

# SHALOM

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## Martin Kavka

# Searching in Vain for a “Pure” Elie Wiesel

**WHEN THEY READ** Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, my Bible-belt students are regularly caught up short. They are flummoxed by the events about which Wiesel wrote; by the very fact that the Holocaust took place. But they are just as flummoxed by *how* Wiesel narrated his experiences, and especially about Wiesel’s account of the gradual attenuation of his faith in God while in Auschwitz. They think they know how religion works; but when they read of Wiesel’s offering “a prayer to this God in whom I no longer believed,” they must face their own ignorance. At that moment, they learn that not even God can be exempt from critique.

Wiesel never wrote that God answered his prayer, or that God revised God’s ways as my students have to revise theirs. But if Wiesel could not teach God, he could do the next best thing. He could teach Oprah.

Redemption is always around the corner for her (and for us, the audience). Trauma can always be put to rest once and for all. Kathryn Lofton has written about Oprah’s spiritual capitalism, in which consumption — of pashminas, makeovers, diet manuals, uplifting fiction, and so on — is the mechanism by which Oprah gives her audience “redemptive certitude, and ... millennial promise.” Such certitude evaporated in her conversations with Wiesel about his experiences at Auschwitz.

In an interview that appeared in *O* magazine in the fall of 2000, she asked him, in her usual optimistic tone: “And is every person who survived proof that the human spirit can triumph over anything?” Tactfully and delicately, Wiesel broke the news to her: “It’s hard to say. Some persons sur-

vived because they wanted to, Oprah; I did not. . . I wish I could say that I wanted to live to tell the tale. But it wasn’t important then.”

Six years later, as she looked with Wiesel at infant clothes on display at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and listened to him talk about the infants and mothers who went directly to the gas chambers, she remarked, “There is some grace in that [quick and unexpected death], don’t you think?”



*Elie Wiesel and Oprah Winfrey.*

Somewhere on the border between naïvely cute, idiotic, and obscene, Oprah’s question implies that divine grace would not be expressed through receiving more life (or surviving), and that God for some reason did not care for those men and women — including Wiesel himself — who did not die immediately upon entering Auschwitz. All Wiesel could do was sigh and reply, “I don’t know,” before patiently explaining to Oprah that there must have been some period of time, however brief, in which everyone who died at Auschwitz knew death was imminent. To associate those moments with grace, or any divinely ordained meaning, is the height of offense.

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**WIESEL COULD ALSO** destroy his own redemptive hopes. In the first volume of his memoirs, *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, he quoted from entries he'd made (in Yiddish) in his diary while in Israel in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War. They began as a series of rhapsodic celebrations, as he exclaimed "now, more than ever we must begin with Jerusalem, city of a thousand generations of men who dreamed of deliverance and paved the way for today's heroes." But such joy soon fades into a forlorn pain as he reflected upon seeing conquered Arabs, observing that "for the first time in my life, children were afraid of me." This was not a messianic moment after all.

But there was one issue that, for Wiesel, was beyond criticism and beyond reasoned debate: the State of Israel. Many of the remembrances that have appeared since Wiesel's death this past July have noted the disconnect between Wiesel's stature, as, in President Obama's words, "the moral conscience of the world," and his position on the Israeli occupation.

Bernard Avishai, in *The New Yorker*, writes that "many of us who admired him in our youth became increasingly impatient with his inability to see the occupation for what it was." Others have remarked on his alliances with right-wing organizations, like his support for the Jewish settlement in Silwan, or Rabbi Shmuley Boteach's use of Wiesel's photo in several ads over the last few years — most notably one in support of Benjamin Netanyahu's speech before Congress in 2015 criticizing the Iran arms deal, and another from 2014 during the Gaza conflict. (The latter ad was beautifully analyzed, shortly after it ran, by Seth L. Sanders for *Religion Dispatches*.)

It is tempting to take this as evidence of two Wiesels: one, the thinker of radical and all-encompassing critique, and another, the thinker of Jewish power. It is tempting to write a piece chastising him for his inconsistencies, for being willing to throw one set of ideas out for the sake of the other (depending on his audience). It is tempting to turn to various political philosophers in order to argue that one of these Wiesels speaks the truth, and the other does not. Following any of these temptations is not wrong, but indulging them is of limited use. They bring no clarity about who Wiesel was as a thinker, writer, and political voice.

For Wiesel was quite aware that his own thinking, on issues great and small, was rooted in affect. (His writings remain powerful in part because he knew the affective power that narratives have.) He was no principlist, no systematician, no lover of reason. Indeed, at first he did not even listen to the reasoned exhortation of his cardiologist before his quintuple bypass.

And so his support for Israel was not grounded in any concrete first principle that we might know from political theory. It stemmed from an all-encompassing attachment to the story of the Jewish people that he could not see morphing into any other form.

But he would not have begrudged others, whether Jews or non-Jews, from taking different positions on Israeli poli-

tics than he did. Or at least he should not have done so, given what he stated in an interview with the *International Herald Tribune* from April 1980:

Do not ask me, a traumatized Jew, to be pro-Palestinian. I totally identify with Israel and cannot go along with leftist intellectuals who reject it. *Perhaps another generation will be free enough to criticize Israel; I cannot.* [Italics added.]

Was this a betrayal of his other broadly humanist commitments? Absolutely. There is no reason why critics should not continue to take Wiesel to task for what he said about Palestinians, or why they should not point out how especially unprepared Wiesel was for the recent growth of Israeli racism. But if we have anything to learn from Wiesel, it is that we human beings are a self-betraying lot.

