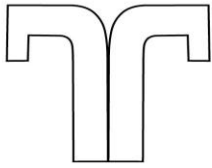


Book Three
Seeking



he door to the Rebbe's office is closed, so I sit dutifully in the waiting room, waiting to be allowed in. I have about ten minutes before our newly scheduled "tai-chi dance" compromise extra meeting. Images of Mery dancing and Johannes cavorting are fresh in my mind and swirl about. These images intermingle with the trauma and confusion caused by my two counselors forcing me to bring up the chaos and pain of my Kansas City visit, and my family interactions.

As I wait, I can hear mumbling, even laughter, as they talk with the client who is keeping me from seeing them. I feel some jealousy at being excluded, like the person on the outside of a joke. I feel anger arising at having to wait, and uncertainty about whether they are really helping me, or can help me. Things are not getting better, they are getting worse.

And today is the day I am going to have to pay them. Jealousy and anger escalate, combine and become rage. Something breaks in me.

Calmly, I reach into my pocket. There are only about ten lirot. I need money for my dinner. I weigh, as if on a balance, food versus them, and the answer is clear. As uninteresting to me as food is, I still believe it will provide me more sustenance than another meeting with them. Good-bye to a failed experiment at therapy. I am definitely worse off for having been forced to rehash and rebring up so many ugly memories.

I do the only logical thing. I write them a note, saying I unfortunately have another commitment and am not going to be able to make this afternoon's session. I mention that I really

don't have much money, so am enclosing what I can. Because of my financial straits, I'm not going to be able to continue in therapy. Out of courtesy, and because I am a gentleman, I thank them for their efforts this past month. I end with shalom. I like that word. It's ambiguous. Hello. Good-bye. Peace. For me, it means good-bye.

They're lucky I'm leaving them anything. I place six lirot in the letter, over half of what I have left. I fold up the sides of the letter, and leave. I'm impressed with my generosity and thoughtfulness.

Outside, the sun is beginning to set. I feel a sense of liberation and freedom, as if I've escaped from thea bondage, into which they had slowly lured me. At first they offered their counseling for free, an entire hour and half session. Then they said I'd have to pay something, and the sessions shrunk to less than an hour. Bait and switch. But I have escaped.

To celebrate my freedom, I take a walk to Independence Park. Within an hour it will be completely dark outside.

I wonder about the darkness within. In them. In me. In my family. In Mery. Is it really good to do too much rooting around in your life? Does that effort fertilize the soil for a possible rebirth, or does it tear up the roots, causing your own death?

What's next in my unfolding day, and life? First I'll get some dinner; then I have the freedom to continue writing about my experiences in Eilat. I think gratefully of Jean-Claude and his wisdom. Much superior to the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. And his advice was free of charge.

Inspired by Jean-Claude's refreshing attitude toward life; his poetry; being in Independence Park and free from the tenta-

cles of the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet, I sit and write a poem, free style. No more efforts to fit into Dr. Lisbet's legalistic, legitimizing limits of haiku's form. I have been called to freedom.

DARKNESS: AN ODE TO INDEPENDENCE

Oblique setting
sun caressing my shoulders,
legs, crossed yoga-style,
sitting on the hard dirt.

Freely rooted?

Crushed and broken
beneath a passing car's weight,
all that remains
are two tire-tracks now molded into
this ground, once wet and malleable.

Exposed, now cut off at earth
a stubbled root
of foliage
that once boldly, naively,
carelessly, groped to break
through the sod, grasping for
the light.

Freely seeking?

All that is left lies
below the ground,
in darkness.

Does the root
under the ground even know
there is sunlight above?
If so, will it dare try again
to grow?

If unknowing, will it
be content to lie
buried in darkness?

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Faces flicker, light and shadow, reflecting the firelight.

A full moon reflects off what Homer might call the "wine dark sea." Saturday night. The branches and logs fueling the fire are like a large intertwined Havdalah candle celebrating

the end of the Shabbat.

I sit outside the campfires with my little chess set, and watch. I can't write, but I think what I will one day write about this experience.

I hear the singing. I see, but don't feel, the warmth of the fires. Even at a distance, I sing along with them. I wish I could play my flute. I try, but with one hand, it's too awkward, and half the notes I'm not able to play.

"The times, they are a' changing."

The song ends.

Empty spaces.

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The people around the campfire turn toward each other and joyously celebrate in the afterglow of the music. They hug, talk, caress. I hear only the silence, feel the aloneness, see the distances between me and others, the tenuous melodic connection broken.

I see spaces everywhere, a foggy mist that I can't seem to crawl out of. Except for the brief moments of song.

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Outside the circle, by the full light of the moon and the fire, I read this week's Torah passage. Sodom and Gemorrah. Is that what I've been witnessing here the past few days? Women walking and swimming topless; men wearing thong swim suits that make my speedo look like a three piece suit. Or is it just that I want to criticize because I don't feel part of it? Vayera. The Lord appeared. Where? Not here. Why am I staying and wasting my time? I need to keep going forward to Sinai. "Look not behind thee." Even in the book of beginnings--Genesis-- there are end-

ings, and we shouldn't look back at them.

There is too much pain behind. Abraham binding Isaac, the dominant father and timid son. I need to leave behind my father/son relationship.

Hine-ni. I am here. All of me. Present before the Lord.

Those are not words I can honestly say.

Hitpallel. The first mention of prayer in the Bible. I need to start living a more prayerful, God-centered life.

What a beautiful passage: Hakhnasat orhim--extending hospitality to strangers. I read a commentary from Talmud Taanit 20b, Rabbi Hamnuma "Whoever is in need, let him come and join."

I wish those here would heed that message. I am alone and in need.

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"Suzanne takes you down to her place by the River..." I listen to the words waft over me. The song is too piercing, I can't sing along. "And you know that she's half crazy and that's why you want to be there, And she feeds you tea..."

I refuse to start crying again. I pinch my thumb nail into my index finger. The physical pain is almost soothing as it blocks some of my mental anguish. As consolation, or torment, I remind myself that it wasn't always like this. My life used to feel connected. Very rarely would there be a moment of space or emptiness.

Now, after Elizabeth, I see the emptiness everywhere.

"And Jesus...spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower...and when He knew for certain only drowning men could see him...."

Has the emptiness always been present, just not noticed, and is it her absence that revealed it to me? Or has it been created by her leaving a void in me that I now see all around me?

"And you think maybe you'll trust Him

For He's touched your perfect body with His mind."

Maybe both. Once I saw only words. Now I see the spaces within and around them. Is it just where and how I focus?

Trying to understand myself is not that easy, as if I'm trying to look at my eyes directly, without mirrors. I can't see them. I have trouble bringing myself into focus.

Find the basics, like Descartes' Cogito, ergo sum. Can I agree that even if I can't see my own eyes, at least I can see?

No. Even that is an illusion, isn't it? When I blink, I create darkness, but most of the time I don't even realize that I've lost touch with the visual world. I don't see that I don't see. The world still feels there after my sight returns, and often I don't register that I've left it-- I don't notice the brief instance of sightlessness.

"While Suzanne holds the mirror

And you want to travel with her

And you want to travel blind

And you know that you can trust her

For she's touched your perfect body with her mind."

Or what about the blind spot we all have, that none of us notices. We don't know what we don't know. And even when it's pointed out, I still have trouble believing that a blind spot in my eye actually exists.

"Has anyone ever said you think too much?" Jean-Claude asks

me with a twinkle in his eye and an easy smile. He answers his own question by saying "Is the Pope Catholic?" He says nothing, but feel my mood lightening as he continues: "You are a thinker. Thinkers think.

"Use your thinking to turn the world upside down and inside out. If you assume the world is connected, you are sad every time you see emptiness. Every loss of contact, every empty space is shattering. BUT, if you turn things topsy turvy, and assume, like the existentialists, that the world is a lonely place, then when you see spaces, you are not surprised. Lower your expectations. If you assume spaces and emptiness, then contact is amazing, is it not? See how, contrary to expectations and belief, the existentialists are really positive!"

I look up at the moon, which has lost half its reflection. Another week has passed. Another Shabbat come and gone. If it weren't for my occasional contacts with Jean-Claude, my first two weeks in Eilat would have been filled only with those empty spaces.

I suppose I should be grateful that connection and song are still possible. "Patience," he counsels me to counsel myself. "The moon is still half full." Maybe these are new shoots budding with me, and this is a time for resting and healing. It is, as he told me, pointless to compare myself to who I was. I have to acknowledge that this is going to be a slow rebuilding and healing process.

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Over the next several days, I find myself willing to open up and share with Jean-Claude. Eventually I share about Elizabeth. He feels both safe and wise to me, and I ask him if he's ever

been hurt like that, felt the emptiness. He seems to me so fluid, so content with himself, comfortable either with company or without.

"No one goes through life without being wounded. Of course I have been hurt. That's what women do. I'm joking, but pain is part of the journey. We are humans. We hurt each other. Not always on purpose. Have you read Sartre's *No Exit*?" I nod. "Read it in French. *Huis Clos*. *L'enfer, c'est les autres*. Hell is other people.

"See that beautiful blonde Scandinavian model? "

"Yes, why? She's gorgeous."

"Yes, she is the stereotype, but often true. That is why you can't take Sartre too seriously! Heaven is other people, *n'est pas*?"

"Ten years ago, a school teacher from Sweden visited here, looked almost like that one. Tall, lithe. Gorgeous. Yes, I'm superficial at times, too. But God gave us bodies, didn't He? We spent the summer together. I asked her to stay but she couldn't or wouldn't."

"Why didn't you go see her?"

"No money. Plus, I hate the cold. Too much uprooting already in my life. She said she would return on vacations, the following summer. I never saw her again. And after a few weeks, no more letters or cards. Just silence."

He's interrupted as someone comes to rent some snorkeling equipment. They negotiate, exchange a few pleasantries, then he continues.

"Sad? No. *Désolé*. Numb. For several weeks I talked to no one, felt like I could not say anything. Me. Can you believe

it? I even built a rocket ship out of wood and stones." He points to different objects on the beach in a sweeping gesture. "A rocket ship to take me to the moon. Each night I would sit in the rocket ship for hours, looking at the moon, saying nothing, talking to no one. Everything seemed strange, lost, without moorings. Sartre's Roquetin's Nausea. Wait."

He goes back into his little shack, and comes out with a crumpled piece of paper.

Je ne comprends rien...cette vie.
En effet, il n'y a aucune chose
que je comprends. Rien.
C'est seulement...
rien.

I read his poem. I could have written it, it so closely expresses my feelings. I sense that he really does understand what I am saying. Yet he seems as though he's moved beyond this nothingness. Ten years. A long time. But at least there's hope. He hands me another of his poems

Seul?
Qui, je suis seul,..mais,il n'y a
aucun difference entre moi et
les autres

Tout le monde nait seul, meurt seul.
Mais il y a des amis, comme toi.
Tu viens et nous partageons
le pain et le vin
Puis, bien que nous soyons seuls, nous ne
sommes pas
solitaires.

Le renommée, le bien, tout ne vaut rien.
Tout n'est rien; sauf, mon ami,
les amis, le vin, et le pain.
Ca, c'est tout.

"Remember, the spaces can be your friends. They give you time for healing. Use them well. But don't get lost in them."

I point to my hand, and ask him if he can make me a copy of the poems for me.

"Gladly. Only a small copyright fee, artistic fee, and printing fee." I start to say how little money I have, but before I can he slaps his hand on my back, laughing at my downcast face. "Come, tonight, you must join our group around the fire. I see you each night watching us. Enough aloneness. Tonight is a night when there is no visible moon. On such a night you need company."

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In vino veritas.

Wine flows freely, as Jean-Claude passes his silver chalice around to the singing group. It's as if we are in a vineyard of God, Kerem-el. Somehow the supply of wine seems endless, like John's (2:1-10) recounting how Jesus turned water into wine.

There is harmony and camaraderie here. Though there are a few Israelis, most have gathered in Eilat from other countries--Australia, Norway, France, Germany, Italy, Japan-- because of the weather, the free rent on the beach, the hashish, and the Red Sea. Conversations occur mainly in English, but also in many other languages. I'm picking up a few words here and there. I notice if I don't concentrate too hard, but just let the words flow over me, I can understand better the languages I've studied, and even some I've never heard before. I'm learning slowly to trust myself again, not to focus so much on every detail, every word, but try to find the big picture, the tone, the feeling. I'm trying to become more flowing, allowing, free.

We all sing together, creating even more harmony, both in the act of singing, and in the nature of the songs themselves: spiritual, connected, hopeful: Blowing in the Wind; This Land is Your Land; Turn, Turn, Turn, There is a Time for Every Season.

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If it weren't for the moon, I would have no sense of time here. Days came and go, just following nature's rhythms. Each day the sun shifts a bit more when it rises and when it sets. Tonight we see the fullness of the moon returning. What wonderful days and nights the end of November has brought. I feel like I'm putting down roots here. I've bought an inexpensive used tent--from a departing Brazilian couple, which gives me additional shelter, and some much needed privacy for the evenings after the singing stops. I also feel safer having my few material goods stored out of sight.

More wine is passed. More songs. Judy Collins, Pete Seeger, Simon and Garfunkle, Peter, Paul, and Mery, Bob Dylan. It's interesting how many singers/songwriters are Jewish.

As I've gotten to know some of the people, I can say that all of us in Eilat seem dedicated to a better humanity: civil rights, gender equality, nuclear disarmament, peace movements. I have a real feeling of hope, about me, and about the world. The vision is reflected in the songs we song, both their content, and, as importantly, the joining in song of so many diverse cultures, beliefs, individuals... in harmony.

We are like a small United Nations.

There is an easy sensuality here that is allowing me to reawaken my body, which has felt lost to me for these last several months. We are all joined by the song--words, humming, fingers and hands pounding out rhythms, swaying bodies. Connectedness.

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Everything is shared. Not just by Jean-Claude, but anyone you meet, after knowing them only a few moments, invites you into

their tent for shit. There is something gemütlich about passing the pipes--not only the effect of the smoking,--but the ritual and camaraderie of sharing that goes along with it.

Hashish isn't the only thing that is shared: bread, wine, anything that someone has instantly becomes communal. Like on the kibbutz, the acquisitiveness of American society is absent. Both are like a big family, but on the kibbutz there were so many rules required in order to belong to the family.

Though I don't drive here, it reminds me of what it was like trying to merge onto a freeway. I was never sure whether the car in back would let me in. If I cut it too close, they would press me, until I picked up speed and could feel I belonged. But I had to go at a certain pace to ensure that belonging. With my own family, it was the same thing. I had to keep driving through life at a certain pace--progressing, rising, becoming a star--to feel loved and accepted. Here, in Eilat, I don't have anything to prove. I don't have to wear contacts, worry about my hair, lift weights, try to be academic. I can just be, and nothing is expected of me by anyone, including me.

What is there to seek any longer? Freedom, belonging, money, safety, security? I have all I need, right here.

It is so refreshing to be in a place where there is no structure, no limitations, no one telling you what to do and when to do it. These people are truly free, not bound by artificial restraints, not even those of clothing.

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More wine. We're just following the instructions of St. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy (23). Drink no longer water, but

use a little wine for the stomach's sake.

As I look around me, in the light of the moon, over half full, there is something lovely and pristine about this natural environment. It hasn't yet been desecrated by humans. The initial beauty I found at the kibbutz turned out to have been an illusion upon closer inspection. The fabled, enchanted Sea of Galilee, where Jesus walked on water, was filled with excrement. When I got too close to reality, it didn't match the vision.

Both Sides Now. I let the song drift over me as I continue my reverie while imbibing another glass of wine. I notice I care less about its taste and more about its effect. How pompous Richard's wine obsession-- wanting to sound like a sommelier--a mere waiter in charge of wines; and how silly I seem for being bothered by his pretentiousness.

Progress? Yes, indeed.

I take a big puff on a pipe passed by the lovely blonde Swedish model Jean-Claude pointed out to me last week. She's here on a photo shoot.

I pass the pipe to an Italian woman, with long dark hair. The model whispers her name in my ear--Carina-- and places her hand on my right thigh, as she sings and sways her hair in the moonlight.

The Italian woman places the pipe in the mouth of a powerful looking Italian man on her left, who is playing a guitar. Carina whispers again in my ear that his name is Thomas, and he is the photographer for the photo shoot. I lean over and ask him if I can learn some tricks of the trade from him, as I fancy myself an amateur photographer, and I've brought Mr. Cannon with me. He

easily agrees.

No competition, just cooperation.

His girlfriend sways her hair over my left thigh, as she continues singing. "Love your brother and sister, Gotta love one another right now."

Carina keeps rubbing my thigh, and smiling at me. Why is she doing that--to me? Although I haven't looked at myself in a mirror in a while, I can't imagine that I am that attractive. I've stopped working out, let my hair grow long, have a scruffy beard, no Brooks Brothers shirts or Countess Mara tie. Why is she making advances? Do I still have it? It? What? I hear Jean-Claude's words, "Don't think so much."

Maybe it's the wine? I take another drink. Maybe, because she is so beautiful, and in such a body-focused profession, she's learning to go beyond the body, and she feels my burgeoning spiritual nature. Maybe she feels my good heart. But how good is it, really? Maybe it's the hashish.

Too many questions. No answers. Maybe I've "touched her perfect body with my mind."

Maybe it's an act of spiritual charity on her part.

If so, this is a spiritual charity that I am going to enjoy receiving. My lingham is adding to the glow of the moon and the campfire. I have a feeling that if I can just stay out of my own way, and stop thinking, later on tonight she will guide me to the light.

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As I look around the campfire, seeing the shining, happy faces reflected in the light, I feel full of pride.

Look at us, singing and swaying as one. We are all living together here, simply and harmoniously. This community is proof that it is possible to see beyond a narrow materialistic and selfish vision of life. There is no greed. No struggle for fame or glory, no Richard-like oneupsmanship. We are showing there can be a better, gentler life here on earth, a value system that treats human life in a sacred way, and an individual communion with something beyond this earthly plane.

Together, we are modeling it can be done by peoples of all nations, creeds, colors, ethnicities, religions. Why can't everyone everywhere be this open and loving, and remove the barriers that alienate people from each another?

I sense a commonality here, irrespective of culture, parents, environment, society. Are these people unique subsets of their cultures, or is there a transcendent core within all humans waiting to be discovered and let out?

Gotta love one another right now.

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Another beautiful sunrise. Early morning. Some fisherman are already up and have set out for the day. My compatriots are sleeping in. For some reason, no matter how late I go to bed, I always awake with the first light.

I like this morning time. It gives me time to think.

Why are things so good here, and what went wrong at the Kibbutz? With my left hand, I make awkward notes of what I have already thought about. The natural beauty here. Freedom and the lack of restrictions. No one telling me what to do.

What else?

An Asian man--Japanese?--he reminds me of my golf buddy

Inamatsu, walks by, carrying a wooden flute. I try out "Ohio." He stops "ohayoh **gozaimasu.**" I point to his flute, cup my left hand to my mouth, and place my cupped right hand about ten inches away, as if holding a flute, and motion for him to sit and join me.

He does, raises his bamboo flute, saying "shionbue", and starts to play. Slow, methodical notes, right hand over four holes, a different fingering than my Yamaha silver flute. My flute seems out of place, less natural, too ostentatious. Look at me, a rich boy from Kansas City. I want to hide my flute. I also become angry with myself at the fear I become aware of. that someone might steal it, or I might lose it. Still a frightened greedy little boy. I want to hide not only my flute, but that part of myself.

As he plays, I continue my reverie and left handed writing.

I feel like I'm trying to learn again how to play the music of my life, to get the sound right, to find the notes of who I am, what range of emotions I have. This is a learning and practicing time, when lots of mistakes are and will be made. As Jean Claude said, "It is all good. When it is good it is good. When you make mistakes, you learn from them and it is good. Failure is what makes success remarkable."

I know these new lessons are going to take time. I think back to my early flute lessons. When first learning a flute piece, I have to overview it, find the key signature, notice the sharps, flats, accidentals. After I play it a few times, I no longer think each note, try to find each finger position. I start to feel the rhythm, Soon, I can just jump in and play, trust, read the music as a flowing sentence rather than as individual letters and words. Maybe

in the quiet of Coral Beach, I am relearning to play some notes, starting to trust more, pick up momentum.

After a while the man offers me his flute to play. It is light weight, and I can easily support it with one hand. I place my left hand over the three holes. I try to play. At first I'm self-conscious and it's breathy. But soon I hit a couple of pure notes. He claps and bows. Then he runs off.

Soon he returns with a second flute-like instrument. "Shakahachi," he says, and plays and holds a single tone, a much deeper sound. He motions for us to play together. Spontaneity and improvisation is not something I am good at, especially without music and without a lot of practice. His gestures tell me to begin. I again play a few notes with my limited mobility. I'm in awe at his ability to harmonize and counterpoint. We sound like a well-rehearsed team, even though it's our first time.

Several people gather around, as we spend most of the morning playing. The notes of my life seem to be returning.

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When he finally leaves, he indicates I can keep the flute. Again, amazing. "Arigato" I reply. Another example of the way everyone here, like Jean-Claude, gives what they have to everyone else. I'm ashamed of my earlier thoughts, hiding my flute.

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It was hard to think last night--the wine, hashish, Carina, the singing. But I know forming in my mind was a vision. In the clear light of day, I want to sort through my thoughts. I'll take some notes--as well as I can with my left hand--and when I can again write I'll fill in the details.

I make a chart, four columns across the page representing four

geographical/cultural areas. Down the side of the page I make four rows: motivation and economic system; economic system and spirituality; views of human beings and violence; and love/freedom.

	MY FAMILY GRANDPA / DAD	AMERICA	ISRAELI KIBBUTZ	EILAT
MOTIVATION/ ECONOMIC	survival, then ego; capitalist competition more is better	same	survival, sharing co-operation more =better	sharing cooperation seek simplicity
ECONOMICS/ SPIRITUALITY	capitalism has no god;	socialism has no god	transcend materialism; seek the spiritual	
VIOLENCE/ NON VIOLENCE	Dad: never back down from a fight	Vietnam	Teach children war games	Non-violence
LOVE, FREEDOM	If are success within limits, Don't stray Too much.	if success high freedom	high belong low freedom	both high!

For my grandfather, his economic motivation was survival, to pull himself out of poverty, fighting and battling to achieve material success. He accomplished that dream. The motivation of survival, as he grew wealthier, became fear of loss, and as with dad, money equated with self-esteem, a way ordering the world and defining success. Their views were merely a reflection of America's capitalistic belief system. More is always better. Survival of the fittest. Be the best. Cooperation is for wimps, and losers get left behind. Capitalism has no spiritual vision.

The socialism of the kibbutz was an improvement in that its members want to make sure everything is fair and equal. They espouse the values of cooperation, and on one in their community is left behind. But they haven't transcended materialism and are still

trapped by it. They still wanted MORE material goods, just like my family. Thoughts about money and possessions are still a major way they structure their time and efforts, and there is no spiritual vision beyond the material.

Here in Eilat we have chosen a different, better way. We share, like on the kibbutz. But we voluntarily choose not to be bound by the material striving evidenced by both my family and the kibbutz. It's as if we see beyond the material toward the emergence of a new spiritual vision. The Times, They are A'-Changing. A new generation, new beginnings, new values. Turn, turn. turn.

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The sun continues to rise, and I look for some shade.

I think of the lovely moon last night, nearly full. What we need is for everyone to become an astronaut on the moon for a moment, looking down at earth. Aren't we all one planet? From that far distance, there are no borders, no boundaries. How can we not respect the sanctity of human life? Once we decide a life is expendable, either on the radical right or the radical left, then no human life any longer has value. As soon as I feel I can judge another human being's life as not worth living, and can make that decision for him by killing him, then I lose part of my humanity. Like Dostoevsky's Ivan, everything is permitted and the last thread tying me to existence is cut.

Dad's admonitions seem so wrong: "Never back down from a fight." "Never let anyone push you around." And isn't that just a microcosm of our country, and what's going on in Vietnam. It's all about our fears of the stranger--the other-- whom we now call evil communists, the "red devils attempting to take over the

world, one domino at a time. Don't let them push you around. What a horrific, bloody, meaningless result.

I watched as the kibbutzniks taught their children war games, praising them for fighting--whenever they would take the time to play with them, before shunting them back off to their boarding school like day care. Why does our tradition enjoin us to dance and celebrate on Purim, when Jews killed Persians? "How many deaths does it take till we know that too many people have died?"

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I see the beginnings of a loving and peaceful vision, but I also notice a lot of anger. I wonder how much of the harshness toward the kibbutz's style of child rearing is based on unresolved feelings toward the Kansas City family, feelings that were not directly brought into the open until months later, when John is writing this after seeing the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. Also, his anger toward Purim makes sense on one level, but he has yet to learn some of the deeper, mystical understandings of the different holidays.

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What if "they" --Americans, Israelis, Palestinians, Communists, capitalists, Jews, Arabs, --those who consider each other the "enemy," were forced to sing songs around a campfire on the moon. Share wine, maybe even hashish. Would that help them see our pure human essence within, that to kill someone else is to kill part of ourselves, part of our humanity?

Somehow we have to stop these views--material consumption, aggressive competition, fear of the other, violence as a means of

solving problems--from being passed onto the next generation, and the next. This only escalates the cycle. Killing is thought of as a necessity. Each succeeding generation hardens its heart, and becomes more blinded to nonviolent solutions. I know there is a better way.

Someone needs to shout, "What about the light? The good?" Why not be appreciative of the message of the Torah: Leviticus: Love thy neighbor as thyself. Or the message throughout the Torah: Kindness to the stranger for you were strangers in a strange land. What about Jesus' New Testament message of love. Gandhi's and Martin Luther King's non-violent lessons? These need to be our teachers, our curriculum.

The sun has moved again, and the shade with it. I run into the water, splash around, cleanse and cool myself. Healing my mind, healing my body. When I return, I dry off. Carina comes by with a lemonade.

She is topless, wearing only a small bikini bottom. She has a lovely smile, and is a lot more comfortable with her body than Elizabeth was. I ask her if she believes in world peace and one world, and she nods. "Of course."

I ask her if she has heard of De Chardin and the omega point. She says no, and I explain to her what I'd read. Thanks to Mery. I have a fleeting thought, wondering if this entire quest is somehow related to trying to impress Elizabeth. What a strange thought. I dismiss it immediately.

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"The omega point, the teleological goal of our existence, the highest expression of love." Carina giggles and cuddles into

me, spilling a bit of lemonade on my stomach. It's cold, and I'm at first annoyed both by the unexpectedness, and by the interruption of my train of thought.

I quickly recover, however, as I look around me at the beautiful scenery, then at a nearly naked Swedish girl bend who bends over and starts licking the spilled lemonade off my stomach.

"Omega point," I continue, now with a smile. "Not a merging, but a converging of humans. A time when individuals are willing to learn about, tolerate, and seek to understand rather than fear, condemn, even abuse those who are different. We can each be unique individuals, but each working, in his or her own way for the good of all. Collectively, each of us striving toward and helping to create that omega point."

"Perfect," she purrs. I love it. Her purr sounds different than Mery's. Maybe it's the Swedish accent.

"A new larger vision of spirituality: freedom, hope, non-materialism, non-violence. I want to believe all of us-- are good and loving and peaceful at our core."

"Sure thing," she agrees.

"What keeps them from seeing it?" I ask out loud, as much to myself as to her. "Is it just a stage people are in, that they will grow out of? The Israeli survivors of the Holocaust, feeling that memory and terror, hardening themselves for fighting the next perceived enemy."

"Have you been to the Holocaust museum?" I shake my head no. "Beautiful. Terrible. Beautifully sad." She snuggles into me. In the distance someone is starting to sing again. "Bridge Over Troubled Waters...."

The words of Simon and Garfunkle continue to drift over us. Carina says nothing. Her head is on my heart. Jean-Claude walks by, smiles, and gives me a thumbs up.

Once again, I feel myself surrounded by people who believe as I do. People who are groping for answers, but searching in an open hearted, non-violent way, committed to helping humanity.

"The times they are a changing...."

I feel as though I have found what I am seeking...a place of kindred spirits and values.... people that give me freedom and accept me as I am.. I've found a family, a home.

* * *

The sun rises. The sun sets.

There is nothing new under the sun. And that is fine with me. Days come and go, nights come and go, all drifting together.

Another majestic sunrise after another wonderful night of singing, sensuality, and a moon even fuller and more glorious than the previous nights.

Carina's photo shoot ended, and she left a couple days ago. I remembered what Jean-Claude had said about people leaving. I was sorry to see her go, but not that sorry. We said we'd write. I have low expectations. I've learned my lesson.

As I look around, everyone is still asleep, and I'm not exactly sure what to do. I feel like I'm catching up with myself. My hand hurts less. I'm getting plenty of rest. Perhaps even too much. I decide to take my usual morning walk along the beach. The days are quiet, lazy, uneventful. Could I live here forever? Is this where my life ends?

There is something pleasant, but also slightly unsettling in

the thought. Am I feeling at all bored? I notice a bit of restlessness in me. What has happened to my desire to visit and climb Mount Sinai? Is the tranquil life here lulling me into passive complacency? Is my new golden calf unstructured and directionless freedom? Can the Garden of Eden become monotonous?

Maybe these are just idle questions, and what I really need to do is come to peace with a life without striving, to learn to live with a daily, routine ordinariness. My problem may be, paradoxically, that I become agitated when I'm too calm. Why do I always seem to want to seek more, not willing to allow a place or a person to be "home" for me. Is this the wandering Jew within me? Is it just an old Protestant ethic throwback reaction? My grandfather saying "be the best?" Johannes always looking for a new conquest, something exciting, an adventure?

I had the Sinai "aha" experience in Jerusalem with the Rebbe. I've climbed it in my mind. Maybe that's all that is important, and I now need to apply the lesson of love and acceptance wherever I am. And Eilat seems a fine place to be.

I break into a jog, and find myself humming a song from last night "Hey Mr. Tambourine Man...."

I haven't been dreaming much, or at least not remembering my dreams. A snippet of last night's dream comes to mind.

I am in Paris, visiting a music conservatory. There are several beautiful women there with whom I am talking, when an older bearded headmaster comes running out, grabs me roughly by the shoulders and tells me to leave in perfect, Parisian French.

"Ne me touchez pas sans mon permission" I respond angrily, in an awkward, clearly American accent.

The end.

* * *

I pick up the pace a bit, feeling the sun's heat, and some sweat. The exertion feels good. Have things been too easy here? What's going on?

What is the dream's meaning? Is it my unconscious giving me the first sign of trouble in paradise?

On the surface the dream's meaning is obvious. I don't feel authentic; I, the outsider, the American, don't belong. I don't speak the language well; I'm not really that well trained a classical musician; and I'm making Johannes like moves toward the women, for which I'm being reprimanded. Defensively, I try to stand up for myself. But I'm still being ushered out.

I find myself running still faster.

Deeper level? Was I feeling bodily threatened? Is the headmaster Jean-Claude? Is he J.C, Jesus, saying I'm making too many advances toward women, returning to the ways of the flesh? That I need to treat my body (and others') with more respect? Is he a superego, one who speaks better French than I do, and presumably is a better musician?.

Though I said I wasn't going to editorialize, I feel it's helpful here to add the new understanding of dreams that Dr. Lisbet shared with me

If I'm all parts of the dream, I'm both the one who created the perfectly accented French, and the one who is struggling to speak it. Does that mean the goal and the struggle both co-exist within me?

I am both the one entering the music conservatory, and talking to the attractive women, and I'm also the one trying to

prevent myself from doing so.

The women? If they are not external, does this mean I long for, and fear a reconciliation with and development of the feminine in me?

* * *

I wonder if I could live life just trying to understand myself. Comment and re-commenting in waking life on a dream that takes longer than the dream itself.

When I return to our beach, a few people are up and gathering for morning coffee. I feel better having run. The physical helps clear my mind and brings a certain comfort and aliveness to my body. Maybe that's all that is missing here. Some additional physical exercise.

