MS-831: Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation Records, 1980–2008.
Series C: Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE). 1988–2003.
Subseries 5: Communication, Publications, and Research Papers, 1991–2003.

Box	Folder
43	10

Green, Arthur. Restoring the Aleph: Judaism for the Contemporary Seeker. Planning, dissemination, and drafts, 1995-2003.

3101 Clifton Ave, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220
513.487.3000
AmericanJewishArchives.org

December 4, 1995

Dear Art:

I know you're mulling over the talk/piece. Before you sit down in January, I wanted to relay a couple of things.

First, as I told you briefly at the GA, your talk has had a widening resonance for me--and not for me alone. Rachel Cowan, Bethamie and I were talking over the (Wexner alum) retreat about how much your talk has become a point of reference for all of us.

Rachel led a session on the writings of Etty Hillesum, whose beautiful quest for the living presence of God in the midst of (Dutch, Shoah) horror exemplified the kind of seeker you were describing. When the (large and interested) group of Wexnerites began to discuss whether she was really a Jewish seeker or a "universal" one, I quoted your talk about how, for seekers, all rituals, liturgies and metaphors are pathways to the oneness of God, which is at the center. Much talk ensued about how uncomfortable we are with such direct talk of God, and how it "sounds Christian to us."

At another point, I found myself quoting your talk about the way people like Hillesum (the spiritual elite), were they born today, might not find a place for themselves in the Jewish community, and how impoverished we would then be. The idea that we are losing such people (people with the kind of souls and spiritual power that Etty Hillesum had) made a big impact on people, as a number of them came up to me afterwards and over the weekend to thank me for my comments (your comments!). They were also very interested in the Jewish Healing Center, which Rachel had mentioned only obliquely (since she and I were among its founders). This is further affirmation of the interest in spirituality even among these mainstream attendees.

All this is to confirm that there was something very important at the heart of what you were addressing that night.

I also took notes on the GA talk you gave and wanted to offer back to you what had seemed striking to me. You may or may not want to include what follows in your January work, but because I thought the GA talk was, at times, an elaboration of your earlier one, I wanted to be sure to pass these along.

--I liked your saying of spirituality: "There are just a few things to learn--but it's very hard to learn them." You spoke about the need not only to learn our tradition and to preserve it, but also to "open our hearts."

--I liked the way you addressed the question: What is Jewish spirituality--and what isn't it?

--I also liked the distinction you drew between Jewish spirituality and Jewish continuity--that they overlap but are not identical.

--You again alluded to what you had spoken of at CIJE: What is needed in the future that does not currently exist? (Kabbalat Shabbat silent services, etc.) Such ideas help concretize for people the possible place of seekers in a more expansive life of community.

--I was very struck by your phrase about "trusting history" [to take care of what might end up being an aberration].

--By the way, your statement that "the majority of non-Asian Buddhists in North America are Jews" is particularly potent in delineating this issue.

--Last, your saying that we have much to learn from other traditions, and that Judaism has important answers but no monopoly on answers, is also illuminating.

In other words, I think you are making a real contribution in describing for people what animates genuine, serious seekers and why being a Jewish seeker is not quite the same thing as being Jewishly literate.

I don't know what timetable works for you. Ideally, I would like to mail your printed essay with the invitation to attendees of the next board seminar, and to an expanded network of readers across the country. To do so, the piece would have to be in published form by the end of March. Counting back from then, I would need your fnished work as close to mid-January as possible. That may not be feasible for you--and that, of course, is the only factor that really counts.

Please let me know what you think is realistic.

With warm regards to Kathy.

Green: Spirituality & Meaning

There are just a few things to learn — but it's very hard to learn them.

Each person goes his/her way.

But we all eng. in our personal quest in a context — t contemp. J commun.: the geog, hist. content.

A period wh. J law no longer determines how Js live.

- also a historical context, from Avraham

- a broader context - we did not rediscover it.

A sense that t West, scientific progr had failed us: We needed deeper answers — wisdom of the ancients, the earth.

Ours is one — and we will need all wisdoms.

- a history of our planet.

Need a common spiritual lang., to teach reverence, caring for the world in which we live., to live in harmony w/ God's world.

∴ Jewish continuity & spirituality overlap but are not identical.

We want to preserve t J people as instrument to a greater goal. Pers. transform — toward a better society.

While for many, J contin. may suffice. But on campus it's not enough 5th & 6th gen. Amer. Js. No ethnic contact w/ immigr generation.

In talking to them, must effect. is lang of spirituality, not continuity. ?s bring us are universal ?s. Meaning of human life, rehumanizing society.

Relig. quest - not a quest w/ an easy answer.

Where is God? Rt here

What's t truth? Open t bk.

Relig. search is ab. cultivating awareness, teaching people what it means to see relig. life fr. inwardness, personal commitment

Spirituality - first used RC. or רוחניות.

Relig. life is seen fr t perspect. & personal commitment. Presence of God in yr life & how y cultivate it. Action out of pers. commit, but alw. in relation to that inward pt. Distinct fr relig authority, ideas, behavior. They are secondary, back-up mechanisms wh. t seeker uses.

Change of our most basic metaphor — t vertical metaphor.

Since Middle Ages, journey is inward.

11th c. - [illegible] - [illegible], went up to the sky
- בחזני לבו כי אסתכלים [illegible]

What is J spirituality?
continuity — spirit.
distinctiveness of J spirituality

what isn't it?
what is it?
what is distinctive ab it?
the future — what do we need?
[illegible] silence
feminist
new age

trusting history

Green - 2

"[illegible]" is also a metaphor   I trust history

If we turn to our hearts & understand that being a J, human being is the same process

Our relig. lives — not only learning, preserving, but opening our hearts

Jewish spirituality

Most of non-As. Buddh in N Amer. are Js. Authentic spirituality.

What's Jewish? The language. We seek it, express ourselves in it.

As passed on of trad: Better & richer bec we have used it.

Not the only lang. that is legit or God understands but it ours & we love it.

What's exciting?

The women's movement.

Pockets of teaching.

[illegible]

Art: Lots of energy among yg Jews.

Affects y emotionally but goes beyond — reaching something bey. yrself.

Cert. features are common to all spirit. lang, but each has unique tone.

Ground. beh spiritual & normative is not uniquely Jewish — one cn. in spirit. activity also, in tension w/ the prophetic trad.

Org. efforts to do it?

Art and Kathy Green
324 Ward Street
Newton Centre, MA 02159

Nessa –

Thanks for your patience. Here it is. I'll be grateful for your reactions & suggestions.

We go to Europe next week for two weeks. I'd like to do any revisions during the last week in June. Call me before Tuesday night if you have a chance to read this by then; otherwise we return on 6/20

Best regards –

Art

Art and Kathy Green
324 Ward Street
Newton Centre, MA 02159

Barry: I found this beautiful and near-perfect for us. Alan and I would like you to read it so that I'm not the only one signing off. Please before June 20.

Thanks,
Alan

Nessa-

Thanks for your patience. Here it is. I'll be grateful for your reactions & suggestions.

We go to Europe next week for two weeks. I'd like to do any revisions during the last week in June. Call me before Tuesday night if you have a chance to read this by then; otherwise we return on 6/20

Best regards-

Art

Barry: What about education?
Nessa: "Religious humanism"

Art Green
324 Ward St.
Newton Center, MA 02159

Dear Art:

Here is your piece, with modest editorial suggestions.

Technical: I have left your Hebrew transliterations as they are, although my impulse was to change them because they are too academic for this audience [i.e., "kawannah"]. But then I decided that perhaps we should retain some trappings of the academy.

Another technical note: I don't know if the Hebrew words will transmit on the disc you prepare for the designer. Please call her (her number is on the following page) to ask her about it.

A couple of comments too long for the margins: As you'll see on the pages, I am concerned about the number of times you evoke "the wisdom of the ancients," which is a very vague phrase. I feel that you are carrying your scholarship a little too lightly here. What precisely do you mean when you say this? The scholarly audience will find this too much like "Judaism says...," or "the Rabbis believed...," I suspect; and the lay audience won't know what you're thinking about.

Similarly, I'm wary of sentences like the following two: "Perhaps not since the terrible plague years of the Middle Ages has life seemed quite so precarious" [p. 3]. You may have arrived at this conclusion after a genuine immersion in the history of the world, but it seems overly broad. Also: "As mature and sophisticated as we Westerners become in our faith..." [p.22]. When I look around, I can't say that people are so mature and sophisticated in their faith these days. They are probably thinking less about their faith now than at any time since the beginning of the Enlightenment--unless they're fundamentalists, who are certainly not mature and sophisticated.

One of the tensions I want to retain is the one between your enormous body of knowledge/rigorous mind--and your "on the edge" thinking. I don't want the essay to seem "lite" on the first, because it ends up paradoxically undermining the force of the second. (For this reason, although the essay is very different

and more dependent on sources, I asked Jonathan Sarna to include all his footnotes and references--although he was not initially inclined to do so for a general audience.)

Perhaps you can read the essay through one last time with this point in mind.

When you've reviewed my suggestions and made the changes you wish, please send the piece, a disc, and an annotation about what program you use directly to the designer:

Liz Sheehan
27 W. 24 St./Room 801
New York, NY 10010

Her phone is 212-627-4490. Please call her the day before so that she can look out for it. If you can get it to her in the week of July 8, that would be optimal.

[redacted]

I will be back on July 31, at which time the designed pages will be waiting. I will review them doubly carefully, because you and I have not been able to speak in person; then I'll send you my annotated copy for your review. We can still make minor changes if we need to at that time. Also, if you have any questions, we can address them together.

Please let me know by mail where you'll be in the first 10 days of August. I would like the piece to be published by Labor Day and want to be sure it has received the care and time it warrants. Also, please include a one-paragraph bio as you would want to be identified at the back. (I have enclosed a copy of the Sarna piece to remind you of our design; yours will be the second in the series.)

Have a good July--and thank you again for reworking this so beautifully.

Nessa

Nessa

RESTORING THE ALEPH:
JUDAISM FOR THE CONTEMPORARY SEEKER

Arthur Green

The Zohar, the greatest work of Jewish mysticism, is deeply concerned with the nature of exile and the exilic situation in which God, the cosmos, and the Jew all find themselves. In one of his more profound comments on this situation[1] the thirteenth century author suggests[2] that the divine name that accompanied Israel into exile was itself a broken one. The Zohar knew and accepted the ancient tradition that "wherever Israel is exiled, the divine Presence is exiled with them." The name that accompanied them was אהיה, 'EHYEH, God's "I am" or "I shall be." The name, however, was broken: the aleph of 'EHYEH remained above in the heavens while the three letters HYH joined themselves to Israel. But in this configuration of the verb "to be," the aleph is the indicator of the future tense. Its departure means that Israel in exile loses hope, becoming detached from a sense of its own future. All that remains is HYH, that which "was," the

[1]Zohar Hadash 38a.
[2]Based on the text of Ezek. 1:3.

memory of past glory, past intimacy with the Holy One, the cosmic Aleph. Exile becomes truly serious when it causes us to lose hope.

Why should we feel hopeless as we think about the future of Jewish life in the new millenium before us? We have come through this most unspeakably complicated century of Jewish history a strong, proud, and free people. For the first time in nearly two thousand years we can say that Jews are no longer oppressed by any regime for the crime of being Jewish. Popular anti-semitism still exists, but not on a scale to constitute a significant threat. Israel is living through an era of prosperity and is looking forward to a time of real peace, even as terrible costs in human life are being paid along the way. Jews in North America have achieved levels of material success and acceptance by the established powers of this society that go beyond the immigrant generation's wildest dreams. Even the final taboo against mingling with Jews, that of accepting them into the family circle, is breaking down. Surveys show that few Christian families, especially those of older American Protestant stock, any longer object to their children marrying Jews.

Ah, but there's the rub. Intermarriage, it turns out, was not quite what we had in mind. We sought full acceptance in America: that meant elite schools, executive positions in old companies, moving into the "right" suburbs, even joining the country club. But somehow we naively thought it would stop there. Jewish boys would take Jewish girls to the country club dance, or at least would come home to marry Jewish women after a few "flings" on the other side. Now we discover that there are no "sides" any more. Young Jews growing up in this country after 1970 are almost fully integrated into American white upper and middle class society, ~~one that~~ which with but rare exceptions embraces them with open arms.

For the vast majority of American Jews under forty, this is the fourth generation since immigration. These are Jewish kids, or half or quarter-Jewish kids, whose grandparents were born mostly in urban east coast American cities. Few of them live in those cities any more, and a great many are scattered to other parts of the continent altogether. To these Jews the "old country" is Brooklyn, Philadelphia, or Baltimore. Their grandparents' tales of childhood are as likely to be about baseball games as they are about pickles or herring from the barrel. Jewish knowledge is rare in that second generation; most were too busy Americanizing to care much about the bits of Jewish lore or practice their parents had dragged with them from across the sea. The fourth generation has no direct tie to the world of East European Jewish life and its spiritual and cultural riches. All that belongs to history. The natural ties to Yiddishkeyt, ~~including~~ the rhythms of the Jewish year, the inflections of Jewish speech, even the humor, ~~all of~~ which we Jews over fifty (including the important group of children of Holocaust survivors, whose memories are still more vivid) remember so well are no longer a part of this younger generation's psyche.

From the twenties through the sixties, Jews were among the great proponents of melting-pot ideology. Here we were, part of a new nation being forged in America. Forget the old hatred and divisions of Europe! Those were code words for us; we hoped they would mean "Leave anti-semitism behind." "Who wants to visit Europe?" an immigrant uncle of mine used to proclaim, as the first relatives ventured forth as tourists in the fifties. "We ran away from there!" Here we would help to create something better, fairer, less hateful, more humane. Ethnic divisions would recede with the passage of time. Even racial divisions, we thought somewhat naively, would eventually fall away like so many relics of backwoods prejudice.

In the late 1960's the pendulum began to swing the other way. Ethnicity was rediscovered by America, thanks significantly to the "black is beautiful!" cry that came forth from African-Americans toward the end of the civil rights generation. Distinctiveness and pride in origins took the place of full integration as the final goal. Latinos were just beginning to become articulate as a minority, and they too clearly wanted to hold on to some of their old ways, including language. But if black and Latino were beautiful, so were Italian, Polish, Armenian, and all the rest, including Jewish. For us this era in American cultural history coincided with the shock-therapy in Jewish awareness offered by the Six-Day War, leading to a major renewal of Jewish life over the course of the succeeding two decades.

