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Jewish secondary school leadership initiative. National Jewish High School Leadership Seminar. Planning (Folder 2 of 3), 1998.

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September 24, 1998

Mr. Henry Lehman  
7913 Winterset Avenue  
Baltimore, MI 21208

Dear Mr. Lehman:

Thank you very much for your generous pledge of \$10,000.00 which has been allocated to our two National High School Leadership Seminars. The funds have been allocated in the following way: \$2,000.00 was used to provide subsidies making it possible for lay and professional leaders of Jewish high schools to attend the 3/8 – 3/9/98 seminar. \$8,000.00 will be used to provide additional participant subsidies for the second seminar on 11/1 – 11/2/98.

In order for these programs to receive the benefits of this generous contribution receipt of this donation at your earliest convenience would be greatly appreciated.

On behalf of CIJE and all the participants who are benefiting from your generous contribution we thank you for making these programs possible.

Sincerely,

Karen A. Barth  
Executive Director

Moral Outrage and Education

David E. Purpel

Cultural Transformation and Education

We are asked in this volume to consider relationships among education, transformation, and information which implies that there is good reason to believe that they are in fact closely connected and that we are in an era that requires social and cultural transformation. Therefore, it would seem appropriate as we approach the end of a millennium to consider very broadly the notion that a sophisticated education is a critical dimension of a peaceful, prosperous, and joyful society. One of the major goals of this century has been to enlarge and expand opportunities for formal education at all levels, a project that has shown impressive accomplishments in both scope and magnitude. It has also been a century of incredible scientific and material achievement and of enormous spiritual devastation- a century when small-pox was eliminated and genocides were perfected, when we have come to believe in the big bang theory for both the beginning and end of life; when God died a most untimely death.

In the U.S. of the last moments of this millennium , we still have far too many poor, far too many rich; we have far more hatred, bigotry, racism, sexism, classism than we say we want; we have a culture that emphasizes achievement, competition, conquest, and domination at the expense of compassion, caring

community, and dignity. The abomination of homelessness persists but it has vanished from the media and political platforms except from those who promise to shield us from the unpleasant presence of those who have no shelter. Poverty persists and increases but instead of a discourse of poverty we have a discourse of welfare; instead of a war on poverty we have a campaign for middle-class tax relief. There is a growing gap in incomes, a widening gap of trust among racial and ethnic groups, increasing homophobia, xenophobia, and whatever phobia it is that covers fear and loathing of the other. A dismal record indeed for a talented and enterprising people and a shameful state of affairs for a powerful and wealthy nation that claims sacred status, one explicitly founded on the principles of liberty and justice for all.

The added shame of this situation is that our educational system has contributed to and colluded with much, if not all, of this. Our most powerful and influential leaders call upon education to meet the demands of a cruel economy and a meritocratic culture. The great bulk of formal educational policies and practices reflect and facilitate structured inequality, rationed dignity, rationalized privilege, and self-righteous hierarchy. Moreover, much of the rhetorical justification for this violation of our commitment to a vision of liberty and justice for all comes from the ranks of the school and academy. Perhaps most disturbing of all is the realization

that the movers and shakers in government, business, communications, advertising, banking, et.al., that is to say those institutions that shape our lives in critical ways , are people who almost surely have had what we have come to accept as a "good education." It is the very people who have brought us to our present plight who are among the brightest, most articulate, most creative, most imaginative, and most reflective people in the land. It would seem that at the very least, we need to re-consider what we mean by a "good education".

Moreover, the professional educational community has largely responded to our crises with characteristic opportunism, timidity, and accommodation, exercising their skills to meet the demands of the dominant political forces. What would seem to be required is a pedagogy of moral and spiritual transformation but instead our profession has fashioned a pedagogy of control and standardization focused on technology, competitiveness, and materialism. There is , however, in spite of the overwhelming dreariness and blandness of the present professional educational discourse , some extremely encouraging work that is being done that has great power, hope , imagination, and daring . I have in mind the work being done in what I would call a pedagogy of transformation and meaning. educational ideas directed at the search for social justice and personal meaning, Among the prominent writers in this mode are Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Svi Shapiro, Nel Noddings, Wlliam Pinar, Ron Miller, C.A.

Bowers, Jane Roland Martin and James Moffett, all of whom address basic issues of cultural and existential meaning as the necessary framework for developing educational policies and practices. It is work which at least holds out the possibility of challenging the dominant educational discourse of achievement, competition, and standardization and of stimulating the public and profession to reexamine the relationship between our highest aspirations and prevailing notions of schooling.

I want very much to affirm and celebrate this work even as I speak to how its very insights and analyses testifies to the limitations of some of our most valued educational traditions and public schooling . What this work does in its affirmation of serious reflection on fundamental issues of justice meaning in a context of their complexity , ambiguity, and perplexity is , among other critically important things, is to highlight the problematics of detachment, independent thinking, and critical rationality. It must be pointed out that I am lumping together educational orientations that have important differences among them, e.g., the difference in the emphasis put on social , political, and economic concerns as opposed to writers who emphasize personal development and human growth. However, among the very important connections are their commitment to social and cultural transformation and their reliance on critical rationality, personal reflection, openness and respect for varying perspectives, and good faith dialogue.