From the very beginning of his writing career, Wiesel was worried that his testimony would somehow go wrong. In the 1970s, as he recollected the years before he published *Night*, he wrote: "I knew that the role of the survivor was to testify. Only I did not know how. . . how can one be sure that the words, once uttered, will not betray, distort the message they bear?"

To search for a pure Wiesel is to search for a world in which humans do not err, in which they are politically consistent and correct in every way. That search repeats the sin of Oprah, the sin that expects redemption in just a few moments. It leads to the self-aggrandizing bemoaning of others' faults, the hasty demand that others agree with me *now* because I have the answer, the quick naming of holy men and women who might free us from our own burden of making difficult decisions, and the premature end of deliberation.

If we were to truly defer redemption, as Wiesel did with Oprah, we would not cease to call one another to task. But we would expect all of us (including Wiesel) to betray our better selves on a regular basis. For those of us who are humanists or social scientists, we might research how such betrayals — or, for those of us who love jargon, "dialectical reversals" — occur as a matter of course when we live out our commitments among people who disagree with us.

And all of us might come to realize that our acts of solidarity, whether with some of the living or with some of the dead, are not innocent. They all cause pain to someone, somewhere. Perhaps that pain can be minimized over time, but the magnitude of the labor needed is far more immense than we might suspect. It was at times too immense for Wiesel. Yet if we read him again, perhaps it will not be too immense for us. ✧



I am deeply grateful to Ingrid Anderson, Robert Erlewine, and Shaul Magid, in addition to the editors of *Religion Dispatches* ([www.religiondispatches.org](http://www.religiondispatches.org)), where this essay originally appeared — *Martin Kavka*.

Patrick Henry

## Man of Peace Forever

*Daniel Berrigan (1921-2016)*

“First it was a question, then it was a mission,  
How to be American, how to be a Christian.

I had no right but for the love of you.  
And every trial I stood, I stood for you.”  
(“I Had No Right,” Dar Williams)

“Our apologies, good friends, for the fracture  
of good order, the burning of paper instead  
of children.”

(Daniel Berrigan, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*.  
Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, p. 93)

**D**ANIEL BERRIGAN VISITED Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, in April 1976. It was my good fortune to drive him to the University of Oregon in Eugene and then north to Reed College in Portland, where we had also arranged lectures and poetry readings. He would later spend another week at Whitman College in January, 1977, and a few more days in 1983 at the height of the nuclear freeze movement. I had the privilege of remaining in contact with him until his recent decline and death.

It was while we were driving on Interstate 5 from Eugene to Portland in April 1976, that Berrigan first spoke to me about Christianity and peace. The hostilities in Vietnam had ceased the year before, ending what was then the longest war in our nation’s history. Berrigan’s career as a Christian peace activist, however, was just getting started. The first Christians, he argued, refused to do military service. They believed it was incompatible with the gospel of peace

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to which they adhered. But over time, the “Just War Theory” won out and Christians have been waging wars ever since. For his part, though, Berrigan never saw any Christian justification for war.

I was drawn to Daniel Berrigan as early as November 1965, when Roger Laporte, a former seminarian and Catholic Worker, immolated himself in front of the United Nations Building in New York City as a protest against the war in Vietnam. Behind Laporte, on the Isaiah Wall of that building, was engraved “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares... Neither shall they study war any more.” For the Catholic Church, this act was suicide and young Laporte could not be buried in sacred ground. Berrigan had been warned by his Jesuit superiors not to speak publicly about Laporte’s death. But he did speak publicly and positively about Laporte at a memorial service conducted at the Catholic Worker House. There he argued that, whereas suicide proceeds from despair and loss of hope, Laporte had died in another spirit where death is conceived of as a gift of life. However misguided the act, Berrigan read Laporte’s death as an offering of self so that others might live. This thinly-veiled reference to Christ’s death infuriated his superiors. He was ostracized and exiled to Latin America, which caused demonstrations at Catholic universities and a major rally in New York, in front of the office of Cardinal Francis Spellman. Berrigan’s friends took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* to protest his exile and the violation of his right to “freedom of conscience.”<sup>1</sup> After four months of exile, he returned to New York on March 8, 1966.

In 1964, with his brother Philip, Thomas Cornell, Martin Corbin, and James Forest, Berrigan had cofounded the Catholic Peace Fellowship and had protested against the war in Vietnam in Lafayette Square, across from the White

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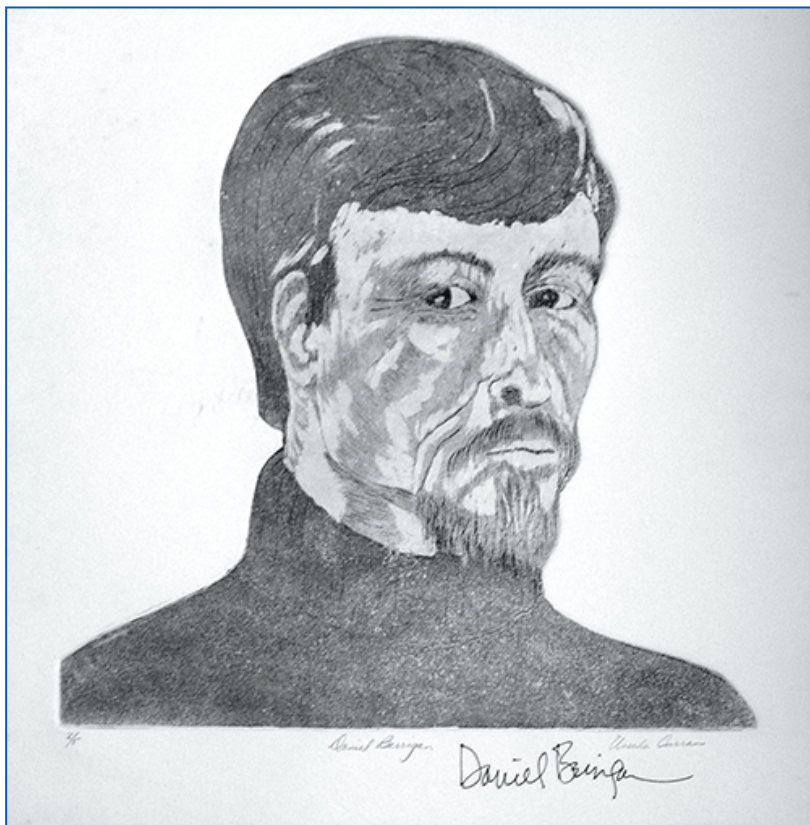
1 Murray Polner and Jim O’Grady, *Disarmed and Dangerous: The Radical Lives and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997, pp. 135-137.