This renewal was heralded by the growth of the Jewish counter-culture, best known through the Havurah movement and the Jewish Catalogues. But it includes such mainstream phenomena as the growth of day school education, the development of Jewish Studies programs in colleges and universities, a great array of books, ranging from fiction to scholarship, magazines such as Moment and Tikkun, and much more. It includes the new pride (and sometimes militancy) of Orthodoxy and the inclusion of Orthodox concerns on the general Jewish agenda. It is represented in a significant shift in both style and priorities within the organized community, from the greater funding of Jewish education to the observance of kashrut and shabbat at public communal functions.

Then came the nineties, opening with the devastating news of the National Jewish Population Survey. Was the whole Jewish renewal movement, in all its phases, both too little and too late? Such qualitative observers as Charles Silberman and Leonard Fein, celebrators of the spirit of renewal, were now swept aside by dour figures-don't-lie predictions based

on the ever-increasing rates of intermarriage, the surprisingly low rate of conversions to Judaism, and the high drop-out rate of Jews themselves. The fear begins to mount that Jewish counter-culture types are our version of aging hippies, that the "new" and supposedly dynamic Judaism of the havurot and minyanim is in fact serving ~~but a small~~ only closed group of rabbis' kids and ~~alumni of~~ Jewish summer camps, ~~and that~~ even a day-school education is viewed as far from innoculation against intermarriage, as we raise a generation that lives in a very nearly unbounded (for upwardly mobile and educated whites, which happens to include most Jews) open society.

That is why we are afraid. We see a decline in numbers, in loyalty, in knowledge. Those of us raised in this tradition were taught to value one mitsvah over all others: ושננתם לבניך, "teach them to your children." Even among Jews where there was in fact rather little left to pass on, the transmission of heritage, especially in the years following the Holocaust, was the greatest imperative of Jewish life. We were raised ~~ever~~ to see ourselves as a link between our parents and our children, our grandparents and our grandchildren, passing a legacy from each generation to the next. In Jewish families all over this country there is a feeling that the chain is being broken. We stand dumbfounded as we see whole limbs falling off the tree, the end of Judaism or Jewish awareness in branches of our own families.

If Judaism is going to survive in this country it will do so because it meets the needs of new generations of entirely American Jews, including Jews who have some non-Jewish relatives and ancestors in their family trees. Rail as one may against this utilitarian/psychological approach ("They should be serving God -- or standing loyal to tradition -- rather than having their 'needs' met..."), those who work in any form of outreach to younger Jews know it to be true. These needs are partly social and communitarian, the need for small community

and intimacy in the face of mass society, partly familial and recreational, the need for "safe" day-care for toddlers and high-quality squash and tennis courts for upper-middle class Jews and their friends. But above all the need Judaism can answer is the spiritual one, a dimension of life that continues to have great and perhaps even increasing significance in American life.

The term "spirituality" is one with which most Jewish thinkers, including rabbis, were quite uncomfortable only a decade ago. Imported into English from the French chiefly by Roman Catholics, it seemed to Jews to evoke monastic life, otherworldliness, and the awesome silences of vast, dark cathedrals, all so alien to the values and experiences of children of East European Jews. Increasingly it has come to be associated with Eastern forms of meditation and the tremedous influence they have had on Americans over the course of recent decades. If these associations with "spirituality" were strange and alien even to rabbis, the communal activitists and "doers" standing at the helm of Jewish organizational life saw them as dangerously solipsistic, a self-absorbed turn inward that would lead to fragmentation rather than to greater communal strength. In fact the only Jewish group that was well-poised to deal with the needs of many Jews in this era was HaBaD. For them "spirituality" translated precisely into rukhniyes (ruhaniyyut),[3] a well-known term in Hasidic parlance, and precisely that which Hasidism had to offer. This Jewish version of spirituality meant a life devoted to avoides ('avodat) ha-shem, the service of God, but marked by an inward intensity (kavone; kawwanah) leading to attachment to God (dveykes; devequt) and ultimately to the negation (bitel; bittul) of all else. Of course for the HaBaDnik as for any hasid this avoide was to be carried out through the usual

[3] I render the terms here both in the Yiddish colloquial of Hasidic speech and in the more "proper" Sephardic and accepted scholarly versions.

Jewish means of Torah and mitsvot, including full commitment to the halakhic way of life.

Hasidism, in other words, comprises a Jewish version of the "spirituality" that so many in America are seeking. It does so, however, in a way that insists upon uncompromised acceptance of traditional norms, a way of life attractive to a few but probably impossibly alienating to most young American Jews in the twenty-first century. It is hard to believe that we are to build the Jewish future by a return to the life patterns (including role of women? style of leadership? norms of dress?) belonging to the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. This "Amish" pattern for Jewish survival is the way of a few hardy souls who join the core of those raised within it, but it offers little attraction for the many.

But let us return to "spirituality." Now that we have found a Jewish language for it, let us examine more closely what it means and why it has so much become the cry of our age. Spirituality is a view of religion that sees its primary task as cultivating and nourishing the human soul or spirit. Each person, according to this view, has an inner life that he or she may choose to develop; this "inwardness" (penimiyyut in Hebrew) goes deeper than the usual object of psychological investigation and cannot fairly be explained in Freudian or other psychological terms. Ultimately it is "trans-personal," stretching deeply into the self but then extending through an inward reach beyond the individual and linking him/her to all other selves (to all other Jews, the hasidim would say) and to the single Spirit or Self of the universe we call God. God is experientially accessible through the cultivation of this inner life, and awareness (da'at) of that access is a primary value of religion. External forms, important as they are, serve as instruments for the development, disciplining, and fine tuning of this awareness.

Such is in fact the shared theology of vast numbers of seekers in our era. Though pursuing the quest through a great variety of symbols and traditions, we are joined by a series of shared sensitivities that transcend the differences between our various systems of expression. We understand "being religious" not primarily as commitment to particular symbols or even as faith in a specific set of principles, but as openness to a deep well of inner experience. This includes experiences in nature, in solitude, those induced by meditation and silence, or some quite spontaneous. Moments like these offer us insight into the wholeness of being, expressed by Hasidic tradition as the realization that "the whole earth is filled with His glory" or "there is no place devoid of Him," but by Hindu and Buddhist philosophy without reference to God as "that which is, is." It is the truth of such moments, translated into teachings through one language or another, that nourishes our lives, that gives us the strength to go forward. It is the love for and unity with all creation in such moments (whether those are moments experienced, imagined, or merely striven for) that underly our ethical and moral lives and tell us how to live. Whether our spirituality is Jewish or Christian, Buddhist or eclectic new-age, you will probably hear us talking about living in harmony with natural forces, following the voice of our deepest inward nature, and seeking to shape a human society that appreciates more and destroys/consumes less of nature's bounty, or of God's gifts. There is beginning to emerge a shared spiritual language of this age, one that transcends the borders of the traditions in which we live and where we may have gained our original impetus toward the spiritual life.

We share a sense that the world urgently needs this new spirituality, and are as committed to it as we are to our individual traditions. Living in an age of ecological crisis, we understand that nothing is more important for

humanity than a shared ~~spiritual~~ language, reaching across the borders of traditions, that will make us more sensitive to the natural and physical world in which we live, which is itself the domain of the sacred. In the coming century all the religions will have to be drawn upon to create such a language in order to ~~make for a~~ transformation ~~of~~ human conciousness ~~needed~~ for the very survival of our world.

This "new" universal spirituality of the late twentieth century is most commonly lightly dressed in Indian or Tibetan garb and thus accompanied by belief in reincarnation, karma, and various charts of spritual energies or stages in the process of enlightenment. Western elements too are "thrown into the pot" of this ever-changing spiritual stew. The commonality of theological and ultimately experiential sub-structure across religious and cultural lines also makes it possible for some seekers (and not only those to be dismissed as "flighty" or unstable) either to turn from one tradition to another in the course of a lifelong quest or to combine elements that seem (at least to the outsider) to originate in entire different and even contradictory social and historical contexts.

the way you phrase this – "lightly dressed," "thrown into the pot," invites skeptical readers to derogate your insight

Perhaps move this phrase up to address my comment at the top of p. 8?

Over the course of some thirty years as a Jew committed to my own form of religious quest within Judaism, I have met many Jews who have chosen or needed to explore their spiritual lives through a variety of non-Jewish, mostly Eastern, spiritual paths. Among them I have come upon some remarkably profound, honest, and open seekers. I urge us to see such seekers not as "apostates" or as rejectors of Judaism, nor as the duped victims of "cults" ~~(though~~ such do exist; they come in Eastern, Christian, and even Jewish ~~garb~~ versions), but as continuers of at least one aspect of our people's most ancient ways. Among the spiritually wandering Jews I have met over these three decades are faithful children of Abraham, doing for themselves what we are taught our first ancestor did. They have rejected the

weird?

superficial idolatries of their own time and place (those of Washington, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue; even those of complacent, semi-assimilationist suburban Judaism, rather than those of Ashur and Ur) and have gone off to the desert, seeking in it the secret places that flow with milk and honey. Though the terrain they explore may be alien and sometimes even objectionable to us, their need to do so and the growth that takes place over the course of such exploration should be familiar ~~and comforting~~ to us as Jews.

In the generations born or raised since the end of the second world war, religious quest has been prominent among Americans ~~in~~ a way it had not been earlier. This is true among Jews in somewhat higher numbers, but it is true of general culture as well. Such serious students of American cultural norms as Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, and Martin Marty have tried to document and explain this phenomenon. The attraction of Americans to serious religion in recent years runs the whole gamut, from fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity to the quasi-Eastern, from charismatic Catholicism and HaBaD Judaism to the new age and experimental in all (and no) traditions. Among Jews it includes <u>ba'aley teshuvah</u>, those who have found their way into a more intense and spiritual, but also more observant, Jewish life; and the much larger group who have turned elsewhere for their spiritual satisfaction, sometimes to Christianity and a neo-Sufi version of Islam, but primarily to eastern religions. Generationally this group runs from Allen Ginsberg and Baba Ram Dass (a.k.a. Richard Alpert), now in their mid-60's, who came of age in the 1950's, to students currently on campus and living near campus in such centers as Berkeley and Santa Cruz, California, Cambridge and Northampton, Massachusetts, and several points in between.

Why has this generation turned so much to seeking? Some of it surely has to do with being the first to grow up in the aftermath of both Holocaust and Hiroshima. Life in the nuclear shadow has given us an insecurity paralleled in few earlier generations. Perhaps not since the terrible plague years of the Middle Ages has life seemed quite so precarious. Pictures of mass burial pits and endless bodies again inhabit our imagination. The notion that at any time some lunatic (for a while he was even named "Dr. Strangelove!") might come along and "push the button" has forced us to reach somewhere for ultimate meaning. We need something that will enable us to go forward, to bring children into the world and work to improve human life even if this does turn out to be one of its last generations. The shift over the past decade from nuclear war to ecological disaster as the focus of our fears ~~of life's destruction~~ has not essentially changed this situation.

A second motivating factor in the search for meaning among Jews is surely high level of material success that many Jews have attained over the course of these four generations. As members of the financially highest-achieving ethnic or religious group (on a per capita basis) in this society, we are brought face-to-face with questions of values and priorities. "Is this all there is?" we find ourselves asking. Wealth, achievement, and glamour do not in themselves bring happiness or fulfillment, as a significant portion of our newly active Jewish leadership has found. They also do not protect us from the personal crises ~~in which~~ spiritual meaning ~~most needed~~. Wealthy and powerful Jews still face death, infirmity, divorce, alienation between parents and children, even the ennui and emptiness that ensue when you seem to run out of deals to make, resorts to visit, entertainments to enjoy, obstacles to conquer. Life has to have some greater meaning, some value

beyond that of our own seemingly endless, and ultimately somehow trivial, achievements.

Where do we turn for such an ultimate value? Prior generations might have had an easier time believing in a God who had ultimate power over His creation, and was thus the source or guarantor of absolute values. But that sort of religion is hard for us. Will we trust a Deity who did not prevent the holocaust (or slaughter in Rwanda, starvation in Ethiopia, or the AIDS epidemic) to re-enter history and save us from destruction at our own hand? Conventional Western-type faith in an all-powerful Creator God seems difficult unless it is explained in a highly sophisticated -- and somehow compromised -- fashion. No wonder that it is rejected by large numbers of seekers, including many Jews. On the other hand, the well-known Western alternative to religious faith seems even more discredited. Our trust in humanity, and especially in the modern pseudo-religion of scientific progress and the conquest of evil through systematic human knowledge, is severely tested in the late twentieth century. Our memories include Nazi scientists in the land of reason and morality, emerging in the century after the Categorical Imperative and Absolute Spirit. It is hard, even fifty years later, to believe in the "progress" wrought by modernity and its achievements. Added to these are the economics and politics that complicate and often corrupt the "pure" advance of scientific thinking. We are happy to support scientific advance, to be sure, especially insofar as it alleviates suffering and contributes to the world's survival. But we cannot turn to it as an ultimate source of values.

Today's seeker is one who takes the accomplishments of science for granted; the old battles between the religious and scientific world-views on life's origins read to us like ancient history. But we also understand that we

need not look to the scientific community as our provider of meaning. Often we try to push science by integrating into it the wisdom of the ancients, whether in accepting traditional Chinese and homeopathic medicine or in talk of rungs of consciousness that may preserve memories of countless past lives and generations, much like the rungs of the tree of, more to the point, molecules of DNA preserve genetic "memory."

There has been a sense throughout this period that humanity needed to be rescued by a deeper truth, by some more ancient wisdom. Over the course of these past several decades, that has mostly been the wisdom of the East, in various Indian, Japanese, and most prominently in recent years, Tibetan forms. The insecurity of the West about its own achievement, including the basis of its ~~own~~ moral life, makes us more open (and not for the first time) to learning from other civilizations. The heart of this Eastern teaching is a profound non-dualism, an acceptance of all that is, and a timelessness created by meditative silence that allows one to transcend daily worries great and small. When seen anew from the heights of this compassionate yet detached ~~monastic~~ mindset, life regains the value it had lost in the battle-scarred decades of violence and degradation through which all of us have lived.

