

But that argument overlooks an important fact: when Ian Smith was let off the hook, so were his methods, which wound up being put to use by Zimbabwe's new leaders in Matabeleland. A public accounting of Smith's abuses would have illuminated the laws and tactics he employed, as well as the other people who used them, much in the manner of the exhaustive post-mortems undertaken in recent years in Argentina and Brazil under the banner of *nunca más*, "never again".

The unresolved grievance of the Ndebele people is by no means the only source of potential conflict—and repression—in Zimbabwe's fragile democracy. Now that the Ndebele are back in the fold, the Shona themselves are riven with internecine rivalries. The Shona-speaking people are actually a collection of smaller tribes in competition for power and patronage, and for slices of what is still a very small economic pie. The country has made only limited progress in resolving a fundamental dilemma of its inheritance: How can an economy built to serve 250,000 white settlers meet the needs of a rapidly growing population of eight million blacks? There are wide gaps between rich and poor. School enrollment has nearly tripled since 1980, but so has unemployment. By some estimates unemployment will double in the next five years, leaving one person in three out of work.

An election is scheduled for 1990. No one knows what shape the balloting will take now that Zanu and Zanu are one, but some Zimbabweans are hoping that this will be the first meaningful referendum on the country's political leadership after a decade in power. Mugabe's government calls itself socialist, but Mugabe has proceeded with what

most Western observers regard as commendable caution in implementing his egalitarian designs. Some of his most vocal critics are on the left, particularly leftist students and lecturers at the University of Zimbabwe. A series of student demonstrations against corruption last September provoked a heavy-handed police response, including beatings and detentions. There have been other disquieting omens as well. In December a provincial governor briefly detained and assaulted two *Chronicle* reporters who were investigating his real estate dealings; Mugabe and other ministers responded by blaming the reporters. Earlier a popular politician, Edgar Tekere, was expelled from the party, apparently for being too bellicose in his denunciations of corruption and single-party rule.

Zimbabwe's leaders deserve more credit than they've been given for stepping back from the precipice of protracted tribal warfare; would that some of their neighbors were able to resolve their rivalries as Mugabe and Nkomo have done. But the nation's failure to confront its past leaves open the possibility of future episodes of violence and repression. And entrenching one-party rule seems to invite that prospect by closing off political avenues of dissent for those who are unhappy with the status quo. For now, there is no guarantee that Zimbabwe's newfound unity promises more than just a lull before another storm.

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Tales from the American Jewish left.

BROKEN VESSEL

BY EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

THE GRANDEUR of a metaphor can be sobering when casually applied. Consider what lies behind the name *Tikkun*—the name of a "progressive" Jewish magazine that began publishing in 1986. The word "*tikkun*" comes from the writings of the 16th-century Jewish mystic, Isaac Luria. According to Luria, the universe was created after God contracted to a point, leaving a void. The fire of God's spirit emanated from that point into that primordial space, filling spiritual forms—known by the mystics as "vessels"—with formless light. The vessels, though, could not withstand the intensity of God's light and shattered. This "breaking of the vessels" scattered sparks throughout the universe, mixing divine light with fragments of earthly

dross. The task of man was *tikkun*—the undoing of catastrophe, the repair of the shattered vessels.

So *Tikkun*—the magazine—is setting itself an ambitious task, nothing less than (in its words): "To mend, repair, and transform the world." Its approach is to define itself metaphysically, politically, and stylistically in opposition to the neoconservative *Commentary*. While the name *Commentary* implies focused interpretation and analysis, *Tikkun* suggests excavations amid the shattered vessels, prospecting for redemption; that is precisely the atmosphere the magazine creates, in loosely edited, wide-ranging, and openly contradictory essays.

In December *Tikkun* brought that spirit to a conference

in New York with more than 1,800 people in attendance. Its project was "Reconstituting the Progressive Tradition of American Jewish Intellectuals," and its argument was that there is an essential link between Judaism and left-wing politics. This claim has become familiar: it is often used, for example, to explain the strong identification of American Jews with the Democratic Party, a bond that has weakened only slightly during the Reagan years. The problem is that although there may have been Yiddish folk songs sung during the 1930s at Communist meetings, and there was many a Jewish patronymic among the radical "revolutionaries" of the 1960s, the left itself can hardly be considered an unambiguously hospitable home for Judaism as Judaism. So the conference was meant to provide a bit of *tikkun* after decades of fractious politics and conflicting obsessions; it aimed to create a united front to redeem the universe—or at least Israeli policy and domestic politics.