House. Now, two years later, he returned from Latin America even more determined to do everything he could to end the war in Vietnam. In 1967, he and his brother Philip became the first Catholic priests to be arrested for opposing the war. In January 1968, Dan and Howard Zinn were invited to Hanoi by the government of North Vietnam to bring home three captive American airmen. There he “had cowered under American bombings [which] helped wonderfully to clear the mind.”<sup>2</sup> He now fully understood the limitations of his earlier protests (vigils, petitions, even draft card burnings) and was ready for a more radical resistance.

On May 17, 1968, in an act that would change the nature of Christian nonviolent resistance forever, with eight others, one of whom was his brother Philip, then a Josephite priest, Berrigan entered Local Draft Board No. 33 in Catonsville, Maryland. The participants seized Selective Service records (three hundred and seventy-eight individual 1-A classification folders) and burned them outside the building with home-made napalm. Their intention, as one of the participants, Thomas Melville, related during the trial, was “to speak to our country, to the conscience of our people,” to make them understand that “killing was repugnant to the letter and spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.”<sup>3</sup>

The trial of the Catonsville Nine, held in Baltimore from October 5-9, 1968, became a cause célèbre. Hundreds of people gathered at the courthouse every day of the trial. All the defendants pleaded innocent and all were found guilty of destruction of US property, destruction of Selective Service records, and interference with the Selective Service Act of 1967. They were all sentenced to prison. Daniel Berrigan went underground shortly before he was to surrender for imprisonment. Captured on August 12, 1970, on Block Island in Rhode Island at the home of William Stringfellow, he was sent to Danbury Federal Prison where he served eighteen months of a three-year sentence. Twelve days after his parole ex-



1973 portrait of Daniel Berrigan by Ursula Curran.

pired and he was free to leave New York City, he was one of sixty persons arrested at the White House as they knelt and prayed to protest the bombings in Cambodia.

As soon as the war ended in 1975, the Berrigans focused on the issue of nuclear weapons. In the first letter Berrigan mailed to me, dated March 1976, he writes: “Why is the nuclear question, when raised at all (infrequently) merely regarded as one question among many, sort of #2485 on the grocery list of public ills? Is it too hot to handle? Too horrifying to imagine?” It was, perhaps above all, the reality of nuclear weapons that convinced Berrigan that we live in a culture

of death: “Our real shrines are nuclear installations and the Pentagon and the war research laboratories... If North Dakota seceded from the Union, it would be the third nuclear power. And this is a farming state.”<sup>4</sup>

The nuclear question was the subject of all the talks given by Berrigan that I attended in the Northwest from 1976-1983. He was outraged by the sin of mass destruction, and feared that, four decades after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, our government was preparing for similar atrocities. Appropriately, on August 6, 1979, he was arrested with ten others at the Riverside Research Institute, a Pentagon think tank in Manhattan, and three days later, in Washington, D.C., on the day of mourning for Nagasaki, as he relates in a letter to me and others: “...we poured blood and ashes, cuffed ourselves to the doors; at noon we did a ‘die in’ in the main concourse.”

Hoping to expose the criminality of nuclear weapons, on September 9, 1980, the Plowshares Eight, Dan and his brother Phil among them, entered the General Electric Re-entry Division Assembly Facility in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. Using hammers, they damaged two nuclear warhead cones of Mark 12A missiles and poured their blood on top-secret blueprints. The protestors wanted to draw the public’s attention to the fact that, whereas General Electric claims “We bring good things to life,” first-strike weapons of mass de-

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Berrigan, *To Dwell in Peace: An Autobiography*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>4</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh and Daniel Berrigan, *The Raft Is Not the Shore: Conversations Towards a Buddhist-Christian Awareness*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1975, 2001, p. 10.

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struction were being produced in one of its plants outside the City of Brotherly Love. “As manufacturers of the Mark 12A reentry vehicle,” Dan notes sardonically, “General Electric actually prepares to bring good things to death.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the terminally ill and the terminally poor, Berrigan’s teachers were his brother Phil, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thich Nhat Hanh, and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, whom he refers to as “a saint before the judgment” and “a father to me, in more senses than one.”<sup>6</sup> There were nonetheless deep tensions in the peace movement, and the actions of the Berrigans were often criticized, not only by those outside the movement but by various groups within the movement itself. Outside the movement, the resistance activities of the Berrigans infuriated prowar patriots. There were also the usual charges that it was un-American to protest a war still in progress and, perhaps above all, that priests should be apolitical models of behavior rather than flagrant law breakers. Within the peace movement itself, even among those who admired the Berrigans, many judged their actions unrealistic and too self-sacrificial for most people who simply could not afford to go to jail.