I certainly would not want to quarrel with this educational approach, and indeed I am proud to be part of an intellectual and professional community and tradition that is deeply committed to them. However, I increasingly find that such an orientation, necessary as it is, is not anywhere near being sufficient to respond to our present set of existential, social, political, economic, moral and spiritual crises. The twin roots of this doubt are in the sense of moral outrage that I share with many people at the depth of unnecessary pain and suffering in the world and simultaneously in the absence of moral outrage of so many people. Not only do I affirm the validity of this outrage, I consider it an absolute requisite to serious efforts at cultural and educational transformation. I am also very much aware of the problematics of a pedagogy of moral outrage, not least of which is the psychological reality of the resistance and hostility to it when it is perceived to be guilt inductive. People simply do not want to hear constant messages of disaster, gloom, and suffering and are wont to tune out jeremiads as hysterical if not counter-productive-the perfect defense mechanism. In addition, there is the frustration that comes with the awareness of the depth, enormity, and scope of the problems that engenders helplessness if not despair. Yet it is difficult for me to see in the absence of a passionate commitment to the plight of the suffering how we can seriously address the really vital issues that threaten our existence as a caring people.

In addressing the matter of moral outrage I have had to confront three basic questions: what are the criteria for morally outrageous phenomena ? how do we come to internalize them? and thirdly, what is the authority and source of these criteria? I have some sense of the first issue as I affirm what I believe to be our basic human moral framework of liberation, dignity fulfillment , and peace for all. Having said that let me quickly acknowledge that this is in no way suffices as a satisfactory response. The question regarding how we come to learn to have moral commitments is obviously a very complicated and controversial one and with it comes a very strong and rich tradition of reflection and theorizing. Moreover, there is some very interesting and intriguing work going on in educational theory today in this realm as reflected in the work of such people as Nel Noddings , James Moffett, and Jane Roland Martin. However, the harsh reality is that the public schools are very far away from paying serious attention to such questions and issues largely because they do not have the political will or intellectual tradition to accept this responsibility.

Moreover, I believe it is time to question the broader notion that we can significantly effect social and cultural transformation primarily or even largely through serious study and dialogue. It is more than a little disquieting when we consider the poignant effects of critical rationality on our struggle to find meaning and create a morally sound and

spiritually satisfying path to personal fulfillment, cultural richness, and social justice. This process has inevitably confronted us with enormously diverse perspectives, incredibly perplexing dilemmas, extraordinarily complex ideas, and a fathomless set of paradoxes. Because of these realities we have learned to be cautious of generalizations, suspicious of certainty, reverential toward difference, and wary of affirmation. We have learned about the historical, political, and subjective nature of knowledge and have had to respond with critical and skeptical detachment lest we be seduced by self-serving rhetoric masked as universal truths. We have become so smart that we find it extremely difficult to believe in anything except the contingency of knowledge and the inevitability of conflict. Our critical studies have taken us to spiritual and moral inarticulateness if not silence; our detachment has led us to the emptiness of the marginality of interested but paralyzed bystanders; and our tolerance has forced us into an unwilling consciousness of moral relativity.

Part of my skepticism is directed at the whole notion of there being such a thing as an educational enterprise, i.e., the difficulty of the reification of education, of separating out certain processes and phenomena from a larger framework of meaning and labelling them to be "educational." I have come to believe that such a reductionism serves to blur the intimate relationships among critical cultural, political, and social

phenomena and education and to nourish a myth of an objectivity based on technical expertise. Perhaps it is time to tell ourselves that Education is an empire without clothes and that we need to return to the realms of the fully clothed. It seems rather ludicrous to me to have this vast array of sophisticated, well-trained, and creative people called "educators", sitting around in their offices and classrooms with nothing to do except to define and solve "educational problems". Where do these educational problems come from? Do they exist as such, in a conceptual vacuum, outside of any larger context? Educational problems, per se, would seem to be of a secondary (no pun intended) nature; they necessarily arise as a consequence of other issues and concerns, e.g., the efforts to teach literacy emerges from a variety of motivations: to facilitate productivity, to strengthen democracy, for personal empowerment, to name a few. Indeed one of the prime activities of educators is to determine objectives and goals in an Alice in Wonderland effort to figure out the reasons we're doing what we're doing! To me it is quite extraordinary that we are constantly being asked to state our goals, (a process which, incidentally, rarely, if ever, results in changing what we do). If there is uncertainty about our educational goals, then how could we possibly continue to teach what we do? How could such uncertainty arise in the first place? Presumably, if we do not know our goals, then we should stop whatever it is we are doing and

restart only when we know what the goals are. Of course, much of the goal stating effort is largely disingenuous, since politically it usually adds up to a post-hoc justification of what we already are doing. However beyond the cynicism and ritualism, I believe that the impulse to ask the question of educational purpose reveals an unsettling lack of confidence in the validity of what we do and masks a deep and genuine uncertainty of our moral direction and a suspicion that we are morally and spiritually lost. This brings me back to the third question regarding moral outrage: what is its authority and source?