MICHAEL LERNER, the editor of *Tikkun*, could attempt such a "reconstitution" because he is not distressed by outright contradiction; the implicit argument was that anything to the left of neoconservatism shares similar "progressive" goals. There was hardly a major figure of the left unheard from: Edward Said on the Palestinians, Victor Navasky on the neoconservatives, Ted Solotaroff on American Jewish literature, Arthur Waskow on radical politics and religion, Marshall Berman on Modernism, Abba Eban on Israel, Cornel West on blacks and Jews, Letty Cottin Pogrebin on radical feminism, Michael Harrington on American politics, Howard Fast on Jewish culture. Alfred Kazin spoke. So did Irving Howe and Grace Paley. There were leftists old and new, from the radical religious to the secular intellectual, from democratic socialists and converted fellow travelers to reborn returners to ancestral faith.

Along with this miscellany that gave the conference the unpredictability of a bazaar, there were distinctively Jewish variations on left-wing looniness. Phyllis Chesler, a radical feminist, piously declared that women's bodies were "colonized everywhere in the world, not only on the West Bank"; she then asked where the Israeli parachutists were who could rescue her oppressed sisters held hostage in "Saudi Arabia or Westchester." Arthur Waskow praised the ritual of living in the Jewish sukkah—the hut open to the sky and the elements during the fall holiday—as an antidote to the Western fallout shelter. And the Hebrew blessing chanted after the conference's celebratory dinner had one line, and only one line, changed to refer to God as a woman—an example of what might be called affirmative blessing. There was even a Hebrew song that seemed something of an anthem for the conference—"Hine Ma Tov," whose lyrics proclaim how good and sweet it is for brothers to sit together in amity. That was the song dedicated to "our Palestinian brothers" at one session; and that was the song that closed the conference after a fractious parliamentary-style session about the PLO.

Even in its more sober aspects, the conference was in the

tradition of left-wing Judaism that developed with the counterculture. During the 1960s and 1970s there were many Jewish participants in radical political movements. Some took their Judaism seriously indeed. They became observant Jews, following the laws of kashruth, regularly attending prayer services, dedicating themselves to Jewish spiritual life. There were communes and "alternative" synagogues; there were spiritual heroes (Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Buber) and biblical heroes (almost any of the prophets); there was even a guide, modeled on *The Whole Earth Catalog* (called *The Jewish Catalog*), with information on how to make Sabbath candles, wine, matzoh balls, and skullcaps, how to build a sukkah, bring the messiah (by planting trees in Vietnam), and generally how to connect Judaism with the counterculture.

ONE OF THE major documents of the Jewish counterculture was "The Freedom Seder" created by Waskow, now a member of the *Tikkun* editorial board and a ubiquitous commentator at the conference. Its origins were recounted by Waskow: he was in Washington during the Passover holiday in 1968, just after Martin Luther King was assassinated, and he realized, looking about at the police presence, that this was Pharaoh's army. He saw the United States as Egypt, the counterculture providing the Mosaic miracles, and blacks, Vietnamese, and a host of Third World peoples oppressed by white capitalists as the slaves. Waskow's own version of Mosaic redemption was to help create the Institute for Policy Studies—never known for its warm vision of Israel—and the short-lived organization Breira, which in 1974 objected to peaceful demonstrations against Yasir Arafat when he appeared at the United Nations.

Waskow has mellowed some, but the aura of the Jewish counterculture still hovers. Michael Lerner himself headed the Berkeley chapter of the SDS during the mid-'60s and in 1969 was indicted as one of the "Seattle Seven" for conspiracy to destroy federal property (a charge on which he was cleared three years later). He studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary, obtained a Ph.D. in philosophy and then a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. In the late '70s, attempting to combine his political energies with his psychological training, he helped found the Institute for Labor and Mental Health, where he was involved in developing a form of psychological therapy he described in a book, *Surplus Powerlessness*. Then he founded *Tikkun*. "This is not the *Nation* with a Jewish star," he told me. "We are serious about Jewishness in a very deep way. We are not coming to Judaism out of liberalism but to liberalism out of Judaism."