We far fewer seekers who have made Judaism the path of our quest find some similar and some different formulations. We too look toward the contemplative and inward portions of our tradition: "Jewish Meditation," reconstructed from many fragments of nearly lost practices has evinced great interest in recent years.[4] The theological language to which we are attracted

[4]It would be interesting to make a study of "Jewish meditation" as a growth industry over the course of the past twenty years. The bibliography in Mark Verman's would be a good place to start. Such a study would be an object lesson in the interpenetrating influence of Orthodox Kabbalists (Aryeh Kaplan), critical Judaica scholars (Moshe Idel), and new-age teachers (Zalman Schachter), all in the shadow of the growth of Eastern meditational practices in the West during this period.

is largely that of the mystical tradition, though few would find it accurate to designate ourselves as "Kabbalists" in a literal sense. It is the abstract notion of Deity, combined with the richness of metaphor and symbol, that makes the Kabbalah attractive. The highly simplified mystical language of the early Hasidic sources, one that speaks of fullness and emptiness, of the ever-elusive God beyond and the spirit of Godliness that fills all existence, seems especially well-suited to the contemporary need. Most have found that regular patterns of observance, especially the rhythms of shabbat and weekday and life according to the sacred calendar, offer unfathomable spiritual rewards. This includes those who have "gone all the way" and joined Hasidic or other ultra-Orthodox communities and others who have sought less rigid structure, often gravitating toward Reconstructionist or "Jewish Renewal" circles. At their best, the latter have sought to create a "maximalist" version of liberal Judaism, as intense as Orthodoxy in its demands, but more universalistic in perspective and emphasizing a renewed prophetic commitment and ~~a sense of~~ Judaism's demand for justice and care for the downtrodden as key portions of that maximalist agenda. Whether such a "muscular" and demanding liberal Judaism can take hold is a key question in thinking about our collective future.

The serious seeker, today as always, is open to taking on spiritual disciplines, even of the most rigorous kind. We are not talking about an easy push-a-button or drop-a-pill experience-craving pseudo-spirituality, one that seeks only "highs" and takes no responsibility for the deep valleys that lie between the peak experiences.[5] All the traditions recognize that discipline

[5] The emphasis here is an address to ~~my~~ several friends, thinkers and writers who are my seniors by a generation, who continue to attack the recovery of spiritual life in Judaism in the most distorting terms. Let me make it quite clear to ~~these~~ them that neither I nor any responsible voice I know is advocating 1) the abandonment of commitment to social justice; 2) a drug-like euphoria in which we lose any sense of borders and therefore the ability to distinguish right from wrong; 3) entering closed havurah-cloisters where we will ignore the rest of the Jewish community and leave it to its sorry fate.

and regularity of practice are essential building-blocks of the spiritual life. Their routine and the very ordinariness of doing them day after day, even when they seem empty, provide the counterpoint to the spiritual mountaintops of great insight that appear occasionally in their midst. But the diciplines we seek, whether old or new, are those that seem helpful to us, those that ~~provide~~ offer us the tools and framework within which to engage in the task of spiritual growth and self-development that each of must ultimately face alone. When a practice is just there because it is traditional, done that way just because it always has been, today's seeker may be expected to question. Turn as we do to ancient paths of wisdom, we inevitably remain late twentieth-century Americans, for better and for worse: practical, somewhat impatient, wanting a hand in shaping things, not content to ~~just~~ simply accept them and pass them on. We are open to hard work, but for our efforts we expect to get results.

A number of years ago my family and I were living in Berkeley, California. Around the corner from us was, of course, a spiritual or ~~new-age~~ New Age bookstore. The front of the store was decorated with a huge sign, in inverted pyramid form. The top line read, in ~~large~~ block letters: SCIENTOLOGY DOESN'T WORK. Beneath that, in lightly smaller letters, it said: INTEGRAL YOGA DOESN'T WORK. Then, again slightly smaller: CHRISTIANITY DOESN'T WORK. After going through six or seven more would-be spiritual paths the sign concluded, again in large letters: YOU WORK. Seeing this sign reminded me of a definition of Hasidism that Abraham Joshua Heschel had passed on in the name of the Kotsker rebbe. When asked what Hasidism was all about, Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk replied: "Arbetn oif zikh" -- "to work on yourself."

Being a seeker means understanding that there is work to do. In the first instance this is spiritual work, and that means the transformation of the self, opening oneself to become a channel through which divine light shines or cosmic energy flows. This means a training of the mind in the twin tasks of awareness and responsiveness. Awareness, da'at in the Hasidic sources, means a knowing and constant remembering that all things and moments contain the Presence, that eveything can lead us back to the one. It is intellectual, to be sure, but an act of mind colored with all the eros of the first Biblical meaning of "to know," as the Hasidic sources not infrequently remind us. Responsiveness is that state cultivated over years of inward prayer or meditation, where the heart is always half open, ever ready to respond to the lightest knock by the Beloved on its gate.

The seeker in these generations has also inevitably to deal with the question of the relationship between personal and societal transformation. Each of us feels challenged by the social ills that still surround us: poverty, racism, injustice, the destruction of the planet. Few would say these matters are of no concern. Even the Eastern religions, often stereotyped in the West as totally unconcerned with alleviating the sufferings of this world on the material plane, when imported and reshaped by westerners begin to take on a measure of worldly and practical responsiblity. All of us who seek, no matter how specific our symbol system or spiritual language, are universalist in our concern for humanity and its earthly home. The question for us is often one of priorities and faith in our own capabilities to effect change. Should I spend my time in demonstrations or political party work to change the opinions of others, or should I work first to make sure my own inner garden is free of weeds? Given the shortness of my life and the limits of my strength, where should I put my energies? These questions are

unresolved for many a contemporary seeker; most of us tend to ~~shuffle~~ back and forth among priorities as our lives go on and as specific demands present themselves.

We also very much seek religious community. The lone work each of us has to do cannot thrive without the support and understanding of others. But the communities we need have to be made up of those who understand and share our search. The American synagogue, even at its best, seldom had that character in the previous generation. It was too concerned with propriety, respectability, and public image to be very welcoming to those ~~oddball~~ Jews who were seeking on the spiritual plane. That is beginning to change in some places as a new generation of rabbis and synagogue leaders are discovering the seeker in one another. Many synagogues have been quietly remade in recent years into warm and supportive communities that in havurah-like fashion serve as extended family to their members. The next step for communities like these is to seek out the seekers and make room for them, working with them to create a shared language of personal religious expression.

Judaism is not an easy path for the contemporary seeker, even if it happens to be his or her ancestral tradition. The reasons for this are manifold and the mix varies from person to person, but it behooves us to examine a few of the serious stumbling blocks that lie in our way as we think about educating for a Jewish future with the potential spiritual seeker in mind.

First are the external difficulties. Judaism is a highly verbal tradition and its language is Hebrew. Nobody says that you have to learn Pali or Tibetan or Japanese to be a good Buddhist. True, those are the languages of scripture, commentary, and the contemporary faith-communities.

But texts may be translated, as many have been, and a language-and-culture barrier to the native Buddhist cultures of Asia may in fact help in the Western Buddhist's somewhat naive recreation of the faith, rather than harm or challenge it. Significantly, few of the Eastern teachers who have come to the West in recent decades have insisted that their Western disciples learn the languages, fully absorb the practices, or assimilate culturally to the world from which their teachings came. They are realistic in this regard; recognizing the cultural distance involved, they have chosen to "go native" in the West and create indigenous forms of Buddhist or Hindu spirituality, very much a mirror image of what Roman Catholicism learned to do in Mexico or in parts of Africa. For Judaism, particularly because our traditional mentality was so shaped by oppression, minority status, and the struggle for group survival, such transcendence of the cultural/ethnic context is almost unthinkable. To do the Jewish spiritual life seriously, you really do have to know Hebrew. Our prayer traditions are highly verbal and tied to the intricacies of language, so that they just don't work in translation. So much of our teaching, including the deepest insights of the mystical and Hasidic sources, is so caught up in plays and nuances of language that translation of such sources, while it is to be increased and encouraged, will never quite be adequate.

Because we are right here in the West, the seeker living cheek-by-jowl with various ongoing Jewish communities, it is all the more difficult to create a Judaism of one's own. There seems always to be someone down the street or in one's synagogue (sometimes even if you are the rabbi!) telling you that what you have is not authentic, not Judaism as it once was and ever should be. The Havurah/Jewish Renewal movement has tried to fight this, creating small independent communities that are neo-traditional in form but

often quite revolutionary in hierarchy of values. Unfortunately these too have undergone a certain weakening as the sixties have turned into the eighties and nineties. Such communities constantly need to examine whether they are truly agents of positive change and rebalanced Jewish intensification for their members, or whether they have not become convenient clubs for those who want less, rather than more, of one or another sort of commitment. In recent years those communities have suffered from the well-known struggles of new communities in our society over issues of leadership and empowerment: does "egalitarianism" mean that those with more experience or greater knowledge of the tradition are not welcome as teachers by those who come, ~~hopefully~~ seeking to learn?

But a new commitment to Judaism as a spiritual path involves deeper problems as well. I alluded earlier to the question of God and the use of the word "God" in a contemporary spirituality. Now we have to examine this question more closely. It is clear that a person can have a spiritual life without believing in God. That is precisely what Buddhism provides, at least on a rarified theoretical level; ~~and~~ I dare say that is a major reason why it is attractive to so many Jews. The emphasis of Buddhist spiritual training is on attentiveness, on attitude, on an approach to reality rather than on a personal Subject who is the goal of one's spiritual life. Even the most spiritualized form of Judaism is focused on knowing, loving, and obeying God in one way or another. Is it in any way conceivable that one seek to have a Jewish spiritual life without "believing in God?" Let us not rush in too quickly with our negative answers; the question is more complex than it appears, and a contemporary response requires a good deal of subtlety. ~~What~~ How do we say to the Jewish seeker who says:

"Yes, I am a religious person. I believe in the oneness of all being. I feel a connection to something eternal and infinite that is present in my own soul and in yours. That's what my quest is all about. But I can't call it "God." That means that I don't consider it to be a willfull, personal being. It is not someone I want to worship, someone to whom I can address prayers. Certainly the language of the synagogue, that of God as King of Kings and myself as His supplicating servant, is not one I like or see any reason to adopt."

Or to another who says:

"I am grateful for the inordinate gifts that nature has bestowed on me. I have health, sustenance, meaningful work, a loving partner, friends and family. Sometimes when I walk on a beach or am alone outdoors on a beautiful day I feel overwhelmed by gratitude and by a sense of inadequacy to express the fulness with which I feel blessed. That is about as close as I can come to prayer. But the prayer that wells up in me in such moments is addressed to life itself and to no one in particular. surely not to "God." And all this has nothing to do with the synagogue, the cantor and choir, or uncomprehended Hebrew chants that feel like they come from another time and another place."

These are very much not the voices of the Jewish atheist of a couple of generations ago, the "old left" Marxist sympathizer who believed that religion was the opiate of the masses and wanted no part of God, synagogue, or religious life. We are confronted now with a religious agnosticism (and sometimes a-theism) on a massive scale. Does Judaism have the resources to respond to such a generation? Or will it leave these seekers to turn elsewhere, concentrating its efforts on those who do not question or who have found a way, usually because of long-standing emotional commitments

and the ability to re-interpret texts almost automatically (rather than because of truly different beliefs), to stay within the fold of Jewish forms of expression?

A Judaism for the seeker in this generation will have to re-examine a number of the givens of our tradition. How certain are we that we need insist on the personalist metaphors, mostly those of male parent and ruler, that have constituted the heart of Jewish prayer-language for so many generations? The theology of Avinu Malkenu, God as Father and King, is problematic not only because of the single-genderedness of these terms. We in this psychological age understand the divine parent as a projection, a cosmic superego figure, if you will, that we impose upon ourselves and accept because of our felt need for an externalized center of societal and individual self-control. But once we let that cat out of the bag, as it were, the control no longer works as well. Once I lose my naivete about God as Father, it is hard for me to use those words again, to fully re-enter the now broken myth. It is true that becoming a father helped me bridge the gap for many years. The realization that God loved me in the same way that I loved my then-helpless infant child from the moment I saw her did much to sustain in me the language of Jewish faith. But it is hard to leave faith in the hands of the volatile parental metaphor, one toward which we all have a complicated network of emotional reactions, and which changes profoundly as we go through the course of our lives. And "King" is even harder than "Father" in a world where kings no longer radiate ancient glory, but are either powerless figureheads, dressed once a year in garb of state, or else petty despots who remind us mostly of the ugliness rather than the glory of earlier times. Of course classical Judaism had other metaphors for God. The Beloved, the God of such Kabbalistic poetry as Lekha Dodi or Yedid

Nefesh, is a tempting one to seek to restore. But here too I hesitate. The same question of the possibility of religious language ~~in a~~ psychologically self-conscious age comes directly to the fore. God as Cosmic Lover will work in some very special moments. We will always find ourselves on guard, however, asking about what it means to long for the Lover of the Song of Songs when the "real" issues of love and erotic self-fulfillment are so painfully obvious to us on another level. The fact that we are a tradition without monasticism or celibacy must also mean that we are one that cannot be naive about love. We may have exhausted the resources of our old language for speaking both to and of God. We may need to create a new language, as the Kabbalists did in the Middle Ages. Meanwhile, perhaps we should say: "Unto You Silence is Praise." Silence may create in us the condition out of which a new prayer-language might be born.

We will also have to ask ourselves how fully wedded we are to the vertical metaphor for the divine/human relationship, one that almost completely dominates in our classical sources. By the "vertical metaphor" I mean the notion that God dwells "in heaven" while we humans are "down below" on earth. This notion is of course derived from ancient beliefs about the gods as sky dwellers. As mature and sophisticated as we Westerners become in our faith, it is difficult for us to outgrow entirely the notion of "God above," an idea that God "resides" in some vague place on the other side of the sky. Every time we read a Psalm about "God in heaven" or tell the tale of Moses ascending the mountain to reach God, we reinforce the myth of verticality. We do so also by such abstractions as referring to someone who is "on a very high rung" of spiritual attainment or even negatively by referring to someone who is not serious about religion, but merely trying to "get high."

Why do you say this? See letter

Art-thou and p. 23 are the only instances that echo your -thee. And yet they seem necessary here.

I am not one who believes that we can or should get rid of all the vertical metaphors in our religious tradition. We would be terribly impoverished, and for no good reason. But it is important to see through this language and thus to be freed of its total hold on us. We can do so most easily by turning to the other great metaphor of religion tradition, that of inwardness. Rather than seeing all humanity climbing up the great mountain, let us imagine ourselves rather as journeying down into the depths, seeking to draw water from our innermost well. Instead of ascending rung after trying rung, we are peeling off level after level of externals, reaching ever toward a more inward, deeper, vision of the universe. Of course this too is a metaphor, but the presence of a second way of seeing our journey helps to release us from the singular hold of the first.

But once we have let ourselves question the vertical metaphor of our ancient cosmology, a great deal more is questioned as well. The God above might come down onto the mountain once, at a particular place and time, to talk with those gathered there. Since God is outside the world, revelation is a unique and unusual event. But can the God within, the one who speaks to every human heart, have the same relationship of "choosing" with the Jewish people? If God is none other than the innermost heart of reality, is not all of being equally an emanation of the *same* divine Self? Is Judaism not just the human symbolic language into which we Jews render the universal inward God's silent pre-verbal speech, just as others translate it into verbal symbols of their own heritage? And can the internal God be the source of authority in the same way as the Fellow on top of the mountain, the One who could hold it over our heads, even as we agreed to receive Torah, saying: "If not, here you will be buried?" Most basically, it would seem that the God within is not <u>other</u> than ourselves in the same clear way as the God above.