My position is that above and beyond studying educational processes we as educators are required to wrestle with issues regarding the nature of our culture's highest aspirations and most cherished visions. In addition, we as educators need to ground our work in a vision that in some significant way resonates with what matters most and is of the most profound nature, to matters of cosmology, religion, and spirituality. One needs to proceed from this point cautiously and carefully because I believe that figuring out what it is that matters most and what constitutes profundity can be an extremely difficult, elusive, and anguishing process since we are dealing here with issues of extraordinary importance, ambiguity, and complexity. A particularly complex and elusive dimension of this process is sorting out the role of spirituality in this quest. I would like

to share part of my own sorting out process in the next section of this essay. I do so not to particularly autobiographic or to claim that my quest has produced radically new answers to profound questions but because I believe that the questions, processes, and insights that I came to accept are shared by many if not most of those interested in personal and cultural meaning and transformation. Obviously, individuals will address these issues on the basis of their own unique background, history, and orientation and indeed I believe that the process of sharing individual quests can greatly contribute to the task of reflecting on both our differences and commonalities.

## II. Education and Spirituality

The context of trying to connect education to spirituality, passionate commitments and to matters of ultimate concern has been and continues to be a difficult and confounding struggle which has certainly not led me to a resolution but clearly has led me to a source of authority. I came to a place where I realized that I would not be able to respond in depth to the question "to what should we be committed?" unless I was willing at some basic level to accept a starting place, a point of departure, a fundamental frame of reference, or to put in more contemporary terms, I would need to be part of an interpretive community. It was at this point that I truly encountered capital M Mystery for I came to this conclusion in part because I realized that what I was looking for involved a process which

gives life to existence, which animates, energizes, and gives direction, or as it is written, that which represents the spirits that reside within our midst. Perhaps this is in part what is meant by the term, spiritual- literally, that which inspires and gives breath to. The first Mystery then has to do with the source of this energizing spirit; although I am prepared to accept, albeit gingerly and hesitantly, the importance and reality of these spirits, I remain among the baffled about what they are, where they come from, how does one find them and what does one do with them when one does.

The second Mystery for me has to do with the reality that I find myself generally drawn to religious issues and particularly and increasingly so, to the study of Jewish religious traditions. At first, I saw my interest as part of the way to provide further justification and validation for my work on an educational orientation that focused on equality and social justice and found powerful support for this in such traditions as the writings of the Biblical prophets. However, I quickly realized that what was going on was more than the usual kind of academic scrambling for post-hoc rationalization that passes for carefully considered inquiry. I was astonished to find, generally speaking, this material to be simultaneously familiar and fresh, old and new, accessible and remote. It was as if I was revisiting an important and suspended part of my consciousness even though I do not remember ever being in that state, at least in any

systematic, thorough, or direct way. My formal religious training had been minimal, perfunctory, superficial and banal if not counter-productive and misleading and yet it would seem that my work had been significantly influenced by traditions I had largely ignored and misunderstood. I still cannot fully explain why this would be so. Nor do I entirely comprehend why I am still so strongly drawn to examining Jewish sources but I am and I find myself relying increasingly on them for that which animates and informs my work. My reactions to these materials is varied, if not contradictory -I find much that is affirming and energizing; there is a great deal that I do not accept, much I do not even understand; some seems directly relevant to my work and much if seems quite removed from it; some of it troubles me and all of it intrigues me.

Will Herberg points out in his book Faith in Biblical Theology, that it is what we remember and what we expect that shapes our quest for faith. According to Herberg, "...the act of faith is double: the existential affirmation of a history as one's redemptive history and the existential appropriation of this redemptive history as one's personal background history, and therefore in a real sense the foundation of one's existence." (pp.40-41). Accordingly, I seek to ground my work in my hopes as they are informed by what I choose to remember and by what I want to expect. I expect and accept meaningful existence and that as educators we must do our work within a larger framework of

meaning, that which is of utmost importance to us and constitutes the substance of our very deepest commitments, those which Paul Tillich calls matters of 'faith and ultimate concern'. Tillich describes faith as:

"... the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man's ultimate concerns. Man...is concerned about many things, above all about those which condition his existence, such as food and shelter. Man in contrast to other living beings, has spiritual concerns- cognitive, aesthetic, social, political. Some of them are urgent, often extremely urgent, and each of them as well as the vital concerns can claim ultimacy for a human life or the life of a social group. If it claims ultimacy it demands the total surrender of him who accepts the claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name."(p.1)

It certainly makes sense that we determine our goals, purposes, and strategies within a framework of faith and ultimate concern and it also makes sense that we within this frame we are wise to study, reflect, and dialogue. While we need not insist on linearity we, however, are still beset with the greatest of all difficulties, that of determining our faith and what constitutes matters of ultimate concern. The processes of critical rationality can operate with enormous power both within and without such frames of faith and ultimate concern but by

themselves they cannot bring us to affirm a faith or celebrate an ultimate concern. Study, reflection, and analysis cannot be at the center of an education for meaning, although they surely can and ought to be among the inevitable and valued partners in the task of naming and acting on our faith. I believe that we are living in a time when there is wide spread earnest and heart-felt searching for the other critical partners.