The Judaism, then, is a countercultural observance in which the notion of redemption becomes paramount. The liberalism is thus oddly unliberal—slightly messianic and apocalyptic. It is consistent with New Left ideas but chastened by the experiences of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism many Jews had in the "Movement." In Lerner's case, and in the case of many at the conference, this Jewish leftism is accompanied by the countercultural notion of psychological transformation partly derived from Herbert

Marcuse, whom Lerner considered a close friend: namely that under current political conditions personalities are contorted and distorted. The political reformation would be accompanied by a personal reformation, a rebirth in which pain and ugliness would be transformed into pleasure and love. In Lerner's view, Judaism would itself move far beyond the legal systems of rabbinic rulings and community regulation that served it until the Enlightenment, far beyond the various orthodoxies and assimilations that have marred its history ever since. "Judaism," Lerner said, "is the metaphysics of revolutionary transformation and healing."

Though this cosmically medicinal vision was the motivating force at the conference and behind the magazine itself, it was not as unifying as it first seemed. First of all, for most Jewish intellectuals, Judaism has become little more than a cultural fact. Unlike some groups on the religious right in both Israel and the United States, which treat the political realm as if it should be an extension of the religious, the left has generally treated these realms as contradictory, or worse. There was some palpable discomfort in evidence at the overtly religious material at the conference; I heard several intellectuals of assimilated temperament wryly contemplate conversion. At a dinner honoring three senior figures of the left these tensions were particularly pungent.

Grace Paley, for example, punctuated her talk with references to the Bible and tentatively used the Hebrew word "midrash," but only to imply that Judaism's fulfillment was in secular socialism. She also attacked Israel for not realizing that ideal. "This seems a waste of nationhood, a waste of statehood," she said, casually writing the country off as unsuited to her ideological predispositions. Alfred Kazin also interpreted Judaism as a sort of secular gesture of "opposition"—against the "intellectually dissolute" movement of neoconservatism. Irving Howe was still more sweeping. His political disagreements with members of the Jewish community led to a wholesale condemnation of American Jewish religious life as a "life malformed," marred by "moral erosion." But he also attacked the conference itself, arguing that there is no sanction in Jewish religion for liberal politics. "To claim there is a connection," he said, "can lead to parochial sentimentalism or ethnic vanity"—both of which he obviously felt in evidence.

THE HOPE WAS that at least on one subject there could be a mobilization of forces—Israel. The conference took place just a week after the United States decided that Yasir Arafat was serious as he mouthed the correct formulas for acceptance of Israel, and this was a matter of great debate, yielding all manner of display and argument—everything from *Tikkun's* call for a "demilitarized" and "neutral" Palestinian state, to Edward Said's demand that American Jewish intellectuals take responsibility for Israel's unmitigated sins.

One of the goals *Tikkun* set for such discussion was to break an alleged monopoly over the presentation of American Jewish ideas on Israel. The claim was that the "main-

stream" organizations make it seem as if American Jews completely support Israeli government policy, and that a dissenting voice needs to be heard. In fact, not only has such dissent been widely expressed by "mainstream" organizations themselves, but beginning in 1977 with the election of Likud it has been almost impossible to read an article about American Jewish attitudes to Israel that isn't about dissensions and differences.

At the conference it became clear that there is no unanimity even on a dissenting position. During all three days of the conference, copies of a modestly phrased statement circulated calling for Israeli negotiations with the PLO. The document was unavoidable for anyone who attended the major sessions and was posted on the major bulletin board. Yet out of the more than 1,800 conference attendees, only 300 or so actually signed it as requested. At the last session there was some thought about adopting it as a statement by the conference. But its supporters decided first to vote on whether or not the document should even be brought up for discussion. When there was substantial opposition, the entire motion was withdrawn, leaving an unsettled feeling that lasted even through the final refrain of "Hine Ma Tov."

SO WHATEVER *tikkun* was taking place seemed barely to help the shattered vessels of the Jewish left. The problem was not just strategic; it was intellectual. The conference was defining itself in opposition to the neo-conservatives, but this was a strange opposition, for it followed no serious attempt to understand the opposition or portray it accurately. Some speakers, David Twersky, Paul Berman, Michael Walzer, and David Bromwich, were circumspect, careful in their comprehension of opponents. But they were the exceptions. In most of the attacks, it seemed as if no one had dared read *Commentary* to find out what was actually being said in its pages. This method of opposition turns politics into a mere assertion of faith and opposition into a mere assertion of heresy.