We are all sitting around in a circle, lazily enjoying the sun. There is something so peaceful and idyllic here. I decide to take a picture, to send to my family, and maybe even to Elizabeth and Richard, to show them the beauty in which I am now living.

I go to my tent, and realize that while I was out walking and jogging, someone has broken in and stolen my camera.

I feel violated, punched in the stomach. It's not just the loss of the camera, but a feeling of desecration. I so wanted to believe in the Sinai vision of love and acceptance. To believe that we have created a non-materialistic, spiritual model U.N. here. How can this happen? How can I believe in the purity of and trust in my fellow humans. Maybe it wasn't one of them? But who?

I feel enraged, and think about going from tent to tent, investigating, accusing, probing,

I go to Jean-Claude, the eyes and ears of the group, to see

how best to proceed.

When I tell him about the theft of my camera, he begins laughing. "Lucky man, good for you!"

My anger grows. He continues laughing.

"What are you talking about!" I can feel myself breathing rapidly, working myself into a tantrum. *J'accuse*. But who? Who is the thief?

"Lighter for your journey. Less to worry about. A camera comes between you and life. Life is more immediate without it. You're getting closer and closer to life. You should go celebrate!" His laughter feels taunting, but when I look at him, he looks sincere, and truly appears happy for me.

"Do not do anything now. Go back and sing with the group. Or take a hike. There's a beautiful fjord down the road. I'll ask around regarding your camera. But think about what I am saying."

* * *

I take his advice, and decide to hitchhike from Coral Beach. Same sea, same sand farther on, but I want to get out of there, and find a different perspective. I'm picked up by an Israeli driver who tells me he'll give me a lift to the fjord "Israel's only one."

On the ride, I am sure there is no way to avoid dying, and not in an abstract sense, either. Death feels imminent. He's a reckless driver, tearing along this old dirt road carved into the wilderness. The road has just been built, and is sloppily constructed. The jeep is nearly overturning, and my concerns about the camera quickly seem trivial and are replaced by abject terror.

"Rega, rega echad" I shout. I'm becoming angry, wanting him to slow down.

But he can't hear me. He drives faster and farther into the wilderness. The "road" ends. He continue driving.

I'm fascinated by my other emotions. Yes, some fear, some anger, but these are almost drowned out by an emerging feeling. Excitement, exhilaration. Almost as if I were coming alive, feeling life more fully as I find myself approaching death.

The desert sands are colorful as they whirl by, no longer the starkness of the Negev.

Finally the driver stops the car. There is a huge grin on his dust-covered face.

"What was that about?" I smile back, wagging my finger at him. It's as if a death-defying macho camaraderie has been formed between us.

"My road! I built this!" he exults, punching his chest.

** * **

He explains that we'd just driven over the road that he had helped build. The road is his creation, and he drives it fast because he knows it like the palm of his hand. He's labored with it, suffered with it, and watched it grow. It's his, and I can sense in his pride that its meaning is sufficient to him. It is his base into existence.

And what is mine?

** * **

I walk along the top of the fjord. Alone. I like being on the summit. Heights give me a literal, and symbolic perspective. The fjord's pretty, but not as majestic as the ones I saw with my grandparents when we were in Norway.

Always judging, comparing.

What is my base into existence? I know I don't want to be captured by societal achievement, or by the legal profession, like Johannes.

I want somehow to find a meaning for me that works. I envy the Israeli road builder. He is proud of his contribution; I envy the members of kibbutz, making sustenance grow from the earth. I even envy the happiness of the wanderers drifting in Eilat.

Why do I say drifting? More judgment? A signal to me?

Do I need or want a base? Can the daily routine at the beach be enough?

I think about the feeling in the car. I liked being frightened. Part of me even wanted to drive faster and faster to see how much I could take.

A death wish?

A way to arouse myself from a dulling passivity that I wasn't even aware of?

By hurting myself, I was able to break out of and leave the regimented life of the kibbutz. Looking back, it is clear that I felt I was becoming a stagnating, enslaved, routinized work machine. But at the time, I was not able to get enough distance from myself to be aware of how much pain I was feeling. Have I been seduced by the complacency of the lifestyle at Coral Beach? By living there am I hiding from my lack of meaning, direction, and focus? Is there a part of me that seeks to escape the self-imposed prison of total freedom on the beach?

Do I need to hurt myself again--accidentally--in order to do so?

There must be a better way to make choices.

As I walk along the top of the fjord, looking down at the blue water, I wonder whether the theft of the camera was really a blessing, as Jean-Claude suggested. Could it be a wake-up call to get me to step outside myself and reflect on where I am?

When Moses climbs Sinai, the people at the base make a golden calf. Is my golden calf the insidious golden ropes of a comfortable dulling routine of beach life? Am I being captured by passivity, sloth, complacency?

I remember the exhilaration the summer before my senior year of high school, running sand dunes until I vomited and nearly passed out, lifting weights until my body was ready to burst. I loved the feeling of having a focus and goal, of seeing my body grow stronger and more powerful.

And I loved the feeling of seeing my mind grow. There was a joy in studying so hard that I was certain I was sure I was going to ace the exam. Once in High School I remember studying for a history test, memorizing the names of all the U.S. presidents, their birth and death dates, terms of office. The night before the test, after weeks of study, my brain felt completely filled. Then, just as I was about to go to bed, I reviewed the list once more, and realized I'd left out a whole column of information on each president's major accomplishments, and another column on their wives' names and the number of years married. I wouldn't let myself go to bed until I'd memorized both additional columns.

The next morning when I woke up there was a lump on the back of my head. I was sure it was a place created so that more material could fit into my brain.

What has happened to the part of me that wanted to break through all barriers, to push myself as hard as I could--physically and mentally--in spite of the pain, or maybe because of the pain? Be the best was Grandpa's admonition, but is there a part of me that also believes and wants that, not for him, but for me? What has happened to that willingness to challenge myself, to see what my limits are?

I can feel welling up in me emotions that I may have been repressing in Eilat. I know that once I enjoyed living on the edge, because it kept propelling me onward. I didn't feel anything could fence me in or bind me. I fear I may be becoming too complacent, like a bee that drowns in its own honey.

Where is the part of me that used to feel, if I'm going to drown, I want it to be from falling into the sea, after the wax has melted my wings?

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Dramatic. Poetic.

Yet, is that the real me speaking, or is that a left-over artifact of my family, Stanford, Harvard? Maybe there is a masochistic streak in me, which makes me seek punishment and suffering, to keep pushing myself to the limit. Do I need something to be causing me pain, something to fight against, to feel I'm alive? If I'm comfortable too long, do I almost reflexively start to feel something is wrong? Is that a strength, or a weakness?

I add another row to my chart:

MY FAMILY AMERICA ISRAELI KIBBUTZ EILAT
GRANDPA / DAD

Be the best? yes yes be good enough be
Push self

Perhaps that was the reason I kept going back to see Elizabeth. It was as if I was seeking suffering, hoping that she would continue to show me how blind and callous I was, and thereby challenge me to grow beyond myself. It's clear where that led.

Maybe I need to learn to just enjoy the process of living in the moment without always trying to achieve something. Is it running away from myself and hiding from life to stay in Coral Beach, or is it running away from life and myself to leave Coral Beach because I'm afraid of facing myself?

How do you know where wisdom lies? How do you know when it's time to leave and move on? Can I think this through? I remember Mery telling me to stop analyzing so much. Be more like eecummings, she told me--use your feeling and intuition more--as she read me his "oh sweet spontaneous."

How do I access this process? Is it really deeper than thought? While I'm doing all this analytic reflection, is something independently occurring somewhere within me, regardless of my cogitations, so that I will move on when it's time to move on, like a leaf, which one day just falls, although the severing of the connection has been building up over time?

I sit down and stare at the water below, seeking an answer.

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As I watch the water, I let my mind lazily drift. I feel hungry, reach into my pocket and find an uneaten piece of the chocolate that was passed around last night. As I take the first bite, unbidden, a childhood advertising jingle springs forth.

"Melts in your mouth, not in your hand." Then another: "Snap, Crackle, Pop." Then another "You'll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with...."

Is this the mind that I'm going to use to help me make decisions, and feel in control of my life? A mind that jumps and jangles with words and phrases and emotions of which I have no control of when they arise, or when they leave? How did Johannes ever once feel that his life was in control? Talk about a grand illusion!

* * *

I close my eyes, and remember the experience with the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet in Jerusalem, where he guided me up Sinai.

"Trust....."

"Trust.....you are loved."

Unbidden words arose in that experience that were wise. Do they come from a different source within than advertising jingles?

I drift in and out of sleep. Occasionally my eyes partially open and I look down at the water, or up at the clouds drifting by. I remember the game Mery and I played on the way to Carmel, creating names and stories from different cloud shapes. A simpler, gentler time.

More sleep. No dreams. I awake with an unbidden Latin phrase *In omni re nascitur res quae ipsam rem exterminat*. If I'm not being born, I'm dying.

Applied to my current situation, does that mean anything? Wisdom or nonsense?

The very question melts in my mouth.

* * *

When I return from the fjord, Jean-Claude comes up to greet me with a big hug and a smile. "Bad news, I'm afraid." I say nothing.

"Thomas, the photographer borrowed your camera for a new photo-shoot. Before she left, Carina had told her he could use it any time. He'll be back in a couple hours, and you can talk to him then. Sorry. I still think you might be better off without it.

I feel ashamed. Of course I had told her he could borrow it. Probably trying to impress her with my open handed non attachment to Possessions, and willingness to share. I'm so appreciative Jean-Claude stopped me from thrashing from tent to tent. Clearly there's more I need to learn here about trust and mellow-ness. And myself. I'm not finding myself here. Not the self I want to find.

J'accuse.

I can see that the problem is not Eilat, or the people here. It's me. I can't run away from myself, and I'm finding the very aspects of me I was trying to leave behind. Again. I'm like my father the policeman and my grandfather the lawyer all in one. And enraged. I am judge, jury, trial lawyer, and executioner intertwined. Somehow "they" have followed me all the way to the south of Israel. I don't see to be able to outrun the parts of myself I'd like to leave behind, and am still in bondage.

* * *

The next few days are uneventful. We sing. Drink. Smoke. I think. Make some notes with my left hand. Play the flute. In the evenings, the moon grows larger--we are once again nearing a full moon. I notice I'm having some trouble resettling myself into the

routine here. Like a low grade fever. Or the moon's restless stirrings of the tides. Nothing dramatic, but noticeable.

Friday afternoon, erev Shabbat, little groups of us are alternately swimming, singing, chatting. While drifting in and out of conversation, I hear a panicked shout. I leap up, but because of my ear, can't tell where the sound is coming from. One of the smokers casually opens his eyes, and points toward the water.

A small child's arms are thrashing. He cries again.

I rush toward the water, leap in, and begin swimming toward him. I'd forgotten about my hand, and there is a sharp pain as the saltwater cuts into it. I ignore the pain, and swim, keeping in sight the spot where he last was. He's now disappeared beneath the water.

I dive under, touch the boy, pull him up by the arms, and begin the side stroke rescue crawl back to the shore. I feel him squirming, trying to get away, but he is small enough that I can easily manage to contain him. He's coughing and retching.

When we reach the shore, I apply CPR and mouth to mouth resuscitation until he starts breathing smoothly again. He's fine. I give him a reassuring hug. He's still shaking and scared from what happened.

I feel a great pride in myself. In a crisis, I acted without overly thinking, almost instinctually. I didn't care if I looked foolish, or made a mistake. I wasn't self-conscious. I didn't do it for glory, status, sex, or reward. I was only motivated by the desire to help someone in trouble. There's hope for me, yet.

I look up, and see his mother ambling over in a slow jog. She's actually quite attractive, and I like the way her full breasts sway and jiggle nakedly as she runs. She's someone I've been thinking I'd like to meet, especially now that Carina has left. Hmm, maybe there is some reward in this after all.

She seems slightly confused, even a bit annoyed, though in a hazy sort of way.

"What are you doing with my son?" she demands.

Immediately my mood shifts from potential lust to anger.

"What are you doing letting him swim alone?"

"He's a good swimmer, and it's none of your business."

"He almost drowned!"

"Says who?" She grabs her child and drags him away, admonishing him with her index finger, returning to the guitar playing group where she was smoking.

** * **

Something snaps. A branch. Me.

The leaf falls.

Do I really want to become a hashish smoking zombie like this woman hazily coming to find her child who nearly drowned? Do I really want my life to be sitting around singing at night and drifting through days?

Maybe there is a time for judgment. And action.

** * **

I return to my tent, and notice a slight limp, and when I look at my foot, see that part of a sea urchin is embedded. The adrenalin must have kept me from noticing. Great, no good deed goes unpunished. I take my tweezers and pull it out, and pack my few my remaining belongings. I see the Torah, which I haven't read since the first

Sabbath night here, when I sat outside the fire, watching the Sodom and Gemorrah-like proceedings. It's pre-erev Shabbat, why not?

I sit down and look at the Haftarah portion for the first week I arrived, which I never read. Second Kings. Last days of David and the destruction of the Temple. Elisha brings back to life the son of the woman, raising him from the dead. "He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes and his hands on its hands...." And the woman fell at his feet and bowed herself to the ground. Not exactly the reaction I received for saving a drowning boy.

** * **

I skip several dozen pages to this week's portion, Vayetz. "And he left." Who left, to where? I thumb through and see that it is Jacob leaving for Haran. Haran, which in Hebrew means crossroads. Jacob leaves for the crossroads of his life.

No matter where I open it, there always seems to be something symbolical and relevant in the Torah portion that speaks directly to me.

I read on. Jacob has a dream of a ladder rising to heaven, with angels going up and down. God promises to protect Jacob wherever he goes. Jacob names the site of the dream Beth-El, the house of God. He then changes his own name to Israel, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." (28.16).

** * **

I pack up the Torah, and the rest of my possessions, and go to J.C.'s Junk to tell him good-bye.

"I am not surprised. I was wondering when you were going to realize it is time to move on. For me, it's home. For others, like you, a way station." He points to his heart, then to mine. "You have healed many parts of yourself."

I'm afraid to let myself feel, that if I do, too many emotions--tenderness, sadness, fear-- would come forth, and I may not leave.

"I'll let you find a buyer for my tent, and tell Thomas to keep the camera."

"Good choice. Here are the poems you asked for. I recopied them for you."

I look down at the poems, and his curvy, ornate writing.

"Thank you. Maybe one day I'll write a poem about my time here."

"How will you describe it?"

"I can't tell. I know I've seen a vision here of what might be possible. But then I wonder whether this is just a great vacation spot to create a pot-smoking mirage, a hashish induced euphoria, in a beautiful setting."

"Like you, I once asked the big questions. What is the contribution these people--and me-- are actually making? Are we striving for meaning, purpose, brother and sisterhood, or just a way to pass the time? Big questions for the Garden of Eden. Too big for me. Let me know when you find out, so I'll know who I really am."

He gives me a hug, and starts laughing. I start to laugh with him. I laugh at the coral reefs, the hashish, the desert sun, the real and yet imperfect model U.N. I've found in the desert. I laugh at laughter and lightness.

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Is it the external events--the non-theft of the camera, the drowning boy and his mother's indifference --that are causing me to move on. I don't think so. Rather it feels they reflect some internal clock that says it's time. Would Dr. Lisbet call it Jungian synchronicity?

"There's always a place for you here. We need a thinker. A resident philosopher. You could set up shop, next to me. I'll sell the physical at 'J.C.'s Junk.' You could sell the mental at 'J Jr's Junk.' What a team, eh?" He spreads his hands out, as if surveying his kingdom.

I stick his poems in my pocket. I'm aware of trusting that it's time to leave, time for change.

Openings, healings, sprouting some roots.

Closings, internalizing those roots, but not establishing them in space, in geography. In time? I hope so.

I no longer feel rooted here. How do I know? I just know.

"Do not forget us. You may need an oasis to return to."

I pat my heart and give him another hug. "Don't worry. I will never forget you."

Even when there is a new rope to swing to, partings are becoming harder and harder for me.

But amidst the sadness, I also feel a rekindling of energy and determination. My Shabbat candles for the night.

Time to continue the wandering in the desert.

I re-remember why I came down here.

Onward to Sinai.

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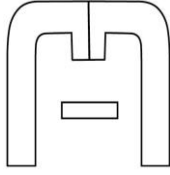
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gain? And again?!?!"

The words are Inamatsu's when I called this Sunday morning, before church, to tell him that I was going to have to once more miss our Sunday golf game. Have to? That's not taking responsibility. Want to, choose to would be better. At least it looks like I have learned something from Dr. Lisbet.

"Same girl? Church? Better watch out. Getting hooked, and I bet your golf game is going to hell, too."

He has no idea what I am going to actually do instead of play golf this afternoon--feed the poor, again.

"Sumimasen, my friend. Tell Richard I'll be there for Tuesday's tennis game, I promise. And..." I think to myself that "again and again" could well apply to the frequency of Mery and my entwinements over the weekend. She even asked if we could stay an extra night at the Fairmont. Talk about the poor little girl getting used to an extravagant lifestyle. "And play well today. Sayonara."

"Ciao and Fore."

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"Lox and bagels, cream cheese, grape and strawberry jam; tea for me; tea and lemon for the lady; and three, three minute soft boiled eggs."

"What do I look like, a kitchen timer?" the waitress glares.

"Three three minute soft boiled eggs," she mutters as she walks

away.

"I love their attitude..." I smile at Mery, so motherly comforting." We are at Solomon's once again. Mery felt upset at the idea of going to David's, and being served by people with whom she worked.

"Oh, why three minutes, Mr. Precision."

"I'm glad you asked, Miss Dreamer. You see, when soft boiled eggs are cooked three minutes, the yoke isn't squiggly, squishy, squirmy, but rather bursting with bountiful bliss in bubbly bites."

She winces, but I can tell she's appreciative of my wit, and my profound poetic rhetoric. Must be my creative writing class.

"Did you ever hunt eggs on Easter? My family did. I loved boiling the eggs and decorating them."

"No, my father said that was a criminal desecration of the meaning of Easter, the sacred symbol of Jesus's rebirth."

"Ouch. Why do you think hiding eggs became a custom?"

"I don't know, I guess the symbolism of eggs as a sign of potential life and birth, little chicks." She ponders, "A hidden God?" Then with a whimsical girlish "Have you ever seen a baby chick? They're sooo cute." Before I could answer she asks "How did you like the church service this morning?"

"Let me ask you a question" I intentionally avoid her query.

"Since this is the week of Passover for us Jews, and since Friday night is the Last Supper for you Christians, shouldn't today be Easter Sunday, not weeks ago? Why do the dates shift?"

She looks puzzled. "I have no idea"

"And does that mean that our last supper was the fruit and fondue and wine?"

"Now, now, naughty boy. No mocking allowed. I certainly hope that wasn't our last supper." She looks down shyly. "Though we certainly drank enough wine."

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The waitress comes with our tea, and I hold my glass up in a toast "To the ecumenical couple," I hear myself saying joyfully. Then, as the words sink in, I feel shock at what I've just said. What is this "couple" talk? Generally this is the point in a relationship when I begin looking for the exit stage left. As Inamatsu said, "Careful. Fore."

Never would I go to church AFTER being successful with a girl, only as a strategy before to move the game forward.

Is this a type of relational rebirth for me? Is there something special and unique going on between us?

"Yes, ecumenical, the Christian girl with a minister father; the Jewish fellow with a great-grandfather rabbi, going to a Christian service, and now eating lox and bagels in a Jewish deli."

She smiles. "How does your family feel about this? she points to the two of us.

Since I'm not speaking with my family, and since none of them liked her--or the image of her--and since she knows none of this, I reply as if she's talking about our ecumenicism. "My Uncle married a Catholic woman. My mom went to Catholic school. Although for some of my friends, dating a Jewish girl was important, it was never ever mentioned in my family to my knowledge. The message I always received was just so she loves you and you love her..." and then I smile, and from my grandfather, "Don't

get her pregnant."

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Mery takes some water from her cup and flicks it at me.

"You were very responsible these last two days, and I appreciate that." Rather than looking at me as she says this, she looks down. It seems she is about to say something else, then she hesitates. I notice the space between her brows furrow. What is she thinking? Is she having second thoughts? Is she going to ask about the pictures? I've told her I develop them myself, and they're just for me. Should I reassure her? Maybe I should just keep it light. As I'm thinking of something witty to say, she continues.

"These last two nights turned out differently than I thought they were..."

Oh no. Great. Finally someone I'm beginning to have feelings for, and she's going to start pulling back.

"...going to be. It was so special, so wonderful, almost as if we were touched by grace." I don't know what got into me. I'm normally not like that. I feel trust with you." This is not what I expected. While I try to think of something to say back—reassurance? platitudinous distance?--, she is now looking directly at me, and continues.

"I've learned through counseling that that kind of happiness is hard for me to receive. I usually try to sabotage it, saying I'm not deserving. So, in church this morning, and even last night, while I was up watching you sleep..." She keeps talking but I become preoccupied with what she has just said. Watching me sleep. That feels a bit vulnerable. And what is this coun-

seling? I again wonder if I'm being attracted to someone like mom. Warning bells begin going off. First I'm afraid she's going to pull back. Now, I worry she's getting too close too fast. Is she really the right person? And all this occurs within the space of less than a minute. Whoa, Nellie, slow down.

"I'm sorry, something the minister said this morning popped into my mind. I got distracted. You were saying you were watching me sleep..."

"Yes, you looked so peaceful and content. It was just lovely. And I didn't want to start feeling bad like I sometimes do. So, I remembered what my counselor advised me: 'When you receive joy, you can feel guilty about it; you can push it away and feel unworthy; or you can use the energy and happiness from the joy to put good energy back into the world.'"

"Makes sense to me." Yet even as I say this, I notice some worry that she's been in counseling. Is she as troubled as mom?

"So, I have an idea and I'd like your support if you're willing."

"Shoot."

She looks puzzled. "You don't want to hear it?"

I smile. 'No I don't mean 'shoot' as in darn it, I mean 'shoot' as in fire away. I'm listening."

"Sorry, I can be pretty sensitive about sharing this openly. Anyway, I was wondering if you'd be willing to go to the mission again to serve food this afternoon. Sort of our way of giving back and saying thanks to God for bringing us into each other's lives."

* * *

I sit stunned.

I replay her words: "go to the mission again." My reflex

reaction is ugh? "saying thanks to God." More ugh. This is the point where I am supposed to get up hurriedly and get out the door. Those reflex reactions don't stun me.

"For bringing us into each other's lives." There is no ugh.

What stuns me is the depth of warm feelings that well up in me toward this woman. This is really a kind, saintly, wise person. She's not afraid to be vulnerable. She's so giving and pure. Ok, proceed with caution, but let's open up just a bit more.

"You know, you are the third person in my life who 's suggested I give back more. The first two I ignored. Maybe this time is the charm. Of course I'll go."

She looks relieved and happy..

Our eggs come. I am relieved, too, for I didn't really want to comment on God bringing us together.

I look at the yokes. They are a little overcooked. I'd guess three and a half minutes. I look at the waitress. She knows. Yet she stares at me defiantly with an "I dare you to say anything" attitude. "Come on, Tiger, let's go another round. You won't win." I feel my competitive juices start to resurface as we stare at each other.

I also feel I don't want to ruin the mood with Mery by looking too aggressive, or acting too mean. I remember the discomfort at the swimming pool.

I look directly at the waitress with a snarl. "You underestimate your talents." She looks annoyed, puzzled, unsure how to respond. I've caught her off guard. Perfect. I then break into my most charming smile. "You are not only a magnificent kitchen

timer, but efficient to boot. These are perfect. Thanks!" Then
I wink at her.

She still seems puzzled, but softens. "Get you any more hot
water, kids?"

"No, we're fine, thanks for asking."

Ah, kill 'em with kindness. Point for me.

* * *

I butter my bagel, then put cream cheese on it.

Mery is motionless. I look up. Though she is silent, her lips are
moving, eyes closed. I notice the curved arch of her eyebrows
sheltering the soft upward curling of her lashes. When the
lashes raise, her brown eyes reappear.

"A prayer of thankfulness before the meal," she explains a
little self-consciously. "Dad used to make us pray before every
meal, and punished us if we forgot. Once I was out of his sight,
in college, I stopped. But my counselor said to choose my rebel-
lions wisely. In this case, she said, remembering to be apprecia-
tive and not take for granted the gifts I receive might be a good
lesson to reinstitute, even if dad didn't teach it very well."

"Lovely." I take her hand. "Next time, let's do it togeth-
er. My dad used to say, 'Good food, good meat, good god let's
eat.' That's when mom made him."

She smiles and begins poking around in her egg. "If it's
not too personal, you said this was your third time being asked
to be more giving. What were the other two?"

When I said I felt like opening up a bit more to her, I
thought it was enough to let her know that there had been two
previous times. I'm not sure how comfortable I feel sharing the
actual events. I hesitate. She seems to sense this and says, "If

you don't want to, that's fine. I'm sorry if I'm being too intrusive. It's just that I want to get to know you better."

"Be careful what you ask for!" I smile, but it feels like an awkward smile. "Ok, this is a bit embarrassing. I'll tell you what, I'll share, but you have to promise me not to hold it against me, not to bring it up in the future, to dismiss it with prejudice, and to practice some of the Christian forgiveness and non-judgmentalness the minister talked about in the sermon this morning."

"Ah, you were listening. Now you're the good boy. Of course I will. Now, shoot away..." she teases.

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I need to decide where to begin, what to say, and how to say it, so I take a long pause, ostensibly trying to decide whether to put strawberry or grape jam on my bagel.

After about thirty seconds, Mery asks, "Why did you get two types of jam? Are you trying to make life harder for yourself?"

"Now that is a question I can easily answer. I like strawberry jam better on bagels. But eating grapes yesterday, and since we've just come from services this morning, I thought grape would be more symbolical, you know grapes, wine, Jesus's blood. All tied together."

Her smile is gone. "Are you making fun of my religion?"

Geez, I was just trying to be playful. Maybe not the best word choices, but good grief, how defensive. I choose my next words and tone carefully.

"Fine. What I thought was just a playful exchange is going to turn into a referendum on faith. Let's change the subject back to something easier --my being told to give more to others.

See," I smile at her, "I'll do anything to get out of a jam."

And I hold up the strawberry container.

She flicks more water at me.

Phew. She seems to be playfully moving on, absolving me of my "sin" of religious mocking—and sexual innuendo. Is the water a sign of baptism to purify me? I know enough not to ask.

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"Ok, both times were freshman year. Time one. First, let me say, with some bragging, my parents are both very attractive. My dad is handsome, my mom is considered beautiful, has done some modeling for charitable causes, and the story goes that her mom, my Nana, was a beauty pageant winner in Texas."

"So, you're saying that's why you're so cute. I can see this is a very vulnerable story for you." Actually, as she opens up, Mery is a much better sarcastic teaser than I had expected. I like it.

"Thanks, Miss Compassion. I now really feel safe to continue!" She takes my hand and squeezes it three times. We go through the ritual, reciprocated this time, while looking into each other's eyes. There is something so vulnerable, open, hopeful and optimistic in this moment that I wish I could somehow capture it. I know, unfortunately, that in this case Mr. Cannon wouldn't be sufficient.

"In my family, looks are extremely important. Not only does mom use makeup, but I've actually walked in and seen my father powdering his face. And sometimes he would say to mom, 'You're frowning, stop that. It will create wrinkles on your forehead.' Or 'Don't smile so much, so fully, you're creating wrinkles around your mouth.'"

"So, you're saying you forgot your powder last night. Or that's why you never laugh."

"Quiet girl. I'm getting to the punch line. So, I went to the student health center, and the doctor says, asked 'What brings you here?' I told him that I had a concern and I needed his help.

"Go on," he said.

"I'm wondering," I asked pointedly as I stroked the flesh under my jaw, "am I getting a double chin?"

Mery starts giggling. "No, you really didn't."

"Hey, this is not easy. No judgment."

"But you've got a great jaw line, a great chin."

"Better, and thanks, but I'm not fishing for compliments."

"So what did he say?"

"He looked at me directly and said 'Son, I'm astonished. No one in all my years here has ever come for medical services asking that question. You need to look around you at the poverty in the land, the suffering around the globe, and find some more worthwhile topic to worry about than the flesh under your chin, which, by the way, is fine.' And with that he turned and walked out the door."

Silence.

"Silence is judgmental, too."

"Thank you for sharing that story. You're right. It makes you look pathetic." She holds up her hand as I start to protest.

"That's not judgmental, that's just true! But it shows a real openness that you could entrust me with that story." I feel her feet reach under the table, up my leg, and give me a little caress.

* * *

I thought the sharing of this part of my life went well.

Why did I tell it to her it? To show what a superficial
cad I WAS, and how I'm changing under her influence. I knew she'd like
that. To surreptitiously fish for a compliment about my looks?To
actually show some vulnerability, open myself to her? Layers and layers.

But what about the limits of the flesh, and you and your family's—
and your—continued obsession with appearances. And your obsession with
sexuality. You still don't yet see what a vain effort that is...and what
a misguided focus. Layers and layers.

"And the second time?"

"Ummm, I promise I will share it with you at some point.
But that's enough vulnerability for one morning. Let's enjoy the
rebirth signified by the three eggs," I say as I take a bite of
egg, thinking to myself, "These chicks won't be reborn."

I hold the egg in my mouth while I reach for, then place the
bagel, cream cheese, and grape jam in my mouth. When the salty
soft egg, and the sweet jam and crunchy bagel are all together, I
begin to chew. I love the way the sweet and salt, soft and
crunch blend. The chick's life is well-sacrificed.

A perfect bite.

* * *

There were a lot of perfect bites this weekend. Another
occurred at Saturday brunch. As Mery had requested, I let her
sleep in. When I finished my morning writing in the Crown Room,
I got off the "mery-go-round," and walked back to the inside
elevator to return to our room. Out the big picture window, next
to and east of the elevator, I saw Grace Cathedral, reflecting
the sun's light, backlit by fog. I spent several minutes staring

at its beauty and majesty. I was fascinated that I didn't see it when I came up and got off the elevator earlier this morning. It's amazing what a change of perspective can do. On the merry-go-round, I had an enormous panorama of the Bay and the city. I guess it goes to show that no matter how large your view, it can still be larger. There always is something missing, just out of sight, even if it's right there before your eyes.

I must say, even for me, that's profound.

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When I enter the room, there is no view out the window, because the blinds have been pulled shut. Mery must have closed them to keep the sun out. She is still the sleeping beauty. I think of just snapping open the shades, but decide, as Prince Charming, the only appropriate way to awaken her is with little kisses. On her eyes, her cheeks, her mouth.

She moans and begins to stir, then rolls over on her side, and pulls the covers around her.

"It's too early. Can't I sleep a little more? Five more minutes."

I give her a few more kisses. She's partially responsive, and I ask "Are you saying that Prince Charming's kisses are not powerful enough to wake the beauty?"

"They're most excellent, kind sir, but please, just five more minutes."

I give her another kiss, tussle her hair, and get off the bed and look around the room. There are still vast portions of food we haven't eaten, particularly the desert platter. Strawberries embedded in creamy yellow custard, lush pie shaped wedges of New York cheesecake. I worry how well they've kept overnight.

I turn to the chocolate fondue, which has hardened, and reignite the paraffin under it. I pick up the icebucket and go into the hall to gather some ice to rechill the Moet and Chandon.

In the hall, I realize I have a few minutes, and decide to go down to the garage to Mr. Red to retrieve Mr. Cannon. Why not? There might be some good pictures this morning. I start humming two of my favorite songs, "Come on baby light my fire" and of course "Great balls of fire." How far I've come from Davy Crockett.

And how far you are, mentally and spiritually from "This Land is Your Land" and "Blowing in the Wind." I wonder if it's always necessary to go through the Doors of "Strange days have found us"; and Eleanor Rigby's "all the lonely people" to have a chance to come out the other side, being more caring and sensitive to others. Necessary, but not sufficient? We'll see.