Indeed, it may be that it is the very human desire and impulse to seek faith and ultimate meaning that is itself another critical partner. The modern condition is one in which we seem to seek rather than express faith and one that requires that we do so in order to pursue hope, and sustain our struggle to create a just and loving community. Franz Rozensweig in describing the rationale for a center of adult Jewish education said that at one time people went from the Torah into life but now is a time when we must go "the other way round from life... back to the Torah." (p.152). The modern age is one in which we encounter the world not with faith and a sense of ultimate meaning but with skepticism, wariness, and suspicion and convinced that we are better served by being armed with knowledge and critical rationality. This approach has certainly served many purposes well but it has also exacerbated our alienation and anxiety leading us to be even skeptical about our skeptical armament. Many of us indeed seek the faith and framework of meaning that can enable us to understand the evil that has befallen us and

that can help to sustain the impulse to resist if not overcome it and return to traditional and sacred sources like the Torah. However, it is one thing to study sacred traditions and sources of wisdom and quite another thing to be nourished and energized by them. This generates yet another search—the search and struggle for the disposition, accessibility, and openness to faith and the desire and willingness to be nourished by the sacred.

Abraham Heschel teaches us that we can learn to faith only when we wonder, for only when we truly wonder we will be able to confront the awesomeness and sublimity of creation. He says in God in Search of Man , "Mankind will not perish from want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.(Heschel,1955, p.46) It is this wonder that inevitably brings us to confronting the awesomeness of the most fundamental questions of origins , purpose, and destiny-- the overwhelming and disturbing mystery of existence. Heschel says that this mystery, " ... is not a symptom for the unknown but rather a name for meaning which stands in relationship to God... Ultimate meaning and ultimate wisdom are not found in the world but in God, and the only way to wisdom is through out relationship to God. That relationship is awe... The beginning of awe is wonder , and the beginning of wisdom is awe. ...Awe

enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, to sense in small things the beginning of infinite significance, to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal". (Heschel, 1955, p.74, 75).

Faith then is not a function of study, not the result of research and analysis, not the culmination of reasoned reflection but rather emerges from wonder, awe, and engagement with the infinite. Heschel is not unaware of the educational implications of such a formulation for education, "...Our systems of education stress the importance of enabling the student to exploit the power aspect of reality. To some degree, they try to develop his ability to appreciate beauty. But there is no education for the sublime. We teach the children how to measure, how to weigh! We fail to teach to revere, how to sense wonder and awe ..., the sense of the sublime, [and] the sign of the inward greatness of the human soul." (Heschel, 1955 p.36)

It seems that an alternative response to issues of ultimate meaning is to dismiss essentialist questions about the meaning of life, human nature. and the course of human destiny as naive, irrelevant, or sentimental if not stupid and dangerous. I have chosen to speak from the perspective of traditions that assume quite the opposite, namely that these questions are the *only* ones worth asking and moreover, from the grounding of a tradition that

takes commitments very seriously. As Rabbi Heschel has said, "Socrates taught us that a life without thinking is not worth living. Now, thinking is a noble effort, but the finest thinking may end in futility... The Bible taught us that life without commitment is not worth living; that thinking without roots will bear flowers but no fruit...." (1955, p.216)

I affirm traditions that not only recognize that as humans we are fated to create our world but believes that above all we are called upon to create a world resonant with divine intention—a world of peace, justice, love, community, and joy for all. These are traditions that accept as givens the potentials of human abilities as well as the limits of human fallibilities; they posit our capacity to be generous as well as to be selfish; to be angelic as well as demonic; compassionate as well as cruel; wise as well as foolish. Such traditions revere knowledge but only as it is tempered with the wisdom that advances justice and mercy; a perspective that acknowledges the enormity of the task but dismisses human despair as sinful; and one that represents a consciousness of unmitigated outrage in the wake of cruelty and injustice but always in the faith that witness, confession, and healing offer the possibilities of transcendence and redemption. What is absolutely crucial to redemption is human responsibility and human agency since these traditions require that we act as God's agents, dedicated and committed to constructing and sustaining intentional communities

based on joy, love, peace, and justice.

As educators we should not be merely committed to education, we should instead be more deeply committed to human dignity; we should not dedicate ourselves to higher learning but to a high standard of living for all; our responsibilities are not to select the best students but to eradicate privilege; our commitment must not be to the market economy but to the Golden Rule. It is idolatrous to commit oneself primarily to the preservation of History, Biology, or any other discipline or field when there is injustice, inequality, and hatred in the land. We need not be concerned with a decline in test scores; we need to be outraged and obsessed with an increase in unnecessary human suffering. As educators we must not offer justice, joy, and love as rewards or luxuries but affirm them as requirements for a life of meaning. Personal dignity is not something to be rationed and manipulated but cherished as something inherent and inviolable.