Even within the religious segment of the peace movement, there were specific objections to what the Berrigans were doing. These criticisms came from the two people Dan respected most and from whom he had always sought spiritual guidance, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. Although Day herself was a war protester, she did not approve of violence done to property. She was aware of the disproportion between burning paper and dismantling nuclear weapons on the one hand, and burning children with napalm on the other. Nonetheless, regarding the resistance activities of the Berrigans, she consistently dissociated herself from them, even as she supported these same protesters and engaged in nonviolent protests against the war. Like Day, Merton favored a more Gandhian-like, totally nonviolent form of protest as practiced by Martin Luther King, Jr. Merton feared that violence toward property might lead to violence against people and, in the long run, such actions could prove counterproductive. Merton agreed, however, with the Berrigans’ view of America, their opinions on the war in Vietnam and the construction of nuclear weapons. He also shared their commitment for peace and social justice and insisted on the role of individual conscience in these matters. The Berrigans never lost their love or respect for either Day or Merton, but they stood their ground on the issue of violence toward “idolatrous things,” maintaining that some property has no right to exist.

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5 Daniel Berrigan, *Portraits of Those I Love*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982, p. 147.

6 Patrick Henry, “Religion for Peace: The Vietnam Years and Today,” *Journal of Peace & Justice Studies*, 20, 1 (2010), p. 9; Daniel Berrigan, *To Dwell in Peace*, pp. 178-179.

During his last thirty years, mostly spent outside the public eye, Daniel Berrigan continued to teach, lead retreats, write, and protest against nuclear proliferation and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The protests often led to his arrest. Far from optimistic, he repeatedly warned us at these moments not to worry about being successful. Our goal, he always made clear, was to be faithful: to stand up and remain standing for peace and nonviolence. The last of his witty “Ten Commandments for the Long Haul” helped him persevere: “Start with the impossible. Proceed calmly toward the improbable. No worry. There are at least five exits.”

**BUT THESE FINAL YEARS** were largely given over to corporal works of mercy, such as care for the dying at Saint Rose’s Home in Manhattan, one of seven homes run by the Hawthorne Dominican Sisters, an order of nuns founded by Nathaniel Hawthorne’s daughter, Rose Hawthorne Lathrop. Saint Rose’s, which closed in 2009, was dedicated to the care of the working poor who were dying of cancer. It was completely free of cost. Berrigan also worked during these years with people dying of AIDS in Saint Vincent’s Hospital in Greenwich Village, where he immediately became a volunteer whom the dying trusted and to whom he offered great comfort and compassion.

An active pacifist whose pacifism was biblically based, Berrigan often declared that no principle is worth the sacrifice of a single human life. He struggled in what he considered a culture of death, one “almost totally bankrupt of a vision of what a good life might be.”<sup>7</sup> In “Zen Poem,” which he read on January 11, 1983, in the First Congregational Church in Walla Walla, Washington, he unwittingly described the man we all loved:

Blessed is the one  
Who walks the earth  
5 years, 50 years, 80 years  
and deceives no one  
and curses no one  
and kills no one.  
On such a one  
the angels whisper in wonder...

He was so vibrant and energetic, so much more alive than most of us, so steady and unyielding in his principles and so full of courage, that it is impossible to think of him dead. All of us thank him for his moral leadership and example. May his memory be a blessing. ☆

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7 Hanh and Berrigan, p. 9.



Ben Ehrenreich

## Short Cuts



Hebron: Entrance to Checkpoint 56.

**I WAS SURPRISED** a few weeks ago to find everyone I knew in Hebron feeling cheerful. Perhaps it was the weather. Four months had passed since my last visit to the city, the largest, and lately the bloodiest, in the West Bank. It was January then, and cold, and everyone had seemed distant and shaky, glassy-eyed with trauma. The previous November, most of the

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**BEN EHRENREICH's** *The Way to the Spring is based on his reporting from the West Bank in 2016. He is the author of two novels, *Ether* and *The Suitors*, and blogs at [www.ben Ehrenreich.net](http://www.ben Ehrenreich.net). This essay first appeared in the June 30, 2016 issue of *London Review of Books*.*

neighborhood of Tel Rumeida had been declared a “closed military zone,” a convenient legalism that allows the Israeli army to exclude Palestinians — and journalists and foreign activists — from a predetermined area for a predetermined period. In this case the zone was a large one. Those who happened to live inside it were issued numbers and instructed to call them out each time they crossed through Checkpoint 56, at the base of Shuhada Street, where the section of Hebron inhabited by Israeli settlers is sealed off from the rest of the city. All through the winter, several Palestinians were being killed every week, sometimes a few a day, most of them in Hebron or the towns and villages surrounding it. Almost without exception, the Israeli press described the

killings as incidents of terror: Palestinians armed with kitchen knives, scissors or screwdrivers shot while attacking — or apparently intending to attack — Israeli soldiers or civilians.