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"A perfect bite for m'lady." Upon my return, I once again give her a few kisses on her still closed eyes, but this time I take some of the melted chocolate fondue that I've dipped my finger into, and rub it around her lips, sticking part of it into her mouth. She starts to flinch, but then relaxes and says

"Yumm. Breakfast in bed."

"Your expression looks so cute, I need to save it for posterity." I take Mr. Cannon from around my neck, focus and snap.

"Hey," she says, pulling the covers up around her neck.

"Awake now, princess?" I say it as a question, but isn't it really an imperative statement? Inflections are intriguing. I pull the shades and the sun filters into the room, bathing our last night's festivities in its warm light.

"No pictures. Not of me in bed first thing in the morning."

"Does that mean later is ok?"

"No promises."

"You look beautiful. Chocolate lipstick. A real fashion statement. Come on, strike a pose." I come over, lean her head toward her left shoulder, "Now, look up at me out of the corner of your eyes." Snap. "Perfect." Snap. "Now take your index finger and point it at me, like I'm a bad boy." She smiles and does it, her playful expression belying the finger's admonition. Snap.

The bad boy finger works every time. I'm not exactly sure why. Maybe because it seems to take their "no" seriously, recognizing that what we're doing is a little naughty, but at the same time making it humorous, playful, and not so threatening. It's an ideal time to tell her the story's origins.

"When I was a little boy of about five, I was happily eating some french fries with my fingers, dipping them into ketchup. I spilled a couple of the ketchup-laden fries on the floor just before mom walked by. Some of the excess ketchup had splatted in drops on the floor, and at first she gasped fearfully, perhaps thinking it was blood and I'd cut my finger. Who knows, maybe she even thought the fries were finger stubs.

When she looked more closely, she realized the coated limbs on the floor were merely my having an accident, or being careless. Fear became anger and she admonished me, 'Junior, dumb bunny, bad boy.' Isn't it interesting how often when a terrifying situation passes, how quickly we turn, not to relief, but to anger?"

At that point in telling the story, I make a little pout, sticking

out my lower lip, as if I'm sad and hurt and fragile little boy.

Generally, whenever I do this--which is pretty often with cute girls--
whomever I'm with will try to comfort me. Mery is no exception "Oh,
you poor little baby. Five years old."

I graciously receive the comfort, "Well, I'm a little bit of a
bad boy," and I hold up my thumb and index finger, about a half-
inch apart. "But mainly I'm a good boy" and I uncurl my fingers
and hold my open hands two feet apart, to make the contrast.

"So, mainly a good boy, right?"

I nod, giving her a caress.

"And just a little bit of a bad boy?"

Another nod, another caress.

"I bet you're only a bad boy at good times, right?"

I smile. "You're so understanding."

I pull out Mr. Cannon and take another picture.

"Hey, enough with the pictures, already."

I turn my head to the side, duck my chin, and look out of
the corner of my eyes, pointing at her with my index finger

"Now, Junior, don't be a bad boy."

She laughs. "That's a beautiful laugh," I say. The covers
fall a bit, revealing the top of her breasts. I focus Me. Cannon. Snap.
She doesn't pull them back up. Snap.

"Just a little bit bad boy" I whisper, barely audible.

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Her stomach starts to rumble, and we both laugh.

"Hungry?" I ask.

"Starving."

I get off the bed, and place a piece of bread into the

chocolate.

The covers now reveal about two thirds of her breasts. There is not much cleavage as their weight pulls them across her ribs. I hold the bread above her face, and a large coagulated clump of the excess chocolate gathers at the bottom. It holds itself suspended for a moment, hanging, like a fall leaf just before it lets go. Then, kerplunk, it lands, some hitting her mouth, some running down her chin, and then like a dark river onto her chest.

"You bad boy, you."

"Nothing I can't fix." I scoop a glob from her chin and place it on my finger which I place in her mouth. She begins to suck the chocolate off my finger, concaving her cheeks, and giving a little moan.

I bend over and start licking the chocolate off her chin, neck, and lower to the tops of her breasts. Once most of the chocolate is off her chest, I turn my attention to her nipples, like lush raspberries, and start to playfully nibble on them, "Yummm..."

"Hey, no fair, you're eating me, and I'm the one that's hungry. I want more chocolate."

"Yes, Princess. The sleeping beauty is definitely awake." I get up and take a couple more pictures. She starts to cover up, but instead just resignedly--and shyly--smiles.

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When I return with the bread-soaked chocolate fondue, I stand on the bed and hold it above her head. She sits up to receive it.

"You look like such a cute baby seal. Are you well-trained?"

Are you ready to show your master some tricks? Tongue out now."

"Arf arf."

"Very good." The covers are now completely off. Her neck is strained upward. As I lower the warm chocolate bread toward her mouth with one hand, I grasp Mr. Cannon in the other. Snap. I allow some chocolate to drip into her mouth.

"Excellent, good seal, now let your arms dangle like little flippers by your side. Great, now, palms up and push your elbows toward each other." When she does this, her breasts swell to enormous proportions, forming a long, deep cleavage. Snap.

"Good girl" I let the chocolate drip into her mouth, along with some bread. She tears at, bites into and sucks the warm chocolate bread. I focus, watch, and shoot a few more pictures.

Yummm.

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When Mery finishes swallowing the feast, she jumps from the bed. Snap. And runs over to the fondue. Snap. I love the way her breasts bounce and sway, as if they have a life of their own. Snap. I assume she wants to eat some more. Hungry girl.

"Now, bad boy, you are the baby seal. Time for you to beg." She smiles playfully as she sits back on the bed. "Put your head in my lap." I don't like her telling me what to do, but decide it may be worth it to play along. I comply. "Eyes closed....Now, open your mouth for a treat." I fear she's going to stuff the chocolate and bread into my mouth, and I worry about choking. Also, I don't like being fed. No one can regulate as well as I do the amount of calories and get the proper proportion of bread and chocolate I like. I wait. Nothing happens. I start to open my eyes, but she has put her hands over them.

The next thing I feel is her placing her breasts on both sides of my face, then swaying, placing one, then the other in my mouth.

Ah, no calories. A perfect bite.

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"Mmmmm, yummm, but where's my chocolate?" I mumble through her swaying mammaries. I wonder if I could die by being smothered by her breasts. Maybe that's the way to go out...

"Fine, jerk, you got it," she giggles. "Keep your eyes closed." I wait, eyes closed, mouth open, for the chocolate.

Instead, I feel this warm sensation over my chest and belly. I open my eyes, look down, and see that she is drawing on my stomach, finger painting with chocolate fondue.

"Oh my goodness, now you're the naughty little girl." With that I roll over on her and reach under her armpits and start tickling her. She's good, and counters with the sides of my stomach. I turn around and go after her feet. I love seeing her breasts jiggle as she tries to get away, laughing. We begin a playful wrestling, and more tickles ensue, as our bodies press together and the chocolate rubs between us.

Definitely a delicious breakfast in bed.

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The sun disappears behind clouds as late morning wears into afternoon. The front office calls to tell us we are past the check out time.

"Oh, can't we stay one more night," she pleads.

Who am I to resist?

"Again?" She asks. It's not a question.

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She tells me to pull the blinds down, as dusk begins to settle.

I do, and light a few candles. "It's definitely time for the Moet and Chandon." I open the bottle, shake it, and let it spray over both of us. A champagne bath was in order. We both drink from the bottle as it pours over us. She jumps up on the bed, and begins a slow undulating dance to the candlelight. Snap. I love the sensuality of her body swaying, as if she is in a trance. Snap. Her eyes are closed as she continues to dance and to a music that I can't hear. Nonetheless I remain an appreciative audience, once again at her feet, looking up at her. Snap.

Is she dancing of her own free will? It's almost as, like her breasts tossing and bobbing with a life of their own, Mery is a wave being danced by some far off musical moon, not completely under her own control.

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And again.

After, she asks, "Why don't you like to swim in the ocean?"

I have no idea why she would ask that question at this particular moment. It sounds a bit like an interrogation. I start to respond with a cross-examination of my own--probing why now, is she still upset about going to the swimming pool-- then decide I'm too tired for a legal skirmish, and the mood seems pleasant. I respond with playful sarcasm. "I'm sure it has something to do with some deep memory from my childhood,"

"Really?"

"No, kidding. Well, maybe yes. Growing up in Kansas City, the ocean was always the dream, the goal, the infinite. The Beach

Boys. Surfer dudes."

"You wanted to be a surfer boy?" she smiles, and drinks Moet. Then, in a serious tone, "That's not an explanation. That would be a reason you'd like the ocean." More probing. Oh well, let's flow with the current.

"You'd think, wouldn't you? But it became totally the opposite." I stroke an imaginary goatee pensively, as I remember Grandpa Julius would do. "I wonder if you come to fear what you are attracted to?"

Sometimes, Johannes, like the ocean, you are deeper than you even know. The ocean,--where you are vulnerable, can become lost, swallowed up lose your "self" and disappear in the great unknown.

And I wonder, John, do we sometimes become attracted to that which we fear?

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She is silent. I continue. "Actually, on our family vacations to California, my parents were always very protective of us when we went in the ocean. We were warned of rip tides. Surfing wasn't allowed. We were told that ocean waves were dangerous. They conveyed a sense that we'd better be very careful around the ocean."

"The waves can be rough, especially during a full moon."

Is she empathizing, or making fun of me?

"Dad did teach us how to deal with big waves. First, try to avoid them! But he also taught us how to dive under the wave. Such a strange concept. The deeper you go, the less turbulence. Unless you go too deep."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, in college, sophomore year, I had a girlfriend

who..."

"You mean there was someone before me. Why, white knight, are you becoming tarnished right before my eyes?"

"Oh maiden, if only I'd known you were on the horizon, I'm sure I would have saved myself for you....Can you absolve me of my sins...."

"Maybe, if you continue to be good." She strokes my lingham a few times. This is innocent maid Mery?

"Anyway, to continue, I was trying to impress this California girl--babe-- and I went running into the ocean. I see a wave coming, and, as I was taught, I dive under it. Unfortunately, the wave was not that high, and the bottom of the ocean was not that deep, so all I do is SPLAT into the sand, and the water foamed all round me. Totally embarrassing."

"Serves you right, you bad boy." And she continues to stroke me.

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And again.

I hold her hands tightly over her head, as I now know that she likes. She seems to enjoy feeling totally subservient, surrendering, giving herself. Overall, I don't mind this. But there were a couple of times today when she wanted me to do more than I felt comfortable. She seems to really like to feel a strong, almost piercing pain as part of her pleasure. For some reason--my father's anger?--I like to think of myself as a gentle (though perhaps calculating, even conniving) seducer. I don't ever use force or physical strength to bed a woman.

What she's asking violates an image of myself and is not comfortable to me. Further, as I start to push harder into her hands, it

makes me feel angrily aroused, and I don't like that. I don't want to hurt her, or anyone, physically, even if she says it's not really pain, but pleasure. It's not sexual to me. It crosses a boundary, and I'm not sure how to address this with her, so she doesn't feel embarrassed by what she's asking for.

These are not questions I'd thought of asking Dad about when I was sixteen and we had our little man-to-man talk. And I certainly can't ask him now. Whom do you ask? How do you know what's right and natural? Johannes, that's again deep, almost philosophical. I face different content, but am asking the same root question. And I'm just as unsure who to ask, or who I can really trust.

As I'm thinking this, Mery pushes the boundary again, asking, shyly, teasingly, if I think it would be fun to use my necktie to bind her arms to the bed post. I feel like I'm playing a flute song for which there is no music, and I'm trying desperately to improvise. I try to be jovial. "You must be kidding, wrinkle my Countess Mara tie?" But she persists in her request, gently, but determinedly. Finally, I say to her,

"Rest your head on my shoulder, and I'm going to tell you a true story. I actually read it in my journal when I was home this past vacation. Let me impress with you with what my family called my 'photographic memory':

Jan 1, 5th grade, When we woke up it was New Year's day. We got up. We got dressed, that is me and my brother, Joseph. We ate, we went outside. Some friends came over and played traffic cop. One of the friends was the cop. I got cot. My brother got cot too. We had lunch. Then are friends came back over. My broter was the cop. We tied him up and let him go... the second time we let him stay there. We were told not to tie people up.

I write out for her how I spelled caught "cot". I thought she would

find that adorable. "So, you see, Mery, it's part of my Kansas City
upbringing. We were told not to tie people up." I smile somewhat
sheepishly.

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There is not much in my life that I can control, but one thing is when I pick up and put down Johannes' journal. I'm glad I re-picked it up for I see hope in his entry in his reluctance to physically bind Mery, and his concern about hurting her physically. His overall behavior is atrocious, and he's a calculating cad--ignorant, crude, primitive in many ways. But there does seem at least a small redemptive side. He doesn't consciously want to hurt anyone, certainly not physically, but not even emotionally. At best, he's just naïve and ignorant and unaware. And he is honest with each person he meets about his unwillingness to commit long-term.

And at worst? I'm glad, John, you can have some softening toward Johannes. But careful of too many blinders in you, too. He's not that naïve. Rather, I'd say conscious, calculating, and willful. And couple that with uncaring denial, not wanting to be sensitive to whatever collateral damage he may inflict on relationships that he so cavalierly enters into and leaves on his whim. He wants all the control and to have his own way, to get whatever he desires. That is always his primary focus.

* * *

"I thought you said your brother's name was Aaron."

She's not addressing the point I was trying to make, and seems
annoyed with me. I decide to ignore her tone and answer her question.

"That was the name I gave him in the play I read to you. You know,
da da da dum, Dagnet, names have been changed to protect the

innocent." She doesn't seem amused by my cleverness, but I continue, "My motto is 'Veritas gignit persequimur ficta': 'chasing fiction creates truth.'" She looks confused and even more annoyed with me.

As we empty our third (or fourth) glass of champagne, she makes a little self-conscious pout. I'm concerned how the evening is going to proceed. Will she be angry at me for not acceding to her "tie up" request? Generally I've felt like I'm much more experienced sexually than she is; but now I'm also having feelings that perhaps I am a backward Kansas City hick who is not able to play in her league. Confusing. Mery seems to be sulking. I'm not sure what to say.

I set my glass down and leave to go the bathroom.

When I return, her glass is empty, and her mood seems to have changed again. She is standing on the bed, and begins a full, free form movement "Want to take some more pictures?" she asks, playfully. Ah, this is more like it. She bends over, squeezes her breasts together, and looks right into the camera, with a sultry, almost too provocative expression, tongue rolling on her lips. Snap. Snap. Snap.

I vaguely wonder what happened to change her mood so quickly. but am delighted.

Mr. Lingham snaps to attention again.

"One thing I was allowed to do was 'tickle" as I reached under her armpits, the sides of her stomach, her feet as she fell to the bed. I loved seeing her breasts jiggle as she tries to get away, giggling. We began a playful wrestling, and I heard her stomach grumble.

"Hungry," I ask.

"Starving!" She wiggles free, hops off the bed, and sashays over to the fruit plate, where she picks up some grapes, then climbs

back onto the bed to continue her dance. While still gyrating, she plucks off a grape and starts licking the round wine colored fruit. Snap. The pink, slightly coarse tip of her tongue moves in ever-increasing concentric circles around the grape's circumference. The skin of the grape shimmers with the fresh coat of saliva, and is slowly partially sucked into her mouth, as she hollows her cheeks...Snap. Her teeth gradually sink through the purple skin. There is something erotic and ferocious in the bite...Snap...as she pierces the gelatinous center, randomly spurting juices. I imagine some juices landing in her mouth, coating her tongue. The excess drips down her chin.

Eat, drink, being merry.

She bites into another grape, and another, and the juices continue to flow from the punctured grapes. Some are shooting forth volcano-like from her mouth, cascading across her chin, slithering down her chest, meandering over her stomach and then gliding even lower, curling into, entwining, and melding with the now fluidly moving thrusts of her pelvis. Snap.

I put the camera on the tray table with the fruits and desserts, placing a plate under it so it's focused on her writhing figure, and set the automatic timer on continuous.

I leap onto the bed, and begin dancing with her, as she plucks another grape, and grinds it into her body, crushing and rolling and squishing. As I dance, I lean over and begin slurping all the sweetness from her body. Snap. I am now licking and sucking grapes off her breasts. Snap. Stomach. Snap. And as I proceed still lower, I hear both her piercing moan and snap. Snap. Snap.

Eat. Drink. Be Merry, Mery.

Thank you, Mr. Cannon. Where would I be without you?

Pictures to be reviewed again and again and again. The sweet
sucking of multiple flowing juices.....Immortalized.

A perfect bite

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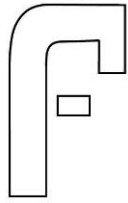
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or those of you who were here last week, or who have received notes," the Rebbe looks directly at me, "you know that the Israelites went forth from Egypt, and crossed the Red Sea. Then what happened?"

Several hands go up. He calls on a studious looking man, who has raised his hand higher than the others. His obvious need for approval is annoying. "It's the Sabbath of the Song. Miriam leads them in singing and dancing. As you said, Rebbe, song is important as a way to celebrate progress on our evolving journey, but God enjoins us not to rejoice at other's pain and suffering. As the Talmud Megilla 10b says, God doesn't want the angels to sing at the drowning of the Egyptians. So, it's not about singing per se, it's about when and why you sing--the intention." What a suck butt.

The Rebbe beams at him. "Excellent, Mr. Jason. First rate."

I haven't been to the sessions in a while, so Mr. Jason must be new. That sounds so formal. I wonder what his first name is. But already I have an intense dislike of him.

"The Israelites no longer have Pharaoh as a master, but they still have a slave/victim mentality. They grumble about their fate, they complain to Moses that at least in Egypt they were fed. In the wilderness they are given food, but told not to be greedy, to take only what they need. But they are still fearful, and trying to hoard--to no avail." Again, the Rebbe looks at me.

I want to meet his eyes directly, but am not able. Is he upset about the note I left him? The amount of money? What does

he want from me? I, who am barely getting by on \$200 a month, poverty level in America. I have \$7 a day to live on, 35 lirot a day. Their minimum was 10 lirot a session. Four sessions. Forty lirot. Did they expect me to go a day without eating and shelter? Do they want me to sell some stocks? If I did, then I'd have even less monthly income. That's not greed, or hoarding, that's reality. I have to protect myself. No one else seems willing or able to do that. I thought I handled the situation well last Wednesday afternoon.

Is he upset at my not returning to therapy because of the amount of money he will lose? In addition, he requests a "donation" of two lirot for the Parashah sessions. Is that even kosher?—exchanging, even asking for money on Shabbat? And Dr. Lisbet is going to charge for her "Tai Chi" class. They're constantly asking for money. Shouldn't God's teachings be free? Who is greedy here? Talk about casting the first stone, Rebbe.

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"Sinai is a mystery, offering revelation and law. Whereas the Book of Genesis--the first act of God's creation-- is a denial of the randomness and chaos and a movement toward physical universe, Exodus and Sinai are God's second act of creation, and a movement toward spiritual order."

I put away my journal notebook, pull out my parashah notebook, and begin to take notes on what the Rebbe is saying. **Even though you are angry at him --because of his presumed anger at you-- you are at least smart enough to recognize that there may be wisdom in what he's saying.**

"Why, then, is this chapter called Yitro? Jethro in

English. By the way, note that there is no J in Hebrew." I look over at Jason. Yason? I smile to myself because Mr. Suck Butt doesn't seem to know the answer. At least he hasn't raised his hand. No one raises their hand.

I make a note in my journal: "There is no J in Hebrew."

"It's because Moses learns an important lesson from Jethro--how to share responsibility. Jethro says to Moses (18.22), You will surely wear yourself out, for the task is too heavy for you. You cannot do it alone....let them share the burden with you."

I look up from my notes, and the Rebbe is again looking at me.

* * *

The dry white midday heat of the desert sunshine hides nothing. Shadows disappear. The Sinai desert, one of the most barren places on earth, a giant peninsula wedged between Africa and Asia. There is a melancholy beauty, a stark loveliness and loneliness about it.

The heat reminds me of when I was sent into the desert as a child, with my grandparents, to help cure my sickness.

God sent the Israelites into the wilderness to "learn what is in your hearts."

Maybe this is where I've been pointed all along, and just didn't know it. I can feel the anticipation and excitement of a goal. And not just any goal. The highest goal. Climbing Sinai, seeking to find what's in my heart.

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I am camped with a group of fellow travelers, and we are all staying in tents near the 1700 year old St Catherine's monastery,

at the southern tip of the Sinai desert, hundreds of miles from civilization. It's freezing outside. We will awaken in a few hours to begin the climb, intending to arrive at sunrise. Rather than go to sleep in our individual tents, we huddle together outside, around a fire, for warmth, listening to the insistent drumming of Arab music, swaying, smiling, drinking tea.

There is a completely different feeling around this fire than in Eilat. There is no cavorting. No wine. Not really even much talking. We all stare directly at the fire, each seemingly lost in thought, as if preparing for whatever we might encounter in the morning.

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I remember from the Rebbe's talk "Sinai Workshop" in Jerusalem six months ago. That seems so distant. Yet now here I am. He spoke of engaging in a period of preparation necessary before the actual climb. Like when the Israelite people sought to purify themselves at the base of the mountain for receiving God's word. One of the purifications the Rebbe mentioned was sexual abstinence. Stay pure. "Do not go near a woman.. Exodus 19:15) I believe that may be a good thing for me, to help me totally remove Johannes from me. I can see, after the Sodom and Gemorrah of Eilat, how easy it is for me to return to that lifestyle if the opportunity presents. I think of the large pendulous bags of fat of the hashish smoking woman coming down to see her nearly drowned son. How could I ever have believed breasts were a mystery that promised nurturance? I'm seeking something far deeper and more nurturing here.

What else do I need to focus on to purify and prepare myself? Later at Sinai, the Israelites, had to face their attach-

ment to and worship of the golden calf. As a symbol of money. That calf is not a problem for me. I have moved beyond the materialism of my family and country. Money and wealth are no longer important to me. I think of my camera back in Eilat. Though I do wonder why they are charging so much to guide us up a sacred mountain. Shouldn't the ascent up God's mountain be free? Did Moses charge to lead the Israelites in the wilderness?

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The golden calf as a symbol of worldly power? That too I have moved beyond. As a symbol of human law. No, I seek God's law.

Food, wine, drugs? Yes, I need to purify myself by what I put in my body. I make a vow here. No more drugs. And the silliness and pettiness of my wine consumption. No more careless wine. Food? I need to purify there, too. I admit I'm attached to the pleasure food provides, always trying to make each bite perfect. I will reduce my eating to absolute necessity. Only as sustenance, no longer as enjoyment.

This afternoon, in a brief tour of the monastery, we saw what is purported to be the Burning Bush, where Moses heard the Word of God while tending the sheep of his father in law Jethro.

"Deliver the people from bondage in Egypt."

Food, wine, sex. Those are my bondages from which I seek deliverance.

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I watch the fire and sip my tea, feeling the warmth of both. I feel a pressure on my right thigh, and subtly turn. There is a German woman sitting to my right. Her right hand is in her boyfriend's and she is looking at him with affection. I feel her

left thigh pushing into my right leg. Is this accidental--we're in close quarters and she is just trying to get closer to the fire? Or is it purposeful-- is she seeking the warmth of additional bodily contact? I'm curious, and push back a bit. Nothing overt. I keep my head facing forward, and take another sip of tea.

There is something erotic in this touching/non touching ambiguity.

I take my thumb, through my glove, and pinch it into my index finger in anger. What am I doing? I can see that the mere presence of a woman may be too strong for me to overcome my bad habits. Maybe the Orthodox have it right. Keep us separate. Keep a big fence around temptation.

I'm not willing to get up and go back to my tent, losing the warmth of the fire. But I do remove the pressure I was exerting with my thigh. Does she even notice? Was this all a game in my imagination?

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I know I was right to leave Eilat. Though I haven't really talked with them, I can tell that the people here at Sinai, from several different countries, are all seekers. Just by being here, they show they are not content to sit complacently, like those on Coral Beach by the Red Sea, and be lulled by life's hypnotic rhythms.

I remember clearly the Rebbe's question, in Jerusalem, "At the deepest level, what are you seeking at Sinai, what do you want from God at the meeting at the top of Mt. Sinai?"

What is it I'm seeking? Life direction, purpose, meaning,

love? The message I heard in the Rebbe's imaginal journey up Sinai in Jerusalem was "Trust...you are loved." Yes, I'm seeking to trust more, to feel loved. On and from a higher, spiritual plain. But I'm also asking what is my meaning. From the place of trust and being loved, what is it I am supposed to do? Where am I to be guided and led in this life? What is the road I am supposed to build?

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Finally, with head nodding in exhaustion, I return alone to my tent to sleep, awaiting the call to awake in the early morning darkness, ready to set out and find the answer. As I'm about to fall asleep, I wonder if the experience of climbing Sinai in my imagination in Jerusalem will be better than the actual climb here.

Is that my doubting mind? Isn't doubt the opposite of trust? Trust still seems to be an issue.

* * *

I sleep fitfully. It's freezing, and my two layers of long pants and socks don't seem to help much. My dreams are also fragmented. I'm waking every half hour to forty five minutes.

* * *

The airplane starts to quiver and shake. The lights go out, and I'm trying to write. But it's nearly impossible to make legible letters, both because it's completely dark, and from the undulations of the plane. What am I trying to write about? Pain, loneliness. I find something humorous in the fact that I'm writing in darkness about the darkness of life.

I look outside and can see nothing. Total blackness. I feel the plane losing altitude. Vertigo. My stomach dropping like on

the precipitous downhill of a roller coaster with no brakes.

As my eyes begin to grow accustomed to the dark, I look around. I can make out vague outlines of featureless people. Unmoving heads. They seem calm. One person is focusing on the air vents, trying to get a better air flow. I almost start laughing. I guess we try to control what we can, completely denying the chaos happening around us. I hear one person say "Don't worry, the pilot is in complete control." At first I'm reassured. I'm not alone. We're in this together.

But I do wonder where the pilot is, and why doesn't he say something.

The plane continues to roll from side to side, losing more altitude. I have this panicky feeling that I know we're going to crash, and no one else is aware of this fact. I want to yell at the strangers, "Where's the pilot? We're going to die. How can you all be so calm, like sheep, looking straight ahead, heedless of our fate?"

We're going to crash and they're sitting here being led to the slaughter. We're plunging headlong into a void. Look at you fools, putting your faith in the pilot, and he's not even communicating with us.

I return to my writing, even though it is difficult with the plane's motion. I wonder why am I even bothering to try to write?

For me alone?

Would it help to share this with anyone?

Then I realize, if a collision and death is unavoidable, why alarm the others around me, and wake them from their obliviousness. That would only raise fear in them, and there's nothing I,

or any of us, can do to change the situation.

Will someone find this writing after the plane hits the ground and all the passengers in it die? If so, is there a hopeful message in reading about one person's struggle, in the face of the inevitable?

John, do you also find it at all humorously ironic that you're having a dream about waking others up while you're asleep?

After another minute, I put my pen down and duck my head preparing for the end. Where is my father to protect me? Where can I turn for help?

Then I hear some lively music, and the sound of tapping, then pounding feet. The other passengers seem to be stomping as if in a jig-like dance to the music.

At last, there is an announcement: It's a woman's voice: "We are making a movie of dancing feet. Let yourself loose. We are only focusing on your feet. This is a dance contest, for our movie. For Christ's sake, forget about any feelings of self-consciousness and let your feet really fly, dazzle, be ecstatic and playfully joyous."

The "Do Not Smoke" lights come on, flashing, blinking, oscillating, creating a strobe-like effect. In the alternating light and darkness, all I can see are my feet and those of the passengers, like in a slow motion black and white homemade movie, as they perform an exuberant display of gliding, bopping, jumping.

After several minutes, the voice over the loudspeaker comes on again. "The plane is going to be landing shortly. Your dream is over. You may now wake up.

* * *

I look at my watch. An hour and a half has passed. Still

dark. The dream has a too simplistic ending, but I like it. Awake, I still feel some joy of the dance in me. But I am exhausted, and have no desire to think about or interpret the dream. The reality of the imminent climb is going to be hard enough to face. All I want is sleep.

John, maybe there is a lesson in this dream from Reb Jonathan's and Dr. Lisbet's class, when they discussed Castenada's Don Juan books about "death as an advisor." Rather than just grimly hanging on, perhaps you, we, all of us, need to try to take time to appreciate and be grateful for the positive blessings of the gift of each day that is given to us.

* * *

We're awakened and it's still dark and freezing. I know I had others dreams, but can't remember them. It feels like an inauspicious start. I don't feel settled. The only image that keeps popping up is a skull. A hollow-eyed cranium staring at me.

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I am groggy, disconnected, incoherent as we get ready and start our climb. There is a full moon which provides our main source of light, and I just keep my eyes on the feet of the person in front of me.

We're off.

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"Camel, mister?"

The ascent up Sinai is supposed to take several hours, and Arab bedouins offer camels for lease to help carry you. I'm shocked and insulted to be asked after only a few minutes. I wave

them away disdainfully.

* * *

To learn what's in my heart.

Disdain does not seem something that I want to realize, it's certainly not what I'm seeking.

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"And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend." The Rebbe looks at us, one by one, as he cites the words from the week's Torah portion. "The words seem obvious on one level. It is Moses receiving God's word at Sinai. But, from a mystical perspective, and as a teaching lesson, what else might it mean? Anyone have any ideas?" I start to raise my hand, but am not really sure, and don't want to make a mistake, especially given the Rebbe's looks at me.

"Could it be that the part of us made in God's image is supposed to speak to the Moses part in all of us in a friendly, compassionate way?"

Oh no, not Mr. Yason Jason Suck Butt again. That's what I was going to say, more or less. Damn. I need to trust myself more. He beat me to it again. I look at him--and myself-- with disdain.

* * *

My pack is heavy. I'm glad I left my camera back in Eilat. Why didn't I leave my flute, too? I have the Japanese fellow's light bamboo flute. Why do I need to be carrying a silver flute that I'm not even able to play because of my hand? Greed? My "silver" calf? For some reason, it wasn't that hard to leave the camera, but I don't yet want to part with the flute. Will I time to let go naturally come, or do I need to develop more discipline

to let go of possessions?

I am at the end of a long line of people making their way quietly, single file, up the mountain. I walk methodically, watching the feet of the person in front of me as I try to focus my thoughts. It's hard to believe I am at the start of my climb of Mount Sinai. When I look up, past the people, I can barely see a small path, with many twists and turns.

How did I get here?

Balaam's ass. Maybe Elizabeth Mery was like Balaam's ass. The day I met her, I had just been admitted to Harvard Law School and clearly saw my road ahead. She blocked me from going in the direction I wanted --first, law school; then marriage and commitment to her. Balaam's ass blocked his way. But of course the ass saw the Angel of Death waiting on that path, so he was actually protecting his master.

Sometimes when we're thwarted, it's for our own good, but we don't know it. The jackass. A sign of wisdom? A means of carrying us to where we really want to go? Or preventing us from going where we shouldn't?

And the mule you're now being offered, John? A test of your willingness to show fortitude and self-determination? Or a sign of your inability to accept help from others because you feel it's a sign of weakness?

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How amazing the twists and turns life takes. Abram had to go forth from the house of his father to a place he did not know. I had to leave my family. I fell into Mery's arms. She opened me to a level of joy and suffering that I'd never experienced before.

Initially the suffering had to do with what I saw in the outside world--those homeless, hopeless, alcoholic men on Sixth Street. But the suffering became internal so that what I saw was the emptiness, and meaninglessness of what I was doing with my own life.

When she disappeared with the joy, I was left with only the suffering.

What a journey since then....leaving my country for the promised land of Israel, Kibbutz Haon on the Sea of Galilee, where I saw even more clearly the limits of my materialistic country's values. Leaving behind the world of law school and its teaching of a confining, imperfect, secular human law.

I'm right where I should be. Behind me are family, relationship, human law, society. Before me is the quest for God.