Yet in spite of our prior commitments and vows, it is certainly true as well as tragically unnecessary that we have created a world in which justice, love, peace, and joy are unequally distributed and that is why it is truly a blessing when we try to reduce this inequity situation by situation, one person at a time. However, our commitment must extend beyond the enrichment and support of particular individuals as worthy and commendable as that goal surely is. We must recognize that the

sources of the inequality. inequity, and injustice lie not only in within the souls of individuals but also within the structures of our economic, political, and cultural institutions. Our present economy requires poverty, our current culture demands elitism, our existing political system necessitates hierarchy. Our commitments , therefore, extend to the creation of a just world beyond merely making accommodations to an unjust system; we are called upon to both heal the wounded and to create healthy environments , to respond to both the effects and the sources of injustice. As educators we need to be concerned not so much with minimum scores as with minimum wages, not with classroom deportment as much as with business ethics, less with the distribution of grades than with the distribution of wealth. More accurately, we need to be mindful of the links between classroom pedagogy and social policy as there are, in fact, close relationships between minimum scores, classroom deportment, the distribution of grades and minimum wages, business ethics, and the distribution of wealth.

### III. Educational Implications

#### A. The Public Schools and Transformation

Is this an oxymoron or a cherished vision? a delusional fantasy or the stuff of dreams? Is it a useful way of distracting us from the necessity of deeper structural change or the conviction of the inevitable triumph of good sense? Much has been written and much has been expected of the possibilities of

public education and of course, much has been written on how the public schools act not as agents of liberation and enlightenment but as engines of the dominant classes.

Perhaps it would be useful to pause on the term "transformation" and examine it as a neutral rather than a polemical term, i.e., There are all kinds of possible transformations some of which we may like and some we may not. The common schools of the 19th century endeavored with a great deal of success to transform a group of largely rural, multicultural, multilingual regions into a unified, industrial , and WASP nation. The schools of today are striving to transform us in such a way that we can accommodate to a cybernetic culture and multinational economy. It must be remembered that public schools are bureaucratic agencies of the state which are required by law to follow the policies of publically elected officials who have total fiscal control of the schools. If there are to be transformative functions assigned to the schools, the assignments will be made by those in power, i.e., by the established dominant interests. In addition, we must also confront the reality of an entrenched professional bureaucracy which largely works for self-serving inertia and stasis. Although there is an honorable and modest history of the profession calling for genuine social and cultural transformation it is a story of very little impact. At the same time it must be said that the profession has been able to make a great many technical changes( e.g., in instruction,

curriculum, and assessment), but even these are usually absorbed into the basic schooling frameworks set by the dominant power structures.

However, what I believe is meant by transformation in the context of this book has to do with a fundamental change in moral and spiritual consciousness in which we reject the excesses of individualism, materialism, competitiveness, and acquisitiveness. The kind of transformation that is required is one that energizes us to pursue personal meaning, social justice, world peace, and ecological harmony. The difficulty is that those who favor this kind of transformation does not have the political clout to direct the energies of our social and cultural institutions and hence it is quite naive to expect that the public schools can be a primary source of such a transformation. After all, public school educators are under quite strong political, professional, and community controls which work to put enormous pressure certainly not for moral and spiritual transformation but on the intensification of our present consciousness. Most teachers are over-worked and underpaid; and most come out of a tradition that stresses professionalism rather than social reform. What we will have to do is to work harder to create the cultural and social conditions that will enable the public schools to do their part in changing consciousness. Schools are not there to thwart the will of those in power so if we want to change society it is simply neither fair or wise to ask the schools to be in the

vanguard. This means that educators who want to work for transformation cannot limit themselves to schools, community colleges, universities and the like but need to be involved with other and larger cultural movements.

Obviously, there are many forces and movements working for the kind of transformation being described, some of them political, others economic, and others ecological. I want to speak directly to the enormous force of the current interest and involvement in spiritual matters that up to fairly recently has been mis-represented as a rise in religious fundamentalism. There is surely a dramatic increase in religious fundamentalism but there is a broader and more wide spread phenomenon of spiritual seeking and struggling that cuts across class, religions, and ideology. As I have already indicated, some of this energy has been expressed in the professional educational literature, a literature not noted for its daring. My own view is that we as educators, citizens, and humans ought to involve ourselves more directly and openly in this larger realm since it is my belief that the transformation that radical educators seek is fundamentally spiritual in nature. More particularly, I believe that we as educators need to engage in the struggle to affirm spiritual beliefs and to integrate this struggle into our professional responsibilities.

