of all the things that meant so much to us both. where i carry all his favorite things. and where i put all the things he would have loved that he will never see or know or taste. here is where i will carry all the balloons lighter than air and heavier than grief.

i am the descanso. ●



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When Discussing Zionism

SUSAN EISENBERG



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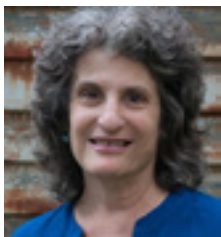
Unless you want eyes to somersault backwards avoid tiresome clichés: no *bulldozers*, no *olive trees*, no *Deir Yassin*.

Avoid phrases marked *Highly Flammable* starting with A: *annexation*, *apartheid*. Likewise *ethnic cleansing*, *human rights*, *international law*, *settler-colonial*, so on so forth.

Don't belabor the past. That 3500-year-old relief archeologists destroyed in Tiberias — gone is gone. Same for those four soccer cousins killed which — already stated — was unintentional unfortunate regrettable accidental pick one.

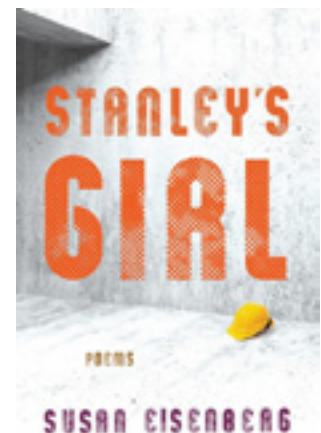
And don't *don't* reference the Shoah or compare right to German citizenship / Right of Return, compensation for business there / here, or artwork books homes still held hostage, or any other parallels or goose and gander.

And *don't!* even imagine a sentence that holds the words *Jews* and *pogrom* where *Jews* is the subject not object. ●



SUSAN EISENBERG — poet, visual artist, and oral historian — is a Resident Scholar at the Brandeis Women's Studies Research Center where she directs the On Equal Terms Project focused on employment equity. A recipient of the 2023 Joe Hill Award, she is poetry editor of *Labor*, and

her most recent poetry book is *Stanley's Girl* (Cornell) and most recent art installation exhibition was at the AFL-CIO in Washington DC



March

LISA NAMDAR KAUFMAN

Karkur Junction, one hour north of Tel Aviv, March 2023.



Image credit: Lisa Namdar Kaufman. Used with permission.

My left eye is a puddle
of blood. Thursday morning,
I woke up that way.
My husband took my
blood pressure. *Stop talking*
he said which made me laugh
and the digital cuff flash
Error. *Relax*
he said which made my heart
beat harder.

Friday evening and the blood's still
pooling. I will see a doctor and he (or
she but let's be real, most likely he) will
ask, Are you stressed? Under pressure?
Am I stressed.
Democracy is collapsing,
my mother's breast cancer has marched
into the meningeal lining of her brain, we won't talk
about my father now, because none of that
is new. It's 85 degrees on the first of March and I
can't get the smell out. Skunk and cowshed
still wafting from the water cannon
that doused us ten minutes from home.

They rolled the big guns
across the highway. I'd heard
these cannons hurt,
often shot straight
into crowds, knocking people down and
tearing at their clothes. But
on Wednesday night the police aimed high
and let the foul water
rain on us – then rushed
the intersection
to open it to traffic
and let the cars pass, let
the people home. It was rush

hour and the sun set and
the migrating birds flew
in great black v's across
the dusky sky. The water sprayed.
A 400 meter range.
A yelp went up, a collective holler,
an instinctual retreat, but then we —
the protesters, returned. We did not yield
to the forces charged with clearing us.

My mother is ready for more chemo,
she had ruled it out before, the potential
side effects of this particular poison too much
to bear. But that was before
the latest scans and mapping. Before
the disease raced up the spinal thoroughfare.

I am trying hard to understand
the legislative process of my adopted home.
Three readings they say. The bill is read
three times and voted on three times
to make it law. That sounds silly, but
it won't be silly the morning after.

I am envisioning the *shiva*. We will rend
our clothes and all sit down
on the hot asphalt
and mourn. ●



LISA NAMDAR KAUFMAN is an American Israeli writer, filmmaker, and translator whose written work has appeared in numerous journals including *Quarterly West*, *MARGIE: Journal of American Poetry*, *Fox Cry Review*, and the SMEOP Anthology, *HOT*. She teaches for Gotham Writers' Workshop and earned a BA from Brown University and an MFA from Columbia.

Tikkun uplifts Jewish, interfaith, and secular prophetic voices of hope that contribute to universal liberation. A catalyst for long-term social change, we empower people and communities to heal the world by embracing revolutionary love, compassion, and empathy. We promote a caring society that protects the life support system of the planet and celebrates the Earth and the universe with awe and radical amazement. We support ethical, spiritual, economic, and political ideas that seek to replace the ethos of selfishness, materialism, nationalism, and capitalism with an ethos of generosity, caring for everyone on the planet (including animals), and every attempt to build local and global solidarity while enhancing love.

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