That's all that is left.

I image myself as a lone man in the wilderness, like Moses, like Jesus, seeking the divine presence. The final rung in the ladder of the journey. Climbing Sinai, seeking God's law, seeking God.

"Camel, mister?"

Some of the older people have given in and are now riding the camels offered by the Arab Bedouins climbing with us.

Over an hour has passed. It's still dark. I'm tired, hungry, thirsty, and have fallen farther back from the rest of the group. There are now nearly fifty yards between me and an older woman who is the next straggler, but still keeping a better pace than I am. Twenty-seven hundred meters. I've never been very good at heights. Over a few thousand feet, I get a dizzying mountain

sickness.

I look at the camel with more affection. One hump, a light yellowish brown color. I wonder why they have camels here, rather than donkeys. Maybe because with a donkey, you'd say there's a jackass on a jackass? Cute. Maybe because the camel's hump is symbolic of the mountain? Clever. My mind is still working.

In my hazy vision, I superimpose a donkey within the camel, seeing one change to the other, and back, as the donkey slowly develops a hump, then the camel loses its hump. My mind is starting to play tricks with me.

The camel's Bedouin master is smiling at me. At first the smile seems friendly, but then I sense a mocking tinge. Lazy, unfit American.

I remind myself that even as I'm looking down at the ground in front of me, my goal is the heights above. The Rebbe said that the ascent of a mountain is the perfect image for faith. Sometimes the ascent is demanding, as I certainly feel, and maybe everyone in the group is experiencing.

"In the midst of labor, that is when we are purified."

Yes, I'm now the last one in the group. "Mister, want a camel?" I hear again. I stubbornly shake my head no.

Effort, purification. Effort=success.

I dismiss him, once again.

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Another hour of climbing. Steeper, more arduous. More echoes of "Mister, camel?" as I've now fallen far enough behind the group that I can barely see the person in front of me. I feel as though I've now been singled out as the weak one of the

pack. Like buzzards and hawks, several Arabs surround me with the offer of an easier ascent.

Step, step. Ever upward. "Ever closer."

I think of the dental assistant's comment, as she prepares to poke, prod, and check my gums for deterioration, and examine my teeth for cavities. Not exactly the sublime image I expected I'd be having on my way up Sinai. A spiritual examination?

Buzzing brush. Burning bush. Foggy, distracted mind.

With each step, the summit is "ever closer."

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Why doesn't anyone stop and smell the non-existent flowers? Why such a goal-oriented focus? My breathing is labored now. I wonder if I'm beginning to get dizzy.

There is a bit more light, and I can see the top.

Someone shouts back, "3500 steps now."

Thirty-five hundred steps. I have two thoughts. One, that's a lot of steps. Why does it get harder the higher you are and the closer you are to your goal? My second thought: "Did God carve these steps to help Moses near the top?" If God was truly trying to make it easier, why not just appear in a dream during sleep, or place the tablets by Moses' bed while he slept?

** * **

More switchbacks at a relatively steep angle--at least for me. Groggily, I continue to place one foot before the other. Step by step. My airplane dream of last night returns to my mind. The basic feeling from the dream is one of joy and happiness, but occurring after and on the other side of a lot of panic and fear. Who's the pilot? Male? Female? Does the pilot symbolize faith in

humans--whom I don't trust? Faith in God Whom I should trust?

The undiscovered me that I don't yet know?

And who are the other people? My family, my society, the kibbutzniks? The passive side of myself that I distrust? The wise calm part? Trust? God? That is what I seek on the top of Sinai.

And the dancing feet? Miriam asking all the Israelites to dance after crossing the Reed Sea. At the least those feet show there's still joy in me, even if buried deep down.

More steps. The only force I am aware of is gravity, holding each foot down like leaden weights. The opposite of dancing. I should have been counting so I'd know how far I have to go.

Others seem to be picking up the pace, as if some unseen current or force is drawing them toward the summit.

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I feel the beginning of a dizzying nausea. I knew it was just a matter of time. I debate whether to sit and try to let it pass, or continue pushing. Is it really fair that while some are being pulled to the top, I am being thwarted?

I decide to sit, placing my forehead in my hands. I feel my father's hand once again on my forehead, during the Kansas City flood, placing a warm cloth to comfort me. I see the picture in my mind of my mother holding me as a young baby, staring with love into my eyes.

I push both images away. False idols. A posed picture. There is no father, or mother to comfort me any more. And no more little baby.

Breathe. You are choosing to make this climb. Remember an image of strength. Self-chosen nausea:

The summer before my senior year of high school, running

sand dunes at camp in Wisconsin. I was pushing so hard--to build my endurance--that I wouldn't stop until I literally threw up. There was a certain macho badge of courage in that nausea. Trying to be the best conditioned, most powerful person I could be.

The image is reassuring. I start to get up, but feel like I'm hit by a wave of dizziness, a return of Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death". The dream image: We are all going to die. I fear I am never going to feel differently. I am completely at a loss about how to change or control these feelings.

A Job-like emptiness, a Roquestin nausea, like after Mery left.

Was that self-chosen? Groggy thoughts. Am I trying to think to clear my mind? Or do they thoughts just make it worse?

After she left, the horrible pain certainly didn't seem self-chosen. I don't believe it completely was. But I wonder how much that suffering was me trying to be the best--at suffering. If Mery has seen the nothingness, I'm going to show her that I can feel despair, pain, and existential nothingness even better than she does. I will out-existential the existentialists.

Is that the side of me that made me leave the comfort of Eilat? Push on to be the best? Then why do I stop and quit as I near the top of Sinai? I push my thumb into my index finger, hard, to....Why? Feel pain and punish myself? Stop my thoughts and clear my head? Make me feel like I'm giving myself pain--which is better than uncontrollable pain and groggy confusion that comes unbidden.

I think back to the sand dunes and the strength I had, in spite of pain.

I stand and once more begin taking a step at a time.

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A thousand steps to go?

It seems interminable.

But that means I've done twenty-five hundred.

One more step. Ever closer.

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The sky is light now.

Though I don't miss the weight of my camera, or having it hang around my neck, I wish it could magically appear in my hands. This is a scene I'd like to commemorate and immortalize.

If I had my camera with me, and took a picture, the snapshot of the sky would be ambiguous. It could be just after sunset, like when I was riding with Mery along the ocean. It could be just before sunrise, like at the top of the Crown Room. The same with a snapshot of the full moon. Either rising or setting.

Heights and Depths.

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I hear the group talking, and know that the top is just around one more bend. At first the murmurs are unintelligible. I'm surprised they're even talking at all. I'd have expected hushed tones. Silence. Solemnity. Instead there is chatter, and as I get closer, I can hear a few words: "Hungry." "I wonder what's for breakfast." This is not opening yourself to receive the sacred. How petty they are.

I think I even overhear someone talking about the tall lazy American who fell so far behind, I wonder if he'll even make it for the sunrise." Petty and judgmental.

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I arrive at a plateau on the top, joining the other members, Just as the sun begins to emerge, a shout goes up from the group, welcoming the light. Then we are still, and around us is an eerie and awesome quiet.

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I look from this lofty height over the pink morning sunrise, the cool blue light. The first sun rays reach us, illuminating--like little dust motes-- all the millions and millions of particles in the world that were previously invisible.

The bush was aflame but not consumed. Like the Hanukkah shamash candle-- sharing with others. New light is formed, but the old light loses nothing.

Stark, elegant, naked, fearful, majestic. Crystalline air.

I'm on a lofty pinnacle from which to view the world.

I think of the little fountain in Kansas City, from which I gave a Tarzan call, while sprinkles of water splashed over me. Some of the same exuberant, joyful feelings well up in me. Multiplied by hundreds. Thousands. I feel surrounded, at the top of a mountain rising out of desert, by an oceanic feeling of bliss. Sprinkles of water become waves become ocean. Water on a mountain in a desert. It makes no sense. I am not just splashed by water but feel surrounded as if in a sea of infinity. Swimming? Floating? Swelling with pride?

I feel like I am a distinct wave, yet if I were to break or fall or crash, all I would do is merge with the watery substance of which I am made. God as container and content.

Is this what it is like to experience God? To be a part of God? To be held by God? To feel like God? To be God?

Too many questions. I remain with the experience.

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Moments pass.

I realize the nausea is gone, completely gone. When I felt so dizzy and sick, it was impossible to imagine I could ever feel otherwise. As I climbed higher, the dizziness and loss of balance should have gotten worse. But it has magically disappeared, vanished. From these heights, with the joy I am feeling, I wonder if it was really as bad as I experienced it. I even question whether I ever really felt it. If so, where did it go? Absorbed back into me? Taken from me?

By whom?

"Trust...that you are loved."

By Whom?

I feel the heat of the suns' first rays on my forehead, my face, as if I'm being bathed with a warm cloth of comforting light. My heavenly Father healing me? I slowly turn and look out over the vistas. A 360 degree panorama unfolds before me. With each degree of my turn, I feel the same light, surrounding and caressing me. My heavenly Mother holding and protecting me?

I make a complete revolution. Back to the beginning. Only different. I feel once again like a little child, only now in a man's body. This time, my nausea is cured by my heavenly Father and by my heavenly Mother.

Both Father and Mother are One. One indistinguishable, radiant light, circling, enfolding, and loving me.

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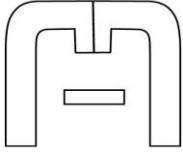
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nything you can do, I can do better. I can do anything better than you." As I finish writing about my ascent of Sinai now back in Jerusalem, I realize I'm humming a little song my brother and I used sing endlessly to each other. It was our anthem, and fit perfectly given Grandpa's competitive admonition to "Be the best."

As I hum it, I'm thinking of the Rebbe. After the Parashah session today, he said he had some things he wanted to talk to me about, but that "they weren't Shabbos conversations." Could I stop by for a few minutes on Monday, before Dr. Lisbet's tai chi class. I agreed. Reluctantly. Maybe I'll go, and maybe I won't. We'll see.

I bet he realizes he's losing me as a therapy patient, and that bothers him. His loss. Both of me, and of my money. I don't need him, and I'll save money. I can be my own therapist. Like the camel carrying his own food in its hump. The Rebbe made lists of topics to comment on when we were in therapy sessions. I've have done the same with the Sinai ascent. The advantage is I don't cost myself anything.

"Anything you can do, I can do better..."

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Writing about Sinai, it was hard restraining myself not to editorialize. I know the future, at least better than I did in Sinai. I also am a bit wiser. Perhaps at least some of that can be attributed to the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. Certainly, I'm better at understanding dreams.

What else do I need to explore? I consult my list.

**Golden calf: money, and possessions. I'm not quite as good here as I thought. I felt I was beyond money issues. Clearly, that's not the truth, given how much time I spend worrying about it. Same with possessions. I still have both flutes, and when I went back to Eilat after Sinai, Jean Claude again offered me my camera, and this time I took it. So, Mr. Cannon, though renamed more non-violently Mr. Reflection, is back in my possession.*

**Black/white thinking. When I saw the Bedouin's smile at Sinai, at first it seemed genuine, then mocking. I assumed it was only mocking. Not very nuanced. Same with the my view of faith versus doubt. Both the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet cautioned me about that type of either/or thinking. Dr. Lisbet said to read the theologian Paul Tillich on the relationship of doubt and faith--that faith can and will include doubt. I haven't yet, but maybe I will.*

**The dream and death. Grandma is dead. We all will die. The plane inevitably crashes. I was much too willing to focus on a brief moment of dancing joy. That does not resolve death. Is that either/or thinking? I don't think so.*

**"Trust...that you are loved." This may be the biggest wrestle for me since the ascent up Sinai.*

I knew then, and know now who and what I can't trust. My earthly father and mother; law school; Elizabeth Mery. I even have strong doubts about Dr. Lisbet and the Rebbe, supposedly God's representatives and ambassadors.

I do know what I experienced on the top of Sinai--a feeling of pure trust in God.

But now, in Jerusalem, two months later, the intensity and

joy has definitely dissipated.

I still want to believe in and trust that memory. But with time, it grows hazier. Reabsorbed into me? Taken from me? Did it really exist?

What does it mean to experience God? Moses was able to see only the back of God, for to see God directly was to have been too blinding. Elija heard a still small voice. Jesus said "the Father and I are One. (John 10:30)"

What really was my experience?

Is it logically possible --experientially possible-- for me to feel like I was a part of God, cradled and taken care of by God, and at the same time feel I was God? What does it mean to be God? How do I know whether those feeling were a complete experience of God, like Jesus', or only partial, like Moses'. Or whether the experience itself was an egocentric prideful return to Johannes, a primitive Tarzan-like euphoria from accomplishing a goal and climbing to the top of a mountain?

Who can I turn to for guidance and answers?

Only myself. To remind myself that I once felt my "self" part of the larger "Self." During the dark times, I need to remember the trust and love I felt at the heights. It is that memory that allows me to believe that love is possible. Divine love gives me the strength to keep going forward, and, to plunge once again into my past, where Johannes is at the pinnacle of his relationship with Mery. I remember in my writing class where the teacher said "in every good story there is a turning point. That toward which things have been building and after which things change." Johannes at the Fairmont. Moses at Sinai. Although Johannes doesn't yet know it,

there is only one way for him to go. Just like after you reach the top of Sinai--the ascent--there is only one way to go.

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I can't believe how many pathetic, angry, terrible drivers there are on the road. The drive south from Mery's on Sunday was a nerve-wracking nightmare. Through luck, skill, and Mr. Red's reliable performance and speed, I made it home safely.

Parting was difficult. When I got home, I added some notes to my file about our visit to feed the homeless, which should be helpful for my political science class on the elderly and social security.

I realize that "home" is a temporary word. I only have eight more weeks left at the Farm, and then all structure here completely disappears. It's hard to hold that thought in my mind at the same time return and commit to a dissolving framework.

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It's been hard for me to get back to the order and structure of my classes these past couple of weeks, but I am thankful for the framework, even if only temporary.

Like summers, or vacations, lack of structure is hard for me without a plan. I wonder if that's why I would try to fill the start of my summers when I was younger with counting numbers, and writing them down. A meaningless ritual in which each summer I would try to beat my past record, and count higher and higher.

Somehow I have been able these last two weeks to return to semblance of normaly--flute playing, my classes, my tennis at the Farm--even while knowing each day brings me closer to the Farm's demise--or rather the demise of my time at the Farm.

It's interesting that what Johannes is saying about graduation,

from a larger perspective, is true of life. Certainly on the physical plane, it will end, yet we try to connect to a dissolving framework. That's not easy.

It's hard to maintain intensity and focus. Especially when nearly all my thoughts are on Mery, and wanting to return to see her. We've talked daily, often for hours. Some nights, in fact, when I was having trouble sleeping, because I missed her so much, I'd lie in bed and she'd read me a story over the phone until I fell asleep. Winnie the Pooh. She loves Tigger, though she sometimes says she feels more like Eyore. King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

The talk is often about daily events--she tells me how mean her boss is to her; or how some customer is really nice. I try to help her solve the problems, though sometimes there are silences and it feels awkward on the phone. And I also catch myself becoming a little jealous when I hear of nice customers, especially if it's a male, a potential rival. She just laughs at me "Silly boy. You have nothing to worry about." I want to trust her. But I know I do have something to worry about---when Grandpa \$ gets these phone bills.

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How do you create a day?

Johannes structure is provided for him: classes leading to a degree leading to the next rung on the career ladder. Even as he realizes his framework is ebbing, he still acts. I admire his focus and energy. I know they will later waver and he will end up like me!

By choosing to leave the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet's counseling,

I once again face empty days, and the realization that I have no external framework at all. I can't--don't seem to be able--to stay on the raw edge of existence, creating every moment.

I make a list of hobbies and activities I can do by myself. I'm slightly embarrassed at doing this, like I'm just a big baby, though with a modicum of consciousness, trig to figure how to play and amuse myself.

1) Take small excursions to different sites I'm reading about in the Old and New Testaments. That will get me out of this room.

2) Self improvement. I love to play with words. So, take I'll take a half hour each day for a cross word puzzle. That will keep my vocabulary sharp.

3) Keep carving the chess set, to get me out of my mind.

4) Keep playing music.

a) Practice some etudes. Work on tone, fingering speed, rhythm. b) Play free form, just feeling the music.

There, now life seems more structured.

See, baby John, there are lots of ways to create order, meaning and purpose. Some may be received. Some are self-created.

I wonder what the non-shabbos issues are that the Rebbe wants to talk to me about. I feel like I'm being called into Dad's room to be grounded, or spanked.

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My main task is still to continue my forward and back time travel and reflection. Me as Johannes, continuing his dance with Mery, literally and symbolically, including some more heated "discussions"

about human law and God.

Me as Moses on the top of Sinai, asking God for guidance in
The next step of my life.

And me in Jerusalem, trying to see if all these different
selves can come together and make sense. I feel like I'm working
at both ends of time. Jumping from past to present and present to
past.

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I hope, like Shakespeare when he was writing his historical
plays, Richard 11, Henry IV and V, that somehow I will be able to
order history--the past-- , and give it meaning. Is it ironic that I
read the tragedies Henry 1V and V first--in America--, the class
assignments. Then I take Richard 11 with me to the kibbutz. It's
as if I read the future before I read the past. Sinai before
Carmel. Story of my life?

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Maybe like the building of the Union Pacific Railroad--one
group building tracks west to east; another east to west, even-
tually there will come a point when the last stake is nailed in,
and the tracks will seamlessly join. That union, in turn will
hopefully create a smooth transition and become the railroad tracks of
my future. Working backward and forward, I will come together somehow
with that last stake.

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I'm dawdling. I don't want to leave the top of Sinai and
the magnificent, Moses-like, even Jesus-like experience of en-
countering God. I don't want to face the descent, either there,
or with Johannes and Mery.

With both descents, at least I know what is coming. My only task is to figure out how or if I could have lived those days better or wiser; and what I can learn from my mistakes and foibles. Recycling their lives, I can see into and know the future--for I am it. And in my present life, I'm seeking to gain wisdom from the past, to create a more meaningful future.

Enough procrastinating. To the task. Again, I realize there is not much I can control in my life, but one thing I can control is when I stop reading and writing about my past selves. And which one I choose to read about. Do I want to read about Johannes, or write about coming down Sinai? Ah, control. Right?

Control? Self-created? or the illusion thereof?

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I received a present today from Mery in the mail. A book by Martin Buber "I-Thou." In it she inscribed,

"To J, my 'thou,' who helps me to see the dash (-) --God-- in my Life through a loving relationship. Thank you. Love, E.M."

When I call to thank her, there's no answer. Assuming she's at work, I call David's, but they say she's not working today. Where could she be? Perhaps she's painting and doesn't want to be disturbed.

Maybe I should drive up and surprise her.

I think about how cute she was at the Fairmont. "What are you going to do with the pictures you took of me 'down there?'" Down there! What a naive little girl.

I haven't yet developed them, but as I image her, what comes to mind is her face. How expressive her face is, and how fluidly she shifts through a range of emotions, each flowing into the other. Beautiful eyes. Amazingly trusting. "I feel so

comfortable with you."

I decide it will take too much time to make the drive to see her, and I have a lot of work to do. I can wait a couple more days until our "date" when she is going to cook for me and says she has a surprise for me. When I asked for a hint, she only said "JJ".

In the meantime, I'll develop the pictures. That way she'll be here with me even during her absence.

* * *

Later that evening, after several more calls, she finally picks up.

"Hi, I've been trying to get ahold of you. Your book arrived today. Thank you so much."

"Oh, I'm glad you like it. Did you read my inscription?"

"Of course. It's beautiful. What is with the dash and God?"

"Buber sees connection between people as evidence of God. He's spiritual, mystical, and Jewish."

"Sounds like the Trinity. I'll read it for sure." Trying to sound as if it's an offhanded comment, even though it's an implied question (Where were you?), I state, "I've been calling since early afternoon, but couldn't reach you. I even tried David's."

"Are you checking up on me?" She responds more defensively than I'd expected.

"What? Of course not. I just wanted to thank you."

"Oh."

Silence. I try again. "But you didn't say where you were."

More silence. Then, her defensiveness disappears, and she says, "Remember when we were in the Shakespeare Garden the first

time, I told you I volunteered with autistic kids doing art therapy."

"Yes."

"Well, that's where I was. Working with a group of them."

I want to ask "All afternoon and evening?!" But I know that sounds like some distrustful jealousy slipping through and she'd be annoyed with me and pull back. Instead I go with safety, and compliment:

"You really are amazing. The homeless, the retarded. What a good-hearted person."

"Thanks. It's good to hear your voice. Actually, I'm feeling discouraged. It's nice to hear some words of encouragement."

"What's wrong?"

"Aren't you tired? It's late. Are you sure you want to hear this?"

"Of course. I love the sound of your voice. In fact, I almost drove up this afternoon to surprise you."

I await some affirmative response like "That would have been great," Or "Wow, pretty spontaneous!" She says nothing. There is just silence.

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I sit and look at a picture of her jumping on the Fairmont bed. By doing so, I restrain myself from becoming annoyed at her non-responsiveness, and from probing. Instead, I ask her to tell me about her work with the kids.

"What motivated you to begin that, to work with them in particular?"

"I've been doing it for years. I told you when I was younger, I was dyslexic, didn't I?"

Did she. I don't remember. "Dyslexic? What exactly does

that mean."

"Just that I turn things around sometimes, words, letters.

Do you have a piece of paper and a pen near you."

"Yes."

"Make a small r."

"Done."



"Do you see that the top of the vertical meets the left hand part of the line at the top?"


"Yes."

"Well, I'd draw the vertical line starting on the right side of the top line. Try drawing that."



"Done. It looks like an inverted J."

"I did that too. I'd write the J of my last name as if it

were . That was me. I literally saw the world, or parts of it, differently than anyone else. I quickly learned that people are often caught up in their own perspective. No one ever really made the attempt to understand how I was seeing things. So I made it one of my goals to really see through the eyes of others."

What a refreshing idealism, though very close to naivete.

"You would be a good lawyer. One of the fundamental principles of the British Constitution is just that: *audi alteram partem.*"

"Exactly."

"Do you know Latin?" I say with some surprise. I was expecting she'd ask for a translation.

"No, but that's pretty simple: *audi:* from audio; *alter...*the other, like alter ego; *partem*. Duh. Not everyone who doesn't go to Stanford is a dunce!"

Is she being playful, in a sarcastic style, like my family? Is she feeling hurt? Was I being patronizing? Sarcasm is sometimes hard to read, and everything gets so complicated. Fine, I can dish it back.

"I thought you were this spiritual, kind-hearted, innocent girl. Where is this sarcasm coming from?"

"You. You're my role model." She laughs somewhat awkwardly. "Just kidding. You're right. My therapist told me I need to take things less seriously and be less sensitive when I get into one of my 'down' moods. You seem to make light of everything--oops, I did it again!--sorry. But maybe that's something I'm learning from you. You said you like that quality in others. Maybe I'm trying to please you. Maybe it's from being around the other waitresses. It seems a way to toughen up, keep the world at a distance, say something without having to take responsibility for really saying it. I'm not exactly sure yet how to be less serious, more playful. I'm still learning."

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She seemed pretty playful and spontaneous at the Fairmnt, jumping around on the bed. But I don't say anything. I don't really like where this conversation is going--I make light of everything; I use sarcasm to avoid responsibility; I'm the evil force teaching her sarcasm. Poor little lamb. I feel to continue in this vein would to enter a briar patch. I want to change the subject and return to the topic of her kids. "Tell me more about what you do with these retarded children."

"I don't really like the word 'retarded' it's become so

pejorative, a taunt kids use on the playground." She's right about that. I used to make fun of several "less athletically gifted" kids like that. Do I hear another criticism? It's so hard not being with her in person. I don't say anything.

"Because people didn't try to understand me I decided I'd work with children with disabilities, kids who seemed isolated and couldn't be reached. I want to get into their world, to see if I could understand things as they did, rather than making them conform to my world."

"How do you try to do that?"

"One of my former professors, an art therapist, said he thought I could use my art gifts as a non-verbal way of communicating with them. A way to bypass words and get to feelings. So, I assist in a weekly class he teaches the autistic kids. We use art, talk, touch if they allow it. Anything I can find that might work."

During her monologue, I take out a couple of pictures from the first time I photographed her--at the Shakespeare garden, wearing that bright yellow dress, and blue shawl. I compare them to the ones at the Fairmont.

"Art. Touch. Lovely. That's really lovely," I say, as I stroke myself. "So, why the discouragement?" Good for me. Reinforcing, solicitous. I vaguely wonder if I should ask her more about this former art Professor she's assisting. But I'm drawn to another one of her pictures.

Arousal trumps the desire to query.

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She continues to chatter as I notice the way the blue shawl innocently falls off her shoulder. Could she have had any idea at

that moment in Golden Gate Park that less than a month later she would be letting me photograph her at the Fairmont nude? I look at her facing the camera as she dips a banana into the chocolate fondue. What does she mean she doesn't know how to play. I begin stroking myself.

"I've been seeing some of them for several years. I've tried with every ounce of my strength to communicate with them, but there are still many that I haven't even begun to reach." Her voice has a tone of weary resignation.

"That must be really painful." And now, she's holding the banana above her head, as the chocolate drips into her mouth.

Why does she voluntarily put herself in a situation-like with those kids-- that is so difficult and frustrating? What a painful waste of time and energy. I know that's not the right thing to say. "I'm really sorry. I'm sure you must have helped a some." That's good. A kindly empathetic response.

This is embarrassing to read. What a hypocrite. Johannes, are you really such a sexual-obsessed, emotionless robot? She's in pain, and you are basically ignoring her and seeking to gratify yourself. And if you hadn't been so involved in ignoring her pain for your pleasure, you might have wondered how she was able to so completely let go of restraint at the Fairmont. That might have been a warning sign, which you completely missed.

I look at a voluptuous picture of her, taking the chocolate covered banana, and looking straight into the camera, starting to suck on it, hollowing her cheeks. My lingham continues to be re-born.

"I can't even imagine how frustrating that is. I really

admire you for trying. I know I don't have kind of patience.
Would you like me to drive up and be with you?" I ask, trying to
keep my voice filled with compassion, and not with excitement.

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"That's so sweet of you." Watching her suck the chocolate-
covered banana, I want to say, "You are the one who is sweet."
But I just keep listening.

"I'm sorry I'm like this. I get so frustrated with myself
that I can't do more. I would feel horrible even if there were
only one child I couldn't reach. But there are so many. How did
Jesus deal with the frustration --there are so many to heal, so
many hurting and suffering, so many who stand by and seem imper-
vious to the suffering of others?"

Those who stand by impervious? Ouch. That's too close to the
bone. My lingham starts to shrink. I put her pictures down.
Though I'm feeling tense, it's clear to me this conversation is
not setting the right mood for achieving an orgasm. I'm feeling
annoyed. Also impressed.

The latter seems more strategic to share, so I say "You
really are a sensitive soul, aren't you?" while I think to my-
self, with more than a trace of sarcasm, what should we call you,
Saint Elizabeth? Saint Mery?

"If you knew what else I was thinking you wouldn't say that.
It's embarrassing to tell you this, but sometimes I get frustrat-
ed, even angry at God. I don't understand how a loving God can
let children be born who can't be reached, who can't show or seem
to feel or receive love.

"My therapist tells me we're all wounded, but some wounds
just seem too deep. How can children be born that way? I've

tried to study it--is it something human caused? Pollutants in the environment? Parents drinking? I won't allow myself to believe a loving God can allow this to happen to those beautiful, innocent children."

I can't tell whether she's angry or crying. "And I can do nothing, absolute nothing, to help them."

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I'm not exactly sure what to say. What I want to say is "Well, either God isn't all that compassionate, or has a crazy sense of humor, or doesn't exist." Probably not the best response.

I'm also feeling irritated. This is definitely not the most conducive conversation for having an orgasm.

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"Are you sure you don't want me to come up?"

"No, thank you. I wouldn't be that much fun to be with tonight. Also my therapist said I have to learn to find ways to cope with these feelings myself. Somehow I have to keep myself open, and not shut down. Sometimes I can do that. Other times it just hurts too much. Then I close down to the kids, to the world."

"What does your therapist suggest you do when that happens?" I look down at the pictures and my limp shaft of light.

"Sometimes it helps if play the piano, or paint, or run until I'm completely drained. Then I just sit down and cry."

I like the image of seeing her run. My lingam starts to revive. I give it a stroke, but know that sharing with her my

ideas for letting off energy and staying open to the world would probably not be such a good move. "Well, just know I'm here if you want to talk, and of course I'd come up if that would help. You know, give you a cuddle." And....

"Thank you so much. It does help talking to you. I feel like we really are having an I-Thou encounter. Just talking to you helps me feel more open. I feel you not only as the Thou, but also as part of the dash of God."

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As I sit looking at her pictures and stroking myself, I feel a bit awkward being called the dash of God. "That's very kind of you. I'm not sure I deserve that."

"Ah, modest, too." I hear her laugh. It's a bit forced, but it seems she's trying to be more cheerful.

"How do you cope with all the pain and suffering you see around you?" she asks.

"I'm afraid in this area I'm pretty far behind you. To be truthful, mainly I try to avoid it. I'm only slowly coming to the realization-- with your help-- just how much suffering there is in the world. Thanks a lot for showing me the world's pain. I really feel much happier, now."

"Do I detect a bit of that Kansas City family sarcasm you've told me about coming through?"

"Just a tad. Actually, you do make me think about what it means to be sensitive to the world and others beyond where and how it affects me directly. That is new for me, and I'm not really very good at it. Remember the story I told you about the doctor and my double chin?"

"How could I forget?"

"Well, he was trying to encourage me to get more involved with the world, and be less self-absorbed. I think you're helping show me how to do that in a caring, giving way. So, really, thank you for opening me to a larger world."

"That is so kind of you to say. By the way, remember you said you had a couple other experiences like that you were going to tell me."

"That's it, rub it in. Does it make you feel better to hear what a pathetic non-giving person I am? Thanks a lot. What happened to my being part of the dash of God?"

"Please. I promise. No judgment, and only a few giggles. Especially if it's as weighty as the last one."

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"Spring of freshman year, a group from our dorm went hiking in Yosemite with our resident assistant."

"That sounds fun. I can't wait to hear how you screwed up."

"Thanks, Ms. Understanding. Speaking of 'weighty' I'd just finished a diet Dr. Pepper, and threw the can into the woods, off the trail."

"No, you didn't."

"Thanks again for your understanding. Look, you can see how far I've come. Remember how I helped pick up after us at the Shakespeare garden?"

"Right, after I reminded you."

"Well, no one's perfect. I told you, I'm still a work in progress when it comes to helping be of service and clean up the litter of the world."

"Litter? Are you referring only to things, or to people,

too--like my little kids, or the men on Sixth Street?"

"Come on. This is hard enough. Bad choice of words. No, of course not. Of course not."

"Sorry, I'm being too sensitive. My therapist says I overreact sometimes. Go on."

"I thought nothing of tossing the can. The RA, who was walking behind me, angrily yelled for the group to stop. I had no idea why. He said something about how pristine and lovely nature is, and that I have no right to use it as my personal trash can. That each of us has a responsibility to pick up after ourselves, and we weren't going to continue hiking until I retrieved the soda can. I was confused. This was not a lesson or value that my family had ever practiced. Wasn't nature big enough to absorb all our waste? He sounded preachy. I also thought of my Latin teacher yelling at me, calling me a prima donna when I was putting my clutter in the trash can. I felt like the world was so unfair, and I just couldn't win."

"Your family seems so nice. I'm really surprised that they wouldn't teach you not to litter."

"Yea, it's their fault, right?" If you only knew.

"You sound like such a poor misunderstood little boy. Everybody seems so mean to you. I wish I were there to cuddle you."

"Better. This is the girl I know and love."

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"It may sound somewhat humorous now, but at the time, I was angry. I didn't like being singled out like that in front of my dorm mates. If it had just been the two of us, I'd have told him not to be ridiculous, since I'd thrown the can far

enough off the trail so that no one could see it. I didn't understand why he was making such a big deal about it. But I didn't like the peer pressure and holding everybody up, so I grudgingly found it, and was forced to carry it with me the whole trip. I felt like an idiot."