There are ancient spiritual truths that must be asserted-- truths that do not constitute information but wisdom, that do not

emerge from research but from the soul, and are not matters of consensus but of affirmation. For me it is abundantly clear that we are our sisters' and brothers' keepers and we are inevitably and intimately connected to each other and to nature. It is clear to me that we suffer enormously from the loss of this truth and the resultant profound alienation. It is because of this that we seek to reclaim our holiness and in doing so we will end the isolation, suicide, murder, pillage, and pain we inflict on ourselves , each others, and the planet. Scientists, theorists, and philosophers now tell us of our intimate and inevitable interconnectedness with society, culture, history, and nature and have made it possible even for skeptics like me to approach the essence of spiritual consciousness, the belief in the oneness of being. Indeed the question of being our brothers' and sisters' keeper becomes moot when we begin to realize that we are very likely not apart but a part of our brothers and sisters.

This consciousness impels us to renew our struggle for direction, meaning, and guidance with determined intensity - Heschel says, "Man is not the same at all times. It is only at certain moments that he becomes aware of the heart-breaking inconceivability of the world in which he lives and which he ignores. At such moments , he wonders : what is my place in the midst of the terrifying immensity of time and space? what is my task? what is my situation?"( 1955,p.130). His own response is powerfully unequivocal: " He who seeks an answer to the most

pressing question , what is living? will find an answer in the Bible; man's destiny is to be partner rather than a master , there is a task , a law, and a way,; the task is redemption , the law is to do justice, to love mercy, and the way is the secret of being human and holy," (,1955,p.238) .

How are the rest of us to respond to Heschel's challenging questions? Walter Brueggemann urges us to respond to such questions in a consciousness of confession and grief. Confession refers to a process in which we affirm our basic aspirations, hopes,visions, beliefs and commitments as well as to admit to our failures to act on them. This is very likely to be a matter of both celebration and grief for as we remember our communal and personal spirits we will undoubtedly be renewed by the energy and joy of this wisdom and as we remember our history we will surely be horrified and mortified by our refusal to live by them. Brueggemann makes it very clear that we cannot omit the grief process for that is a necessary part of the process of confronting the chasms between our hopes and realities, our human responsibilities for the pain and injustice in the world, and recommitting ourselves to our cherished destinies. In his book, Hopeful Imagination, he invokes the work of the Biblical prophets as a metaphor for how we might address our present cultural and religious state which he characterizes as a parallel exile for serious believers. In his concluding chapter, he offers three themes : "1. Grief is offered against establishment

denial and cover-up Jeremiah regards as a lie. 2. Holiness is proclaimed against conventional theology that never quite faces the otherness and always hopes for and forms a utilitarianism that links God's holiness to some historical purpose. 3. Memory is asserted against amnesia in which nothing is noticed or critiqued and everything is absolutized in its present form... Grief should permit newness. Holiness should give hope. Memory should allow possibility." (p.131-132).

It is poignantly if not tragically clear that much of our culture is a long way from acknowledging its responsibility for such hideous phenomena as slavery, poverty, war, racism, sexism, inequality, and hunger. This refusal to take responsibility and hence to grieve and mourn for the pain we as a community have inflicted represents to me the limitations of an education grounded primarily in critical rationality, study, and the exchange and analysis of information. Indeed, many of our most learned and reflective commentators have used their vast store of knowledge, insight, and information to celebrate a smug and intoxicated triumphalism of capitalism, consumerism, and meritocracy, American -style. It is obviously impossible to grieve if there is no sense of significant loss, or even more strikingly, if there is a sense of significant gain! Instead of compassion for the suffering, we have learned to blame the victims or to make them invisible; many curse rather than bless the poor; and rather than seeing others as God's children, many

of us see human beings through the lens of potential customer or expendable worker. The dominant culture does not celebrate justice but competition, does not value unconditional love but grooves on conditional rewards; its rituals are not of communal solidarity but of partisan triumphs, and its energies are not rooted in a divine impulse to seek oneness but in a frantic spirit of greed and acquisitiveness.

What I think is required for genuine transformation is an education that emphasizes the processes that I have been discussing in this piece, awe, faith, the struggle for ultimate meaning, commitment, confession, moral outrage and grief. In the present political and cultural realities, these cannot be a significant part of the public school experience, largely because they go counter to both public and professional expectations of the role of these schools. For the most part, parents want their children to succeed and look to the schools to provide them with the wherewithal to gain an edge in the struggle for privilege and advantage. Academics, for the most part, want to preserve their disciplines and areas of study while school administrators are preoccupied with maintaining good will and stability. Moreover, the public schools are politically positioned to be as accommodating and acutely sensitive to community pressures as possible, effectively making them hostage to the demands of zealous and determined groups. The possibility of introducing on a widespread basis, serious spiritual and moral consciousness or

even dialogue to educational policy and practice is extremely remote, if for no other reason than the political clout of the Christian Right. The cliché that the public schools try to be all things to all people and consequently fail to fully satisfy anyone is basically true and must be accepted as a consequence of our political and social structures.