That wave of violence, which flared up most recently in Tel Aviv, began in Hebron on September 22 last year, when soldiers stopped an eighteen-year-old girl named Hadeel al-Hashlamoun at Checkpoint 56. She was standing three or four meters away from them when they shot her in the leg. She fell. One eyewitness told Amnesty International that she dropped a knife. Another said she never had one. Either way, her hands were empty when the soldiers shot her nine more times. By the time I arrived in January at least eight other Palestinians had been killed within a half-mile of that spot. February and March brought still more deaths, including the execution of twenty-one-year-old Abdel Fattah al-Sharif, shot in the head as he lay unarmed and bleeding on the ground. That killing was caught on video, prompting the arrest of the soldier who delivered the fatal shot. The subsequent outpouring of public support for the arrested soldier was one of the factors that led Netanyahu to fire his hawkish minister of defence, Moshe Ya'alon, replacing him with the still more hawkish Avigdor Lieberman.

But there hadn't been another killing in Hebron since then. The shootings in Tel Aviv hadn't happened yet. Neither had Lieberman's subsequent decision to flood the southern West Bank with troops and to seal off all exits from both Gaza and the West Bank. It was sunny and warm when I arrived, the violence was still at an ebb, and the closed military zone order had been allowed to lapse. Issa Amro, a local activist I had known for several years, was in a far better mood than I was accustomed to. I even caught him smiling, and without the tense and bitter irony that usually lifts the corners of his mouth. On the way to the checkpoint, he stopped to speak with three women. One of them was a teacher at the local girls' school across the street from the settlers' flats in Beit Hadassah. The other women lived behind the school. They complained that now, only the teacher was allowed to use the stairs that climbed the hill across from the settlement. None of the other Palestinians who lived nearby, and that included the other two women, was allowed through: they had to walk in a long loop to get to their homes.

Inside the checkpoint — the one where al-Hashlamoun had died — we pushed through a turnstile, removed our belts, passed through a metal detector and held our IDs up against the

thick bulletproof glass for a soldier to inspect. On the other side, Amro, I, and a young Danish woman walked down Shuhada Street, which was as ghostly and calm as ever, the shops sealed shut by military order more than a decade earlier, rust showing through the green paint on the collapsing metal awnings.

"Let's take the stairs," Amro said, and grinned.

At the base of the staircase across the street from Beit Hadassah was another checkpoint, this one a simple guard booth. From that point eastward, Shuhada Street — once Hebron's busiest commercial thoroughfare — was closed to Palestinians, and only to Palestinians, and had been since the Second Intifada. Until November, the stairs, which led to the Qurtuba Girls' School and beyond it to the neighborhood of Tel Rumeida, had been open to settlers and Palestinians alike. (In October, nineteen-year-old Farouq 'Abd al-Qadr Sedr was killed where we were standing and Fadel al-Qawasmeh, eighteen, was shot by a settler a few meters down the road.) This was how so much of the city had already been lost — meter by meter, one block or one house at a time. Amro did not intend to let the closure slide.

The young soldier manning the checkpoint inspected our IDs and told us that the Danish woman and I could pass, but Amro could not. "You have to go around," he said in halting English. Only teachers employed at the school would be allowed through.

Amro asked the soldier why the Dane and I were allowed to pass.

"They are tourists," the soldier answered. I didn't correct him.

"Tourists can go and I cannot?" Amro asked. "Why can I not go?"

"Because you are ..." The soldier stopped. He didn't seem to want to finish the sentence. Eventually he found the courage. "Because you are Palestinian. This is a problem here," he explained.

Amro asked to see a written order. If no formal order had been issued, he explained, he could not be legally prevented from passing. The soldier seemed puzzled. His word, surely, was law enough. But Amro wouldn't leave, he made it clear, until the soldier produced something in writing.

"I know they don't have it," he confided to me, "and if they don't have it I can take them to court."

A man with a long white beard interrupted us. "He's a liar,"

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the man shouted in American-accented English, pointing to Amro. "He's also a terrorist. He's not allowed to be here." He stood a meter or two behind the soldier, and had a pistol tucked into the waistband of his trousers. I recognized him as David Wilder. He lived across the street, in Beit Hadassah. When I first met him two and a half years earlier, he had been the spokesman for the Hebron settlers.

Wilder and Amro knew each other well. Soon Wilder was shouting that Amro should move to Iraq, and threatening to post photos of Amro's wife on the internet.

Amro baited him back: "Why aren't you the spokesman anymore, David? Why did they fire you?"

The soldier said nothing to Wilder, but ordered us to step five meters back. "You're trying to make a mess," he said to Amro, and frowned. A few Palestinians from the neighborhood gathered: women, children, old men. More soldiers arrived. I counted eleven, one with a tear-gas launcher, the others holding Galil assault rifles, their fingers flat against the trigger guards.

Again Amro told the checkpoint soldier that if the staircase was closed he had a right to see the order.

"You don't have any rights here," Wilder yelled. "Go to Iraq."

The soldier seemed sincerely confused. "What are you trying to do here?" he asked. "I don't understand."

Amro repeated: "I want to see a written order."

Half a dozen Europeans in blue and grey uniforms walked over and leaned against a wall on the far side of the street. They were members of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, or TIPH, an international observer force with no police powers and no authority to do anything other than file reports. Their reports are not made public. Amro sat on the curb and began making phone calls. He called an Israeli lawyer, an Israeli journalist, and an Israeli human rights group. An older European couple, tanned and smartly dressed, strolled down from the checkpoint with two TIPH observers. Wilder drove slowly past in a white sedan and stopped for the Europeans. He rolled down a window and chatted amiably with the smartly dressed man. They seemed to know each other. Wilder drove off and the smartly dressed man introduced himself to Amro. His name, he said, was Pietro Pistolese. He had been one of the founders of TIPH in 1994. "I was here during the curfew," he said, referring to the bad days of the Second Intifada, when Palestinians here were forbidden to leave their homes



*Hebron: Checkpoint 56 exit.*

for weeks and sometimes months at a time. He put his hand on Amro's shoulder. "Believe me," he continued, "I know the situation better than you."