"You were an idiot. I'm glad I didn't know you then."

"That's not non-judgmental! Are you feeling better now--at my expense?"

"Sorry, but we do have to take care of nature."

"Am I receiving another sermon?"

"Sorry, you're right, I'm not keeping my promise. Please go on."

"That was the easy story. The next one is even worse."

"I can't imagine."

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"When I was 18, I was drafted. I dutifully went. After being stripped, prodded, and probed, I was given a classification of 1Y, ready for service. I felt enormous fear, and I wondered, Could I say I'm a conscientious objector to get out of it. I had heard of people who didn't believe in taking another life under any circumstances and that this belief kept them out of combat. I liked the idea of avoiding combat, but wasn't sure I believed what they did. It wasn't something I'd given any thought to. I would just be making it up as an excuse. So, I said nothing.

"About 20 minutes later, as I was getting dressed, an officer came to me, and said, 'Son, I've got some bad news for you.' I now really felt scared. Were they going to send me immediately to Vietnam? I looked up at him, expectantly, and he said:

"'Unfortunately, because of the deafness in your left ear,

we feel you would be a liability to us on the front line. You might not hear orders that would put your life, and the life of your fellow soldiers at risk. I know you're going to be sorry to hear that we've reclassified you as 4F, unfit for service. You won't be able to serve your country in combat.'

"I looked appropriately deferential and saddened, but inside there was the biggest whoop of joy you could imagine."

"I'm glad you didn't go," Mery replies. "Taking another life is wrong. I like that story better than the first one, even though it sounds like you hadn't really formulated a philosophy about war and killing. What do you believe now?"

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I feel like I'm in a confessional booth, with lovely voluptuous pictures lying all around me, and a stern super-egoic task master is making me psychologically and spiritually probe and inspect myself. How did I get from the arousal of those pictures to here? I turn the pictures over. Is there any way to just say good night, and end this conversation? I feel like a cartoon snake who's eaten something that you can see is half way down it's body. Somehow I have to dislodge it to get it out of me.

"Before we jump to my current beliefs, let me finish the story."

"I thought you were done."

"No, that was only the prelude. Flash forward seven months. I'm now in the spring of my freshman year at Stanford, and have been elected president of my freshman dorm."

"Wait, are you doing it again, telling a story that's supposed to put you in a bad light, but really using it as a pretext for bragging." Her voice sounds like it's trying to be playful,

but do I hear a bit of an edge? It's really hard to tell when you can't see the person.

"Just you wait. Then there was a council of presidents of all eight freshman dorms. I was elected president of the president's council. I know, this sounds like it's becoming increasingly self-serving, but bear with me.

"One of my tasks was to introduce distinguished speakers who visited the campus. In the spring, William Sloan Coffin came to visit. I had no idea who he was, so I perfunctorily read his bio blurb: 'Yale Chaplain, etc etc'. His topic was the Vietnam War. Since I was now classified 4f and couldn't be drafted, I wasn't particularly interested in what he was going to say. If it wouldn't have seemed too rude, I would have left after performing my presidential ceremonial duties."

"See, you've had a sensitive soul in you right from the beginning."

"Thank you. I will take that how I am sure it was meant. To continue, there were perhaps two dozen people in the room. He began by saying, 'There is a war going on in Vietnam. Our reasons for being there are not clear. Yet more and more of our sons are over there fighting and dying. Do any of you have any thoughts or feelings about this?'

"Later I found out he was a very dedicated antiwar protester, and was helping young men explore their own views on war, peace, conscientious objector status.

"I looked inside, and I saw that now that this war was not a part of my future. I actually had not thought about it again, and had no feelings whatsoever, one way or the other. My

job was to get good grades, do well in school, and get into law school. What compelled me to share that so honestly and baldly, I still don't know, but I did:

"I really don't think about it at all. It has no relevance in any way to me."

"There was a stunned silence. I thought perhaps people were impressed with my candid declaration. Reverend Coffin also was speechless for a long minute. He then went on, 'I believe that one day you will see it may have more direct relevance to you than you think. And that one day you may learn to give something to a cause larger than your own limited self-interest. Now, does anyone else have some thoughts or questions?'"

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I wait for Mery to say something, but the phone is silent. I wish I could see her face. Maybe.

"Silence was what I received then, and what I'm receiving now."

"Don't you realize that this war is causing people to search at the deepest level of their morality for answers about how to respond to the draft and the war?"

"Yes. now I get that. I told you I'm not proud of these stories. I realize I sound spoiled, picked on, misunderstood. But that's who I was. Until I met you. Seeing the way you give to others helps me to begin to realize my own naivete and even callousness. In retrospect, it's actually amazing how composed Reverend Coffin was, not angry and pissy like my Latin teacher. I guess he could have deservedly verbally pummeled me. I suppose you can too if you want."

More silence.

"Are you trying not to be judgmental?" I say somewhat defensively."

"No, well, yes. Honestly, I think it's very brave of you to share that with me. It shows you trust me a lot.

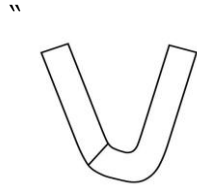
I'm not exactly sure what she means, but at this point the last thing I want is to prolong the conversation. I'm feeling tense, tired, drained. Not from giving service, but from talking about how I didn't. I hope she's feeling better, because I'm certainly not. I'm tired of this masochist self-crucifying conversation.

I turn over her pictures and look at her smiley chocolate covered face, tongue out, leering at a banana. That's the face I want to see. The Mery of the pictures is speaking to me a lot louder than this whimpery, guilty, religious-spouting, judgmental girl on the phone. There's only so much of that I can take.

"I do. I trust you. Now, it's late. We both need some sleep. I'll see you in two days. Sweet dreams."

I hang up the phone, pick up a picture and begin stroking my lingam. Sweet dreams, indeed.

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visualize a teeter totter. There is a shift, based on the fulcrum in the middle." The professor draws an upside down V on the blackboard. ^ He superimposes his arm above the upside down V. "What was up comes down, what was down, goes up." Here he raises his elbow, lowers his hand, then raises his hand, lowers his elbow, in a rocking motion. "At some point in your narrative arc, gradually or in a defining moment, there needs to be a shift in a character's evolution or devolution."

"Does it always need to be in the middle, like the fulcrum of the teeter-totter?"

"I'm sorry?" The professor replies, with somewhat of an incredulous look.

"I'm just wondering does the shift always have to occur in the middle of the work."

"You mean, like take the length of the work, divide it by 2, and then have it on that page?"

"Well, something like that. Or the mid point of the second act of a three part play?"

"Are you an engineering major?"

"No, pre-law."

"That figures. And why are you taking this class?"

"To have some fun, work on being more creative."

"Well, in all my years of teaching creative writing, I have never heard such an absurd and uncreative question. No, no, no."

There is no precise midpoint where a shift should occur. Don't take things so literally. It's not like Sisyphus needs to push the rock up the mountain, and reach the top in the middle of the story. Are you taking this class pass/no credit?"

"Yes."

"Wise choice. Stick to your day job. I'm sure you'll make a fine lawyer."

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Unbidden, the image of the skull in my dream last night returns. I feel a shudder run through me. It's almost as if I'm not able to control my body's trembling. The sun, which is rising higher, should be warming me. But I feel cold, scared.

Why this image? Why now? What does it mean? Where in my subconscious is it coming from? My death? Grandma's dying?

From this lofty peak, looking up at the sky, at the desert below, opening myself to the wisdom of God's presence, feeling a moment ago a message of trust and love, seeking my meaning and purpose, what I'm now receiving is a morbid and frightening image of "skulls."

We begin our descent.

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The way down physically is a lot easier. There is light, we are going down rather than up. Others are chatting playfully, even gleefully. I am silent. I imagine Sisyphus' stone rolling down the hill. Physically easier, mentally much harder.

What I'd hoped for on Sinai hadn't happened. Yes, I'd felt the experience, viscerally, of trust and love. But I'd also heard those words in Jerusalem. What's missing is some sense of purpose

and meaning. I don't want to just lie around on Coral Beach for the rest of my life.

And the message I get about direction is nothing but a version of "Yorrick, I knew him well." I feel a heaviness and darkness returning, even as the sun rises and becomes hotter.

** * **

I return to my tent and begin to pack up. A group is gathering outside to have lunch. I'm not really hungry and decide to continue my fast.

Then I remember.

The skull.

It's not from the dream that I first saw it.

In the St Catherine's Monastery, the day before, during the tour, I saw a whole room of skulls. I'd briefly looked in, but then quickly left. Why had I blocked that out? It's so obvious why I had a dream of the skull. And why it came to me on Sinai. Just a repressed bad memory.

I continue packing.

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For some reason, maybe like a moth to a flame, I feel a desire to go back to the monastery and look more carefully at the room of skulls. Instead of lunch with the group, I go off on my own--like in high school.

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As I enter, I find myself drawn to one skull in particular. A nameless person. I read the inscription. A brief story about a life. A person who came to Sinai, lost and confused, looking for a sense of purpose. What meaning could he find for his life at the base of Sinai? What message and meaning can I find for my

life once having climbed the holy mountain? The inscription said he asked himself what is most needed for fellow travelers and wanderers, in the middle of the desert? What could be his highest calling?

He decided to devote his life to serving water to those making the climb up Sinai.

* * *

I remember Mery when I first met her. A waitress, serving. I smile at the image of her awkward shyness, especially when she gave me milk when I'd asked for water.

No matter what she does, she told me, her goal was to serve: her customers, the autistic kids, as a waitress, people who saw her paintings, the men on Sixth Street. I remember the Minister at Glide, asking "Do you follow the laws of God, or the laws of man?"

This nameless person, now a skull, decided his life was to be devoted to giving to others, to nourishing them with life-sustaining water. What is most needed, physically and spiritually thirsty, in the desert, climbing Sinai--seeking God--is water.

In some way, the content of which I do not yet know, my direction, becomes clear to me. I am going to be a person who "serves water."

Wherever I end up in life, my task is to find out what those around me needed on their quest and pilgrimage up their mountain and to serve them water.

Simple, clear, direct. My meaning and purpose.

I can be someone who serves.

Serving water....

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There is no one so convinced of the truth and righteousness

of his understanding and path as a person who feels he has recently received, and decided to follow, a direct communication from the Almighty.

Like Moses, feeling the sacred in the fire of the burning bush; and on Sinai, amidst the thunder, clouds, and fire receiving God's words, commandments, and laws.

Hearing God in the whirlwind, not knowing how to counter the Lord's self-proclaimed list of accomplishments, Job in the Biblical story proclaims, "Things too wonderful for me which I did not know...now my eye sees Thee...Therefore I retract and I repent in dust and ashes." All doubt and complaining in the early and middle parts of the story are swept away.

Of course, it's nice that the ending is happy: the Lord, after telling Job to "gird up your loins like a man," hears the repentance of his "servant Job" and restores his fortunes twofold: "brothers and sisters comforted him and he had sons and daughters and grandchildren."

And then there's Jonah, called to service by the Lord: "Arise, go to Nineveh and cry against it's wickedness." Instead, Jonah tries to flee to Tarshish, running away from the Lord's instructions. On the ship, he's thrown overboard into the sea and swallowed by a whale. The Rebbe said, during his Fall Preview Yom Kippur talk, that the darkness of the whale can be understood as a time to be alone, a time of meditation and reflection.

I wonder if that is why Jesus' withdraws from the crowds in John 5:13? A way to take quiet space and reflect, pray, meditate?

Once vomited from the whale onto dry land, Jonah is a transformed person, "Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord."

Moses, Job, Jonah, Jesus-- their transformed hearts filled with wonder, awe, and evangelical purpose.

Such a person sometimes is not all that pleasant to be around.

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Serving water....

The vision seems conceptually perfect.

And how ironic.

I receive this understanding not at the top of Sinai, but at the base, after the climb.

And it was an answer that was before my eyes all along.

I saw the skulls before the climb, in reality. Then a skull appeared to me in my dream. Then, in horror, I saw the skull at the top of the mountain, but didn't realize what it meant (or that it was an answer). Only after climbing the mountain, and returning to the hall of skulls did its meaning for me become clear.

It reminds me of the story Reb Jonathan told about the person from Poland who dreams of a treasure in a house in England. He goes to England, finds the house, and inside the house is a note, saying the treasure is buried under his bed in his house in Poland. Did I have to climb the mountain to find out the answer lay at the base of the mountain?

God works in mysterious ways.

* * *

I have a humorous image.

I visualize the mountain as a triangle, with a wide base,


and a point at the top.  *Normally, wisdom occurs at the top of*


the mountain. For me, it occurred at the base. I rotate the "mountain" triangle 180 degrees, so that it that the tip is on

the ground, the base in the air.



Playing with the two triangles in my mind, I see my life journey. If I put the tips together, it forms an hour glass. Mom used to say an "hourglass" was the perfect shape of a woman. Big

in the breasts and hips, narrow in the waist.  The phase of Johannes and women, which is now over.

If I move the two triangles toward each other, eventually the shape becomes a Star of David. 

From the sensuality of Johannes to the spirituality of the Jewish religion.

My way is clear as a still pond: to be an oasis in the desert. I look forward to returning to the world share what I'm learning. I feel like Jonah, emerging from the long darkness in the womb of the whale, re-born to listen to, serve, and heed God's calling.

As a wise person once said:

Escape the many for the One

Embrace the many as the One.

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I have a feeling of contentment. The way up the mountain--to escape the many, to find the One--was arduous. I'm not a little embarrassed that part of my time was spent thinking about a dental experience, and how bad I felt being the slowest climber.

But now I am ready to embrace the many as the One.

Where and how to begin?

As I meditate, the image of the inverted triangle again returns, this time as part of an hourglass image one of my psychology professors used in talking about research. He said that the research process can be understood as an hourglass. At the top of the hour glass, you have your conceptual vision, your goal, your intention, what you want to do, in the broadest possible way, such as I want to do research that helps people feel more mentally healthy.

Then, he said, you have to start narrowing down the hourglass: operationalizing your terms: what do I mean by mentally healthy? Finding the population you want to work with: e.g., children, adults, type of psychopathology. What clinical interventions do you want to use to "help" people feel healthy? All these questions move you down to the narrowest part of the hourglass, so that eventually you have a researchable question: such as, What effect will progressive relaxation have on male college students with test-taking anxiety.

There are two important points in this process. First, you can't stay at the top of the hour glass--it's too much in the clouds. Narrowing is necessary and inevitable. Secondly, you must make sure that when you narrow, you don't lose sight of the top of the hour glass, so that what you study is congruent with your theory and goals.

This model seems perfect for me now, though not applied to a prosaic research project, but to my life.

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Serving water....embracing the many as the one.

The top of the hour glass.

But how do I narrow it down?

How do you operationalize serving water? To whom? Under what conditions? What do I need to learn to do this? More education? By whom? These are questions I need to ask as I go down toward the narrower part of my hour glass of life.

I sit, a lone voice here in the wilderness, and begin to meditate on how to translate serving water into a practical vocation, a profession.

I wonder what experience my fellow travelers had on Sinai. I realize that many of them probably made the climb more out of curiosity or adventure than spiritual seeking. How many of them are ready to receive God's law?

I sense I have a responsibility to share with others, to help point out to them see their spiritual yearning and thirst, even if they don't yet recognize it, or know how best to structure it.

No matter what group of people I think about, I can see how the application of God's law will help them.

I think of those homeless folks on Sixth Street.

Serving water.

What were those poor alcoholics drinking? "Spirits."

What did they need? The Spirit.

Their suffering was so great. No wonder I was in such pain.

This was an authentic response from Johannes as he starts to emerge from his castle into the real world. And an accurate assessment by John. Yet, even as I have compassion for both of them,

I also notice some judgment. It's still all about self: might this reaction to others suffering--how it affects him so deeply and causes him so much pain-- be just the slightest bit self-absorbed and narcissistic? *Either I had to blind myself, to run away, somehow distance myself to become closed to their misery; or I had to take it on and solve it myself. Either I was hard as stone, cold and unfeeling, or I was overwhelmed and submerged in grief.*

And how was I going to try to help them? I remember Mac telling me I should focus on a specific group; so, at his suggestion, I chose to focus on old homeless alcoholic men, the group from which he came, and the ones whom he was currently trying to help.

Now, my efforts seem embarrassing-- to admit that, at the time, I was so self-important that I thought my honor's thesis on social security legislation and the aged might somehow help, if not save them. What a pompous idiot I was.

Or even thinking that becoming a lawyer, and working through fallible, imperfect, human laws would really assist them. I still envisioned the law as a promised land, if only it could be improved and changed. In some ways I saw myself as the self-appointed savior of those people there.

But the absurdity of the law is clearly seen in trying to administer it, and at every turn it violates precepts of both justice and mercy. Human law can never be a base from which to launch my life.

Now, what I want is to point the way to the One who embodies God's law. I could return to work there, to help the poor, the downtrodden, the weak.

Yet, this time I would return from a different perspective, representing not man's law, but the law of God, the statutes and

ordinances which the Lord commanded Moses at Sinai, law that is certain, perfect, permanent.

What the world needs is for people to understand God's law. In the harvest story in the Book of Ruth, Biblical Hebrews set aside part of the field for the poor and the stranger. People sharing and caring for one another based on Gods' laws.

Are those old homeless people the one's I'm supposed to help? Is that where my path lies?

Mery would be so surprised....and awed by the change in me.

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Or I could return to the kibbutz at Galilee where godless socialism reigns. The kibbutzniks, like most of Israeli Jews--except the ultra Orthodox--have fallen away from a spiritual focus. I could try to convince them that we do not live by bread alone, to re-introduce Moses' law to help them see the rewards "if you hearken to these laws and follow them carefully...." (Deut 7:12-11.25):

Suddenly, I know my next step. It is from the Orthodox, the true Jews in Israel, that I need to learn from and study with. Dr. Lisbet and the Rebbe seem like they have some good things to say, but obviously she doesn't know the details of God's law, and I'm not sure how Kosher he really is, either. I need to learn from real, authentic Jews, who know God's law inside and out.

I've been trying to do it all myself by reading and studying the Old and New Testament. I need teachers, guidance, wise mentors, a structure and a framework, more education, more study.

It is they from whom I need to learn more about God's law and how to follow it more exactly. I should read and study the

Talmud--Mishnah and Gemarah--our guidebook to daily living. I'll have to deepen my Hebrew, and learn Aramaic to study it in the original. All the necessary information that I lack is there: daily prayers, ethical business dealings, observing the Sabbath, kosher rules, laws of marriage and divorce. There is nothing in Jewish life that evades a Jewish law. Meaningless words before my revelation, meaningful now.

The answer has been right before me all along, if only I would have had eyes to see. "Who opens the eyes of the blind."

I want to find a way to pursue and serve God as clearly and directly as I can. Through God's law.

I need a new structure. One where every moment in life, every single act in daily living can be elevated and turned into something higher.

And the place to find the answers and teachers I need is back in Jerusalem, the City of God.

Part of my problem, and the world's problem is that we have been living in an anything-goes, sybaritic, lawless time. We need order, rules, structure, not human made, but rather God-inspired and god proclaimed.

A repeat of history. In the desert, when Moses went up the mountain, the people became afraid, and built the golden calf to worship. All societies build their own versions of golden calves. Money, power, lust.

Look at American society. Everybody is so worried about themselves and their next acquisition. The neighbor is the one against whom you compete, not someone with whom you share, not the one whom "you love as yourself."

Property is the highest value. But who in the world gives anyone the right to own property? It's like owning the swimming lane. We are all here to share. From the perspective of God's law, no one really owns the earth. We are here to share it. Why does one person have the right to keep others off? "No Trespassing." What if God said that "No Trespassing" to us! Clearly part of my responsibility is to show others the limitations of these false gods, and to help guide them back to a more spiritual, sacred life, following the word of God.

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It is our arrogance that leads us to a denial of God. I am so thankful for this time in the desert, this chance to meditate on the deepest questions we can face, and how I have been called to service.

I actually have been quite close to my calling all along. All I needed to do was transform from pursuing and being guided by man's law to following and using God's law, first received on Sinai by Moses, then elaborated on in Leviticus, and the Talmud.

I feel a change occurring in me, like Jacob becoming Israel. My Job-like suffering phase is over. I feel my destiny: to point the way to the Divine. Like Moses, leading his people, all people, forth. Providing water in a simple, humble way to those who need it. And everyone needs it. Everyone is in a spiritual desert, thirsty, and not even realizing it.

I am hopeful. I feel my cloud of depression lifting, a cloud so heavy that I came to see it as reality. I am resilient. People are resilient. Look at how the Israelites have made the desert bloom with water. Just imagine how all souls--my fami-

ly's; those of the men on Sixth Street; the souls of the kibbutz-niks--can bloom with spiritual water.

I'll become a messenger to the people, Malachi, an angel of God who tries to show the people God's ways.

And I have come to serve them what they need.

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"Have you ever thought about the possibility of getting a job?"

I'm dumbstruck by the self-interest, even greediness of the Rebbe's comment. He had asked to meet me before Dr. Lisbet's Tai chi class, and when I arrived, he asked why I had left therapy. I decided to focus only on the financial. I explained to him that I only had limited resources upon which to live. That I was living on a poverty-level income. And that it would be helpful for me to return if he and Dr. Lisbet might offer me free sessions, either because they cared about me, or at least from sympathy with my plight. Instead, he asks about my getting a job, which, yes, would help me earn more money, but then I would just turn it over to them. I let him know that.

"Why? so I can afford to pay you and Dr. Lisbet?"

"It sounds like you feel I'm suggesting this to you only to help line Dr. Lisbet's and my coffers. Is that what I hear you saying?"

More of their stupid paraphrasing.

"Exactly."

"It is true that this is how we earn our living. However, let me invite you to consider how what I am suggesting might also be in your own interest."

"Fine. I will." Not.

"Good. We do care about you and want the best for you. You have great potential. You also are wrestling with a lot of issues, which are sapping your energy. We feel you need some help sorting it all out. Even some re-parenting. We'd like to provide that help for you. When and if you feel once again that we can be of assistance, please let us know."

"So you both think I'm still wrestling with a lot?"

"Yes, that is our view."

"And I assume that part of what I'm wrestling with, which you helped me uncover in therapy, is issues with my troublesome parents."

"That's true."

"Well, Rebbe, I agree. My parents were difficult, and certainly weren't great role models. But one thing makes them different from you and Dr. Lisbet as 'parents.'"

"And what is that?"

"At least they didn't charge me to be my parents."

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To return to Jerusalem, I need to retrace my steps, and go back through Coral Beach. It takes me several days to hitchhike through the Sinai desert until I reach Eilat.

Once I arrive, I'm amazed at the difference in perspective, before the climb up Sinai, and after. It's like I'm seeing the same landscape and thoughts, but with different glasses.

I can see clearly now what is missing from the unstructured quasi-spirituality of these drifting, purposeless travelers. What they, too, need is the structure and framework of God's law: Less hashish, and more regular study, daily worship services,

with a goal-directed meaning and purpose. They sing the songs,
talk the talk, but don't walk the walk.

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As I pass the fjord, this shift in perspective seems well
encapsulated by a three stanza poem Dr. Lisbet recited to us in the
Fall Preview. She'd heard it while studying Zen.

When one is unenlightened, mountains are mountains and water
is water.

That seems the old me, Johannes, going through life, on my rail-
road path of existence, unaware, blithely and naively just exist-
ing. The castle protects and hides me. When I first saw the skull, at
the base of the mountain in the monastery, and later in my dream, I
responded with denial and avoidance.

The first stanza. Johannes.

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When one seeks enlightenment, mountains are no longer moun-
tains and water is no longer water.

It's interesting to remember this poem now, after having
climbed Sinai. The second stanza is like a half-way point. Every-
thing that's come before is on one side-- the mountain before the
climb--the Johannes-like ignorance of the first Stanza.

The climb itself--in darkness- is also part of that first
half. Seeing the skull at the top of the mountain was a disap-
pointment and discouraging. Why have I done this? What a meaningless
waste of time and energy. Confusion. Darkness. The second stanza.

That second stanza is so frustrating, because from that
point of view, I've lost the normalcy of the first phase, but
there is no guarantee that there will be a third.

The second stanza's confusion is my Job-like phase, an-

guished, struggling, nothing making sense. Feeling like a Kafkaesque character in the world, an alienated insect, a character forced out of a protective castle, and not able to enter Kafka's Castle. With no identity, not feeling I belonged anywhere, losing my moorings and my chutzpah, seeing all the empty spaces of separation. Even what was once the joy of orgasm I now saw as mere indulgence, a "petit mort" a reminder of death. Like the skull in the monastery that reminds me that after all the suffering there is in life, there is then just death.

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But, now, having climbed and seen the top of the mountain, everything is changed.

When one is enlightened, mountains are mountains and water is water.

I don't feel completely "enlightened," but I do feel "lighter," more filled with light. I feel I have a direction and purpose again.

I feel that the re-born Jonah-like part of me, submerged back in San Francisco, scared, running away, drowned beneath the sorrow of the wailing Job, is beginning to remerge stronger and in clearer relief. Back then, he was not ready or able to emerge to hear and follow God's message. Perhaps he's been meditating in the whale all this time.

Do we have to become lost--in a symbolic or literal wilderness-- in order to grow and expand beyond the confines of our identity, to undergo transformation. Is that lostness and suffering part of the fertilizer of our maturation? I know it's not sufficient, but is it necessary?

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Then, returning to the base of the mountain, and seeing the skull again, though from a different perspective, on the other side of the mountain if you will, on the other side of God's love and acceptance, there I found my answer.

The answer was right before my eyes at the base of the mountain, but I did not know it. I saw it again at the top of the mountain, and again did not recognize it's meaning.

Only when I saw it once again at the base of the mountain--like the third stanza-- did I understand it was an answer. The skull is a reminder to come out voluntarily from my self-enclosed castle, to embrace life, to serve others, while, as Dr. Lisbet taught us, being mindful of our death and finitude.

After the middle stanza, everything may look the same externally, but I now see differently. Consciousness has changed.

I see Coral Beach with new eyes.

This is not where I belong. Not from being pushed out by the empty spaces I initially saw here, but by choice. Because of the empty lives I see being lived here.

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I stop in to have lunch with J.C., and to share my experience with him.

"'Mountains are once again mountains.' That I understand. But 'Serving water?' 'Seeking the Law of God?' Careful. This place is as beautiful as life gets. A never never land. Look" he points to the sun glistening off the sea. "Water is water, right here! Why return to the struggles of Jerusalem? Why go there to study in a yeshivah? Look what you're leaving. You can serve water here, if that's what you want to do." He jumps up, saying "Let me go get

us some lemon aide to celebrate your return."

While he's gone I look around, and I see with new eyes. On my way to Sinai, I was temporarily re-captured by the easy sensuality of life here. But now, with my new decision to purify myself, and with my new eyes, I realize that was an illusory re-entrapment by the body.

Here, as back in the States, I was seeking ever greater orgasms and sensuality. True, I didn't intentionally try to hurt anyone. But my goal was primarily my own satisfaction. If someone else also enjoyed it, that was great, too, and I took pride in their pleasure. But I can see now I was also being a little disingenuous. I would be with a girl, then meet her roommate or friend, and instantly drop the first for second, with no consideration of the consequences to or for either of them.

For some girls, like Alice, we were on the same page, and it was clearly not a problem. But for others, it was. They were hurt, and I would only say, that's their problem--if they were more open and flexible, more liberated, they wouldn't be hurt. If I noticed any sensitivity toward their feelings, I would tell myself I was being too sappy, a little cry baby.

Clearly I was blinded by my body's needs.

The body is the problem. But I am going to leave those cravings behind.

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When Jean-Claude offers me more lemonade, while telling me he also completely disagrees with me on the idea of celibacy; "The body is a joy, one of the few pleasures life has to offer us. Why turn your back on such delight? It is heaven on earth."

We agree to disagree.

But where we find common ground, though from different

perspectives, is on the impossibility of a committed romantic relationship. He from being so hurt in the past and seeing how people drift in and out of his life. I am from seeing not only the difficulty, but also that such a relationship is a distraction from what I am seeking: relationship with the Divine.

We clink our glasses in a toast.

"By the way, you were not even gone that long," he observes.

"Kairos and chronos." I respond. More lemon aide.

"Remember when I was first here, I told you I still had some sadness, even anger toward Elizabeth, about the way our relationship ended? And I felt those feelings were justified."

"Understandable, mon ami. And now, after your great awakening?"

"Now, I know it's over. When I first came to Israel, I guess there was some part of me that believed there was still a chance we could get back together. Not from guilt, or forced effort or false comfort. But because I honestly believed that if it were going to work between us, each of us needed some space individually to grow and deepen as individuals.

"I was in so much personal flux, it was unfair of me to try to find solidity and permanence through her. She couldn't really protect me from the chaos. My desire for marriage was my grasping for illusory structure, trying to hide the nothingness and emptiness I was feeling. That helplessness, need, and desperation can never provide the basis for a loving, stable relationship.

"That's why I liked your poems so much." I pull them out and show him I'm still carrying them.

"And after the awakening. You still haven't answered my

question." He smiles, swirls the ice in his glass, and takes a sip of the lemonade.

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"I'm aware now that even on the other side of nothingness, relationship can never work, and even if it could, I wouldn't want it to."

He toasts me again. "D'accord! Something stronger? Some wine perhaps?"

"Sorry, I've sworn off drinking, too."

"Tant pis. I worry about you. Too much sun on Sinai?" He pours himself a glass of wine. "Ok, now I'm ready. Tell me why relationships can never work. You're preaching to the choir, you know..."

"You were so kind to me when I was here. You saw my aloneness, and reached out. What I realize, though, is that there are some aspects of existence that I--really none of us-- ever totally escape. Yes, my pain here became much more muted than the torment after my initial break-up with Elizabeth. But there is no way I can ever permanently remove the awareness of spaces between me and others. Ultimate belonging that can only come from God. No human relationship can ever remove that underlying emptiness. At best, it can only mask it temporarily.

Jean-Claude sets his wine glass down and gestures with his finger back and forth between us.

I nod in agreement, smiling: "Right, except between us. No spaces, right?"

"Of course right. Sans doute. Don't be such an existential bore."

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"Touché," I respond, thrusting an imaginary sword toward him. But I am not going to let him sidetrack me from what I want to say. The words continue to tumble out. For him? For me? For Mery? For someone up there?

"What I really realize now is that human relationship, like human law, is definitely not the deepest answer I was seeking.

"I remember feeling that maybe Elizabeth was in my life for a reason---and I thought that reason was to teach me about committed relationship. What I feel now is that she was in my life for a reason, just not the reason I thought. Human relationship gets in the way of turning toward the divine. She was there to help open me to the divine mystery. I now clearly see what's important to me is not the pursuit of human relationship, but the pursuit of divine relationship. I-Thou with God. God is both the dash and the Thou."

I say this later with a flourish, almost as if I'm finishing a well-crafted sermon.

Jean-Claude looks at me with a shrug. "Is there no middle ground between being an existential bore and an evangelical fruitcake?"

Out of respect for our friendship, I once again smile at his effort at a joke. But we are seeing things from different sides of the mountain, and even though I know I could probably help me, I know it's time to move on. Though before I leave, I want to make sure I get my camera back from him.

* * *
Sitting alone in my room, writing about Sinai, my final

moments in Eilat, I am convinced that the decision to purify my body--through fasting and celibacy--is and has been the right one.

In many ways, my body has been significantly reduced, from the 215 pound Johannes, to now less than 160 pounds. Over 25% of "me as flesh" has disappeared. I'm glad. I don't miss it at all. I think I would be happiest if my body would vanish, and just spirit would remain.

Is there a relationship--and I feel there must be--between less body focus (and less body) and more spirit? What I want to know is how close to infinity (and the infinite) can I come, or become, and rest and remain in that awareness.