The daring, intriguing, and imaginative ideas of James Moffett and Nel Noddings are instructive to this issue. Moffett basically attacks our culture as bankrupt and our schools as perpetuating a ruinous consciousness and argues forcefully and courageously that only an education that is primarily and radically directed at personal development through various spiritual disciplines can save us from ourselves. He makes a very compelling argument for this approach and I believe with many others it merits serious public and professional dialogue. However, as attractive and creative as these ideas are, I would have to say sadly and ruefully that there is virtually no possibility that they will see very much of the light of day in the foreseeable future of public school practice. They are far too threatening to the dominant thrust of those who dominate public spaces.

The ideas of Nel Noddings on teaching children to wrestle with the enduring and complex issues of fundamental belief are also quite daring for public school although much less radical than those of James Moffett. Noddings urges schools to provide

safe and supportive opportunities to study and discuss such ideas as theodicy, immortality, the existence of God, and the nature of evil, surely a sensible and valid idea. Her plan is not, however, to make such study the focus of the curriculum but to introduce them as relevant spin-offs and dimensions of the traditional discipline based curriculum (e.g., math, science, history, English, foreign language). She advocates that teachers commit themselves to teaching for understanding of varying beliefs; to an attitude of "pedagogical neutrality"; and to an approach that allows them to take a position but insists that they acknowledge and recognize differing views. All in all, I see this as a very prudent and pragmatic way for the schools to deal with such vital issues but the relative cautiousness and lines of demarcation of her proposals only emphasizes the limited range of public school possibilities. It is not an approach that is designed to transform the culture or galvanize spiritual struggle, moral outrage, awe, and passionate commitment but one that hopes to stimulate students to study and reflect on the fundamental questions of existence within the traditional framework of the schools as they are. And yet even such sensible and modest proposals are within our present context relatively controversial and radical with little likelihood of gaining broad support in the mainstream of educational practice. If schools are, at best, reluctant to provide for serious discussion of the most important questions of human existence, then how can we

expect them to be a prime mover in the struggle for cultural and social transformation? We mustn't and shouldn't.

### B. What Can Be Done?

Accepting the educational limitations of critical rationality for changing consciousness and the political liabilities of the public schools does not in any way mean that educators are irrelevant and marginal to the struggle for a just and loving world. It does mean that we have to re-examine the claims that we have made for enlightenment education and the public schools in the context of a commitment to social and cultural transformation. It does not mean that we should accept the anti-intellectualism that denies the undeniable and absolutely essential liberation and inspiration that can and does emerge from study, research, dialogue, understanding, and analysis. It does mean that we need to seek other sources for the energy, wisdom, and courage to sustain the struggle for meaning. It does not mean that we should cede and surrender the public schools to the forces of either blandness or zealotry; nor does it mean that we should not continue to engage in the public and professional struggle for a humane and liberating education. It does mean that we must give up the falsely reassuring and naive way in which we equate democratic education with public schooling.

It does mean that we as educators may have to give up some of our precious programs and pet solutions or at least , be more

modest about their possibilities. There is nothing particularly sacred about whole language learning or experiential learning, nothing specially ultimate involved per se in the teaching of poetry or going on field trips or even in journaling. Indeed, it is possible to turn the teaching of imagination and critical thinking into a sacrilegious act when people use their newly augmented imagination and criticality to make a buck at the expense of others , to exploit the environment, to find tax loopholes , or to encourage teen-agers to smoke. The use of portfolios may stimulate imagination , it is surely more sophisticated than conventional, reductionist assessment, and it no doubt will afford more opportunities for advancement to more people. At the same time, portfolios have, can, and will be used to facilitate and enhance elitism, privilege, and hierarchy. On the other hand, however dubious we may be of the value of particular educational technologies, there *is* something clearly sacred and very special involved in promoting human dignity and social justice and to do so as educators.

Indeed, our deepest commitments should be the same as all other people-they cannot, should not, must not be anything less than those contained in our culture's highest aspirations and most cherished dreams. Our differences with other groups lie not in the substance and nature of our commitments but only in where and how we act on them. The struggle for creating a community of

peace, love, joy, and justice must go on in every sphere, including, of course and perhaps especially in educational institutions. We are not primarily educators, we are first of all God's agents, active partners in the covenant to create a community of peace, justice, love, and joy who, parenthetically, have decided to exercise our responsibilities to this project in places called schools and universities. Educators are called upon to pursue justice, to choose life, to cherish freedom for all, and to love their neighbors as themselves, maybe more but certainly not less than anyone else. Our profession will not be ennobled by feeding the engines of material growth, personal success, intellectual mastery, or national supremacy; it is ennobled by its devotion to spiritual development, individual dignity, moral sensitivity, and universal peace.

My view is that if and when public school educators commit themselves to the task of participating in the continuing responsibility to create a just and loving world, the nature of their work would change dramatically and profoundly even within the context of severe restriction. It is possible to do at least some of what Nel Noddings suggest, that is to engage students in serious dialogue on profound issues within the existing curriculum. It is possible to do what Jane Roland Martin suggests and that is to create a more nourishing and loving classroom environment where students are affirmed as they thoughtfully probe their world. It is also possible to add some

of the opportunities for spiritual growth that James Moffett suggests into existing classrooms. The suggestions that William Pinar makes about the importance of aesthetic opportunities for students to reflect on their inner lives and those of Henry Giroux that students and teachers critically examine the contradictions of their lived experiences are extremely important and doable possibilities. None of these orientations may become central to the schools but that doesn't mean that they can't have some impact in some however modest way.