Tikkun's claim is that it is not engaged in such a pious pose at all. At the conference, representatives from the magazine urged the left to learn lessons from the right, to speak about the breakdown of ethics, the absence of spirituality, crises in families, the importance of religion. But consider Lerner's own social theory. Whenever he saw patients at his institute or examined left-wing political movements, he found people in despair, blaming themselves for their failures. Lerner believes that "the 1970s and '80s in the U.S. were dominated by this belief that the individual had only him/herself to blame if s/he faced a life that was unfulfilling." In fact, he argues, the blame should rest not on the individual but on the "system" that is perpetuated by encouraging self-blame. That system requires nothing less than "structural change."

Despite a few idiosyncratic Marcusean twists, this argument replaces individual responsibility with blame on insidious forces in a capitalist society. But this view of the individual and society is neither Jewish nor truly liberal. Individual responsibility for acts and for their conse-

quences is almost an obsession of the rabbis; it is also the foundation of a truly liberal belief in human reason and its workings in society. *Tikkun's* appeal to religion is an admission that politics is not all-powerful for curing human problems. But its appeal to notions of individual innocence and society's ultimate blame is evidence that politics can be an even stronger religion than religion itself.

What then, of the claim that there is something intrinsically liberal about Judaism? On the face of it, this is not absurd. Judaism has fairly consistently been a "this-worldly" religion, creating a kingdom of deeds, with relationships not based upon absolute authority but on covenant and community. There are strong historical reasons for a connection between liberalism and post-Enlightenment Judaism as well. But as Irving Kristol has pointed out, there are also, throughout the Jewish tradition, a strong counterbalance to liberalism in the texture of the law, a conserva-

tive regard for text and its interpretation, and constraints placed upon religious and political apocalypticism. This doesn't mean that there is any natural link between Judaism and conservatism either. The claim of any intrinsic connection between politics and religion can only lead to a distortion of both.

Left-wing politics has no choice but to defend itself on secular grounds. "Leftist politics have always been very easy," Walzer said in the most memorable speech of the conference. "The vision of the future has always been comfortable." But, he continued, he can provide no "uplift," given the experience of the last few decades. Problems have become more complicated than simple left-wing formulas can solve. "We must worry about where we are going and how to get there." So this democratic socialist could only offer in place of *tikkun* a "radical uneasiness," which was just the sense the conference created.

Metternich they ain't.

BLIND MEN'S BLUFF

BY MORTON M. KONDRACKE

GEORGE BUSH hadn't been in office two weeks before the Washington-New York foreign policy establishment started buzzing and grouching about his new team and wondering whether, at a time when America needs a strategy as never before, the Bushies know what they're doing. Career foreign service officers complained that their new boss, Secretary of State James Baker, had thrown a lavish soiree for 30 news correspondents and their wives—"kissing the ass of the press," said one FSO—while ignoring the professionals. Various think tank experts said that Baker was slow in appointing ambassadors and assistant secretaries. And he was said to be secluding himself behind a "Berlin Wall"—the steel security doors of the seventh-floor executive corridor at State—along with a tight coterie of young loyalists who have limited foreign policy experience.

Meanwhile, the story went, Baker was already losing policy power to national security adviser Brent Scowcroft. Scowcroft, according to the *New York Times*, was rapidly staffing up the NSC with seasoned veterans, was giving authoritative-sounding television interviews, and, with NSC deputy Robert Gates, was assigned by Bush to chair the highest-level policy committees. "Brent already has more power than Henry Kissinger or Zbigniew Brzezinski had at this stage," one prominent foreign policy expert said. Another said, "It's obvious, Baker is going to be neither prime minister nor vicar of foreign policy." The Pentagon,

meanwhile, was completely out of the action, as Defense Secretary-designate John Tower underwent scrutiny that seemed sure to diminish his clout if he's finally confirmed.

While the establishment has been enjoying its gossip about the location of power within the new administration, it's been worrying about whether Bush's team is capable of the kind of global vision the times seem to call for. The Soviet Union, after all, is redefining relations not just with the United States, but with Europe, China, Japan, and the Middle East. And the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles, and even nuclear weapons in the Third World makes it clear that U.S. national security no longer can be defined strictly as a game between East and West. Meanwhile, America's relative economic strength continues to wane as the Pacific Rim economies grow, and the prospect of a Fortress Europe after 1992 raises the possibility that the world will someday be divided among a few giant economic blocs. If so, where will the United States fit in? In short, as a former high-ranking official in the Ford administration put it, "There is a lot of flux going on in the world."

The big question now being asked is whether the new administration has, or is even close to having, a master plan worthy of the new world. Does James Baker or Brent Scowcroft have clear ideas about what the world should look like ten or 20 years from now, and about how to nudge it in that direction? Or, more to the point, is either of them

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