I remember the feelings of awe and joy I felt at Sinai. It was almost like a sustained orgasm. But an actual physical orgasm lasts only for seconds, and then there is often the "petit mort" which Johannes could only come to recognize after Mery. Before that, he merely rushed from experience to experience, like a fast moving fan, which seems a blur of "oneness" as the blades whir, but in reality, when it slows down, you see each blade is separate and apart.

I want that experience on Sinai to last a lifetime at the same level of intensity.

For me, it was like a rock dropped into a pond. The ripples lasted seconds, minutes, days, weeks, much longer than a physical orgasm. Even now, I still occasionally feel a tremble as some distant ripple reaches me months later. That's what keeps me going.

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How do Saints and mystics sustain themselves in times of doubt, when God seems hidden?

I look up an earlier passage I wrote about this, and make some additions. Moses was only allowed a partial glimpse of God. "I am that I am." He could only see the back of God. More would have overwhelmed. Yet, even after experiencing God, he forgets, throws the tablets down in anger. Jesus says "the Father and I are One." Yet Jesus also had a dark night of the soul, the time when he felt God's absence: "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" **Mohammed asked in the Koran why revelations happened so infrequently.**

Everyone, in every tradition, literally comes back down from the mountain, and returns to moments of doubt.

Yet for some the initial revelation is sufficient for a lifetime, even when the moment of transcendence and awe passes.

How to stay close to the sacred, even in times of doubt?

I look over at the Grebu ink drawing, and see the hand in the dark water, once again reaching up for help.

* * *

I once again remember the time as a child, during the summers when I would write numbers on one of Grandpa's legal pad. Starting with one. My goal: infinity. I knew I could do it. 1,2,3, writing each number clearly and carefully on the yellow paper grandpa had given me.

One summer I got to 35,000. The next summer, 80,000. The third and last summer I tried it (before realizing there was tennis and swimming and girls) I reached 6 figures, broke 100,000. Was that part of a spiritual quest in me, even then, a yearning toward the infinite?

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An unbidden memory arises of Mery's free and easy laugh at

my glove compartment dividers in Mr. Red. I feel a glow of joy at the sweet, naively happy moment the memory represents. The joy is mixed with sadness, like the fading of a flower's bloom, or the ending echo of a gentle, peaceful flute note.

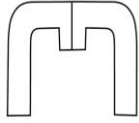
Even though I've gone over our relationship so many times, sometimes there is still a reflexive, momentary lurch of "What happened?!" But maybe nothing happened. Maybe that's just the nature of reality. Nothing human lasts. Even the best relationships are ephemeral. Overall, I don't think we ever intentionally tried to hurt each other. It just wasn't meant to be. And even if it were meant to be, it would still end.

* * *

It's that ending I need to face, once again, to see if I can't finally put it to rest, or, at least learn something more from it. I feel sad. God seems distant again. It's not so easy. My spirit searches for God; but the body and flesh and mind have let doubt return.

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ery, I want you to know that I'm anxious and vulnerable.

Please be gentle with me because it is my first time."

She looks at me askance, as I hand her some flowers, lilies
from which a single sunflower emerges.

"Thank you, kind gentleman, they're beautiful. Now what is
this about your first time? What are you talking about?"

"If you don't like it that much, just tell me. But I hope
you do."

I hand her a piece of paper:

THE DANCE

sweat streaming off smiling faces
She, reddish hair, swinging over brown eyes,
coyishly returning to greet
I, boyishly laughing, throwing my arms
high, spinning faster;
I, dashing out, skipping, casting
daring glances at
She, alluring, following,
breathless
and once more smiling

WE

My first poem.

She smiles as she reads it.

"You're so cute...and what a trickster. You and your playful
sexual double entendres." She re-reads it. "Yes, I do like it.
Is this a version of our bedroom dance at the Fairmont?" She
looks directly at me Too intense. I lower my eyes.

"An artist, and a gentleman, never tells."

I am relieved that there seems an easy lightness between
us. Whatever tension from the phone calls is gone, a distant
memory, probably the result of the technology: impersonal, disem-
bodied voices. No flesh. Seeing her in person, like the poem,

gives form to the voice.

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"This poem--'We'--is dedicated to you, your loving, playful, trusting good nature. I feel a little shy and awkward saying this--and this is the first time I've ever shared such feelings--but I feel ready to deepen our commitment. This is pioneering territory for me. I've shared more with you about my life than I have with anyone. I feel as though with you I've seen what the "promised land" might be like. I want to enter it. This is a strange thought for me: I could see us being life-long partners together."

I'm feeling a sense of joy. I've left my entrapment of Kansas City Egypt, escaped the Pharaohs that ruled me. The plagues are behind me. A new life awaits.

She puts the flowers down and throws her arms around me. "That's the sweetest thing anybody has ever said to me." She gives me a big kiss. "Are you proposing?"

Am I? No. Not really. Well, kind of. Sort of maybe if things continue to go well. Perhaps next year. But what about law school?

"Whoa, Nellie. Or rather, whoa, Marry Mery. Merrying Mery would be Mery," and I give her a kiss back. "But I've still got to graduate and figure out what I'm going to be doing next year. What we're going to be doing."

Mery continues to hug me, but it seems a little less tight.

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After a moment, she lets go and returns to the chopping table, to start preparing the ingredients for dinner.

"Do you like halibut."

"Great." I hate fish. And I still am thinking about the poem.

"The professor gave me a C+ on the poem. Do you want to hear his comments."

She says yes while starting to chop some carrots. I smell the fragrance from the lilies.

I pick up the paper again, and began reading. "The modernistic unrhymed blank verse is well done. Also good is the alternation in the length of the lines. This creates a sexual tension, when added to the impressionistic, kinesthetic energy embodied in the words."

"That sounds positive."

"I thought so, too, but he only gave me an 78."

"That's good."

"Not really."

"Did he have any other comments saying why?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to read those?"

"No."

"Ok." She continues chopping.

* * *

"You know how sometimes you tease me about being too analytical?"

"Why, whatever do you mean, Oh White Knight? You?"

"Cute. Sometimes you seem to like it--my dividers in the car; sometimes not. So, I've been working on being less analytical. I guess, analyzing when to analyze, and when not!"

"Now, that is cute. And waaay too analytical!"

"See, exactly. So, anyway, the professor had asked us to

write an analysis of our poem, applying literary constructs to our creative effort to explain its structure, cadence, feet, meters, syllable accentuation, etc. I felt that the joy and happiness in the poem would be diminished by that--too much reflection. So I didn't do it.

"You rebel, you."

"Well, partly, But also, I may have told you, in second grade, I was put in a group called the Indians--there were two of us; we were the 'retards' because we couldn't figure out how many syllables a word had, and where the pronunciation and accents lay."

"Sounds like an incredibly racist school."

"What are you talking about?"

"The 'retarded' group is called 'Indians?'"

"Well, so is my current school, which isn't exactly full of retards. Anyway, aren't we getting off the point?" This doesn't seem the time to tell her that Dad and I used to go across the street from our house into an empty lot--before it was built over-- and shoot Coke bottles with a BB gun. Dad called it "shooting the Indians."

I have a moment of embarrassment. Am I responsible for his teachings, and going along with it? How was I to know better at 10 years old. Then I think of the decal I wanted to put on Mr. Red, of several Stanford Indians, the first one thumbing his nose at the second, who is thumbing his nose at the third, and down the line, until the last one thumbs his nose at everyone driving behind. At least that seems a small evolution away from dad, willing to identify myself as a Stanford Indian; and thumbing my nose at the rest of the world. A work in Progress? Again, I decide not to share this story with her.

"You're right. Sorry. You're telling me about why you didn't complete the assignment. Trying to be less analytical. Very courageous of you. But maybe not so wise, when the professor is the one grading you. Sometimes it's important to follow rules. 78 is actually pretty good considering you didn't complete the assignment."

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She finishes chopping the carrots, and reaches for a couple of onions. The knife she's using looks sharp, a ten inch blade, serrated.

"I've spent all my life following rules. How do you think I got into Stanford, and then Harvard? Great, the first time I try to draw outside the lines, to evolve into a more spontaneous, creative person--the very thing you're encouraging me to do--I get my hand slapped. By everybody."

Johannes likes rules and structures that he creates. He'll also follow imposed rules when he feels they are fun--golf, tennis. Or he'll follow rules if he feels they serve some other self-chosen goal, like taking certain classes that will be helpful for law school. But if he can find a way to break the rules, or push the envelope, and get away with it, he'll do that without qualms.

It's complicated. I guess I'd say he likes, even needs, some structure, to then see how he can rebel against it, and push the limits of tolerance. And me? I've taken that impulse and found that even as I long for structure, I won't accept a framework that I can't admire and respect, even if that means living on the raw edge of emptiness and aloneness.

Mery walks over to me, the knife in her hand. I

take a step back. When she realizes she's still holding it, she puts it down. "Oh, my big brave Knight is feeling sensitive. Let the little milkmaid comfort him." She gives me a big hug, and then rests my head on her breast.

"Better. That's what I need." I snuggle in. "How about if we go upstairs?"

She puts her hand on the back of my head, and runs it through my hair. "Not now, little boy. You have to be patient. We are on a schedule. First dinner, then, as I told you, I got us tickets to a surprise special event tonight." She continues rubbing and patting me. "Then, if you're good, you'll get to go upstairs later."

I know I should be happy at her flirtations and her surprise. But I hate surprises. And I hate fish. And I hate eating in.

* * *

Mom never cooked me a meal.

She'd sometimes ask me what I wanted, and then would have the cook make it. When I was younger, I resented this, and felt she wasn't properly taking care of me. But as I've grown older, I realize that having someone else cook --like going out to a restaurant--allows conversation to occur without the hassles and divided attention of preparing a meal. I probably should share that with mom.

A first sign of healing and forgiveness?

And maybe I can get her to help Mery learn that lesson.

Johannes, you turn to how you can use this insight to your advantage with Mery, rather than realizing it's time for a healing and asking forgiveness talk with mom. You still have such a long way to go.

* * *

After a few minutes Mery returns to the chopping block. She

takes and handful of greenish carrot tops and throws them toward the waste basket about five feet away. All of them go in.

"Wow, great shot. Where did you learn to shoot like that?"

"There was a waste basket in dad's study, where I'd go when he'd help me with my homework, particularly writing. My work was never good enough, and he'd grab the paper with my scribbles on it, crumple it up, and say 'Throw it away--in the basket over there.' Most of the time I'd miss. One day he said, 'To shoot well, throw it in the direction you want it to go, without worrying about making a basket.'

"It was the best advice he ever gave me...about life. In a funny way, he taught me to distrust myself in writing, but to trust myself in shooting baskets. So, I just throw it in the general direction I want it to go, and trust myself. My therapist says I need to try to forgive him for all the distrust he poisoned me with, and remember the kernel of help he gave me." She pauses. I try to paint the same way, too!"

I give her a hug. "What a cute, goofy, playful girl you are. Wisdom in a wastebasket. My dad taught me to shoot, too."

"Don't give me that girl stuff; I'll challenge you anytime to a game on the courts."

"Oh, adventurous and competitive, too. Bring it on."

She picks up the knife.

"Hey, don't be too competitive."

"My therapist says I both like competition and fear it." She smiles as she picks up the onion, and places it under the faucet and turns on the water. "I was always told running cold water an onion makes you cry less. But I still cry, anyway. As long as I'm going to cry, why don't you read me your professor's con-

structive criticisms?"

"Fine, let me entertain you with my tale of woe." I pick up the paper and continue reading. "John Updike once said that a fine line exists 'between writing a character with a strong ego and one who is narcissistic, and that fine line makes all the difference.' The 'boyishly laughing' phrase gets awfully close to that line.

'Small points: Coyishly is not a word. Use your dictionary. Is your use of the word 'smiling' in the first and last lines planned? Did you attempt a metered rhythm? Where, why, why not? I'd asked you to comment.

'Finally, why was the male 'I' laughing in the middle, but not the 'she?' Be careful of sex-typing --active male, passive female-- with the male 'I' laughing and dashing out, she following.'"

"Wow, he sounds pretty deep and perceptive. He obviously spent time thinking about your poem. He should get an A for commentary."

What's wrong with this picture? Somehow this started off about my poem--about the two of us merging and dancing in love--and ends up about how smart my professor is.

* * *

"I went up to him after class to ask him what I could do to improve the grade."

"Why? You've already made Phi Beta Kappa, and are accepted by your first choice law school. Aren't you taking this class just for fun, anyway? Pass/no credit?"

"Like you, he seemed puzzled, and a little annoyed that I was concerned about getting the grade changed. He asked me if I

was concerned about the grade, or if I was sincerely interested in learning.

"I know a softball pitch when I see one, so I told him, learning, of course. I even used your line, reminding him that I'm taking the course pass/no credit, don't you remember?"

"That wasn't a line. But were you being truthful? Was it about learning?"

"Well, kind of, but not exactly. It's interesting that even when grades don't matter, I still am not happy when I don't receive a good grade. I remember getting my first 'D.' I was in 5th grade. I broke into tears and ran out of the room crying."

"Oh, my poor baby. What trials my white knight has had to endure. I had no idea. I always pictured your life as a fairy tale." Ouch. If she only knew. Well, a little bit at a time.

"He said that 78 was a good grade for this early in the course (and certainly an improvement on my first grade!). It showed that though I'm improving, there's still room for growth, and I shouldn't worry about passing the course.

"I know that annoyed look on the faces of professors and fellow students. In high school, I had the nickname 'grub' as in grade grubber. I didn't like it. Mom told me (and Dad agreed) the other kids were jealous of my good grades so I should ignore them. My Grandpa JC said, 'You should always be the best. Don't let anyone stand in your way. If you're not the best, you need to find out why and learn. Always be in their face. Patient, attentive, respectful, but like a bull dog.'"

At first Mery doesn't say anything, but turns to trim the flowers. Then she goes over to the stove and turns it on. She takes down a skillet.

Did I say too much? I think back to the swimming pool, and realize this assertive side of me is not that she finds all that attractive. I need to be careful what I share with her this candidly.

Finally, she responds, "It's nice how your family comes to your defense." I guess my family is another side of my life that I haven't been totally honest about--the whole truth-- with her either.

"Did the professor give you any helpful advice?"

"I explained to him that 'coyishly' was a Joycean-like made-up word I'd used intentionally to create the same iambic meter in the third line as the first, framing the Shakespearian iambic pentameter of the second line; and also to rhyme with the word 'boyishly' in the next line.

"The professor replied, 'Fine, then you should have written about the meter in more detail, as I assigned. In any event, coyishly seems more anapest than iamb. And then you should have pointed out the headless iamb, tailless trochee, spondee, other anapests, amphibrach, and dactyl."

"What's anapest?"

"I didn't know either. I think he was just trying to one up me with technical jargon. I didn't know how to respond. Talk about going from stressed to stressed, and skipping unstressed.

"What did you say? I hate it when someone gets technical about my painting, too. It seems the feeling gets lost." Better. That's the sympathy I want from a future wife.

"Simple, I tried to one-up him. I asked him if he noticed the overall reverse triangle holistic form, as 'self' and 'other,' the two points at the base, merge into 'we,' a single

point, at the inverted base."

"Let me see."

I show her the poem, and point at how the odd lines:
1-3-5-7-9-11 form a V. As do the even lines 2-4-6-8-10.

"That sounds pretty technical."

"That's what he said--something like be careful that you
don't put more effort into the structure than into the feeling.
How hypocritical, when he'd berated me with all those stupid
structural terms. He was just feeling challenged by me because I have
structure, just not his."

"Hmmm" she responds vaguely, continuing to chop.

Johannes sees an inverted V as two people
converging in relationship. Later, after Sinai, I saw the V as
the first half of the hourglass, or, as an inverted Sinai moun-
tain itself. It's interesting how the same object is interpreted
and understood differently, depending upon the eyes through which
I look. Even the same event--counting numbers--.Johannes sees
it as a meaningless ritual to fill time and create structure
during the summers. At Sinai, I saw it as a spiritual longing to
reach infinity. It's as if who I am at the time is as important
in creating a reality and determining the meaning of what hap-
pened, as the "reality" itself. This feels a profound insight. I
notice part of me wishes I were still in therapy so I could tell
the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet, and get their approbation.

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I see tears in her eyes. "The onions?"

"Kind of. I'm having a hard time at work, too. My boss keeps
complaining about the way I do everything wrong. I'm afraid I
might lose my job. It's just too hard for me trying to keep it

all organized."

I find her description of her bland boss criticizing her rather prosaic and boring. If I were writing as a vignette for my creative writing class, I would punch it up a bit.

His face reddened, fierce, like a gargoyle, and he began yelling at me. I thought he was going to strike me. I recoiled in terror, wondering what I could do to salvage my mistakes. Is he looking at me salaciously? Oh, no, not again."

I put my arm on her shoulder. "You've come to the right person, the White Knight of Structure. Truthfully, for me, making the job into a routine would be easy. The only thing hard about doing your job for me would be it'd be too easy. I'd get bored with the monotony, doing the same thing day after day. Serving people and listening to them complain. It would become mind numbing, and annoying.

"For me there is no routine. It's never the same. Every person is different. Each person comes with a story, a reason they are there. Celebration, nurturance, just to get out of their lonely lives. My job is to serve them however I can. I don't believe anything is trivial. I try to make it a good experience for each of them. If they want to talk, I want to hear their stories. But then sometimes I get scared having to face new people. And upset when they don't seem satisfied with the food; or hurt when they seem sad and I don't seem to be able to help them."

"You really are sensitive. That's what I love about you. That's what you teach me."

"But I know I shouldn't get nervous each time I go to a new table. How can I best serve them? What will they order? Even while I'm taking their order, I'm often wondering who they are, why they are here. I look at their faces, the lines, shadows,

wonder what their life has been like. It's hard to keep my mind on their orders. I need this job so badly."

More tears. I rub her back. "Now who's the baby? It's just a Restaurant, little one. You're just a waitress. You're made for better things. Can't you build some sort of pattern into the job? A system. Make a diagram on your order sheet, like a clock, and give each person a number based on where they are sitting, and write their order under their number. Fit them into your system. Matzah ball with chicken and noodles at 2; brisket with extra sauce at 3. Simple. And if they complain, would you be bothered by criticism if it was coming not from a person, but from a number on a clock."

"I know I'm too sensitive. That was one of the reasons I took the job. Everyone told me I had to get more organized, work myself into a better routine in life, keep myself from spacing out."

"Everyone? You mean besides me?"

"Yes, my therapist. Even my former art professor, Pierre. He told me my sensitivity is great with art, but that I'm too sensitive with people. Like the autistic kids we work with. I take everything too personally.

"But how do you try to pretend the customers aren't really people? Doesn't making them into numbers cause me to relate to them as 'I-It.' That seems to go against everything I believe. Yet, because it's nearly impossible for me to shrug off their criticisms, I get flustered and tense, and do even worse. I want everybody to be satisfied and happy. Even if it's not my fault, but I can see they're sad, that makes me sad, especially when I don't know what to do to help them."

She continues to cut and cry. I take the knife out of her hand, turn her around, place her head against my chest, and give her a hug, holding her tightly. I even go in for a little feel of

her breasts. She calls her former art professor Pierre?

"Sorry, this is stupid. I want to prepare you dinner. I want to serve them well. I don't seem to be able to do anything right at all."

"Mery Mery. It's just food, a meal. Theirs, mine. My dad always said, at times like these, take a breath. Thata girl. I promise you, we won't starve."

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She pulls back from me, wipes her eyes. "Sorry. Enough about me. You WILL starve unless I get something cooked for you. Tell me, what else have you written in your class?" She returns to cutting.

I think of the Kansas City play, which I'm still working on but which I don't really want to share with her, yet.

"Well, one of my first assignments in the class was a disaster, at least according to the professor. We were supposed to write a short piece, a brief sketch of 'A Body in Motion.' I'd been learning this new tennis drill, which is supposed to help footwork, and improve coordination between the feet, arms, head, and eyes, so I thought it would be perfect to write about.

"Because the drill is complicated, I used my usual style of breaking it down into smaller bits of information that are more manageable. When I visualized all the different parts working together, I saw a very graceful body in motion. So, I turned in my description, and called it "A Graceful Body in Motion."

"Do you have a copy of it?"

"It's in my car. Do you want me to get it?"

"Sure. You can regale me with your prose while I chop."

* * *

I retrieve the "Creative Writing Class" folder from Mr. Red, tuck it under my arm, and jog back. For some reason, I pause before entering at look at the outside of her home. Wide eaves and brackets, tall, arched, curved windows, separated by columns, a cone like roof. I wonder why I never questioned how someone who claims she is so poor can afford to live in a place this nice.

I open the door to the smell of onions frying, a smell I love. I have a creative idea. I don't really want to read this to her while she's cooking. I want her undivided attention.

"Mery, rather than just read this to you, why don't we go to the park and let you experience it? There's still enough light outside."

"But I've just begun cooking. And, as you know" she winks at me, "I bought us some special tickets for an event tonight. I don't want us to be late."

"Come on, it'll be fun, Saturday afternoon in Shakespeare's garden. We'll be back in an hour. And I'll help chop when we return. It'll all be fine. I promise."

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As we drive over, I say to Mery, "I also have something I want your help with. I've been putting it off."

"Which is..."

"Law school. Grandpa keeps writing to ask if I've notified them of my acceptance. It's due this week."

"And what do you want my help with?"

"Well, is that my vision, or is it just what grandfather and really society expect of me. As my creative writer teacher observed, I've been trained to be analytical, rational, intellectual. And I'm good at it. Does that mean that's what I should

do? Is this my choice, what I want? That's confusing to me. I need time to think through more who I am. And maybe more importantly, who I could be, what I want to be."

"We've already discussed this. Why not take a year off to decide? Work on perfecting your creative writing!"

"Well, that's where I'm leaning, but if I do that, I don't think Grandpa will be very happy with me. I have to be ready for him to take Mr. Red back."

"Not a problem for me."

"You're the best. So unmaterialistic. You're loving, good nature is always there for me. The 'We' of the poem!" She smiles, and places her head on my shoulder.

"I guess I could see losing Mr. Red as part of the letting go of my materialistic entrapments. In that way, I'd be becoming more like you." I look over at her, and she's looking out of the corner of her eyes at me, smiling. "If I'm careful, I have enough to live on for a year, assuming no more help from them if I don't go to law school this fall."

She says nothing. I look again, and her eyes are now closed. She starts to hum a tune, "Amazing grace."

"Ok, that's what I'll do. I'll spend next year here with you, getting to know myself better, exploring and developing different sides of me, like the creative writing, maybe even take an art class with you, work some more on my flute."

"Great. A decision. See how simple that was." She continues to hum.

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I notice some fear arising in me. It's actually a scary thought to be without Grandpa's financial revenue. Maybe I don't

need to burn my financial bridges there yet.

"Ok, I'll request a year's deferral from Harvard. But what should I write Grandpa?"

"Tell him you're taking a year's deferral. It's not that complicated."

"But I still may go to law school. It's unclear. Do I need to let him know the depths of my uncertainty? Do I need to actually tell him I've requested a year's deferral

'I'm deeply appreciative for your guidance, Grandpa, and am taking it very seriously.' That's not bad. And true. Or, if I write him before I request a deferral, then I can honestly say I haven't yet sent in a deferral. That would also be true, technically, at the time the letter is written and sent.

"I certainly haven't said no to law school. I could tell him how much I admire him as a lawyer. That's even better."

Mery has removed her head from my shoulder, but is still humming.

"What if I put something in about the 'fall' and leave it ambiguous as to which fall, or is that too much of a stretch? Maybe like 'I have let them know I am interested in pursuing law studies 'in the fall.' There's no need to say anything more definite to him just yet. I'm still being truthful, although it's just a version of the truth, as he himself taught me. At a very deep level, I'm sure he'd be proud of me."

"Why all these machinations? He'll find out this fall. Are you just trying to buy a few more months of income?" Her voice is pleasant, sing-song like, but the words sound harsh. Am I showing her too much of my calculating side?

"You're right. Case adjourned. Monday morning I will write

Grandpa, and Monday afternoon I will write the law school."

It seems like money is a consistently difficult issue. For Johannes, at first, it's wanting lots of it and the material possessions--goods and services-- it can purchase. John does not want more, but spends a lot of time worrying about it, and is afraid of losing it, spending it unwisely, or being taken advantage of. Both, for different reasons, are quite controlled by money's energy.

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We arrive at the park. She takes my hand and holds it up to her lips, kisses it, then places it on her cheek. "Sorry if I wasn't helpful--and was too dismissive-- about your letter to your grandfather. I know how scary and confusing this must be to you. It's going to all work out. We'll both be fine."

It's such a tender gesture. I really do feel taken care of. As I start to say this to her, she drops my hand and runs off playfully toward the Shakespeare Garden.

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We find our spot, and again, there are a few children running around.

"Now, this tennis drill is really pretty complicated, like a triple version of patting your stomach, rubbing your head, and standing on one foot! It involves feet, arms, and head coordination."

"And how did the professor feel about your body in motion?"

"He hated it. he gave me a D--a "65"-- and wrote on the paper, 'Horrible, the most ungraceful body in motion piece I've ever read. There is absolutely no kinesthetic movement in it.'"

"Did you take his comments like a man?"

"Well, if you're asking did I run out of the room crying, no. Though it was only the 2nd D in my life. I was more composed, but I must admit that reading those comments felt like a punch in the stomach. I took it like a man in that I fought back. This professor was going to have to explain himself. I reread my piece, and completely disagreed with him. Why couldn't he appreciate how creatively and thoughtfully I'd described this complex exercise?

"He defended his grade, rather passionately I might add. He told me that 'writing about a body in motion is about grace, heart, passion, beauty. This is more like an instructional manual, written by a technician. Or maybe a lawyer's brief, or an accountant's end of year report, or an engineer's analysis. It's dry, uninteresting, fragmented, disjointed, and frankly just plain boring. Great writing can make any topic seem interesting. This isn't great writing.'

"I was not to be put off. I remembered my grandfather's advice: 'Be patient, respectful, and yet a bulldog.'

"'You're a distinguished professor. You've taught creative writing for many years and won teaching awards and published several books of fiction, and one on the craft of writing.' He nodded, unsure where I was going, and probably a little surprised at how well I'd researched him (I do that for all my professors). 'To you, this piece doesn't feel fluid.' Again, he nodded. 'But isn't that just your point of view? What if an accountant or lawyer or engineer read it, might not they be able to understand and visualize it perfectly? How can you say your point of view is the only truth? Is creative writing only for English majors?'

"He looked at me astonished and appalled. 'That's a creative, albeit contrived, argument. However, that piece is not, by any stretch of the imagination, creative writing.'

"'But you do agree that I have a point, and that SOMEONE might be able to visualize it as a graceful body in motion, don't you?'

"'I'll grant you there may be someone out there who would be able to read, or see it that way.'

"'So, don't I get some credit for helping you see a different point of view.'"

"I think he was just so frustrated that he wanted me to go away, so he said 'Fine, I'll give you a C- (71). Now, I have to go. But you're going to have to learn to help the reader visualize the movement, feel the kinesthetic energy. This piece is much too analytical.'

"I gave him my most respectful smile. 'Of course. Thank you.'"

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"Oh, you sly one, you. Now, after all that build up, either read me the piece or show me the drill, oh graceful legal accounting mind." I love the way she laughs, and the way she is opening up more and more with me, letting that playful, slightly gently sarcastic witty side out.

I show her the drill, my feet and arms and head gliding as I skip along the grass.

She claps. "Do it again."

I do, and if I say so myself, quite elegantly and fluidly.

"Look, the children are trying to emulate you. You're like the Pied Piper!" Mery merrily shouts at me as I practice the drill, showing off and imagining myself spinning and dancing

powerfully and gracefully. It actually reminded me of a whirling Sufi dervish performance that Alice had made me go see in Berkeley a few months back.

I look and see that a group of children is indeed copying the side step. A few are able to do a close approximation. Several of the kids are getting confused, and are in a state of disarray. Others seem ok with not being able to "get" the drill, and giggle as they fall to the ground. Some are disenchanted. One actually seems upset.

I motion to him to come over. "Don't try to do it all at once. Keep your head facing straight ahead, and arms extended at your side." I put my hands on his shoulder, and position his arms. "Perfect. Now, watch my feet. Pretend there's a long line going off to our left toward that big tree there. First put the right foot in front of the left foot along that line, then bring the left back around. That's it. Now put the right foot behind the left. Perfect, now, repeat, get the rhythm, go!" He tries, succeeds, and laughingly sways several more yards down the line toward the tree.

Mery comes over and puts her arms around me. "You are so good with children. They just naturally gravitate to you. And what a good teacher you were with that one little fellow." She pulls my head down and gives me a quick kiss.

What could be better, being with someone who loves and admires me, frolicking in the reddish golden sun of Golden Gate Park, in the Shakespeare garden? Little children playing all around us.

Still our Garden of Eden.

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I'm amazed how quickly children pick up new things. For me, learning that exercise had taken quite a while. What I'm having to learn is how I learn. It seems my process is the same no matter what the topic--Dr. Lisbet's Tai chi class, golf, that tennis drill, flute playing, even how I approach understanding the nature of the universe.

When I first saw the tennis drill--or confront any task--it seems overwhelming and complicated. Learning does not come easily for me. So, what I do is break the task down into component parts, before I try to reconstitute it. What's interesting is that with enough practice, a complicated process, like the tennis drill, can become fluid and graceful.

Further, because of the way I learn, I can then take the whole and show how each part works, in a more simplified, step by step manner to someone else. The parts in relation to the whole. The whole in relation to the parts. Perhaps that's what would make me a good teacher, as Mery said.

That strategy might work for some. But will it necessarily work for ALL people? Be careful of one size fits all, trying to impose your worldview and style on others. Maybe it's important as you learned in your psychology class, to match the "technique to the person." There are many ways of learning and teaching. You'll soon learn the Chinese saying, there are many fingers that point to the moon, and Rumi's "There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground."

* * *

I go over by a tree and sit down. Mery joins me.

There are some ants crawling around us. I want to crush them, but decide that might break the jovial mood. I see she is also looking at them and I say, "It's hard to imagine in such an

idyllic place that we really live in a dog eat dog world."

"What brought that up. To mix metaphors, do you see a snake in the grass?"

"The ants. I once had an ant farm, and did a lot of reading about ants. Did you know that there are Amazonian ants. There are certain trees that they dwell in. So, it turns out they inject a toxic acid into the leaves of all plants surrounding their host trees. In other words, they kill off all other species of vegetation in the area of the forest to give their host trees living space to expand, and create space for new plantings."

"Ugh."

"Exactly. Eat or be eaten. Do you know what the human inhabitants of the region call these ants' housing tracts?"

She shakes her head.

"The devil's gardens."

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There is a pause, and Mery looks somber. Then she smiles again. "You sure know how to whet my appetite. Speaking of which, we need to get back. Enough demonstration. Let's hear the fabulous instructional paper you wrote. "

I pull out the page and read the assignment out loud to her.

"A Graceful Body In Motion

The head begins by facing straight ahead, and the arms are extended perpendicular to the sides of your body. You pretend there's a long line going off your left foot, and you first put the right foot in front of the left foot along that line. As the right foot goes in front of the left foot, sway your left hand toward your right, and turn your head left, and your eyes further left.

Then bring the left foot back around to its original position, and as you do so, your arms (now on your right side) come back to the center, and your head, now facing left, comes back to the center, eyes forward.

Now, as your right foot goes behind your left, both hands sway to your left in front of your body, your head turns right.

Then, as you bring the left foot back around once again to its original position, the arms which are on your left side go right and come back to the center, and your head, facing right, goes left toward the center.

Repeat and keep practicing until you feel yourself starting to flow gracefully."

She giggles. "I can't believe that professor. How ignorant.

I know true poetry when I hear it."

"Really?" Then I look at her face and see she's mocking me.

"Fine, let's see you try it."

"Not in a million years."

"No, come on," I tickle her a little.