Art: I thought I'd retrieve p. 24 for my final edit, but only now do I realize that I never received it from you! Sorry...

only because we keep our hearts open by our own practice. It is the presence of divine energy that we find within, renewed each day, that makes our teachings living Torah and not dead letter. The first Hasidic masters knew this well and taught it unceasingly. That voice was mostly lost in later Hasidism's rush to preserve tradition at all cost. But it is our task to recover and renew that voice, the one that speaks out from within a commitment to practice against Judaism's great inner danger of overly zealous commitment to detail and form, at the loss of broader perspective and deeper openness to meaning, even to God.

This is also not a God who redeems as the traditional metaphor depicts it, looking down from the heights of heaven to lift Israel from Egypt or to send messiah who will save the world from humanity's worst violent and self-destructive urges. We speak rather of a God who dwells within the unquenchable spark of freedom that lives within every human heart, the one who inspires the Moses in us to rebel against every pharoah. It is the divine voice in us that calls us to maintain our undying faith in the full liberation of humanity, both flesh and spirit. It is through our deeds that God brings about redemption, being manifest within us and triumphing over our strong desires to escape and avoid the true fulfillment of our divine/human selves.

What I am proposing for the Jewish seeker, the product of my own quest which is essentially no different from his or hers, is a Jewish religious humanism. It is humanistic in that we believe humans are the essential actors in the historical, political, and social spheres. For better or for worse, it is we who are charged with the task of saving this world, we who are also the agents of the world's destruction. In this drama, the only one that counts, there is no deus ex machina who will protect us from ourselves. But it is very much a religious or spiritual humanism, not secular in any way.

On the contrary, we seek to expand the bounds of the holy, to find the One manifest everywhere, to understand that each of us is not just a separate willful being but a unique spark of that single divine light. It is by finding those sparks in one another and drawing their light together that we discover and articulate the deeper truth about this world ~~in which we live.~~

"Why do it through Judaism?" the seeker often asks. My answer comes not in absolutist terms; it cannot. Judaism is a hard path, but one toward which we have a special obligation. We have just been through an age that sought to turn its back on many of the most profound and ancient of human teachings. Modernity "knew better" than the wisdom of the ancients, and traditional ways of knowing and living were cast onto the trash heap of history. The era just emerging is one that seeks to rediscover truths long neglected; we are more willing now, and will be more still in the next century, to re-learn ancient wisdom. This age will need the energies and teachings contained in all the great and venerable traditions of humanity. Among these are perhaps eight or ten truly great religious traditions, developed over the course of human history . Several of them have hundreds of millions of followers. We, diminished both by genocide and assimilation, are a small people bearing a great tradition. Most of its heirs do not care about this legacy. Some who do love it so much and hold on so tightly that they cannot let it move forward into the new and universal age that stands before us. ~~If you were born a Jew~~, or if you are drawn to Judaism, perhaps it is not just by chance. Perhaps what the human future needs of you is your reading of, your encounter with, this great piece of our spiritual legacy. You can raise up sparks that belong to your soul alone, reveal worlds that can be found by no other. The tradition waits for you to discover it.

August 19, 1996

Art Green
324 Ward St.
Newton Center, MA 02159

Dear Art:

Here are your pages, with questions to you addressed in the margins. (You will also see notes for Liz, the designer.) Feel free to answer my queries by writing on the margins--or whatever is easiest for you. If my comments raise questions you wish to discuss, I'm available every day this week except for Wednesday. (If you get my voicemail, leave me a convenient time to call: 212-532-2360, X408.)

You can return the pages to me by Fedex, charging CIJE's Fedex number: 1-820-8223-6.

The only design change I've made is to add more page breaks to "lighten" the look of the essay.

Please be sure to include your bio for the back: I've attached a copy of a previous one to give you a sense of the format.

If you could turn this around so that I have these pages back by Monday, that would be terrific. (I would like to begin mailing the printed essay by mid-September.)

All best,

Nessa Rapoport

Art, this is an outstanding piece of work. I'm proud to be publishing it and believe it will reach Jews on the "inside," but also many whose hearts have not been touched by other essays currently circulating.

Arthur Green

RESTORING THE ALEPH:

Judaism for the Contemporary Seeker

A Time to Act / עת לעשות

Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education

CIJE *ESSAY SERIES*

RESTORING THE ALEPH

Arthur Green

Liz: Note: All new breaks require initial caps.

The Zohar, the greatest work of Jewish mysticism, is deeply concerned with the nature of exile and the exilic situation in which God, the cosmos, and the Jew all find themselves. In one of his more profound comments on this situation,[1] the thirteenth-century author suggests[2] that the divine name that accompanied Israel into exile was itself a broken one. The Zohar knew and accepted the ancient tradition that "wherever Israel is exiled, the divine Presence is exiled with them."

The name that accompanied them was אהיה, "EHYEH, God's" "I am" or "shall be." The name, however, was broken: The aleph of EHYEH remained above in the heavens, while the three letters HYH joined themselves to Israel. But in this configuration of the verb "to be," the aleph is the indicator of the future tense. Its departure means that Israel in exile loses hope, becoming detached from a sense of its own future. All that remains is HYH, that which "was," the memory of past glory, past intimacy with the Holy One, the cosmic Aleph. Exile becomes truly serious when it causes us to lose hope.

Liz: small caps?

[Art: We need to cut out the apostrophes distinguishing א from ע in English: In print, it is too confusing to non-scholars, I see.]

Liz

Why should we feel hopeless as we think about the future of Jewish life in the new millennium before us? We have come through this most unspeakably complicated century of Jewish history a strong, proud, and free people. For the first time in nearly two thousand years we can say that Jews are no longer oppressed by any regime for

Liz

Liz

1. Zohar Hadash 38a.
2. Based on the text of Ezek. 1:3.

the crime of being Jewish. Popular antisemitism still exists, but not on a scale to constitute a significant threat. Israel is living through an era of prosperity and is looking forward to a time of real peace, even as terrible costs in human life are being paid along the way. Jews in North America have achieved levels of material success and acceptance by the established powers of this society that go beyond the immigrant generation's wildest dreams. Even the final taboo against mingling with Jews, that of accepting them into the family circle, is breaking down. Surveys show that few Christian families, especially those of older American Protestant stock, object any longer to their children marrying Jews.

Ah, but there's the rub. Intermarriage, it turns out, was not quite what we had in mind. We sought full acceptance in America: That meant elite schools, executive positions in old companies, moving into the "right" suburbs, even joining the country club. But somehow we naively thought it would stop there. Jewish boys would take Jewish girls to the country club dance, or at least would come home to marry Jewish women after a few "flings" on the other side. Now we discover that there are no "sides" any more. Young Jews growing up in this country after 1970 are almost fully integrated into American white upper- and middle-class society, which, with but rare exceptions, embraces them with open arms.

For the vast majority of American Jews under forty, this is the fourth generation since immigration. These are Jewish kids, or half- or quarter-Jewish kids, whose grandparents were born mostly in urban East Coast American cities. Few of them live in those cities any more, and a great many are scattered to other parts of the continent altogether. To these Jews the "old country" is Brooklyn, Philadelphia, or Baltimore. Their grandparents' tales of childhood are as likely to be about baseball games as they are about pickles or herring from the barrel. Jewish knowledge is rare in that second generation; most were

too busy Americanizing to care much about the bits of Jewish lore or practice their parents had dragged with them from across the sea. The fourth generation has no direct tie to the world of East European Jewish life and its spiritual and cultural riches. All that belongs to history. The natural ties to Yiddishkeyt, including the rhythms of the Jewish year, the inflections of Jewish speech, even the humor, which we Jews over fifty (including the important group of children of Holocaust survivors, whose memories are still more vivid) remember so well, are no longer a part of this younger generation's psyche.

From the twenties through the sixties, Jews were among the great proponents of melting-pot ideology. Here we were, part of a new nation being forged in America. Forget the old hatreds and divisions of Europe! Those were code words for us; we hoped they would mean "Leave anti-semitism behind."

"Who wants to visit Europe?" an immigrant uncle of mine used to proclaim, as the first relatives ventured forth as tourists in the 1950s. "We ran away from there!"

Here we would help to create something better, fairer, less hateful, more humane. Ethnic divisions would recede with the passage of time. Even racial divisions, we thought somewhat naively, would eventually fall away like so many relics of backwoods prejudice.

In the late 1960s the pendulum began to swing the other way. Ethnicity was rediscovered by America, thanks significantly to the "black is beautiful!" cry that came forth from African-Americans toward the end of the Civil Rights generation. Distinctiveness and pride in origins took the place of full integration as the final goal. Latinos were just beginning to become articulate as a minority, and they, too, clearly wanted to hold on to some of their old ways, including language. But if black and Latino were beautiful, so were Italian, Polish, Armenian, and all the rest, including Jewish. For us, this era in American cultural history coincided with the shock-therapy in

Jewish awareness offered by the Six-Day War, leading to a major renewal of Jewish life over the course of the succeeding two decades.

This renewal was heralded by the growth of the Jewish counterculture, best known through the Havurah movement and the *Jewish Catalogues*. But it includes such mainstream phenomena as the growth of day school education; the development of Jewish Studies programs in colleges and universities; a great array of books, ranging from fiction to scholarship; magazines such as *Moment* and *Tikkun*, and much more. It includes the new pride (and sometimes militancy) of Orthodoxy and the inclusion of Orthodox concerns on the general Jewish agenda. It is represented in a significant shift in both style and priorities within the organized community, from the greater funding of Jewish education to the observance of *kashrut* and *shabbat* at public communal functions.

Then came the nineties, opening with the devastating news of the National Jewish Population Survey. Was the whole Jewish renewal movement, in all its phases, both too little and too late? Such qualitative observers as Charles Silberman and Leonard Fein, celebrators of the spirit of renewal, were now swept aside by dour figures-don't-lie predictions based on the ever-increasing rates of intermarriage, the surprisingly low rate of conversions to Judaism, and the high dropout rate of Jews themselves. The fear begins to mount that Jewish counterculture types are our version of aging hippies, that the "new" and supposedly dynamic Judaism of the *havurot* and *minyanim* is in fact serving only a small closed group of rabbis' kids and alumni of Jewish summer camps. Even a day-school education is viewed as far from innoculation against intermarriage as we raise a generation that lives in a very nearly unbounded open society (for upwardly mobile and educated whites, which happens to include most Jews) .

That is why we are afraid. We see a decline in numbers, in loyalty, in knowledge. Those of us raised in this tradition were taught to value one *mitsvah* over all others: ושננתם לבניך, "Teach them to

your children." Even among Jews where there was, in fact, rather little left to pass on, the transmission of heritage, especially in the years following the Holocaust, was the greatest imperative of Jewish life. We were raised to see ourselves as a link between our parents and our children, our grandparents and our grandchildren, passing a legacy from each generation to the next. In Jewish families all over this country there is a feeling that the chain is being broken. We stand dumbfounded as we see whole limbs falling off the tree, the end of Judaism or Jewish awareness in branches of our own families.

If Judaism is going to survive in this country it will do so because it meets the needs of new generations of entirely American Jews, including Jews who have some non-Jewish relatives and ancestors on their family trees. Rail as one may against this utilitarian/psychological approach ("They should be serving God — or standing loyal to tradition — rather than having their 'needs' met..."), those who work in any form of outreach to younger Jews know it to be true. These needs are partly social and communitarian, the need for small community and intimacy in the face of mass society; partly familial and recreational, the need for "safe" day-care for toddlers and high-quality squash and tennis courts for upper-middle class Jews and their friends. But above all the need Judaism can answer is the *spiritual* one, a dimension of life that continues to have great and perhaps even increasing significance in American life.

The term "spirituality" is one with which most Jewish thinkers, including rabbis, were quite uncomfortable only a decade ago. Imported into English from the French chiefly by Roman Catholics, it seemed to Jews to evoke monastic life, otherworldliness, and the awesome silences of vast, dark cathedrals, all so alien to the values and experiences of children of East European Jews. Increasingly, it has come to be associated with Eastern forms of meditation and the tremendous influence they have had on Americans over the course of recent decades.

If these associations with "spirituality" were strange and alien even to rabbis, the generally more secular communal activitists and "doers" standing at the helm of Jewish organizational life saw them as dangerously solipsistic, a self-absorbed turn inward that would lead to fragmentation rather than to greater communal strength. In fact, the only Jewish group that was well-poised to deal with the needs of many Jews in this era was HaBaD. For the Lubavitch *hasidim* "spirituality" translated precisely into *rukhniyes (ruhaniyyut)*,[3] a well-known term in Hasidic parlance, and precisely that which Hasidism had to offer. This Jewish version of spirituality meant a life devoted to *avoides ('avodat) ha-shem*, the service of God, but marked by an inward intensity (*kavone; kawwanah*) leading to attachment to God (*dveykes; devequt*) and ultimately to the negation (*bitel; bittul*) of all else. Of course, for the HaBaDnik as for any *hasid*, this *avoide* was to be carried out through the usual Jewish means of Torah and *mitsvot*, including full commitment to the halakhic way of life.

Hasidism, in other words, comprises a Jewish version of the "spirituality" that so many in America are seeking. It does so, however, in a way that insists upon uncompromised acceptance of traditional norms, a way of life attractive to a few but probably impossibly alienating to most young American Jews in the twenty-first century. It is hard to believe that we are to build the Jewish future by a return to the life patterns (including role of women? style of leadership? norms of dress?) belonging to the eighteenth or early nineteenth century. This "Amish" pattern for Jewish survival is the way of a few hardy souls who join the core of those raised within it, but it offers little attraction for the many.

But let us return to "spirituality." Now that we have found a Jewish language for it, let us examine more closely what it means and why it has so much become the cry of our age. Spirituality is a view

3. I render the terms here both in the Yiddish colloquial of Hasidic speech and in the more "proper" Sephardic and accepted scholarly versions.

of religion that sees its primary task as cultivating and nourishing the human soul or spirit. Each person, according to this view, has an inner life that he or she may choose to develop; this "inwardness" (*penimiyyut* in Hebrew) goes deeper than the usual object of psychological investigation and cannot fairly be explained in Freudian or other psychological terms. Ultimately it is "transpersonal," reaching deeply into the self but then extending through an inward reach beyond the individual and linking him/her to all other selves (to all other Jews, the *hasidim* would say) and to the single Spirit or Self of the universe we call God. God is experientially accessible through the cultivation of this inner life, and awareness (*da'at*) of that access is a primary value of religion. External forms, important as they are, serve as instruments for the development, disciplining, and fine tuning of this awareness. The *hasid* may see them as divinely ordained forms, but still recognizes that they are a means (indeed, a gift of God to help us in our struggle), but not an end in themselves.