Amro, on the curb, gazed up at him in silence. A smile crossed his lips and quickly disappeared.

"We are trying to manage the situation," Pistolese went on.

"You are not doing it very well," Amro observed.

"You will see results," Pistolese promised, "but not immediately." And with that he walked off past the checkpoint and the staircase and strolled on into the section of the city forbidden to the Palestinians who live here. No one stopped him.

Amro told the soldier that he had phoned the police and been informed that a commander would be arriving soon with a copy of the order.

"Don't talk to me," the soldier said.

"I am being respectful," Amro protested. "I am talking to you as a human being."

"But I am a soldier," the soldier said.

More soldiers arrived, and an officer with three stripes on his shoulders, and a smiling settler with an M16. The police came and went without a word to Amro. Zidan Sharabati, who lived next door, poured coffee from a jug into small paper cups. Amro offered some to the soldiers. They looked away. The officer spoke with Amro in Hebrew, telling him that if he didn't leave, the army would close the entire area. Amro seemed pleased. "Let them close it," he said. "I'll come back tomorrow."

A boy with long forelocks ran between the soldiers' legs with a water gun, threatening to spray them. A few meters away, Palestinian kids kicked a soccer ball. The Danish woman passed around a giant bag of sunflower seeds. Off-duty soldiers jogged by in running shorts, their rifles bobbing on their backs. Wilder drove past again, rolled down his window and asked Amro how many tickets he wanted to Iraq. Still more soldiers came. They took our photos. A little boy begged me to play soccer with him. The settlers' children brought the soldiers a tray of brightly coloured frozen drinks. They didn't turn them down. Young Ahmad Azzeh, who lived up the hill, swept the sunflower shells from the pavement. More than an hour had gone by. Amro still sat on the curb. "I'm waiting," he told me. "I'm not leaving. A lot of things come to me like that."

Finally, three and a half hours after we arrived, an armoured police vehicle pulled up in front of us. The police inside it con-

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ferred briefly with the army officer. When they drove off again, the officer was holding several fresh sheets of paper. He approached Amro, escorted by five of his men with their guns at the ready. He pushed the papers in Amro's face. One sheet was printed in Hebrew. The other was a map of the area, with a circle drawn in magic marker around the staircase and the field just above it. "Closed military zone," the officer announced. "You have ten minutes."

In fact the order wouldn't take effect for another hour and did not include the street on which we were standing, but no one

felt like arguing. Amro grabbed his backpack. I grabbed mine. We dodged into a doorway and climbed onto the roof of the Sharabati house and from there to the top of the staircase, from where we could see the soldiers chasing everyone — at this point mainly women and children — into their homes. Everyone but the settlers, that is. Still, Amro was happy. It didn't feel like one, but it was a victory of sorts. He had forced them to draft a fresh order, which was as good as an admission that none had existed before. And as soon as he finished work the next day, Amro promised, he would be back. ✧

## Conscientious Objection in Israel

Tair Kaminer

# Letter to an American Soldier

**D**EAR MR. SMITH, You don't know me, but I feel as though we are really close. For the past twenty days I have worn your shirt. At least, the shirt that was yours while you served in the American army.

Here's the thing: I am sitting in an Israeli military prison. And our uniforms, here in the military prison, were donated to my country by your country. Yes, it is really US Army uniforms we are wearing, the tiger-skinned uniforms, the uniforms of the Marines, and some of them still have the family names of the soldiers sewn on the right and left sides of the shirts. And this time, I received your shirt with your name tag still sewn on the right side of the shirt.

I want to tell you why I am in prison. I am sitting in prison because I refused to enlist in the Israeli army, because I am against the continuation of the policies of occupation in the Occupied Territories. I requested to do alternative community service, but they are not letting me do that. This time, when the prison uniform had a name on it, I thought of you.

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**TAIR KAMINER is a nineteen-year-old conscientious objector who was released on July 19 from an Israeli military prison after serving one hundred and fifty-nine days for refusing to perform compulsory military service in the Israel Defense Forces. This letter was written during her incarceration. Her essay "Why I Refuse to Serve in the IDF" appeared in our February 2016 issue.**

I wondered what you would think, how you would feel about me wearing your uniform.

I wonder who you are. As one might expect, at the beginning I imagined you as a typical American, maybe chubby, a football fan, and maybe you have no idea what is happening here. You are, perhaps, not aware that there is a very complex and sad conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. That actually, since the foundation of this country, there have been horrible wars.

So it's important for me to tell you, because I am wearing your shirt. We have been in this situation for many years now. A terrible situation where wars keep on replaying themselves, over and over. Thousands of people on each side have been killed as a result of this war. The Palestinians live under Israeli occupation. The significance of this is that they are refused the basic rights of life, liberty, security and dignity.

Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip live under a heavy Israeli military presence, and about twice a year, the Israeli army also goes in and destroys the place. And, of course, Israelis are suffering from this situation as well. We have a cycle of mourning that grows from year to year. For years now, entire communities in Israel, near the city of Shderot, next to Gaza, have lived with the reality of constantly running to the bomb shelters to avoid incoming missiles — not just during war times, but daily. Huge populations of both soldiers and civilians live with trauma and anxiety.