"I wasn't watching closely. Do it again."

"Here, let me explain it to you." I start in on a simplified explanation, but she covers her ears. "Way too analytical. Just show me."

"It's too complicated to get all the parts to work without breaking it down incrementally," I chide.

"Show me."

I do it for a few yards, then turn and say, "Ok, do your magic.

And magician she was. The first steps were tentative, but it was almost as if she were closing her eyes and seeing something inside, or feeling something. She developed an instant rhythm. It was extraordinary, and beyond my comprehension. It's simply not the way my mind and body learn.

"Wow, that is like magic. It took me forever to do that."

"Too much analysis," she kids me, tickling me back. Then she starts running "You're it."

I give her a head start, then start chasing her. I love the way she's running, her hair swishing like a horse's mane, right and left, over her shoulders. Naturally, rhythmically, effortlessly. Without analysis. The light of the sun alternately

reflects off and makes her hair golden; then as she turns, the light is cut off, and her hair darkens. She has a cute girlish run, elbows too far out from her body, sashaying hips, and of course I also love the unselfconscious jiggling of her breasts, even in her turtleneck. Like the counterpoint in Bach's Brandenburg concerto, as her foot reaches down toward the earth in her forward stride, her breasts rise. Then they are suspended, as if defying gravity, before they begin to fall as she pushes off with her back foot rising for the next stride.

As I come closer, I call out, "You'd better pick up the pace, I'm going to get you." She laughs and runs harder still. My hand is just an inch behind her, above and between her scapulas.

I give her a tag.

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My tag may have been too hard, or maybe she is running too fast to keep her balance, but some combination causes her to lose her stride, and stumble. I see it in slow motion. Her face turns awkward, contorted, shocked, helpless, vulnerable. Her hands and arms swing forward as if the strings of a puppeteer are pulling them ahead jerkily and spasmodically, as she reaches out for self-protection. I run faster to try to break the fall, but she is out of reach. Her head lurches backward, arching her back, then like a sling shot catapults forward, thrusting her body onto the ground.

She is bleeding, breathing raggedly, trying to control her sobbing.

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X-rays at the Emergency Room show no broken bones, or even

sprains. There are a few bruises, and four stitches are required under her chin.

"I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault. We were just playing. It happens."

The tone is restrained, stoic.

She insists that we not change our plans. "I'm going to cook a dinner for you tonight, even if it kills me."

I am appreciative of her seeming forgiveness.

But it was my fault. I'm the one who suggested we go to the Park over her objection. What I'm feeling inside is maybe mom was right. Maybe I'm not a trustworthy person to be around. Is there an unconscious part of me that wants to hurt Mery? Was I angry because she kept calling me too analytical? Because she was able to do the drill so easily and I wasn't? Is some of my father's anger and rage in me? Am I angry at my mother and so at other women? Do I fear commitment with her and so am pushing her away..literally? My mind is spinning crazily with thoughts.

I know consciously I didn't and don't want to hurt Mery. But Mom's words-- "You think you know yourself, but you have no idea..."-- keep reverberating. Maybe I didn't leave the plague in Kansas City, but carry it with me--inside me-- no matter where I am. Whatever comes near me gets hurt.

Yes, maybe I am the plague.

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he beans are burnt into the bottom of this pan. Some rich people have had a delicious meal, and I'm here to clean up after them. Tell me how trying to muscle this cruddy, gummy, black-crust material from this pot is helping me become a better person. Or how scraping wealthy patrons' saliva-soaked discards from their plates brings wisdom.

The King David Hotel. Majestic, beautiful, elegant. Not that it makes any difference to me, as I labor in the hot kitchen over a sink of pots, plates, pans.

The fall. A bloody face. Stitches.

The beginning of the end is near for Johannes and Mery. If I can't figure out my family by myself, I know I can't really understand what happened between Elizabeth and me on my own. I do need the Reb and Dr. L's help. And that enrages me.

"Get a job." If I want their personal attention, I have to pay for it. It's as if they're forcing me to humble myself to this slave labor in order to see them. It takes three hours of work for one hour of their time.

"When the student is ready, the teacher appears." Bullshit. Easy for them to say.

All that is appearing is brown crud covering my rapidly callousing hands.

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You sound like a victim, John. What Dr. Lisbet would call negative yielding. And from that posture, you sound like mom. You

also sound enraged and furious. What Dr. Lisbet would label negative assertive. Like Dad. Sigh. Much still to learn.

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It is late afternoon, and I lie back exhausted, feeling totally safe and secure. There is a soft, fluid sensuality as the salty water bathes and cools my body in the sweltering heat. I am lifted, held, caressed.

This is how I imagine faith incarnate.

Floating. Unable to sink. Letting myself go, completely surrendering and trusting. A feeling of total relaxation. Experiencing and knowing that the universe is supporting me, holding me up.

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Dream and reality have been interwoven in my journey here. Reality was on the back of a motorcycle. Dizzying speeds, wind blowing in my face, desert sands passing by in a blur, stark colors merging into a grayish caramel-like whirl. Senses both heightened and numbed.

My dream last night was of hitchhiking on the side of the road. People passing me by, not stopping. I bowing to each person who left me stranded in the middle of the desert. Thanking them for not giving me a ride, and for their rudeness, insensitivity, and inconsiderateness as they passed me by.

My bow was ambiguous, multileveled. Part of it was sarcastic. I was angry and bowing in mockery at the drivers' inhumanity. Part of it was trying to address my anger, and honor all humans as God's children. Part was actually thanking them for the lesson in acceptance and patience they were giving me. I was

aware in the dream itself of all these levels of motivation, part impostor, part becoming a wise, spiritual person.

It's fascinating that John becomes more nuanced, and less of a black and white thinker in his dream, from his unconscious, before ever achieving that gradated, subtle wisdom in his conscious life.

I was also able to hear the dialogue of the people who drove by, and each was saying, "Wow, we've just passed a holy person. We should have stopped." **The self-important narcissism is also still very much in evidence in his subconscious** Then a person on a motorcycle did stop, and gave me a ride.

And the next morning the dream became reality.

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The waters of the Dead Sea feel especially welcoming after spending the day climbing Masada. When I awoke this morning, I felt the old familiar pre-orgasmic tension in my stomach. I'm trying desperately to consciously challenge and remove that tension in non-masturbatory ways. I wish there were some magic pill I could take to remove this constant reminder of Johannes' exploits from my body. Cold showers, exercise to exhaustion, sometimes helps.

I consciously didn't touch myself and did take a cold shower before preparing for the climb to the top of the fortress, located on an isolated rock at the edge of the Judean desert, near Sodom. That figure. There is something phallic about it, sticking up 1440 feet, deep gorges on all sides. It rises above the Dead Sea (its cooling, embracing womb counterpart?).

There are many ways up--a 328 foot Roman ramp on the western

side , built by Jewish forced labor during the Roman siege of 70 to 73 C.E. Somehow it doesn't seem right to take a path built on the slave labor of fellow Jews. Instead, I take the ancient, "snake path" on the eastern (Dead Sea) side up the mountain. The historian Josephus first described this steep ascent, rising well over a 1000 feet from the desert. By taking this snake path I hope I am somehow confronting and purifying whatever snakes may still remain from what was once the Garden of Eden of my life.

The climb is not easy, my feet hurt, pinched by my boots, and I've not fully recovered from the Sinai climb. But I'm learning to trudge on, step by step. At the top, I am once again greeted by an extraordinary view. Only here, I'm standing at a natural fortification where defiant Jews, after a valiant, but inevitable losing battle, committed suicide, rather than submit to foreign rule.

I feel a hardening of my resolve. Just as I was able to climb Sinai, I am able, step by step to climb Masada. If people can devote their lives to meticulous observance of the Jewish law, given by God at Sinai, reflected on and discussed by rabbis and scholars over the centuries, the least I can do, with no external threat, is to make a life commitment to study and by so doing honor the sacrifices of those who have gone before.

I am clear on my path up the mountain toward God.

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The climb down the mountain also leads to a spiritual insight. I soak in the Dead Sea, whose waters are so salty I can't sink. I feel I am held, caressed and kept afloat by God's tender embrace.

While floating, I look around at the hills, the old Roman

ruins, the pillar of salt that was Lot's wife, and I laugh.

What a seemingly ironic juxtaposition of nature and stories and experiences. You climb one, a phallic fortress, through great effort, to reach the top to be closer to God, where self-sacrifice and death have occurred to preserve one's faith. In the other, you float, very down to earth, relaxing, just allowing.

Yet both of their different ways lead me to be ever more committed to the holy city of Jerusalem, and the study of God's law.

I've been to Jerusalem before, but never for long, and only as a stopgap. This time I'm approaching the city with new eyes, new intention, and from a new direction.

The River Jordan feeds into the Dead Sea. Tomorrow, I follow it, heading back towards Jericho, and then into Jerusalem. The way the Israelites went, crossing the Jordan River, to enter the Promised Land...

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Same events, different perspectives.

You have such hope that, coming into Jerusalem from a new direction, things will be different.

Yes, they will, but in more ways than you expect.

You're floating in faith on a sea of death. And yet you don't see death. Talk about blinders. The very water that holds you up is so salty that no plants, no fish, no living thing can live there. Fish that accidentally arrive from surrounding fresh water lakes die instantly, crystallized into salt. But all you see is buoyed joy.

Floating in faith on a sea of death.

Aren't we all, whether we acknowledge it or not? It's like Dr. Lisbet's three stanza Zen poem, only this time from a higher, spiritual level. John, at the Dead Sea, feels he has moved beyond his Johannes first-stanza blinders and his Job-like second stanza confusion, to a third stanza faith. And he has. Unfortunately, or inevitably, depending upon your perspective, the quest does not stop there. There are levels and levels of cycles and revolutions.

From a spiritual perspective, at this new level, John at the Dead Sea is both at the third stanza of one cycle of the poem, and back again at the first stanza of a new, higher spiritual perspective. John, in Jerusalem, after feeling the sting of death, once again is in a second stanza confusion. His faith is challenged. He wrestles with God to see whether, in stanza three, he truly believes, once again, that we are floating in faith on a sea of death. Or whether he feels stanza three is more accurately written as humans clawing to survive in an empty universe, where death is inevitable, like the Romans' eventual conquest of Masada, and suicide might be the most noble act of courage and self-determination.

And at the top of Masada, you abstractly talk of honoring the Zealots' sacrifices in order to fortify your own determination to pursue God's law. In his speech to the assembled Zealots, trying to give them strength for what must have seemed like an impossible task, Eleazar Ben Yair said simply "This is what the law bids us do."

Can you imagine the helplessness in their faces when they see the Roman's fires destroying their walls, and know that their fight was over. Do you see the terror in a young child's eyes as his father plunges through him with a sword? Does his mother watch her child die,

overcome by despair? So that when her husband turns to stab her, she feels almost relief. And what of the pain and anguish in that father's, that husband's heart as he destroys all that is most precious to him?

* * *

Then there are ten left. One is chosen to plunge his sword into the other nine. He must either kill them, or wait for the Romans to torture, rape, brutalize, humiliate, and then finish them off. What kind of choice is that?

Finally, there is only that last man standing. Before killing himself, he surveys all the people--friends, women, children-- to make sure each one is completely dead, that his entire community is corpses. How does he feel observing the bodies? And after ensuring that all are dead, his reward is he commits suicide.

Is this the law of God you are seeking? Is this the God you seek, who, with his fires--cancer, plagues, earthquakes--eventually destroys each and every one of us?

You do not yet know what it is like to feel someone dear to you has died and you will never see her again. Once you've experienced death, you see and feel it everywhere. Only months separate us. But there is an unbridgeable chasm now between how we see the world. I understand you. You don't know me at all.

* * *

My sleep last night was peaceful, serene, and I had a perfect dream about commitment. I take that dream as a sign of readiness now to approach Jerusalem in a new, more passionate, more responsible way. It's like my subconscious finally may be becoming an ally.

In my dream, a busty young woman in a peasant dress and I

are playing around with each other, petting, stroking, caressing. It's cold outside, and we start to run towards a nearby swimming pool. As we get closer, we see a crevice, about three or four feet wide in front of the pool, and stop running. We discuss the dangers of leaping across it. The gap seems too wide. We're afraid. It's risky. On the other side, quite likely the water will be cold. Further, our clothes will become soaked, and ruined in the water

In the dream, I try to make a joke, asking the woman "Are we getting cold feet?" I'm realizing that our unwillingness to leap is not a good sign for our relationship. I want to say to the girl if we're not willing to take some risks the start of a relationship, it doesn't bode well long term. Either we recognize this and call a halt, or we decide to literally take the plunge.

As I'm thinking these thoughts and how best to share them with her, I see an olive tree, encased in a 48" box, ready for planting. On the ledge of the box a rather scraggly, dark bearded, not very attractive man is standing, dressed in an Orthodox black hat and long black coat, Eastern European style.

He's singing a song in a joyous manner, davening, but I can't understand the words. Maybe they are just sounds. The feeling coming from the sound and his motions is one of love, yearning, longing. As he continues singing, his hands begin to sway, like a willow tree blown by a soft, gentle wind. First one way, then the other, then in a circle around his body. His hands begin to move in alternating waves, one hand crescendos toward the sky as his palm gently opens upward, followed by the other hand, at first palm downward, then opening gently skyward

like a flower.

The next thing I know, the voluptuous young woman is no longer next to me before the abyss, but is now sitting beside him on the ledge of the olive tree. She begins to hum along with him, her hands following his gestures. Somehow my field of vision becomes like that of an ant on the ground, looking up, and I can see the olive tree and the sky above surrounding them, framing them as I see four arms harmonizing in a beautiful, flowing, flowering dance.

Before I can share my insight with the woman about relationship and commitment, she stands up and her and the Rebbe's arms meet and entangle. They leap together from the olive tree, hand in hand, and start running toward the body of water, both of them letting their clothes drip effortlessly from their bodies as they run. Their last items of clothing are shed as they approach the crevice, and, naked, they leap the abyss with a joyous shout...plunging into the cold water. They rise to the surface continuing their playful dance with waving arms. I hear the melody of their laughter and song echoing back to me, alone on the other side of the abyss.

* * *

A sad dream. At first I think it is. Something about Mery leaving me for someone else. My fear of commitment. Being left alone on the wrong side of the abyss. But I didn't feel sad in the dream. Why? Is it because I'm a new person? Ready to face new beginnings? I've now climbed the mountain. I've crossed the Red Sea. I have left my old self behind. I am ready and no longer afraid to leap.

I realize that I identify more with the woman and the rabbi.

It's a happy dream. I'm leaving my old distrustful self behind. I'm the Sabbath bride, ready to take the leap of the abyss. Ready to join the Rebbe and study God's law. To take the olive tree out of the box and actually plant it.

Jerusalem, City of Peace, Hope, Love, God, here I come.

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From the perspective of three months later, let me welcome you--what should I call you? The one who is ready to be baptized in the cool waters of the dream? You are filled with such hopes as you prepare to cross the Jordan River and enter Jerusalem. Even though the "water is chilly and cold," you are warmed by the vibrancy and certitude of your beliefs. You feel yourself pointing the way to a new, evolving, life-affirming, death-defying spiritual self.

You don't realize that in three months, your great spiritual journey will take you from that lovely vision of hope and love to the back kitchen of the King David Hotel, cleaning beans. Welcome.

Still care to join me?

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I leave you floating in a Dead Sea with no fish, to return to Johannes, eating fish. Symmetry?

"That smells great." I say as I watch her lighting the candles on the table and around the room. I'm just making conversation to try to reconnect with her. "Halibut?" It's the only fish I know, so why not hazard a guess? Ugh. Fish. I never eat it. My last memory is from high school, little fried fish strips with tartar sauce we were served every Friday. I didn't

eat it then, and I don't want to eat it now. And I look at the wine.

Not that good a quality.

She didn't even ask me what I wanted.

"No, Mahimahi, a special dish my father taught me how to cook. Though mine never turns out as good as his." Her mood seems placid, even pleasant. "Sundays are his night to cook. Actually both my parents are good cooks. I'd love coming home in the afternoon and smelling the fragrances in the house. Eating out is nice, but there's nothing like a home-cooked meal."

Is this a jab at me and my enjoyment of eating out? I don't think so. She's really such a simple, natural girl. Home-cooked meals, no jewelry, no make-up. I'm beginning to increasingly appreciate that non-materialistic side of her. Especially given my changing financial circumstances.

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I decide to try my luck at something I do want to partake of. I'm feeling tense after all that is happened, and need an orgasm. I don't like eating when I feel like this. "Do we have time for a little playfulness before dinner?" I ask coming up from behind her and caressing her.

"Back off, Mr. Lech. I'm busy. No, no time."

Why did she insist on cooking? I'd much rather be served at a restaurant. It would not only be a lot less work for her, but there would have been more time for us for sex "before the meal."

Mom never cooked me a meal. She'd sometimes ask me what I wanted, and then have the cook make it. When I was young I resented this. I still do a bit. But it does allow conversation to occur without a lot of ups and downs and hassles. I wonder if that's why I like eating out. Being served.

Mery seems to sense my frustration. Easing the let down, she says with a smile, "There will be plenty of time for 'that'..." emphasizing the euphemism "that" "...after this evening's surprise."

"That" helps a bit. But I realize how much I hate surprises. I love to give them, but don't like the not knowing, of being on the receiving end. It feels like things aren't in control, and I don't like that feeling.

I also trust that whenever I give a surprise it will be good. Like the two I have planned for tonight. My first surprise is that I learned the flute part of Mery's favorite duet piece so we can play it together. I think that was really thoughtful of me.

My second surprise, extravagant I admit, is taking her back to the Fairmont, after whatever her after dinner "surprise" is. She loved it last time. Though, if I'm completely truthful, this surprise is also for me, because I, too, loved being there with her.

I know this is not the time to push things, especially after the episode in the park. I need to be on my best behavior and go along with her wishes. "Mr. Lech." Not only am I being rejected--which I hate-- I don't much like her term of endearment. "Plenty of time sounds good and promising. I'm looking forward to it. Thank you."

There is some enthusiasm in my voice, but not a lot. I want it and I want it now. Take a breath.

* * *

"Do you want to say the blessing?" I remember her silent

_____ blessing at the restaurant. I should have seen this coming.

_____ "No, please, it's your meal."

_____ She closes her eyes, bows her head, folds her hands angeli-
_____ cally. I fold my hands and keep my eyes open, observing her.

_____ "We thank Thee, Heavenly Father, for these Thy gifts which
_____ we are about to receive from Thy bounty. We commit to Thy service
_____ in the name of Your only son Jesus Christ our Lord. In the name
_____ of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

_____ She opens her eyes and looks at me. An "Amen" slips out of
_____ my mouth. I am taken aback, bewildered. Did I just say 'Amen' to God's
_____ only son? Even though I don't believe in God, isn't this sacrilegious
_____ as a Jew? Not very sensitive of her. Should I say something?
_____ Normally on a date, I wouldn't, because I wouldn't want to ruin
_____ my chances of a later sexual escapade. But if this is to be my
_____ future wife, don't we have to clear these issues up? On the
_____ other hand, it was my fault she ended up cut and bleeding, with
_____ stitches. Maybe now's not the best time.

_____ Perhaps she is puzzled by my silence. To fill it, she says
_____ "Would you like to say a blessing. Perhaps the humorous one of
_____ your father's?" I know which one she means, the "Good food, good
_____ meat, good God let's eat. But for some reason a story comes into
_____ my mind and I say:

_____ "I wish you happiness like the little matchstick girl."

_____ Her faces becomes confused, as her eyes scrunch. Her lower
_____ lip sticks out to form a pout. "What kind of blessing is that?"

_____ "One of happiness and joy. Why are you so upset?"

_____ "I don't understand. That's one of the saddest stories I
_____ know."

_____ "Huh? It's enchanting. She meets a prince, and lives happily

ever after."

"What are you taking about? She dies of cold, frozen, when her last match goes out."

"Are we talking about the same story?"

"There's only one, the one by Oscar Wilde. Who read it to you?"

"My mom." Suddenly it dawns on me. Of course.

"Sorry, I bet that was one of those where Mom changed the ending. Just like when I asked Mom and Dad as we walked out of the movie theatre after seeing the *Titanic* in 1953, when I was 6, what happened to the ship? "Everyone was fine and rescued. It never sank."

"Oh my goodness, you were soo protected." Now I pout. And she says, "It's ok. You are naive, but you are soo endearingly cute, too."

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"Wonderful spices."

"You can tell? I'm not really a very good cook. I do it all by feel. That's why Dad, who is very precise when he cooks, says his always tastes better. Oops. I'm doing it again. My therapist says I don't take compliments well. I should just 'Thank you'. Thank you."

"Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme?" I know what I like to eat, but I don't have that sensitive a palate. I'm just trying to be cute, throwing in a little Simon and Garfunkle. But she takes me seriously.

"Right, though no rosemary. But there are chopped chives, black pepper, a hint of ginger, and I bet you'd never guess, but a little touch of cinnamon which creates a warm, citrusy flavor. Mom's addition."

"Sounds complicated. How do you know how much to add?"

"All by feel. Improvisation. Each time is new and unique. Though I bet if you were the chef, you'd know exactly, right?" She playfully starts to mock me "Sous-chef, bring me 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon per eight ounces fish. Two ounces of chives. Chop chop. Hurry hurry. And no gas flame stoves allowed. I want only steady radiant heat of a precisely calibrated oven. Move, onward. Now, quickly, serve it in an orderly arrangement. Fish on the right, asparagus on the left, potatoes at 12 o'clock. Always the same."

I look over at her, and take a bite of the fish. Juicy, crunchy, hot, cold, familiar, unique, spicy, but not too. Food AND women.

"Touché. And you?" I start singing "a little bit of this, a little bit of that..." Then I ask, "How did you select the wine?"

"I closed my eyes in the white wine section and picked one."

"I would never have guessed. You selected a great month."

"What would you have done, o sommelier? You of the three forks and three spoons, and ones on top of the plate as well as to the right. Like haughty Taughty battle fortifications."

"It's just like a language, you learn it, then it's not frightening. But of course, you don't want to be trapped by it, either. That's why I also like to eat with my fingers" I dip a piece of her French bread into the fish sauce and take a bite."

After I politely swallow, I say:

"My brother and sister and I used to make fudge. At first we would improvise. Never could get it right. Our cook finally taught me. She told me it was like a caramel desert. There's little margin for error. If you don't cook it long enough, the brown sugar becomes a syrup. But a millisecond later, it turns into a

seething cauldron of burnt lava. When I was precise about my fudge, the ball, dropped into cold water would coagulate perfectly, and then I was rewarded. See, I'm a quick learner. I know what works for me."

"That you do."

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I ignore her tone and content.

"Was that a serious question about the wine—what would I have selected?"

"Sure." I take her word at face value.

"Good. Ok, then, Eliza, here's your wine lesson. There is a 100 point grading system of wine. Food should complement, but not overwhelm wine flavors. Your Sauvignon Blanc actually is a good choice. It goes well with shellfish, like steamed shrimp or mussels." I hand her a pencil and paper. "Do you want to write this down for future reference?" and I continue: "South American Chilean and Argentinean Cabernets pair nicely with rich, gooey cheese and curried Meats, two of my favorites."

"No, I don't want to write it down. It sounds like homework."

A 100 point numerical scoring system. That takes all the fun out of it."

"Quite the opposite. The scoring puts all the fun into it. You know how to judge and evaluate."

"Judge, evaluate. Why not just enjoy?"

"That's the way I do enjoy."

And I still hate fish.

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As we continue eating, I notice myself becoming uneasy and

tense. Too much has happened this afternoon, and I want--need--
an orgasm. I think of going to the bathroom to self-serve, but
decide that would be awkward and inappropriate since she has just
served the meal. Food tastes better to me after an orgasm. I'm
hungry, and the meal becomes a nice dessert. Otherwise, I've
always found a meal to be something that needs to be gotten
through, a holding pattern before I can land. I guess women find
it romantic to have the meal first. We're certainly made differ-
ently.

"Pungent."

"What?"

"The cheese is pungent."

"Is that good or bad?"

"Depends on your scoring system!? Joke." She doesn't smile.

"Aren't words interesting? Pungent can mean sharply painful;
stiff and to the point."

"Like your words."

"Now, now, Eliza. Yes, in that pungent language is to the point has
a sharp, incisive quality,. But if you meant it negatively,
it depends on the eye of the beholder. Pungent can be sharp and
stimulating to the mind or senses. I happen to like pungent, in
life, and in cheese."

"Well, bravo, maestro. I'm glad the cheese suits you."

"Do you have any port?"

"What? No."

"Again, just for your information and edification, an Aus-
tralian Port would be excellent, especially with Stilton cheese,
some dried fruits, a high end bittersweet chocolate--the higher
the cocoa content the better."

"Maybe you should have prepared the meal."

"You know I don't cook. But I could have taken us to a restaurant that could have taken care of us exceptionally." She makes a face. I realize I've pushed too far, my annoyance has leaked out. "Hey, we can do that another time. This is great, being here. I do appreciate your efforts," meager and unsuccessful as they are.

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Ok, if I can't have sex, maybe we can talk about it, to create a more positive feeling in me. Maybe I'll ask what her favorite sexual fantasy is. But before I can say anything, she says,

"Before you came today, I went over to feed the gang down on Sixth Street."

Why is she bringing this up? I know that she did. She told me she was going to, and invited me to come up earlier, to help her. I said I was busy. Is this a dig?

"How was it?"

"Mac was there, and asked about you again. He said he wants to see some of your work from the creative writing class."

Though I'm still uncomfortable going down there, I'll have to make another visit soon to do more research for my honors paper. But then I realize that now that I have been admitted to law school, I don't really need to do any more work. What's the purpose of going again? "Mac's a good guy. I like him. He seems more normal than most of the others. And he always greets me with a big friendly hug."

"I agree Mac is a great guy. But listen to yourself. You

sound so patronizing. Why do you have to compare him to the other men-- are you saying they're not normal? You don't even know them."

"Sorry, you're right. I shouldn't compare." But it's true, nonetheless. There's something spooky about those people.

Where did and does that need to always make comparison and judgments come from? I realize it's like mom. Every compliment has an implied criticism. 'Your sister helped me so much. (Why can't you be like her).' "You get such good grades; your brother and sister could do better." 'Your brother plays music so much better than you do.'

"Mac is special, so articulate and insightful. Do you know that he writes poetry, and has actually written a book, *The Big Sickness* about his personal struggles with alcoholism. He told me it has recommendations for developing programs and treatment--from the ground up, versus top down-- and he has sent it to the mayor and city officials."

I play around with my fish, pushing it under the asparagus (I can't believe, with no hollandaise sauce). I push the asparagus under the potatoes, which are lumpy, and no cream gravy. I take a glass of wine, which is a wonderful vintage, if you consider the month--ugh. What a bad idea this was.

"Are you sure you like the meal? You're hardly touching your food."

"Just savoring it. You're really a terrific cook. You're not eating very much, though."

"It's a little hard. My mouth is novicained up, and where it's wearing off, my chin is a bit painful."

I make a face of contrition. "Sorry. Really."

"No, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said anything. I know how

badly you feel."

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I take a bite and try not to grimace. Not only is the food not very good, I've never before noticed how annoyingly loud Mery is when she chews.

"I didn't know Mac wrote a book. I did get the idea he seems determined to help the ... older winos..." As soon as I say it, even before Mery winces, I know this is the wrong term to use in her presence. I hold up my hand, palm toward her, before she can say anything, and correct myself. "His ah, friends, fellow travelers." Her brow softens.

"You know, I think it would be interesting to invite him to be a speaker in my honors political science class. I bet that would shake up my ivory tower professor."

"That's a great idea. That could be a perfect title for your paper--Welcome to Sixth Street, Shaking the Ivory Tower."

"I like it, although it's not academic enough. I could call it something like "Reflections on the Aging Homeless: When the Ivory Tower Meets Sixth Street."

"All you academic types have to have semi-colons in your paper titles, don't you?" I start to respond, but she holds up her hand, palm facing me. It feels somewhat hostile and threatening when she does it. She keeps talking. "Don't answer. It was just rhetorical. How's your paper coming?"

"Slowly. I've been putting down some notes on my reactions and feelings. It's still pretty raw, unformed, confusing. I don't yet see how to turn those impressions into an honors thesis. But maybe working on it will help me create some order out

of the chaos."

"Where is the chaos?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is the chaos there--on Sixth Street; or in your mind? Isn't it both?"

"What's your point?"

"Wouldn't that be a fascinating paper? Don't you see..." I can see that Mery is getting very excited about her ideas "You're actually doing two things at once. You're writing a paper about a kind of chaos outside yourself--the terrible lives of the elderly homeless men on Sixth Street--as part of an academic exercise, right?"

"Right."

"But you're also writing to look at the chaos in yourself....the ivory tower, academic part of you that is being challenged to confront and do something about suffering in life. Does that make any sense?"

At first I feel puzzled, but then I see something really profound in what she is saying. I've already said it.

"What you're saying reminds me of what I wrote in my paper on Camus' *Plague*. Camus writes the *Plague* to take a stand against the plagues of life." Am I saying this to her to let her know she is not that unique, and that I have already had the idea? Perhaps. I'm impressed. She doesn't get at all defensive.

"Is this a case of great minds thinking alike?" She laughs, and takes her hand to place some of her hair behind her left ear. It looks slightly flirtatious.

"Like a mirror? Inside reflecting outside?"

"Yes. And outside reflecting inside."

"Deep."

"Profound."

"Mirrors looking at each other."

"What a team! I'll cite you in the footnote."

"I don't want a footnote."

Is she being greedy, wanting authorship? Ridiculous, for what? Are you kidding me.? Maybe to appease her I'd offer her second authorship, maybe, but certainly note first. "What do you want?" I ask warily.

"I want a hug."

Ah, a win-win. My paper moves forward, and so does my relationship.

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Is there a clever way to segue to sexual fantasies? After the hug, which didn't last that long, or lead to anything more, Mery returns to her seat and her fish. I decide it's probably not the right topic. Yet.

Instead, I'll take a different tact. I'll tell her about my two surprises, the musical duet and the Fairmont. I know she'll like the duet, and she can read no sexual meaning into it. The Fairmont literally drips with implied sex. It will be better to present the Fairmont first, then on the off chance she doesn't take it that well--and sees it as too blatantly self-serving--the duet will soften her heart. If I present them the other way, she'll be happy at the duet, but the Fairmont might dampen that joy, if she doesn't take it in the right spirit.

"I've got two surprises for you, one before your surprise, one after. Want to hear the second one first?" She looks puzzled.

"Of course, though I feel like Alice who just went down the

rabbit hole. Second before first? How about first first? And the first better not take very long--and, remember, if you're thinking lecherous thoughts as a before surprise, forget it."

"Now look who's logical and ordered, Miss First, first. Ok, I'll tell you about the first one first." She's not making this very easy on me. All my calculations just went out the window.

"And no, no lecherous thoughts--at least that I'd share with you." It's good I didn't suggest sexual fantasies as a topic. But since the duet is so asexual, and I am so innocent in terms of this surprise, I decide I can afford to tease her.

"Ok, let me give you some hints about the first surprise. It takes two to do it."

"I don't like where this is going."

"It doesn't need to take long, and can be done easily in under five minutes, especially if both parties use their hands well, and at least one uses his mouth well. And of course repeats are desirable, though optional."

"You said it wasn't lecherous."

"Lechery is in the eye of the beholder." I give her a wink.

"Da Capo. The head." I point to my head, which I tilt toward my right shoulder, pout my lip, and give a shy, timid expression.

"What do you think you're going to be doing with your head, oh Mr. Innocent looking White Knight in sheep's clothing?"

"Remember your favorite music piece?"

"You mean Beethoven's Ninth? I know where that led."

I smile. "No, your favorite duet for flute and piano."

"Dance of the Blessed Spirits?! From Orpheus!"