Such is, in fact, the shared theology of vast numbers of seekers in our era. Though pursuing the quest through a great variety of symbols and traditions, we contemporary seekers are joined by a series of shared sensitivities that transcends the differences between our various systems of expression. We understand "being religious" not primarily as commitment to particular symbols or even as faith in a specific set of principles, but as openness to a deep well of inner experience. This includes experiences in nature, in solitude, those induced by meditation and silence, or some quite spontaneous. Moments like these offer us insight into the wholeness of being, expressed by Hasidic tradition as the realization that "the whole earth is filled with His glory" or "there is no place devoid of Him," but by Hindu and Buddhist philosophy without reference to God as "that which is, is."

It is the truth of such moments, translated into teachings through one language or another, that nourishes our lives as seekers, that gives us the strength to go forward. It is the love for and unity

with all creation in such moments (whether those are moments experienced, imagined, or merely striven for) that underlie our ethical and moral lives and tell us how to live.

Whether our spirituality is Jewish or Christian, Buddhist or eclectic New Age, you will probably hear us talking about living in harmony with natural forces, following the voice of our deepest inward nature, and seeking to shape a human society that appreciates more and destroys/consumes less of nature's bounty, or of God's gifts. There is beginning to emerge a shared spiritual language of this age, one that transcends the borders of the traditions in which we live and where we may have gained our original impetus toward the spiritual life.

Liz: break awkward in meaning

Together, we share a sense that the world urgently needs this new spirituality; we are as committed to it as we are to our individual traditions. Living in an age of ecological crisis, we understand that nothing is more important for humanity than a shared religious language, reaching across the borders of traditions, that will make us more sensitive to the natural and physical world in which we live, which is itself the domain of the sacred. In the coming century, all the religions will have to be drawn upon to create such a language in order to transform human conciousness for the very survival of our world.

This "new" universal spirituality of the late twentieth century is most commonly lightly dressed in Indian or Tibetan garb and thus accompanied by belief in reincarnation, karma, and various charts of spiritual energies or stages in the process of enlightenment. Western elements too are added to the mix of this ever-evolving raiment in which the spirit is to be clothed. The commonality of theological and ultimately experiential sub-structure across religious and cultural lines also makes it possible for some seekers (and not only those to be dismissed as "flighty" or unstable) either to turn from one tradition to another in the course of a lifelong quest or to combine elements that seem (at least to the outsider) to originate in entire different and even contradictory social and historical contexts.

Art: sub-structures ? No

Art: entirely ? yes

break

Over the course of some thirty years as a Jew committed to my own form of religious quest within Judaism, I have met many Jews who have chosen or needed to explore their spiritual lives through a variety of non-Jewish, mostly Eastern spiritual paths. Among them I have come upon some remarkably profound, honest, and open seekers. I urge us to see such seekers not as "apostates" or as rejecters of Judaism, nor as the duped victims of "cults" (though such do exist; they come in Eastern, Christian, and even Jewish versions), but as Jews loyal to at least one aspect of our people's most ancient ways. Among the spiritually wandering Jews I have met over these three decades are faithful children of Abraham, doing for themselves what we are taught our first ancestor did. They have rejected the superficial idolatries of their own time and place (those of Washington, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue; even those of complacent, semi-assimilationist suburban Judaism, rather than those of Ashur and Ur) and have gone off to the desert, seeking in it the secret places that flow with milk and honey. Though the terrain they explore may be alien and sometimes even objectionable to us, their need to do so and the growth that takes place over the course of such exploration should be familiar and not entirely surprising to us as Jews. Given the generally low level of spiritual seriousness in most liberal synagogues in our country, it is little wonder that Jewish seekers feel a need to turn elsewhere in quest of profound religious truth.

Art: Paragraph OK here? yes

For the generations born or raised since the end of the second world war, religious quest has been prominent among Americans in a way it had not been earlier. This is true among Jews in somewhat higher numbers, but it is true of general culture as well. Such serious students of American cultural norms as Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, and Martin Marty have tried to document and explain this phenomenon. The attraction of Americans to serious religion in recent years runs the whole gamut, from fundamentalist and evangelical Christianity to the quasi-Eastern, from charismatic Catholicism and HaBaD Judaism to

Art: UC OK? yes

the New Age and experimental in all (and no) traditions. Among Jews it includes *ba'aley teshuvah*, those who have found their way into a more intense and spiritual, but also more observant, Jewish life; and the much larger group who have turned elsewhere for their spiritual satisfaction, sometimes to Christianity and a neo-Sufi version of Islam, but primarily to Eastern religions. Generationally this group runs from Allen Ginsberg and Baba Ram Dass (a.k.a. Richard Alpert), now in their mid-60s, who came of age in the 1950s, to students currently on campus and living near campus in such centers as Berkeley and Santa Cruz, California, Cambridge and Northampton, Massachusetts, and several points in between.

Why has this generation turned so much to seeking? Some of it has to do with being the first to grow up in the aftermath of both Holocaust and Hiroshima. Life in the nuclear shadow has given us an insecurity paralleled in few earlier generations. As in the aftermaths of previous cataclysms of human history, life seems particularly precarious. Pictures of mass burial pits and endless bodies again inhabit our imagination. The notion that at any time some lunatic (for a while he was even named "Dr. Strangelove!") might come along and "push the button" has forced us to reach somewhere for ultimate meaning. We need something that will enable us to go forward, to bring children into the world and work to improve human life, even in this ever-so-threatened generation. The shift over the past decade from nuclear war to ecological disaster as the focus of our fears has not essentially changed this situation.

A second motivating factor in the search for meaning among American Jews is surely the high level of material success that many have attained over the course of these four generations. As members of the financially highest-achieving ethnic or religious group (on a per capita basis) in this society, we are brought face-to-face with questions of values and priorities. "Is this all there is?" we find ourselves asking.

Wealth, achievement, and glamor do not in themselves bring happiness or fulfillment, as a significant portion of our newly active Jewish leadership has found. They also do not protect us from the personal crises that most require spiritual meaning. Wealthy and powerful Jews still face death, infirmity, divorce, alienation between parents and children, even the ennui and emptiness that ensue when you seem to run out of deals to make, resorts to visit, entertainments to enjoy, obstacles to conquer. Life has to have some greater meaning, some value beyond that of our own seemingly endless, and ultimately somehow trivial, achievements.

Where do we seekers turn for such an ultimate value? Prior generations might have had an easier time believing in a God who had ~~ultimate~~ power over His creation, and was thus the source or guarantor of absolute values. But that sort of religion is hard for us. Will we trust a Deity who did not prevent the Holocaust (or slaughter in Rwanda, starvation in Ethiopia, or the AIDS epidemic) to reenter history and save us from destruction at our own hand? Conventional Western-type faith in an all-powerful Creator God seems difficult unless it is explained in a highly sophisticated — and somehow compromised — fashion. No wonder that it is rejected by large numbers of seekers, including many Jews.

On the other hand, the well-known Western alternative to religious faith seems even more discredited. Our trust in humanity, and especially in the modern pseudo-religion of scientific progress and the conquest of evil through systematic human knowledge, is severely tested in the late twentieth century. Our memories include Nazi scientists in the land of reason and morality, emerging in the century after the Categorical Imperative and Absolute Spirit. It is hard, even fifty years later, to believe in the "progress" wrought by modernity and its achievements. Added to these are the economics and politics that complicate and often corrupt the "pure" advance of scientific thinking. We are

happy to support scientific advance, to be sure, especially insofar as it alleviates suffering and contributes to the world's survival. But we cannot turn to it as an ultimate source of values.

Today's seeker is one who takes the accomplishments of science for granted; the old battles between the religious and scientific world views on life's origins read to us like ancient history. But we also understand that we need not look to the scientific community as our provider of meaning. Often we try to push science by integrating into it the wisdom of the ancients, whether in accepting traditional Chinese and homeopathic medicine or in speaking about rungs of consciousness that may preserve memories of countless past lives and generations, much like the rungs of the tree or molecules of DNA preserve genetic "memory."

There has been a sense throughout this period that we needed to be rescued by another source of truth, by some deeply rooted wisdom attuned more closely to the moral and spiritual needs of a much battered humankind. Over the course of these past several decades, that has mostly been the wisdom of the East, in various Indian, Japanese, and, most prominently in recent years, Tibetan forms. The insecurity of the West about its own achievement, including the basis of its moral life, makes us more open (and not for the first time) to learning from other civilizations. The heart of this Eastern teaching is a profound non-dualism, an acceptance of all that is, and a timelessness, fostered by meditative silence, that allows one to transcend daily worries great and small. When seen anew from the heights of this compassionate yet detached mindset, life regains the value it had lost in the battle-scarred decades of violence and degradation through which all of us have lived.

We far fewer seekers who have made Judaism the path of our quest find some similar and some different formulations. We, too, look toward the contemplative and inward portions of our tradition; "Jewish Meditation," reconstructed from many fragments of nearly

lost practices, has evinced great interest in recent years.[4] The theological language to which we are attracted is largely that of the mystical tradition, though few would find it accurate to designate ourselves as "Kabbalists" in a literal sense. It is the abstract notion of Deity, combined with the richness of metaphor and symbol, that makes the Kabbalah attractive. The highly simplified mystical language of the early Hasidic sources, one that speaks of fullness and emptiness, of the ever-elusive God beyond and the spirit of Godliness that fills all existence, seems especially well-suited to the contemporary need. Most have found that regular patterns of observance, especially the rhythms of *shabbat* and weekday and life according to the sacred calendar, offer unfathomable spiritual rewards. This includes those who have "gone all the way" and joined Hasidic or other ultra-Orthodox communities and others who have sought less rigid structure, often gravitating toward Reconstructionist or "Jewish Renewal" circles. At their best, the latter have sought to create a "maximalist" version of liberal Judaism, as intense as Orthodoxy in its demands but more universalistic in perspective, emphasizing a renewed prophetic commitment and Judaism's demand for justice and care for the downtrodden as key portions of that maximalist agenda. Whether such a "muscular" and demanding liberal Judaism can take hold is a key question in thinking about our collective future.

The serious seeker, today as always, is open to taking on spiritual disciplines, even of the most rigorous kind. *We are not talking about an easy push-a-button or drop-a-pill experience-craving pseudo-spirituality, one that seeks only "highs" and takes no responsibility for the deep valleys that lie between the peak experiences.*[5] All the traditions recognize that discipline and regularity of practice are essential

4. It would be interesting to make a study of "Jewish meditation" as a growth industry over the course of the past twenty years. The bibliography in Mark Verman's recent book would be a good place to start. Such a study would be an object lesson in the interpenetrating influence of Orthodox Kabbalists (Aryeh Kaplan), critical Judaica scholars (Moshe Idel) and New Age teachers (Zalman Schachter), all in the shadow of the growth of Eastern meditational practices in the West during this period.

elicited Liz

of Art: ok? These seekers Liz

a Liz

break Liz

footnote
Liz: This must be on some page. or the number.

The History and Varieties of Jewish Meditation (North Vale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1996)

Liz

building-blocks of the spiritual life. Their routine and the very ordinariness of doing them day after day, even when they seem empty, provide the counterpoint to the spiritual mountaintops of great insight that appear occasionally in their midst. But the diciplines we seek, whether old or new, are those that seem helpful to us, those that offer us the tools and framework within which to engage in the task of spiritual growth and self-development that each of must ultimately face alone. When a practice is just there because it is traditional, done that way just because it always has been, today's seeker may be expected to question. Turn as we do to ancient paths of wisdom, we inevitably remain late twentieth-century Americans, for better and for worse: practical, somewhat impatient, wanting a hand in shaping things, not content to simply accept them and pass them on. We are open to hard work, but for our efforts we expect to get results.

A number of years ago my family and I were living in Berkeley, California. Around the corner from us was, of course, a spiritual or New Age bookstore. The front of the store was decorated with a huge sign, in inverted pyramid form. The top line read, in large block letters: SCIENTOLOGY DOESN'T WORK. Beneath that, in slightly smaller letters, it said: INTEGRAL YOGA DOESN'T WORK. Then, again slightly smaller: CHRISTIANITY DOESN'T WORK. After going through six or seven more would-be spiritual paths the sign concluded, again in large letters: YOU WORK. Seeing this sign reminded me of a definition of Hasidism that Abraham Joshua Heschel had passed on in the name of the Kotsker rebbe. When asked what Hasidism was all about, Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk replied: "*Arbetn oif zikh*" — "to work on yourself."

5. The emphasis here is an address to several friends, thinkers, and writers who are my seniors by a generation, who continue to attack the recovery of spiritual life in Judaism in the most distorting terms. Let me make it quite clear to them that neither I nor any responsible voice I know is advocating 1) the abandonment of commitment to social justice; 2) a drug-like euphoria in which we lose any sense of borders and therefore the ability to distinguish right from wrong; 3) entering closed havurah-cloisters where we will ignore the rest of the Jewish community and leave it to its sorry fate.

Being a seeker means understanding that there is work to do. In the first instance this is spiritual work, and that means the transformation of the self, opening oneself to become a channel through which divine light shines or cosmic energy flows. This means a training of the mind in the twin tasks of awareness and responsiveness. Awareness, *da'at* in the Hasidic sources, means a knowing and constant remembering that all things and moments contain the Presence, that everything can lead us back to the one. It is intellectual, to be sure, but an act of mind colored with all the eros of the first Biblical meaning of "to know," as the Hasidic sources not infrequently remind us. Responsiveness is that state cultivated over years of inward prayer or meditation, where the heart is always half open, ever ready to respond to the lightest knock by the Beloved on its gate.

The seeker in these generations has also inevitably to deal with the question of the relationship between personal and societal transformation. Each of us feels challenged by the social ills that still surround us: poverty, racism, injustice, the destruction of the planet. Few would say these matters are of no concern. Even the Eastern religions, often stereotyped in the West as totally unconcerned with alleviating the sufferings of this world on the material plane, when imported and reshaped by Westerners begin to take on a measure of worldly and practical responsiblity. All of us who seek, no matter how specific our symbol system or spiritual language, are universalist in our concern for humanity and its earthly home.

The question for us is often one of priorities and faith in our own capabilities to effect change. Should I spend my time in demonstrations or political party work to change the opinions of others, or should I work first to make sure my own inner garden is free of weeds? Given the shortness of my life and the limits of my strength, where should I put my energies? These questions are unresolved for many a contemporary seeker; most of us tend to shuttle back and forth among priorities as our lives go on and as specific demands present themselves.