If I can summarize: It is not safe here. For anyone. And



*Tair Kaminer, second from right, arriving at an Israeli military prison to serve her sentence for refusing to serve in the IDF.*

the reason that this is connected to you is that your government is very involved. Taxes you pay support these wars, meaning we receive a “security” budget, and in Israel, the meaning of “security” is really “occupation,” a siege and closure of the Palestinian population. For the security of Israelis,

of course. It’s very important to blame Israel for this whole problem. But that’s not enough. You see the atmosphere in Israel lately has become more and more violent, racist, and extremist, and our government is responsible for this; but your government continues to caress my government’s head. . . ✧

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Richard Middleton-Kaplan

## War No More

### *Three Centuries of American Antiwar and Peace Writing*

**WAR NO MORE:** *Three Centuries of American Antiwar and Peace Writing* sets out to demonstrate that “writing animated by the antiwar impulse is more distinguished and varied than most portraits of pacifists would suggest it could be.” So explains editor Lawrence Rosenwald in his introduction to this essential, new anthology from The Library of America. It succeeds magnificently.

The Library of America is a publishing venture designed to gather the best US writing in definitive, affordable, durable clothbound volumes, with a pledge to keep all volumes in print. The volumes now number more than three hundred. (Full disclosure: I have been a subscriber since the 1980s.) Most volumes are devoted to a single author, but some are thematically organized such as *American Sea Writing* and *American Sermons*. The latest thematic anthology is *War No More*, and with its appearance peace writing takes its justified place as a subject and genre worthy of study on its own.

Rosenwald’s selections reveal what he calls “a remarkable vitality and diversity” in American antiwar writing. Arranged chronologically by date of publication, the selections range from the precolonial Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy (c. 1450 to 1650) to 2015. The volume includes essays, diaries, letters, political oratory, songs, fiction, drama, sermons, interviews, leaflets and pamphlets, satires, and even a Bill Watterson “Calvin and Hobbes” cartoon. The moods and tones are as varied as the genres, from scorchingly prophetic to somberly introspective to rollickingly absurdist or anarchic. Just as widely varied are the reasons and experiences cited for becoming antiwar activists. We see that peace advocates are not a passel of naïve, soft-headed idealists or “utopians, admirable but quaint and shallow” and unmoored from political reality. We encounter some of the greatest minds in our history wrestling with their consciences, current events, and the legacies their actions will leave.

All the classics are here: Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience”

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**RICHARD MIDDLETON-KAPLAN** is a co-editor of *SHALOM*.

(which hovers over later entries as a towering influence), Twain’s “War Prayer,” Bierce’s devastating story “Chickamauga,” Stephen Crane’s “War Is Kind,” and contributions from Garrison, Debs, Addams, and King. Standing alongside these giants are the words of lesser known voices from every social stratum. Each selection is prefaced by an informative headnote from Rosenwald, and these are a particular delight; in addition to providing biographical facts and historical context, they are unusually personal for a Library of America volume, with Rosenwald recounting his first acquaintance with older texts and often, with later entries, his personal encounters with the authors.

Conversations develop across time as we move through the book. For example, William James’s “The Moral Equivalent of War” (from 1910) argues that the military virtues of hardihood, discipline, fitness, manliness, service, and universal responsibility should not be condemned or repressed but rather should be adapted to civic service for peace; James’s idea resurfaces in pieces by Barbara Ehrenreich (1997) and Jonathan Schell (2003). We also see singular events from multiple perspectives; for instance, the self-immolations of Vietnamese Buddhist monks are contemplated in poems by Josephine Miles, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Gina Valdés.

Startling originality flashes forth in these pages:

- Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, presents a plan for a Peace Office of the United States in a 1792 newspaper article. He begins with rational arguments but then moves into a Bosch-like phantasmagoric phase as he imagines how the Peace Office will be decorated with facing walls of paintings depicting pleasant peace and wicked war. For the war panels, Rush proposes pictures including “mothers in besieged towns eating the flesh of their children” and a sign over a War Office door alerting entrants to “An office for butchering the human species...A broken bone making office...A wooden leg making office... [and] An office for creating pestilential diseases.”

- Joseph Smith, Jr.’s Book of Alma presents a futuris-

tic vision of a battlefield on which “we will hide away our swords; / yea, even we will bury them deep in the earth, / that they may be kept bright / as a testimony that we have never used them, / at the last day.”

• Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “War” (1838) remains remarkable for its idea that we fashion appearance to conform to our ideas, and so peace seems unrealistic because we have built a world of warships and munitions. If we embrace the doctrine of peace, then we will build things to match the idea.

For me, as for Rosenwald, the most harrowing, haunting images come from S. Brian Willson’s “The Tracks” (1987). In a planned protest gone horribly wrong, Willson sat on a train track to prevent military trains from transporting weapons that would go to El Salvador and then Nicaragua. He cannot recall the train actually running over his legs, but he includes the transcript of a cassette recording made by a friend who was there.

**SHALOM READERS** may be interested in the anthology’s representation of two categories of contributors: Conscientious Objectors (COs) and Jews.

COs occupy a significant portion of the book, from Quakers John Woolman and Cyrus Pringle onward. For every war up through Iraq and Afghanistan, there is a generous selection of commentators: COs themselves, their friends, attorneys, journalists, poets, and people hostile to their stance. Even the “good war,” World War II, is questioned in pieces by David Dellinger, William Everson (later known as Beat poet Brother Antoninus), Robert Lowell, Lowell Naeve, Jeanette Rankin, Bayard Rustin, Howard Schoenfeld (writing about Don Benedict), Karl Shapiro, William Stafford, and others. The Jewish Peace Fellowship receives three mentions in Nicholson Baker’s provocative “The Dangerous Myth of the Good War,” an essay written in response to a harsh review of his book *Human Smoke* that appeared in *The Nation*.