This is an era of increasing cynicism, despair, and helplessness and a time when many suggest that the best we can do is either to ride out the storm or reduce the damage as much as possible. Still others say that the apocalypse is now and that we should abandon ship and/or learn to tread water. I take a different view, namely, that we should renew our commitment to creating a world of peace, love, justice, and joy with greater determination, passion, and vigor precisely *because* these are such desperate times. It is surely proper to count our blessings and to affirm our vision at times of genuine cultural and social advancement but we have an even greater responsibility to remind the community of its covenant in times of danger. This is a time when we must vigorously and passionately counteract the cynicism and despair which only deepens and extends the danger. The times call not for capitulation or curtailment of our commitments but

in affirming , as Herberg suggests, what we remember and what we expect. We ought to remember the enormous amount of unnecessary human suffering and we ought to remember our vows to redeem that suffering with the creation of a better world. We must expect that this requires a great deal of human agency, determination, and will, and we must have faith that these efforts will ultimately succeed. We must remember the magnificent acts of courage and sacrifice that millions have offered in the struggle for a just and loving world.

Let us as educators citizens, and human beings have faith in our ultimate commitment to the creation of a just and loving community. Easy to say, hard to do. Unless we take into account our amazing human capacities and that mysterious spirit that is the source of that faith that energizes and inspires them. Each of us must search for the community of meaning that provides, protects, and enriches that source. It is in these communities that we can find the authority for our moral outrage and the energy to sustain the struggle to preserve the hope that is required to meet our responsibilities. Responsibility without a moral and spiritual framework becomes psychological guilt, the kind meaningless and unrooted dis-ease that cripples people into deafness if not hostility to human suffering. The difficulty in recognizing, enduring, and responding to morally outrageousness is , I believe, related to spiritual alienation, i.e., a failure to affirm. The reality is that we need more help than good

intentions, critical rationality, and tolerance can provide in our vocation to create a just and loving community for all. We and our students need to have the faith that there are such additional resources available in that realm called the spirit.

I find great consolation in what Michael Lerner said in 1994, "The ultimate Force governing the world, the Force that has created the entirety of Being, is the energy that presses for transcendence toward a world in which all Being manifests its fullest ethical and spiritual potential, a world in which human beings recognize one another both in our particularity and in our ability to manifest ethical and spiritual possibility. That Force exercises a spiritual pull within all Being to move beyond what is to what it ought to be....[T]he God of Moses is a Force that transcends all limits and makes it possible for us to do the same. This God is the Force that makes for the possibility of possibility."(p.65)

I am further moved by what Michael Lerner's teacher, Rabbi Abraham Heschel wrote in 1951 : " Only one question... is worthy of supreme anxiety: How to live in a world pestered with lies and remain unpolluted, how not to be stricken with despair, not to flee but to fight and succeed in keeping the soul unsoiled and even aid in purifying the world ".( Heschel,1951 p.179)

I am deeply comforted to know that Lerner, Heschel, and I as well as countless others across time and space have been and will continue to be stirred by what was written in the Talmud 1800

years ago: " The task is not ours to finish , but neither are we free to take no part in it."

#### IV. Summary

The focus of this essay has not been not been on information nor even on education but rather on the part that education plays in the infinitely more important issue of our moral condition. It is my view that this must be the starting point of all serious discussions of all issues of public policy, including of course those involving education. I share the position that we as a society have fallen tragically short of our commitment to create a just and loving community for all and furthermore, that our educational institutions and orientations are complicit in the violation of this commitment. This failure can be seen as the triumph of a consciousness of materialism, individualism, competitiveness, and hierarchy as well as a function of increasing cynicism, loss of energy, and rising despair.

I believe that the most powerful element that is lacking in the necessity for the kind of transformation that is necessary to renew our commitments is a sense of profound moral outrage. The road to moral outrage would seem not to be paved neither in good intentions nor in more critical rationality, sophisticated knowledge, and clever analysis. The more direct path would seem to be the one marked " spiritual", since the nature of the

commitments that generate moral outrage will emerge from our most profound sense of what constitutes ultimacy. This would suggest that educators need to seriously address their own views on what is of ultimate concern in order to explore the moral and spiritual commitments that ground their educational orientations.

It is clear to me that the public schools are sharply limited in their capacity to be a major force in such a transformational process but whatever possibilities exist should be energetically pursued. It is also clear to me that educators need to have the courage to accept the limitations of deeply cherished notions of the traditions of liberal education without in any way denying their necessity. Educators need therefore to be at once more modest and more bold; modest in their expectations of what public schools and criticality rationality can do and bolder in their hopes in the possibilities of awe, faith, grief, confession, and spirit.

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