We also very much seek religious community. The lone work each of us has to do cannot thrive without the support and understanding of others. But the communities we need have to be made up of those who understand and share our search. The American synagogue, even at its best, seldom had that character in the previous generation. It was too concerned with propriety, respectability, and public image to be very welcoming to those few and often "different" Jews who were seeking on the spiritual plane. That is beginning to change in some places as a new generation of rabbis and synagogue leaders are discovering the seeker in one another. Many synagogues have been quietly remade in recent years into warm and supportive communities that in havurah-like fashion serve as extended family to their members. The next step for communities like these is to seek out the seekers and make room for them, working with them to create a shared language of personal religious expression.

Judaism is not an easy path for the contemporary seeker, even if it happens to be his or her ancestral tradition. The reasons for this are manifold and the mix varies from person to person, but it behooves us to examine a few of the serious stumbling blocks that lie in our way as we think about educating for a Jewish future with the potential spiritual seeker in mind.

First are the external difficulties. Judaism is a highly verbal tradition, and its language is Hebrew. Nobody says that you have to learn Pali or Tibetan or Japanese to be a good Buddhist. True, those are the languages of scripture, commentary, and the contemporary faith-communities.

But texts may be translated, as many have been, and a language-and-culture barrier to the native Buddhist cultures of Asia may in fact help in the Western Buddhist's somewhat naive recreation of the faith, rather than harm or challenge it. Significantly, few of the Eastern teachers who have come to the West in recent decades have insisted

¶ new ¶ Liz

¶ here Liz

that their Western disciples learn the languages, fully absorb the practices, or assimilate culturally to the world from which their teachings came. They are realistic in this regard; recognizing the cultural distance involved, they have chosen to "go native" in the West and create indigenous forms of Buddhist or Hindu spirituality, very much a mirror image of what Roman Catholicism learned to do in Mexico or in parts of Africa.

For Judaism, particularly because our traditional mentality was so shaped by oppression, minority status, and the struggle for group survival, such transcendence of the cultural/ethnic context is almost unthinkable. To do the Jewish spiritual life seriously, you really do have to know Hebrew. Our prayer traditions are highly verbal and tied to the intricacies of language, so that they just don't work in translation. So much of our teaching, including the deepest insights of the mystical and Hasidic sources, is caught up in plays and nuances of language that translation of such sources, while it is to be increased and encouraged, will never quite be adequate.

Because we are right here in the West, the seeker living cheek-by-jowl with various ongoing Jewish communities, it is all the more difficult to create a Judaism of one's own. There seems always to be someone down the street or in one's synagogue (sometimes even if you are the rabbi!) telling you that what you have is not authentic, not Judaism as it once was and ever should be. The Havurah/Jewish Renewal movement has tried to fight this, creating small independent communities that are neo-traditional in form but often quite revolutionary in hierarchy of values. Unfortunately, these, too, have undergone a certain weakening as the sixties have turned into the eighties and nineties. Such communities constantly need to examine whether they are truly agents of positive change and rebalanced Jewish intensification for their members, or whether they have not become convenient clubs for those who want *less*, rather than more, of one or another (including the financial!) sort of commitment. In

recent years those communities have suffered from the well-known struggles of new communities in our society over issues of leadership and empowerment: Does "egalitarianism" mean that those with more experience or greater knowledge of the tradition should not serve as teachers and leaders for those who come seeking to learn?

Liz: break

But a new commitment to Judaism as a spiritual path involves deeper problems as well. I alluded earlier to the question of God and the use of the word "God" in a contemporary spirituality. Now we have to examine this question more closely. It is clear that a person can have a spiritual life without believing in God. That is precisely what Buddhism provides, at least on a rarefied theoretical level; I dare say that is a major reason why it is attractive to so many Jews. The emphasis of Buddhist spiritual training is on attentiveness, on attitude, on an approach to reality rather than on a personal Subject who is the goal of one's spiritual life. By contrast, even the most spiritualized form of Judaism is focused on knowing, loving, and obeying God in one way or another. Is it in any way conceivable that one seek to have a *Jewish* spiritual life without "believing in God?" Let us not rush in too quickly with our negative answers; the question is more complex than it appears, and a contemporary response requires a good deal of subtlety. How do we reply to the Jewish seeker who says:

Liz

[doresay is one word]

¶ here Liz

¶ Liz

[retain ¶ here]

"Yes, I am a religious person. I believe in the oneness of all being. I feel a connection to something eternal and infinite that is present in my own soul and in yours. That's what my quest is all about. But I can't call it "God." That means that I don't consider it to be a willful, personal being. It is not *someone* I want to worship, someone to whom I can address prayers. Certainly the language of the synagogue, that of God as King of Kings and myself as His supplicating servant, is not one I like or see any reason to adopt."

Or to another who says:

"I am grateful for the inordinate gifts that nature has bestowed on me. I have health, sustenance, meaningful work, a loving partner,

friends and family. Sometimes when I walk on a beach or am alone outdoors on a beautiful day I feel overwhelmed by gratitude and by a sense of inadequacy to express the fullness with which I feel blessed. That is about as close as I can come to prayer. But the prayer that wells up in me in such moments is addressed to life itself and to no one in particular, surely not to "God." And all this has nothing to do with the synagogue, the cantor and choir, or uncomprehended Hebrew chants that feel like they come from another time and another place."

These are not at all the voices of the Jewish atheist of a couple of generations ago, the "old left" Marxist sympathizer who believed that religion was the opiate of the masses and wanted no part of God, synagogue, or religious life. We are confronted now with a *religious* agnosticism (and sometimes a-theism) on a massive scale. Does Judaism have the resources to respond to such a generation? Or will it leave these seekers to turn elsewhere, concentrating its efforts on those who do not question or who have found a way, *usually because of long-standing emotional commitments and the ability to reinterpret texts almost automatically (rather than because of truly different beliefs)*, to stay within the fold of Jewish forms of expression?

A Judaism for the seeker in this generation will have to re-examine a number of the givens of our tradition. How certain are we that we need insist on the personalist metaphors, mostly those of male parent and ruler, that have constituted the heart of Jewish prayer-language for so many generations? The theology of *Avinu Malkenu*, God as Father and King, is problematic not only because of the single-genderedness of these terms. We in this psychological age understand the divine parent as a projection, a cosmic superego figure that we impose upon ourselves and accept because of our felt need for an externalized center of societal and individual self-control. But once we let that cat out of the bag, the control no longer works as well. Once I lose my naivete about God as Father, it is hard for me to use those words again, to fully re-enter the now broken myth.

It is true that *becoming* a father helped me bridge the gap for many years. The realization that God loved me in the same way that I loved my then-helpless infant child from the moment I saw her did much to sustain in me the language of Jewish faith. But it is hard to leave faith in the hands of the volatile parental metaphor, one toward which we all have a complicated network of emotional reactions and which changes profoundly as we go through the course of our lives. And "King" is even harder than "Father" in a world where kings no longer radiate ancient glory, but are either powerless figureheads, dressed once a year in garb of state, or else petty despots who remind us mostly of the ugliness rather than the glory of earlier times.

Of course, classical Judaism had other metaphors for God. The Beloved, the God of such Kabbalistic poetry as *Lekha Dodi* or *Yedid Nefesh*, is a tempting one to seek to restore. But here, too, I hesitate. The same question of the possibility of religious language in a psychologically self-conscious age comes directly to the fore. God as Cosmic Lover will work in some very special moments. We will always find ourselves on guard, however, asking about what it means to long for the Lover of the Song of Songs when the "real' issues of love and erotic self-fulfillment are so painfully obvious to us on another level. The fact that we are a tradition without monasticism or celibacy must also mean that we are one that cannot be naive about love. We may have exhausted the resources of our old language for speaking both to and of God. We may need to create a new language, as the Kabbalists did in the Middle Ages. Meanwhile, perhaps we should say: "Unto You Silence is Praise." Silence may create in us the condition out of which a new prayer-language might be born.

break

We will also have to ask ourselves how fully wedded we are to the vertical metaphor for the divine/human relationship, one that almost completely dominates in our classical sources. By the "vertical metaphor" I mean the notion that God dwells "in heaven," while we humans are "down below" on earth. This notion is, of course, derived

from ancient beliefs about the gods as sky dwellers. As mature and sophisticated in our faith as we may think we are, it is difficult for us to outgrow entirely the notion of "God above," an idea that God "resides" in some vague place on the other side of the sky. Every time we read a Psalm about "God in heaven" or tell the tale of Moses ascending the mountain to reach God, we reinforce the myth of verticality. We do so also by such abstractions as referring to someone who is "on a very high rung" of spiritual attainment or even negatively by referring to someone who is not serious about religion, but merely trying to "get high." I am not one who believes that we can or should get rid of all the vertical metaphors in our religious tradition. We would be terribly impoverished, and for no good reason. But it is important to see through this language and thus to be freed of its total hold on us. We can do so most easily by turning to the other great metaphor of religion tradition, that of inwardness. Rather than seeing all humanity climbing up the great mountain, let us imagine ourselves rather as journeying down into the depths, seeking to draw water from our innermost well. Instead of ascending rung after trying rung, we are peeling off level after level of externals, reaching ever toward a more inward, deeper vision of the universe. Of course, this, too, is a metaphor, but the presence of a second way of seeing our journey helps to release us from the singular hold of the first.

But once we have let ourselves question the vertical metaphor of our ancient cosmology, a great deal more is questioned as well. The God above might come down onto the mountain once, at a particular place and time, to talk with those gathered there. Since God is outside the world, revelation is a unique and unusual event. But can the God within, the one who speaks to every human heart, have the same relationship of "choosing" with the Jewish people? If God is none other than the innermost heart of reality, is not all of being equally an emanation of the same divine Self? Is Judaism not just the human symbolic language into which we Jews render the universal,

inward God's silent, pre-verbal speech, just as others translate it into verbal symbols of their own heritage? And can the internal God be the source of authority in the same way as the Fellow on top of the mountain, the One who could, according to the Midrash, hold it over our heads, even as we agreed to receive Torah, saying: "If not, here you will be buried?" Most basically, it would seem that the God within is not *other* than ourselves in the same clear way as the God above. The vertical metaphor allowed for distance: "if you do not do good I will turn far away, rising to the seventh heaven, far beyond your ability to reach Me." But the hidden God buried deep within the self feels more like one who ever longs to be discovered, and the process of finding God is not to be clearly distinguished from the deepest levels of self-discovery. What we are likely to find is the truth of the mystics: The individual self and the cosmic Self are one. The Judaism that will emerge from a turn inward will then be something like a version of what Aldous Huxley and others have called the *philosophia perennis*, a single truth that underlies all religions, though expressed and taught in the specific symbolic language of the Jewish tradition.

The theology that will speak to today's seekers will be a Jewish non-dualism, a spiritual vision that seeks to transcend the most basic barriers between God and world, self and other. This is not the religion of God the Creator, who fashions a world outside Himself and sits over it in judgment. It is rather that of God the One who enters into the dance of multiplicity, who dons the coat of many colors and thus is to be found and discovered throughout the world, amid the great richness and diversity of existence.

This is also not the religion of God the Revealer in its classic form: the God who makes manifest His arbitrary will, backed by threat of punishment and promise of reward. Rather it is the God of that beautiful maiden dwelling in the castle who, according to the Zohar, reveals a bit of her face to the lover who passes by her gate day

after day.[6] *We discover ever more of God's self and will as we seek to live in God's presence.* Torah is not a finite body of laws and teachings, codified in details of praxis down to the *n*th degree. It is rather an endless well of wisdom, present in the texts, commentaries, and traditions of our ancestors, to be sure, but living in us only because we keep our hearts open by our own practice. It is the presence of divine energy that we find within, renewed each day, that makes our teachings living Torah and not dead letter. The first Hasidic masters knew this well and taught it unceasingly. That voice was mostly lost in later Hasidism's rush to preserve tradition.[7] But it is our task to recover and renew that voice. It should speak out from within a deep commitment to practice and love of tradition, warning nevertheless against Judaism's greatest inner danger: the overly zealous commitment to detail and form. This zeal can sometimes result in a loss of broader perspective and deeper openness, even the openness to God.

This is also not a ~~God~~ who redeems as the traditional metaphor depicts it, looking down from the heights of heaven to lift Israel from Egypt or to send a messiah who will save the world from humanity's worst violent and self-destructive urges. We speak rather of a God who dwells within the unquenchable spark of freedom that lives within every human heart, the one who inspires the Moses in us to rebel against every Pharoah. It is the divine voice in us that calls us to maintain our undying faith in the full liberation of humanity, in both flesh and spirit. It is through our deeds that God brings about redemption, being manifest within us and triumphing over our own desires to escape and avoid the true fulfillment of our divine/human selves.

6. Zohar 2:99a-b. Included in Daniel Matt's *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (New York: Paulist, 1983) p. 124f.

7. A particularly interesting and dynamic notion of Oral Torah, as a teaching fashioned of the deeds of the righteous in each generation, is to be found in the *Sefat Emet,* a key Hasidic work by Rabbi Judah Leib Alter of Ger (1847-1904). My edition of that work, including selected texts, translations, and contemporary personal responses, is soon to appear through the Jewish Publication Society.

What I am proposing for the Jewish seeker, deriving from my own quest which is essentially similar to his or hers, though conducted within the sphere of our own religious language, is a *Jewish mystical humanism.* It is humanistic in that I believe humans are the essential actors in the historical, political, and social spheres. For better or for worse, it is we who are charged with the task of saving this world, we who are also the agents of the world's destruction. In this drama, there is no *deus ex machina* who will protect us from ourselves. But it is very much a mystical or spiritual humanism, not secular in any way. On the contrary, I seek to expand the bounds of the holy, to find the One manifest everywhere, to understand that each of us is not just a separate willful being but a unique spark of that single divine light. It is by finding those sparks in one another and drawing their light together that we discover and articulate the deeper truth about this world in which we live. That truth understands that there is ultimately only one Being, present in each of us, longing to know its own source and draw together the uniqueness of each being and the singularity of the Source from which we all come and to which we all return.