By my count, the volume includes sixteen writers of Jewish heritage: Emma Goldman, Leo Szilard, Naomi Replansky, Karl Shapiro, Tuli Kupferberg (co-author with Robert

Bashlow of *1001 Ways to Beat the Draft*), Abraham Joshua Heschel, Denise Levertov, Paul Goodman, Norman Mailer, Howard Zinn, Muriel Rukeyser, Grace Paley, Bernard Offen, Adrienne Rich, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Jane Hirshfield. These authors cover a wide range of Jewish consciousness and identity, from the devout Rabbi Heschel to self-described “fourth generation atheist” Ehrenreich. In other words, they represent the spectrum of American Jewishness — and they

show the deep involvement of American Jews in advocating for peace, regardless of whether or how they retained a connection to their Jewish heritage.

With the exception of Heschel, selections by these writers do not explicitly evoke Jewish faith as the basis for antiwar activism. In the earliest selection from a Jewish writer, an excerpt from Emma Goldman’s 1915 work, “Preparedness, the Road to Universal Slaughter,” Goldman does not discuss her Judaism — but she does indict Christian hypocrisy: “Ammunition! Ammunition! O, Lord, thou who rulest heaven and earth, thou God of love, of mercy and of justice, provide us with enough ammunition to destroy our enemy. Such is the prayer which is ascending daily to the Christian heaven.”

In his headnote to Karl Shapiro’s 1947 poem “The Conscientious Objector,” Rosenwald notes that the “preponderance” of Christian antiwar writers “becomes less pronounced around this moment, as the community of war resistance begins to diversify;

the presence of American-born Jewish writers like Replansky and Shapiro hints at that enlargement.” That expansion brings three of the anthology’s most memorable pieces:

• Rabbi Heschel’s searing “The Moral Outrage of Vietnam,” in which he shifts the war from being a political problem to a religious and a personal problem.

• Holocaust survivor Bernard Offen’s letter “To Internal Revenue Service,” in which he recounts that his father was a “loyal, obedient, law-abiding” German Jew who paid the taxes that funded his own destruction and who died in Auschwitz. Writing in 1987 and drawing parallels, Bernard refuses to

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.  
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky  
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,  
Little souls who thirst for fight,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
The unexplained glory flies above them,  
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom—  
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.  
Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,  
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Swift, blazing flag of the regiment,  
Eagle with crest of red and gold,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,  
Make plain to them the excellence of killing  
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button  
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

— Stephen Crane, 1899

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pay the taxes that will fund “a nuclear arms race that is both homicidal and suicidal. It could end life for 5,000,000,000 people, five billion Jews. For now the whole world is Jewish and nuclear devices are the gas ovens for the planet.”

Jane Hirshfield’s poem “I Cast My Hook, I Decide to Make Peace,” in which she employs imagination, ink, and compassion to “put peace in a warm place, towel-covered, to proof, / then into an oven. I wait. / Peace is patient and undemanding, it surpasseth.”

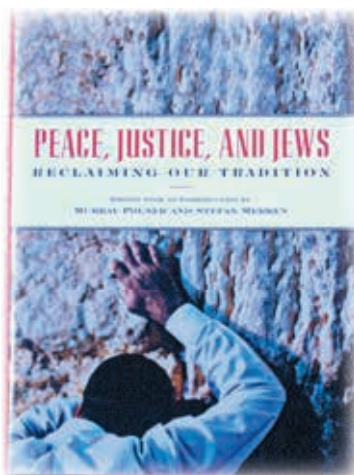
Hirshfield’s imaginative vision stands as the final selection, and with that choice Rosenwald rounds out the volume beautifully; it began with the Iroquois “Tree of Great Peace” and a vision of casting all weapons of war and strife into “the depths of the earth, down into the deep underearth currents of water flowing into unknown regions,” and ends with Hirshfield putting peace into a warm, protected place. At start and finish, *War No More* presents the creative spirit envisioning peace.

Followers of antiwar writing will have their own favorite works, and no single volume could contain them all. At seven hundred and sixty-eight pages of text, plus another seventy pages of chronology, sources and acknowledgments, a list of illustrations, and an index, *War No More* provides an ample selection. If I were to counter the book’s generosity with a carping lack of generosity, I might point to the

following as omissions: General Smedley Butler (*War Is a Racket*, 1935), Charles Reznikoff, Joseph Heller, Cesar Chavez (on creative nonviolence), Muhammad Ali, Gene Sharp, Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams, and of course Bob Dylan (“Let Me Die in My Footsteps,” “Masters of War,” “With God on Our Side,” “Blowin’ in the Wind,” “John Brown,” “Cross the Green Mountain” — any would have fit the anthology’s themes). Does the absence of these personal favorites diminish *War No More* for me? Not at all. Rather, it points to the vastness of peace and antiwar literature, and it suggests how much more rich writing remains to be discovered outside its covers.

Many peace advocates, including several of those just mentioned, do appear in the wonderful chronology section. Rather than repeat the selections in list form, the chronology goes much deeper, featuring full paragraph entries that describe crucial events and construct a concise history of antiwar and peace activism.

Aisles and aisles of bookstore shelves have long groaned under the weight of military histories. In this century, counterweights have emerged, such as histories of peace written by Antony Adolf, Ira Chernus, David Cortright, and Barry Miles. *War No More* makes a significant addition to those histories and will prove an indispensable reference for those seeking examples of how to wage a nonviolent war against war. ☆



### Peace, Justice, and Jews: Reclaiming Our Tradition

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