"Why do it through Judaism?" the seeker often asks. My answer comes not in absolutist terms; it cannot. Judaism is a hard path, but one toward which we have a special obligation. We have just been through an age that sought to turn its back on many of the most profound and ancient of human teachings. Modernity "knew better" than the wisdom of prior generations, and traditional ways of knowing and living were cast onto the trash heap of history. The era just emerging is one that seeks to rediscover truths long neglected; we are more willing now, and will be more still in the next century, to relearn this wisdom of great antiquity and depth. This age will need the energies and teachings contained in *all* the great and venerable traditions of humanity. Among these are perhaps eight or ten truly great religious traditions, developed over the course of human history. Several of them have hundreds of millions of followers. We, diminished both by genocide and assimilation, are a small people bearing a

[Art: Who is "our"? Each individual's? The Jewish people? Unclear.]
[Liz: Remove one-character underline.]
people's
9
9
Liz

great tradition. Most of its heirs do not care about this legacy. Some who do love it so much and hold on so tightly that they cannot let it move forward into the new and universal age that stands before us. And so I would say: If you were born a Jew, or if you are drawn to Judaism, perhaps it is not just by chance. Perhaps what the human future needs of you is your reading of, your encounter with, this great portion of our shared spiritual legacy. You can raise up sparks that belong to your soul alone, reveal worlds that can be found by no other. The tradition waits for you to discover it.

Our sages say that Abraham the seeker was like a man wandering from place to place when he came upon a tqlud hrib a burning tower. Can it be, said the seeker, that the tower has no master? Then the master peered out and said: "I am the master of the tower." The term yich, "peered out," leaves no doubt that it was from within the tower itself that the master revealed his face to the wanderer. Abraham discovers that this world, in the very midst of its conflagration, contains the divine presence. Is it any wonder that my teacher, the late Abraham Joshua Heschel, when he told this story in one of his books,[8] intentionally mistranslated the phrase to mean "a tower full of light?" We find God in the light, in the beauty of life in this world, as we find God in the fire, in our world's suffering and conflagration.

Finding divinity within the world will lead us toward the understanding that God (YHWH in Hebrew) and being (HWYH) are One and the same, two perspectives on the same reality. We will thus come to see that even this most basic of all dualities, the distinction between God and world or God and self is less than the whole of truth. Thus the *bet* of tiwarb will be replaced by *aleph*, the *aleph* of ikna, "I am," the beginning of the Ten Commandments. This restored *aleph* will also turn out to be that of hiha, "I shall be," the one that returns our hope and renews our future.

8. *God in Search of Man* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1959) ~~p.112, p.113~~, n.6, and p.367.

It is ~~further~~, as it happens, the *aleph* of ohrba, the father of all Jews and all seekers. May the seekers of today be faithful children of that earliest father, not only in questing after truth, but also in seeking to pass their truth on to future generations, ~~so that~~ our ancient legacy is not lost, but infinitely enriched and renewed, by this generation of seekers, as we live it, reshape it, and help it continue to grow.

Twenty years ago Nahman book. Concluded with tales, unlike any others.

If there is an single feature about Nahman's tales, and indeed about Nahman's life as well, that makes them unique in the history of Judaism, it is just this: their essential motif is one of quest... Spiritual quest is not a common [theme] in the literature of Judaism. The idea that human life is a constant search for a hidden God would have struck most pre-modern Jewish authors as rather strange. God has already spoken, revealed Himself, and issued His command. Your task is to do His will, to live in the light of a revelation that has already taken place, and at which your soul was present. The Jew, who has already stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, usually does not see himself as pilgrim.

The figure of the wandering seeker, so well-known in the religious literature of the world, is rather rare in Jewish sources. Nahman tales are exceptional.

The one place where this figure does make a sustained appearance in Jewish sources, however, is a place of particular glory, and one not lacking in conflict with so much of the general thrust of Jewish religious consciousness. I refer to the tales and legends of Abraham our Father, none less than the progenitor of the Jewish people and the founder of our faith. Abraham, the paragon of piety in the Jewish imagination since ancient times is epitomized precisely as a seeker, one who left home and undertook a life of wandering in search for God, in quest of religious truth.

I say that these sources are in conflict with much of Judaism because Abraham did precisely what we hope our own children will not do. He lacked any sense of respect for his parents' faith, smashed their idols, left home forever, and sought a path that proclaimed itself to be in absolute contrast to anything that might have been called religion in the house of Terach. What kind of nice Jewish boy is that? What kind of models are we giving our kids in those Hebrew schools, anyway?

The Midrash depicts Abraham's journey as having gone through both rational and intuitive phases. Worshipped sun until he saw it set, then moon, then more. Rational Abraham. But his own inner self advised him. First one depicted as turning inward. Knew all the mitsvot by close self-examination; discovers Torah from within. This is Abraham the intuitive. The one who knows that all knowledge is self-knowledge, who begins the search for God by turning inward.

I start with this most ancient seeker, one who has after all has finally achieved a degree of respectability in Jewish circles, because I want to focus

Green Dissemination List - 9/26/96

// Rabbis - Aryeh Rubin
X AJS - x mailing not academic
CAJE -
Reconstructionist Rabbis - RRA office - labels - David Teutsch - 150 people -
800 GA attendees
Wexner Heritage
Wexner - Foundation
// Eilat Chaim - J seeker crowd - Jeff Roth, director 800-398-2630
Jewish Funders Network - Jeff Delcro (Shefa); Rachel; Barbara Dobkin
- Address to the Jewish community
- I think to seekers too
Alumni -
Pnei Or Kallah - June in Colorado - Aleph mailing list or Eilat Chaim
Barry
Steve Shaw - Open Center

alienated seeker - Sheila Weinberg - Annual Shabbaton for Jubus - Insight Meditation Center
Use Art's name.
Charlie Halperin - Recommend how to get to them?

Audience:

Green 9/26/96 Disseminate piece

Rabbis -

AJS - xmailing not xsdemic

CAJE -

Reconstructionist Rabbis - RRA office - Labels - David Teutsch - 150 people -

800 GA attendees -

Wexner Heritage

Wexner - Foundation

Eilat Chaim - J seeker crowd : Jeff Roth, director

Jewish funders network - Jeff Dekro (Shefa); Rachel; Barbara Dobkin

- Addr to +J community

- I think + seekers too

Alumni -

Pnei Or Kallah - June in Colorado - Aleph mailing list or Eilat Chaim

Barry

Steve Shaw - Open Center

?

Alienated seeker - Sheila Weinberg - Annual Shabbaton for Jubus - Insight meditation center (at Barre, MA.) Use Art's name.

Charlie Halperin - Recommend how + get + them?

Sept. 17, 1996

Arthur Green
324 Ward St.
Newton Center, Mass. 02159

Dear Art:

I am delighted to be sending you a first copy of your beautiful essay. Please let me know how many you would like; we'd be happy to supply what you need to give to colleagues and friends.

The essay will be sent immediately to hundreds of people: our board, invitees to a range of our programs, participants in our work; and alumni. But we also distribute to a broader range of the American Jewish community. I will be calling you shortly to get your feedback on those possibilities. (For example, we sent the Sarna essay to the AJS list, at his suggestion, with excellent feedback.)

Your essay may also have unique audiences of its own. I look forward to speaking with you about it some time next week.

In the meantime, g'mar tov. Warm regards to Kathy.

Nessa Rapoport

I also wanted to let you know, as I told Barry, that I took "Your Word Is Fire" to shul on Rosh Hashanah and found it almost shockingly apt. Considering that you conceptualized the book about 25 years ago, it speaks to the contemporary heart in an extraordinary way.

Arthur Green is the Philip W. Lown Professor of Jewish Thought at Brandeis University. He is both a historian of Jewish religion and a theologian; his work seeks to serve as a bridge between these two distinct fields of endeavor.

Educated at Brandeis and at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Dr. Green has taught Jewish mysticism, Hasidism, and theology to several generations of students at the University of Pennsylvania, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (where he served as both Dean and President) and now at Brandeis University. He has also taught and lectured widely throughout the Jewish community of North America as well as in Israel, where he visits frequently. He was the founder of Havurat Shalom in Somerville, Massachusetts, and remains a leading independent figure in the Havurah or Jewish renewal movement.

Dr. Green is the author of several books. Best-known among these are Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav and Seek My Face, Speak My Name: A Contemporary Jewish Theology, where he turns to the mystical tradition as a key source for a religious language that will speak to the many spiritual seekers in our generation. His most recent scholarly work, entitled Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism is soon to be published by Princeton University Press. His translation and contemporary comment on Hasidic teachings will appear in Honest Talk: The Sefat Emet of R. Judah Leib of Ger, forthcoming from the Jewish Publication Society.

Publications — 718-601-2955 Reynold Levy — fellows - 3, 6, 9 mos.

editorial work charges — books

+ supervision — Uncern: joint; obscure; respectably

calendar - brochure — 20th c. - historical

annual report - 20/24 pp.: $25,000 copy; incl. graphs, statistics, layout; $1000 page - editorial/layout; ptg; dissemination - separate

Sally Arteseros - daily rate

essay - good speech = $10,000 editorial;

+ $2500 if destined for op-ed - built-in

how many ways can we use this? versatility

make people aware of what animates people like me to put in this kind of energy

raise money

broaden base 2 reach

widespr assump that folk sacred to 2 things - not competitive love 2 merit; couldn't make it elsewhere - Amer committee ad. : so well-received anecdotally

Aristocracy piece

FROM: INTERNET:marom@vms.huji.ac.il, INTERNET:marom@vms.huji.ac.il
TO: Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
DATE: 9/17/96 7:32 AM

Re: Art Green article

Sender: marom@vms.huji.ac.il
Received: from VMS.HUJI.AC.IL (vms.huji.ac.il [128.139.4.12]) by dub-img-5.compuserve.com (8.6.10/5.950515)
id HAA10094; Tue, 17 Sep 1996 07:28:07 -0400
From: <marom@vms.huji.ac.il>
Message-Id: <199609171128.HAA10094@dub-img-5.compuserve.com>
Received: by HUJIVMS (HUyMail-V7b); Tue, 17 Sep 96 13:28:18 +0200
Received: by HUJIVMS via SMTP(128.139.9.41) (HUyMail-V7b);
Tue, 17 Sep 96 12:58:07 +0200
Date: Tue, 17 Sep 96 12:58 +0200
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit
Subject: Art Green article
To: Nessa Rapoport <74671.3370@CompuServe.COM>
In-Reply-To: <960916165834_74671.3370_BHW48-5@CompuServe.COM>
X-Mailer: SPRY Mail Version: 04.00.06.17

Men! They are always doing a "oneupsmanship" piece on you! That must be why, after you asked me for a few things, I want to ask you to please, dachoof, arrange for CIJE to fax me copy of Art Green article distinguishing spirituality from religion. I will try to get you the stuff you asked for as well, as soon as possible. I'll fax over the logo first, and the text on the Institute as soon as I get it approved. Meanwhile I'll check into the program used. As for the goals library, it is on hold, while we work out a few of the bigger issues about the goal project. Agnon need more work by me. I know that SF wants to include some version of it in the Educated Jew book. I'll get back to you. DM.

FROM: Aryeh Rubin, 76162,3122
TO: Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
DATE: 9/24/96 8:36 AM

Re: Restoring the Aleph

Dear Nessa, Golden Beach, September 24, 1996

Firstly, a belated wish for you and your family for a Happy New Year and a Gmar Chatima Tova.

Secondly, my apologies for taking this much time to get back to on Green's article. We moved homes, etc etc, and I haven't come up for air yet. I am behind on a number of mitzva projects and have been discussing buying my old company back. And the Steinhardt project weighs in heavily as well. It felt better just telling you about all this.

I finished the Green article during Neila in shul yesterday. I am serious. I have also been reading his, Tormented Master. It was he who helped me maintain my Yom Kippur trance this year with a little help from Heschel. I found the some of the concepts within the article, as I did his lecture stimulating and brimming with new ideas and approaches. Admittedly, upon my first read, the solutions that he offered were more inflammatory in the printed version, than in his oral lecture. I am reminded of when Mordecai Kaplan's, Judaism as A Civilization came out, his son-in-law, Eizesnstein?, convinced him to delete the section suggesting that Shabbat be shifted to Sunday for the sake of the book being accepted. There are sections that I think may be too strong for the kehilla at large to accept. On the other hand, he did not include his vision of a Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat where 'New Age" Yiddin would sit on the floor and chant Lecho Dodi.

I do believe that desperate situations require radical solutions, and we are in a desperate situation. But I think we need to be inclusive; eliminating the concept of schar veonesh as a principle in Jewish hashkofa would inflame everybody, and the good stuff would be lost in the controversy. (One of my bigger beefs with orthodox day schools is the shoving down the throats of the children of the concept of reward and punishment). When you have the time, I will elaborate further on the rest of the article.

I also thought that the punch line of the title, Restoring the Aleph, P. 26, needed several reads, and those that do not know ivre, will not get it. The only typo I found that had not been picked up in my version was on page 19, the hyphen in a-theism, unless this a holy way of writing it like G-d. Heh,heh.

Three final points.
1. To get this piece more widely read, I would heavily sprinkle, perhaps every page with a provocative call out. This would draw the reader in, because reading the entire article requires a commitment and this would help. And for those who don't get to finish it, at least they will get the call-outs.
2. There should be a much shorter version available for amcha to read. Six pages including call-outs.
3. Having said all this, I would be interested in sponsoring an edition of this to a new audience. Say mailing copies of this to synagogue rabbis and JCC's with a study sheet and discussion outline.

Finally, I will be in NY the week of CIJE's board meeting. Let's discuss whether it's important

for me to attend. I hope we speak before Sukkot; Have a Chag Someach.

Warm regards,

Aryeh

TO: Alan, 73321,1220
Karen, 104440,2474
CC: Barry, 73321,1221
Josie, 102467,616

Re: Aryeh Rubin/Art Green

I received a 9/24 e-mail from Aryeh Rubin, in which he offered the following:

"I would be interested in sponsoring an edition of this essay to a new audience. Perhaps: Mailing copies of this to synagogue rabbis and JCCs with a study sheet and discussion outline."

I believe that our selected rabbis' list and the JCC education committee, and perhaps educators, will be among the audiences for this essay; we would be mailing to them in any event. I don't know about the "study sheet and outline."

In any case, I need to respond to Aryeh, who keeps offering to spend his own money on CIJE matters. I am now drawing up the dissemination plan for Green, and yet it doesn't seem appropriate for Aryeh simply to pick up the postage bill. Could you please give me feedback on a suitable role for him in relation to this essay, which has has loved since he first heard it a year ago? (He read it in shul during Ne'ila and was also reading Art's book, "Tormented Master." Together, they "helped me maintain my Yom Kippur seriousness.")

He also asked me whether I thought it was important for him to attend the board meeting. I assume the answer is yes.

Please get back to him as soon as you can, particularly since he may attend the board meeting.

Nessa

Dear Nessa,

Ive sent out extra copies of Green to all those who requested them:

[redacted]

Sheldon Dorph - 25
Rabbi Neil Gillman - 20
Beth Ostrow - 40
Jerome Chanes - 1
Shulamit Elster - 4
Cindy Chazan - 12
Joseph Lubinsky - 1

w a "Compliments" card and my extension written in -

Joella

The Huntington Hebrew Congregation
of the **Huntington Jewish Center**
510 Park Avenue, Huntington, New York 11743

Rabbi Neil Kurshan
(516) 423-5355

October 10, 1996

Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education
15 East 26th Street
New York, New York 10010

Gentlemen:

Please accept many thanks for the 20 copies of Arthur Green's "Restoring The Aleph." I shall be using same in the very near future.

Sincerely,

Neil Kurshan, Rabbi
NK:leb

FROM: gail dorph, 73321,1217
TO: Alan, 73321,1220
Barry, 73321,1221
Karen Barth, 104440,2474
nessa, 74671,3370
DATE: 10/13/96 8:21 PM

Re: Re: a time to meet in seattle

THOUGHT YOU WOULD ALL LIKE TO SEE THIS. BARRY, I MADE A DATE FOR DINNER FOR TUESDAY EVENING FOR HIM WITH YOU AND ME. GAIL
---------- Forwarded Message ----------

From: Sam Wineburg, INTERNET:wineburg@u.washington.edu
TO: gail dorph, 73321,1217
DATE: 10/13/96 5:27 PM

RE: Re: a time to meet in seattle

Sender: wineburg@u.washington.edu
Received: from jason04.u.washington.edu (jason04.u.washington.edu [140.142.78.5]) by hil-img-4.compuserve.com (8.6.10/5.950515)
id RAA20229; Sun, 13 Oct 1996 17:24:35 -0400
Received: from saul5.u.washington.edu (saul5.u.washington.edu [140.142.83.3]) by jason04.u.washington.edu (8.7.5+UW96.10/8.7.3+UW96.10) with ESMTP id OAA20308 for <73321.1217@CompuServe.COM>; Sun, 13 Oct 1996 14:24:30 -0700
Received: from localhost (wineburg@localhost) by saul5.u.washington.edu (8.7.5+UW96.10/8.7.3+UW96.10) with SMTP id OAA32297 for <73321.1217@CompuServe.COM>; Sun, 13 Oct 1996 14:24:32 -0700 (PDT)
Date: Sun, 13 Oct 1996 14:24:32 -0700 (PDT)
From: Sam Wineburg <wineburg@u.washington.edu>
To: gail dorph <73321.1217@CompuServe.COM>
Subject: Re: a time to meet in seattle
In-Reply-To: <961013211518_73321.1217_FHM54-2@CompuServe.COM>
Message-ID: <Pine.OSF.3.95.961013141841.8039C-100000@saul5.u.washington.edu>
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; charset=US-ASCII

happened to be on;line right now: yes, lori called me. thanks anyway.
see below

On 13 Oct 1996, gail dorph wrote:

> hiya sam. it was great to see you in shul, I actually thought we'd have a chance
> to shmooze afterwards and I was disappointed that we didn't.
>
> first of all, do you know that lori was hit by a car last week? she is OK, but
> still bruised. even though I hate to pass on accidents, I thought maybe you'd
> want to know.
>
> second, I am coming to seattle for the GA and was hoping that we could get

> together. barry and I will both be arriving early afternoon on the 12th of
> november and were hoping that you had some time either that afternoon or
> evening.

IT's a Tuesday evening. I could do it if we set it up now -- susan sees
clients on tuesdays so i'd ask our sitter to stay (she's with kids until i
pick shoshana up from hebrew school at 630. so I'd be free from 7ish on.
we could have dinner downtown if you wanted.

>
> no burning agenda. we wanted to catch you up on what happened this summer in
> Israel and also on our thinking about how this "professors" project could move
> forward. we're hoping you are still interested in thinking about connecting
> yourself to Jewish ed projects and this would be a way of keeping connected. and
> last, but certainly not least, we want to know how your own projects are coming.
> it's actually been a long time since we talked about your big projects and we'd
> like to do that as well.
>
SOUNDS LOVELY. I AM VERY MUCH INDEBTED TO CIJE RIGHT NOW. I HAVE READ A,ND NOW XEROEXED THE A. GREEN PIECE. I THINK IT IS FABULOUS! RIGHT ON THE MARK!!!!! UNBELIABLY CLEAR AND EXQUISITELY WRITTEN (DOES IT SOUND LIKE I LIKE IT?) IT SAID STUFF THAT I'VE FELT BUT WOULD FIND IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND THE WORDS TO SAY.

also, sue s. was in town and was a poster child for your israel gig.
sounds like it was successful, to put it mildly.

Let me kno w and i'll save that tue. night.

> so let me know about your time frame. barry and I could also see you in am on
> wednesday, then he's leaving. I'll be in town until friday am. so if it does not
> work for the three of us to meet together, then maybe you and I will still be
> able to make a plan for sometime on thursday or early friday. let me know what
> you think. gail
>
>

FROM: Barry, 73321,1221
TO: Nessa Rapoport, 74671,3370
DATE: 10/13/96 9:46 PM

Re: sam wineburg

nes:

I loved sam wineburg's reaction to Green in the e-mail forwarded by Gail!!

b

Nessa - St. Com. 10/16/96

My wife's first cousin, a son of an orthodox jew, American Greetings grandson, and extremely successful venture capitalist, dropped out to save his marriage & ~~Sister~~ 2 kids at 45 years.

He is now a seeker, spending intense time w/ Buddhism in San Francisco - deeply frustrated because there is no educational setting out there for Jewish ideas.

~~His synagogue~~

He loved Sarna & Green papers. He said they were extremely helpful as he starts to help/make/force his synagogue to ~~start to lead~~ change towards a learning institution.

The stuff works!

Richard

These papers as outreach tools
to for individual entrepreneurs

Dear Nessa:

The following people have requested and been sent additional copies of Green: (w/ compliments card)

1) Beth Ostrow (again)
   40 copies
2) Elliot Spack 25 copies
   for bd of CAJE
3) Rabbi Chaim Seidler-Feller
   40 copies
   teaching a class @ UCLA
4) Daniel Gordis -
   35 copies
5) Mark Gurvis -
   160 copies
6) Ginny Levi -
   15 copies
7) Rabbi Lavey Derby
   1 copy
8) Bonnie Weiner
   1 copy
   for his son in Madagascar

Nessa,

20 Greens were sent to Judith Ginsberg to distribute to her board — 10/23

October 27, 1997

Richard Ostling
Time Magazine
Time & Life Building
1271 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Dear Richard:

Enclosed is Arthur Green's essay, *Restoring the Aleph*, which was first presented as a lecture at the CIJE Board Seminar. Dr. Green's essay is a profound response to the prevailing anxiety about the spiritual quest of fourth-generation American Jews. We publish the work in a series that offers powerful Jewish ideas by scholars committed to the possibilities of a flourishing Jewish culture in North America.

As background for the subject of religion in American life, I have also included a second essay, a stimulating--and revisionist--account of the religious renewal by American-born Jews in the last century and its unusually pertinent applications one hundred years later. Jonathan Sarna, a colleague of Arthur Green's at Brandeis, places the Jewish revival in the context of an American awakening that was taking place within Christianity as well. His conclusions are startling in their optimism.

Both essays continue to be influential.

Please be sure to send me a copy of your piece; I look forward to seeing what you make of this very interesting moment in Jewish life!

Nessa Rapoport

To CUE Staff

FYI: Nessa

12/4/96

Brandeis University

Bernard Reisman
Klutznick Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies

Benjamin S. Hornstein
Program in Jewish
Communal Service
Waltham, Massachusetts
02254-9110

617-736-2992
617-736-2990 Office
617-736-2070 FAX

November 22, 1996

Nessa Rappaport
CIJE
15 E. 26th St.
New York, NY 10010

Dear Nessa,

I want to thank you and the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education for sending us 65 copies each of the two articles, published by CIJE: Arthur Green, "Restoring the Aleph" and Jonathan Sarna, "The Great Awakening." These articles will be assigned readings in the classes our faculty from the Hornstein Program and Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies are teaching to the full professional staff of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. This in-service educational program, identified as BBYOU (University) is now in its third year.

On behalf of our Brandeis faculty and all the professional staff of BBYO, we thank you for making these valuable articles available to us.

Sincerely,

Regards + Thanks

Bernie

Bernard Reisman
Klutznick Professor of
Contemporary Jewish Studies

cc: Professor Joseph Reimer, Director, Hornstein Program
Sam Fisher, Director, BBYO
Steve Alexander, Coordinator, BBYOU
Laurie Mindlin

nb

Time to Act לעשות CIJE Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education
15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010-1579

Pearl Beth Graub, MSSW
Director
PDA Waiver Program

642 N. Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19130 • 3409
215 • 765 • 9000 Ext • 4356
215 • 765 • 9066 Fax

philadelphia corporation for aging

enjoy!

nessa rapoport

With Compliments

Phone 212-532-2360 • Fax 212-532-2646

12/10/97 sent with copy of Vision at the Heart

wexner wkend
family dinners & rsmsh

Pearl Beth Graub, MSSW
Director
PDA Waiver Program

642 N. Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19130 • 3409
215 • 765 • 9000 Ext • 4356
215 • 765 • 9066 Fax

philadelphia corporation for aging

Time to Act / CIJE Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education

Nessa Rapoport
Leadership Development Officer

15 East 26th Street, Suite 1817, New York, NY 10010-1579
Phone: (212) 532-2360 ext.17 Fax: (212) 532-2646
E-mail: 74671.3370@compuserve.com

Deborah:
enjoy!
Nessa

Deborah Lipstadt
1674 Rainier Falls Dr
Atlanta GA 30329

12/10/97 sent w/ one copy of Vision at the Heart

Rapoport, Nessa

From: Barry Holtz [bholtz@nyc.rr.com]
Sent: Tuesday, November 25, 2003 11:42 AM
To: Rapoport, Nessa
Subject: more on long time shelf life of old projects

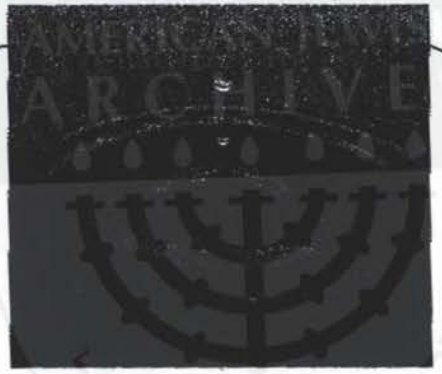
Hi

On a completely different matter: did you see the lovely brochure that the Spirituality Institute has done on the educators' retreats? (With Shelly Dorph and Larry Fine among the faculty) It opens with a quote from Green--from the Aleph CIJE essay!

b

"Spirituality is a view of religion that sees its primary task as cultivating and nourishing the human soul or spirit. Each person, according to this view, has an inner life that he or she may choose to develop; this 'inwardness' goes deeper than the usual object of psychological investigation and cannot fairly be explained in Freudian or other psychological terms. Ultimately, it is 'transpersonal,' reaching beyond the individual and linking him/her to all other selves and to the single Spirit or Self of the universe we call God. God is experientially accessible through the cultivation of this inner life."

—Arthur Green, *Restoring the Aleph: Judaism for the Contemporary Seeker*



CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN JEWS, in growing numbers, have expressed a yearning to cultivate the inner life as an essential component of their Judaism. Jewish educators are called upon to provide learning and guidance in this area. Educators understand the need to connect the head and the heart to inspire Jewish engagement, to move students from Jewish knowledge to Jewish living, and to help seekers find their own connection to the Divine. To do so, they need a deeper personal knowledge of the practices and texts of the Jewish spiritual tradition.

The Spirituality Institute, a study and retreat program for Jewish leaders, offers a unique learning experience to help Jewish educators deepen their own spiritual lives, *and* to better teach, lead and accompany Jewish teens seeking spiritual growth and insight. The program is based on three premises: that spiritual growth is a life-long process which requires commitment, practice and guidance; that educators best serve and inspire their communities when they cultivate and refine their own inner lives, because they can then more deeply model and express such qualities as kindness, compassion, humility and love for God; and that Jewish educators concerned with the life of the spirit need one another for companionship, study and growth.

Join Us!

The Spirituality Institute embodies the spirit of neo-Hasidism which began to grow in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, and which now has substantial roots in America. In our study we explore, renew and apply the riches of Jewish spiritual traditions, especially emphasizing the teachings of mysticism, Hasidism and meditation. Our aim is to encourage a new creativity in practice and in language that is at the same time rooted in the tradition.

Seventy rabbis and twenty-eight cantors from across the country and across the denominational spectrum have completed or are in the midst of a similar two-year learning program, and are looking forward to staying connected to each other in future years as they work to nourish their own and their constituents' inner lives. The Spirituality Institute now seeks the involvement of Jewish educators, to expand the circle of leaders who are engaged in this process of reviving, deepening and transforming Jewish spiritual life. We passionately believe that when Jewish educators study this stream of Jewish texts and practices not only will they develop personally, but through shared leadership and practice they will also transform the texture of American Jewish religious life.

Rapoport, Nessa

From: rachel.cowan@nathancummings.org
Sent: Monday, December 01, 2003 2:01 PM
To: Rapoport, Nessa
Subject: Restoring the Aleph

Dear Nessa,

I wanted to tell you that I have shared Art Green's Restoring the Aleph with countless numbers of people: in classes I have taught at Ansche Chesed and B'nai Jeshurun, in meetings with my Board when I needed to explain to them the importance of funding work that cultivates the inner life of Jews; in a leadership class on Jewish spirituality I will be teaching at the JCC in Manhattan. It is so cogent, so accessible and so relevant to many Jews today. He defines the term and the issues so carefully that even those with no interest in spirituality understand what he is talking about, and those of us who care deeply can rely on him to articulate our needs and understandings.

please, please come to the party on Dec 4 - from 6:30 on at 475 Tenth Avenue @36th St on the 14th floor

Rapoport, Nessa

From: Nancy Flam [rebflam@yahoo.com]
Sent: Monday, December 01, 2003 3:16 PM
To: Rapoport, Nessa
Subject: Hi!

Hi Nessa!

I hope that you are well.

Rachel asked me to let you know about our use of the "Restoring the Aleph" piece. We have used that excerpt in the marketing materials for all our programs for professionals (rabbis, cantors and educators). In addition, it is one of the first things we have EVERYONE read, in ANY of our programs (including our various year-long programs for lay people). It is an excellent piece, an excellent introduction to "the Jewish seeker" about "seeking Jewishly," and I could not be happier that you helped Art by editing it so magnificently. So I thank you over and again for your part in it. "Restoring the Aleph" has had lasting value over these past years in our intensive education of about a hundred rabbis and cantors from all over the country who are trying to develop their own spirituality so that they may become better, wiser and more authentic spiritual guides for others.

Love,
Nancy