"Yes, exactly. Remember I told you I was going to practice it so we could play it as a duet. Well, this past six weeks, my

flute teacher and I have been working on it, and he says I'm ready. So, the first surprise is to play a duet with you."

"Oh, wonderful. I love that piece. You tease. You are so sweet."

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"It will fit right into our tight schedule. I've timed it. It takes less than five minutes to play—exactly 4 minutes and 53 seconds--if we don't do the repeats and use quarter note equals 63 for the andante; and eighth note equals = 80 for the largo, with one Da Capo al fine."

"You ARE really analytical, but SO charming. Yes, of course, it will fit into our schedule, and be a perfect segue for my surprise for you." She pauses. "But before I tell you mine, what's your second surprise for me?"

"Hey, you show me yours before I have to show you another of mine."

"Sounds lecherous, but of course I know that is only in my mind." She makes a face at me and sticks out her tongue. "Ok, fair is fair. My surprise actually fits perfectly with the musical theme you've created. I got us two tickets to the Fillmore."

"What's that?" I've vaguely heard of it--but only in association with its being in a bad section of town, a place to avoid.

"You've never heard of the Fillmore? What planet do you live on?"

"All right, I'm a Kansas City hick. Hey, Toto" I turn to an imaginary dog under the table, and make a contorted corny-looking face "I guess we're not in Kansas anymore."

She laughs. "The Fillmore is a great dance place, the best of all. Last year I heard Janice Joplin and Jimi Hendrix there, and tonight, Janice is going to be singing! You've heard of her, haven't you?"

Kind of. Another one of those druggy performers that make no sense to me. I again think, like with Alice, Someone please bring back Johnny Mathis, Frank Sinatra, and Robert Goulet. "Wow, of course I know her. That's great. I'm really excited. What a great surprise." I hum a verse to myself from Mathis

"Out of the tree of life I just picked me a plum

You came along and everything's startin' to hum

Still, it's a real good bet, the best is yet to come

While I listen to the music she has put on from the Doors "Strange days have found us."

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I push my food around some more. I need sex, or at least to talk about it. As I,m playing with my food, I accidentally hit my wine glass and it turns over, spilling onto my lap. Mery jumps up, gets a cloth, and begins to wipe up the mess. That feels good.

"Don't worry. I have another pair in the car. Is there a dry cleaner's near here?"

She continues to rub my leg and lap to get the stain out, but while doing so looks up at me. "A dry cleaner's? I don't know, let's just throw it in the washing machine."

"I've never used one."

"What?!" She stops rubbing, apparently in disbelief. "How do you do you wash your clothes at school?"

"I told you, the dry cleaner's. What?!? Back at you. Why so

judgmental? It saves time, so I can focus on my studies."

"We really do come from different sides of the track."

"Well, maybe we did. Though it looks like our tracks are converging! Chooo choo. Better rub a bit more."

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When she returns to the table from throwing the clothes in the hamper, Mery asks "Ok, your turn.

What's your second surprise?"

"My second surprise? What if instead of coming back here after the concert, we go back to the Fairmont, a reprise of our earlier festivities there?"

She winces, lowers her eyes to her food, then says, "That's a nice idea."

Nice? Talk about lack of enthusiasm. This feels like one of those letters you get, opening with. "We had a great many talented and fine applicants. You know there is a "but" or "unfortunately" coming.

"And you know I feel what happened there that night with us was like grace, a miracle." She gives me an affectionate, tender pat on my arm. I look for a sign of sexuality in it, but don't see any. Her face looks kind and sincere.

If I'm honest, at least part of the reason that I'm attracted to Mery is because of her giving nature, her child-like innocence. Also I have the belief that if someone this nice can like me, then I really can't be such a demonic figure after all. Take that, mom! You see, I am lovable!

Part of the attraction is also her alternation between that niceness, shyness, and innocence, and genuine sexual appetite

--when it can be aroused. I'm never sure each time I see her whether she will be willing to have sex, so there is also some sense of newness, surprise and new triumph. And when she is ready, vavoom. Hang on, Tiger. I can see my thoughts aren't exactly matching her tone, as she continues,

"It's just that, you know, after having been to Sixth Street today, when you see all the poverty there, it seems the money could be so much better spent and less selfishly. Even though it's your money, I would be taking advantage of all that luxury, and I would feel guilty. That was a special night, but it just doesn't reflect my values. I'm not comfortable in those types of excessively luxurious places."

She sees the disappointed look on my face, but that doesn't seem to deter her. This toughness seems another side of her. At times, she can be so ingratiating, seeking to please. Then, at other times there is a steeliness you'd better not cross.

"Also" she points to her chin "this is probably not the best night to go." What is that supposed to mean? Is she saying she won't be able to effectively give me a blow job because her mouth can't stretch wide to accommodate me (or the chocolate covered banana); or is she pouring salt on the wound, letting me know that because of the pain I caused her this afternoon, it's really inappropriate of me to ask her to be sexually accommodating that very evening.

She is more and more of a contradiction to me. They say about a new country, that you understand it best right when you arrive, based on first impressions. The longer you stay, the more confused you become about the people and the culture. Well, I'm moving from to what I thought was understanding to a state of

confusion about Mery.

They say once you leave the country, you then look back with perspective and once again gain understanding. I'm waiting for that time to occur.

Great. I'm a lecher, materialistic, insensitive to others, wasteful of money, self-indulgent, not giving to the people on Sixth Street, and caused her to suffer and bleed. She is sexually innocent, non-materialistic, sensitive, giving to the poor, cooking and serving me food, and suffering in silence. Seems like a match made in heaven.

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I look for a way to recover. I feel I can never be nicer than she is. I know it's not a competition to her, but I still feel like I just lost. Twice. No Fairmont. AND not as nice as she is. Actually three times. No sex. Why can we take five minutes for music, but not for my needs?

However, not only do I want to avoid getting into a power struggle, I want to show her I can be flexible, am not a plague, am not a lech, and can "out-nice" her.

"You're right, it does seem wasteful, and not the right time for it. I've got an idea. Why don't I take some of the money I'll be saving by not going to the Fairmont, and contribute it to the homeless shelter?"

She comes over and throws her arms around me. "Oh, you're the best." Damn straight. Point for me. A free throw. Nice. Not a plague. I win this round. Kind of. But still no sex.

She is kissing me affectionately. "I love your generosity. I'm so happy to be with you."

I press my head into her breasts. "Ah, I feel like a little baby."

"Oh, good boy. You're so cute. You're right, just like a little baby." She strokes my hair. "This is like the Madonna and child--or like that lovely picture of you and your mother. She must have been a wonderful mother when you were growing up. I bet she nursed you all the time. Is that why you like to snuggle into my breasts so much?"

"Dad told me on my last trip to Kansas City that that was a posed picture. She rarely held and never nursed me." Why did I say that? Am I still angry at mom? Dad? What a stupid thing to say. It just slipped out.

She almost drops my head. "What do you mean?"

I try to re-snuggle in. Maybe I can regain some sympathy. "Dad told me for the first time that I had an older brother who died a few days after birth. He said mom was so afraid she was the cause that she was afraid to touch me, hold me. She had the maids take care of me."

"Oh, baby." She pulls me tighter. "I'm so sorry. That wasn't a very nice thing for him to spring on you about your mom. But how sad for her, too. She and your father."

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I decide the time has come to begin to share a bit more of my family. I don't want to speak untruths, but I do want to keep it historically ambiguous as to when events occurred. "He's angry at her." True, then and now. "I've found out they've decided to separate and get a divorce." True, though a decade ago is when I found it out.

"Oh, no. That must feel horrible. I really am sorry."

It felt horrible then; it feels horrible now. I answer honestly "You're right, it does. It's really hard. I feel caught in the middle between them. It's crazy making. When I was there, each one fights over who I go see first. How much time I spend with each. "

"You really are going through a lot. I wish you had shared this with me earlier. I wasn't as sensitive as I could have been to all you're going through. You poor poor baby." She continues to stroke my hair and I continue to snuggle into her breasts.

I'm feeling aroused, and point down to my lingham. "As you can see, I'm feeling very cared for by you, and happy to be with you, too."

"All right. Because you're so kind hearted in giving to the poor and homeless. And because you're going through so much. You deserve it. But this has to be quick. Five minutes only, Maestro."

I feel like a stray cat being taken in by a charitably-minded animal lover.

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What is the five minute experience like?

Up to this point, my main sexual metaphor has been baseball, in which there are no time limits. I'm flexible. Given the time limit and since I'm taking a writing class, I wonder if it isn't time to be creative and come up with a new metaphor.

I think of Mery taking the carrots and shooting them into the wastebasket. Basketball could be a good metaphor—there is a time limit, though it doesn't seem that creative to select another sports metaphor.

What about music? We're going to be playing a flute and piano duet

soon. That has possibilities.

What about juggling (nice word) and intermingling (also nice)
them. Sports and music as sexual metaphors.

How? Maybe a one-on-one basketball game. On the side of the court,
a band consisting of two people playing music, one a flute, the other a
piano (which looks like an organ).

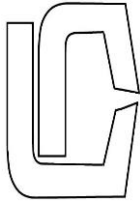
Fourth quarter, the game is winding down. Less than five minutes to
go. The flute is being played.....loud, piercing, shining forth, dominating
the duet's melody and song. Her hands are on the ivory keys. He's down
by a point. The excitement builds. He has the ball. The flute begins to
crescendo. She hits all the right notes, her hands flying over the
organ. Time is running out.

Dibbling. 10 seconds to go. 9,8,7,6,5.

He shoots. It's in the air. Moans and shouts echo throughout the
stadium. 4,3,2,1. Score! Two points. Time runs out. A fitting climax.
Victory!!

A beautiful musical duet...

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a Capo al fine. From the head to the end. The not so fat lady sings for Johannes, as sports and music metaphors join.

Shel rosh. Of the head. My younger self arrives back in Jerusalem. For the first time in four months we are in the same city. The geographical and temporal gap is closing.

But the psychological and spiritual one is not. Two months into my nine month structure, rather than becoming a more unified self, I'm less so. I'm no closer to being integrated with (or being rid of) Johannes. And now I have a joyous, though blinded, spiritual law-seeker self to argue and contend with. I am more fragmented than ever. Less, rather than more whole.

Jerusalem, the City of God. The days are getting shorter. Chanukkah begins in less than two weeks. I have found a wonderful little room at the YMCA.

It's late morning, and my first act is to leave my belongings, unpacked, and immediately go to a store to buy a tallis, tefillin, and an English/Hebrew instructional guide. I decide I'll now wear my black touring cap as my yamulke. As I leave, the store owner, a smiling, bearded old man, puts a yellow flier in my bag.

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Returning to my room, I wonder if it's kosher to pray alone, and in a "Young Men's Christian Association" room. Oh well, I've got to start somewhere. I open a couple of instructional books,

including a Hebrew?English dictionary and lay them out on the floor, and read that you should start with the morning blessing as soon as you wake up. Even though it's almost noon, I'll pretend I'm just waking up. Symbolically, if not literally.

"A Jew should wake up with a lion-like resolve to serve his creator." I adjust the cap on my head. If I were just waking up, would my yamulke be on my head? Are you supposed to wear it all the time? I take out a new folder and try to write with my right hand. I feel a burning sensation. Patience. It will be a couple more weeks, the doctor said, before I can write.

With my left hand I write down "yamulke, always wear?"

The first blessing.

Words of thanks. Then washing hands in a special vessel. I didn't get one. Next time. I go to the sink, and pour water over each hand three times. Excellent. In the same folder, I write slowly, patiently, and awkwardly, "Religious Shopping List:" and put down: "blessing bowl, and pitcher."

I'm going to get this just right. Effort=success. Spiritually, Grandpa.

Next prayer. Reshit chochma yirat Hashem. The beginning of wisdom is the fear (awe) of HaShem. I take out my Hebrew/English dictionary. Yirat can be either fear or awe. I like awe better.

Still whitewashing. A denial of fear and trembling. All is joyous awe. Just wait. It will take less than a week before you begin singing a different melody.

A different round. Just you wait.

Next, I inspect the little fringes, the tzitzis, of my Tallis. I'm supposed to say another prayer, blessing God for all His commandments--all six hundred thirteen commandments. And

asking that I be able to fulfill all of them in all details, implications, and intentions.

I feel such a surge of excitement at what I'm doing. Starting to follow the law of God. I will learn all 613 laws and fulfill them perfectly.

Hmm, I make a note on my spiritual shopping list. Maybe I need to get a set of tzitzis also to wear under my clothes. I place a question mark by what I've just written. That's why I need a teacher. To make sure I'm doing everything correctly--by the book.

I think of jumping up and rushing over to the Mea Shearim, to find out who I can study with. As the Rebbe said, when the student is ready, the teacher appears. I trust that my teacher, yet unknown, will be there waiting for me. Praise be to God. I look up the exact words. Yes. Baruch Hashem. Bless the Name.

I start to get up to go their quarter, and find someone to answer my questions. But I realize I haven't yet said the blessing over the tallis. I sit back down. Patience. It's Friday, and people in the Orthodox quarter must be busy getting ready for Shabbat. I've just arrived. Maybe it's better to start a little slower.

I see and pull out the yellow flier I was given at the shop where I bought the tefillin and tallit.

"From Darkness to Light: The Message of Chanukkah."

I read further, and see that the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet are still at it. They actually have a class this afternoon.

I know they're not the right ones for me to study with, or ask these questions to. He's not really an authentic Jew. And she

certainly isn't either. But they were helpful in getting me to climb Sinai. It would be good to see them again, and I could tell them of my adventures. And this is their first class. Fortuitous. Maybe I will go, just as a holding pattern til I visit and find my true teachers.

* * *

I say the blessing over the tallis, and wrap it around my head and body, reciting "cloaked in light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a curtain." Beautiful. I feel myself wrapped in God's warm embrace.

"By Your Light we shall see light."

* * *

Shel rosh. I place the first set of leather phylacteries--tefillin-- on my head so that the case containing the four parchments rests just above the space between my eyes and below my hairline. I have to brush my hair off my forehead.

I fasten the knot, according to the instruction book, at the nape of my neck. But I don't quite get how to tie the knot in the form of a the letter daled.

I look in the mirror over the desk in my little room. I look a little ridiculous, like a Cyclops. Bad thoughts. Get rid of them.

I return to the instructional manual.

I take the head tefillin off. The arm tefillin is supposed to go on first, I think. It's not entirely clear.

The case of the arm tefillin goes on the left bicep, so that it faces the heart to subjugate the desires and thoughts of our heart to God's service. This is so wise.

Now, I'm supposed to wrap the strap seven times around my

arm. Is it clockwise? Counterclockwise. I check. I want to do this perfectly. And let's see, make sure the section through which the strap passes is toward the shoulder. I adjust it to make sure it's correct. Now, with no interruption, I'm to put the head tefilin in place. Ok. But the arm Tefillin starts to unravel and slips away from my heart. Should I re-tighten it or keep going? Then I see the problem, I'm supposed to secure it on the muscle of the inner side of the left forearm by knotting the strap in the form of the Hebrew letter yod. Wait. Which letter is that, the little comma? And how would you tie a knot in that form?

I decide to keep going with the head tefillin, say the blessing over it and then tighten it with the daled. I look back at the instructions. Wait, there's a blessing to say before tightening the head tefillin, and one after tightening it.

I don't want to undo the head knot, as it seems secure, but the arm case is slipping off. I turn to the arm, and rewrap it.

I have a feeling of strength, like I'm an Indian wrapping his arm in leather, ready to go into battle. Makes sense. How far I've come from being a Stanford Indian, studying pre-law. Now I'm a warrior for the laws of God.

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I can see so clearly, right from the beginning, the battle between the spirit of the law and the desire to meet the letter of the law. This battle only intensifies.

If you take a larger perspective, John, you will see how many times, in different forms, that same battle has appeared. Johannes wanting a strict interpretation of secular law; and a liberal interpretation (if any) of religious law. Your early

infatuation with a strict interpretation of religious law, and a liberal (if any) interpretation of human law.

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I like the arm blessing, as you wrap seven times. "May You pour goodly oil upon the seven arms of the Menorah." Perfect for upcoming Chanukkah. It's all connected.

The arm straps are now in place, but there's still a lot of cord. Let's see.

After seven times around the arm, you wrap it three times around the middle finger. It doesn't say whether clockwise or counterclockwise. Which would God want? Clockwise. It's orderly, just like the world. I place the cord over and under three times. Ok, now the remainder of the cord is passed under the palm and wound around it, forming the letter shin. Ah, I like that letter. Like a W. But I don't see how to wrap the cord like a shin. I twist and turn some straps to get them as close as possible.

This is fascinating. All those letters, shin (from palm) daled (from head) and yod (from shoulder) form Shaddai, God. Wrapping the middle finger is like betrothing myself to God. Perfect.

Now, I'm ready for the morning blessings. Although putting on this tefillin has taken nearly an hour, and it's moving toward afternoon. I'm sure with practice it will get easier and help me feel more connected to God's presence.

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"Da Capo al fine? Or just stop there with the retarded C with the little bird's eye above it? I'll play it six beats, at eighth note equals 80. That could be a good place to stop, n'est pa?"

She shakes her head no, with annoyance and says "First, what's with

the use of 'retarded'; you know I don't like that word."

"Calm down, mother Mery, you must have misheard me, I was saying 'ritardus; sometimes called reitenduo, which means merely 'retarding the speed.'" I smile, "'oops, no offense meant. How about we use the abbreviation 'rit' and call it slowing the speed." I make sure I roll my rrr's with each word.

She nods, but I'm not sure she's exactly mollified. I add, "you said 'First.' Is there a Second?"

"Yes, why do you want to slow the time there?"

"It'll save forty-five seconds."

"Let's go all the way to the end."

"Should we repeat line one the first time?"

"Sure."

"The second time?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Repeat second and third lines, bars 9 to 28?"

"Yes, yes." She's sounding increasingly annoyed. "Is this the way you start all your musical duets?"

"How else do you know how to play with someone if you don't talk about it?"

"Just play. Enjoy."

"How can you enjoy it if you both don't play at the same rhythm? What if you play at different tempos? There needs to be some order. So, what tempo?"

"Arrgh. I don't know. I just feel it!"

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I remind myself to be patient. This is new territory for me. Musically, playing with someone who is not my teacher or a

paid accompanist, is difficult. Further trying to move a relationship to the next level of commitment and intimacy at the same time adds an additional complication.

For musical instruction, I've my teacher to turn to. In the past, for relationship advice, I've relied on Dad for sexual counsel, and occasionally mom for understanding a woman's point of view. But obviously given what happened in Kansas City, I can't turn to either of them now. Even if I could, why would I want to? They certainly don't know how to make a relationship work.

Fortunately, all along, I've also had "books" to counsel me, as well. I figured if I could learn to play tennis from the World Book, I could learn about relationships with the opposite sex from books, too. Kierkegaard's Either became a kind of model for me, was excellent, as well as Ovid's Part 1. I often perused these texts while listening to Mozart's Don Giovanni, another role model, drinking a fine Cabernet Sauvignon. Ah, those were the days.

But those days are now past. For the past couple of weeks--since the Fairmont--I realize I've crossed over into a new stage. Not only was the place symbolic, Johannes--the grand lofty heights-- but the time was too---the week of Passover and crossing the Red Sea. And the irony, that the Passover toast, "Next Year in Jerusalem" turned out to be not only symbolic, but literal. I need new advice. I thought of reading Kierkegaard's Or. But decided to focus on Ovid's Ars Amandi, Part Two. It's shorter, and I can read it in the original Latin. Part Two is advice I need-- how, once "you've caught your quarry," you must learn how to maintain a loving, committed relationship. That's something I've never done.

"My art hath taught thee how to win her; it must also teach thee how to keep her. Though it be glorious to make conquests, it is still more glorious to retain them."

That's my new task. It's a new skill. Practice and patience.

I understand what Johannes is trying to do, how he's trying to evolve, and that does seem necessary as part of his evolution. But I notice myself cringe at the words he so nonchalantly writes in his journal: 'quarry' 'retain them' ..it's like he's seeking to pursue and capture a prey.

Miles to go....

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"Feeling is great. But my teacher says I'm not very good at rhythm. Would you mind if we at least do it the first couple times using a specific count."

"Sure, but that will really be strange for me."

"Thanks. I've found quarter note equals 63 works well for the first three lines, the andante." I point to bars 1-28. "Then we can shift to eighth note equals 80 for the largo, at bar 29." I pull out my metronome.

"No, that's going too far. I will not play listening to a clock ticking."

"How about just to get us started?"

"Fine."

"But then what about when we switch times? Should I pull it out of my pants again?"

I can see she's exasperated. Then, as if some thought magically switches her mood, she offers a cute smile, as if she's just remembered that this is in preparation for a gift that I'm giving to

her. "That sounds lewd. To find the beat, or to beat it?" She winks.

"No and no. You've had yours for now. And well under five minutes!

You lead in. I'll follow."

What I want to say is "Yeah, we had sex, or at least I did--but that was just a tension release for me. You didn't even take your clothes off. All you did was let me unbutton a couple of buttons of your blouse. You said you wanted to keep your bra on." I decide that's not a wise thing to share. And it's true that in my state of arousal, that was enough. In the stats column, you'd have to give her an "assist" for my score. So instead I ask,

"But how will I know what rhythm to set?"

"Just trust. Largo. Slower. Just feel it, hear it inside you."

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It's embarrassing to tell her it's hard for me to feel and hear music inside me unless I've played or heard it thousands of times. So, I say nothing, and run my hands over her piano. Though I've seen it many times before, for some reason it occurs to me that this must be a quite expensive item, a semi-grand. Yamaha. How in the world can she afford that? In fact, how does she afford to live in a Victorian? As my financial circumstances tighten, I guess I'm becoming more sensitive to money issues.

"Is this yours?"

"I wish. No, it's Pierre's."

"Who?"

"Pierre. My art teacher. Former art teacher. This is his place. I just rent a room with a couple of other students."

"Where are they? I've never see them around when I've been

here."

"They work all the time, art studios during the day, modeling and bartending at night. Look, their picture is on the piano."

I see two very handsome guys. Model handsome.

"You live with those two guys?" I'm shocked she hasn't mentioned this, and jealous. What's going on?

"You don't have anything to be worried about. I already told you that. But in this case, you really don't. They're both already madly in love."

"With whom?"

"With each other."

"They're homosexuals? You live with homosexuals?"

"Yes. Is that a problem?"

"No, no. Of course not."

"By the way, they don't like the term homosexuals--too clinical."

"You mean because doctors think it's a mental problem?"

"Right. For some reason, they don't appreciate that. They prefer to be called 'gay.'"

"As in happy?"

"Right."

"Fine. Whatever." I pull out the metronome, turn the knob to 63, and listen to it's soothing click. I look again at their pictures, and place the metronome in front of the frame.

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"Would you mind if we warm up on Bach?"

"I thought the surprise was Orpheus?"

"That's a newer piece, and Bach is in my 'repertoire.' It builds up my confidence to have a success experience first. Also, it's a good way to warm up my fingers."

"Sure."

I play a few warm up scales, practice some long tones, do a couple breathing exercises. She waits patiently.

She then plays one note, a middle c.

"Isn't the tone of the piano amazing. Listen." She strikes it again. There is only the note as we listen. Then she says, "The hammer strikes the string. The initial vibration is like an invitation, which then develops, hits its climax, then dies away." She strikes c again. "Beautiful. Sad. Poignant. Life."

"That's your warm up?"

She looks up at me, seriously. "Yes, I warm up by preparing to feel."

I feel a dig. Not harsh, but a mild sting. Respond in kind.

"My instructor said that the piano is an easier instrument than the flute."

She looks at me, annoyed. "Do you compete at everything?"

"The short answer is yes. But he's making a good point. What he meant was in terms of tone. When you hit the piano, you get the same tone every time. C is c. Whereas with the flute, we have to create the note each time."

"Not a bad point. But listen," She plays the c again, this time with the peddle.

"Can you sense the illusion of growth in sustaining a note. Peddle or no peddle, you have to make the piano sing. You don't want to make it sound like percussions. It's subtle, an instrument of suggestion. Listen to your flute, or other wind or brass instruments,

you can create that illusion with your breath control

"Play your c again." She does, and I play c with her.

"Lovely. Look how we connect, each in our own way with the universal harmony. See, competition can be good. Especially if you play on the same team."

"All right. You win." She winks at me and smiles.

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I pull out my music for Bach's Suite in B minor. Though the polonaise and double, then later the badinerie, are technically more difficult than Orpheus, I've been practicing them for years, and can keep up a quick pace. I'm surprised at how well Mery plays. I wonder how many times she had to practice it to get to this level of expertise. Her fingers fly over the piano. I keep up with her on the flute.

There is a lovely synergy in our playing.

We then turn to the rondeau, with its moving, graceful notes and structure. Mery disagrees, thinking it a bit too pretty.

"Have you practiced Bach much?"

"No. But I can site read really well. And I'm lucky. Once I hear a piece a time or two, it seems to enter into me. I can almost play it from memory and feel."

"That's unbelievable to me."

"Thanks. Yea, to me, too. It's not like I'm trying or anything, it just happens that way. I guess it's kind of like you reading something, though, isn't it? You once told me you had a photographic memory."

"Interesting. You're right. It just happens. So you do with music what I do with words. Does that mean we're opposites?" i

ask, with a light tone.

She's quiet. Did I say something wrong? Is calling us opposites a problem? I put my flute in its holder and give her a hug. "I guess it's true opposites attract."

"You're right. We're very different. I was thinking maybe we're like purple and yellow; or red and green."

"Huh?"

"Well, some people see those colors as opposites. Certainly as very different. But in fact they're complementary colors. Each needs the other for completion."

Need? I don't like that word.

"What if we were primary colors? Then we'd both be independent--you could be yellow, I'd be red-- but we could blend as orange?"

She's silent again. Is she upset? Why? Because I contradicted her, or tried to change her palette symmetry? Transmuted complementary to independent? I don't seem to be able to say the right thing. Women. Ovid, what I put up with. Following your advice, I try again.

"In any case, suffice it to say we're like an artistic palette together. Ready for Orpheus, yellow sunflower?"

She nods, but says nothing.

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We play the andante of Orpheus beautifully. Repeating the first line as a unit; then playing and repeating the second and third lines as a unit. No mistakes. "Stately," I say.

"Not really. More whimsical, really. Sweet."

I feel irritated, but all I say is, "Lyrical."

"Yes, exactly. Can you feel the blessed spirits around us?"

She laughs. I nod, not wanting to say anything as I try to
refind my embrochure.

We move to the Largo. This is awkward, because the rhythm
changes from quarter note equals 63 to eighth note equals 80. I
have trouble hearing that without the metronome. I try, but our
transition does not work. I'm off, and confused. I'm going to
need to put my flute down, and turn on the metronome to set the
time for the Lento. This is awkward. I try to cover it verbally.
"You're right. The andante was beautiful, filled with
'grace'"

I look at her "Get the pun? Double entendre?" She shakes her
head from side to side. "You named this." I hold up my flute,
"Grace."

She smiles thinly. "Cute."

"See, we really work well as a team. Can you believe it's
been almost two months? We should do something special next week-
end to celebrate our anniversary."

"That sounds fun."

I set and listen to a few clicks of the metronome at 80,
then turn it off.

"Ok, let's try again. Six counts to a measure. 4,5,6..."

* * *

The timing at the start of the lento is syncopated, and
tricky between the two parts. My flute teacher said that's what
adds power and beauty to the piece. I stumble and get confused a
couple of times, and each time ask Mery if we can start over.

I realize how much my flute teacher, and having an accom-
plished accompanist, help cover for my mistakes.

"We aren't getting the timing correctly."

"Just play. Trust the music. It will be fine."

"I've been trying that. Without success. Let me put on the metronome, just one time, so we can have its beat guide us."

"I told you, I like to play by feel. I hate the metronome."

"One time."

"Fine."

We start playing, and it's a lot better. I turn it off and we continue without a metronome. I feel like a high wire artist without a net. But when we hit the fourth bar, a difficult string of 32nd notes for me. Although I think I'm doing well, our timing is off.

We try it again. And again.

Finally I say, "You're rushing through my rests in the fourth bar of the largo--here, number bar 32" and I point to a combined eighth and 32nd note rest.

"I don't think so. Let's try it again."

Same error. Again, same error. Each of us is getting a frustrated, so I say,

"Look, there's an objective way to determine this." I pull out the metronome, set it at 80, and turn it on.

"Turn that thing off." She snaps.

"Why? We're not able to agree on the beat without it."

"Try listening to me."

"I am."

"No, you're not. Not my words, my music. Do you know my part?"

"Of course not, it was hard enough to learn my own."

* * *
"Try listening." Her words echo in me.

I realize again that with my flute teacher and accompanist, their job is to listen to me. My job is to play my part as well as I can. To do that, I don't have to listen to them. Playing with someone else--that I'm not paying to accommodate me-- is much trickier. She's right. I can't just play at my own pace, or just listening to and focusing on myself. All right, I can see that this is the next stage in music--and in relationship-- for me. I say I want it. I'm willing to work for it. But I never realized it would be this hard.

Mery interrupts my thoughts. "I have a question for you. It's one of your types of questions. It's something my therapist asked me. Would you rather be a band leader or a player in the band."

I want to focus on listening to her play her part of the piece. Instead, she asks an irrelevant, tangential question. It's not uninteresting, but it's a distraction from our goal of playing the song. I'm confused already, and this confuses me further. I want to think about what she asked me. But right now I want to hear her music. "We're playing music. Why ask me a question like that now? Let's finish the piece."

"So, you can ask questions whenever you want, but I can't?"

She asks as if it's a question, but I know it's not really.

"Fine, the leader. Isn't it obvious! Somebody has to keep the beat for everyone."

"I knew it. Mr. Control. So even if you were a better flute player than conductor, you'd still want to be the conductor. For control."

"Yes, and for status."

"Are you that ambitious? Do you need to be famous in your

lifetime, or could you be like Bach, who really became famous only after his death.

"I have to be famous in my lifetime. After I die is of no use. Be the best now."

"Why is being the best so important to you?"

"Grandpa always said, be the best or be a loser. There is no second place."

"What about just being the best you can be."

"Not good enough."

Well, I can see that my ego is getting less. I don't need to be the best. I like the Rebbe's view that we're all pieces of a cosmic puzzle. Our task is not to be all the pieces--I guess he'd say that's up to the big orchestra leader, God--just be the best piece of the puzzle we're supposed to be. I don't know if I buy into his premise about God, but it's a nice vision. Even if I do buy into his vision, I'm still searching for that piece I'm supposed to be.

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"Now can we get back to the piece?"

"Fine, maestro, take it away."

"This is a bit complicated. You know how to count 1 and, 2 and, three and, right?"

"Of course." There may be a little exasperation in her tone, like that recalcitrant student Eliza Doolittle, but I ignore it.

"Good. With dotted 16ths, and 32nds, my teacher says it's best to divide the count even further--into four parts: '1 e and Uh'; '2 e and Uh.' So far so good?"

She sighs and nods. Perhaps slightly more exasperated. But I

am not to be deterred. "And here, look, in bar four, after the two quarter notes, I rest (3 e), then the 32nd rest (and) and then three 32 second notes (Uh), so it's 3 e and Uh.

"Ready?"

We try it. "There, that's where you're speeding up, on the 32nd note rest, the "and" so I don't have time to play my 30 thirty second notes on the final (ah)."

She pounds her hands on the piano, quite discordantly, I must say. "Listen to yourself." This is the most animated almost angry, that I've ever seen her. "You're telling me I'm wrong. I'm too fast. That there's an objective way to determine this. THIS IS MUSIC. This is Orpheus' Dance of the Blessed Spirits. We're not playing music now, you're reading music. Can't you feel the difference? Can't you flow with the music, live in the notes? Why does everything have to be so structured and precise with you? I feel like you're playing to a metronome, even when it's not on."

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She leaves and goes to the bathroom.

It's interesting how defensive people get when they are wrong. I'm sure she's feeling inadequate that I pointed out her mistake, and that's why she attacked me so meanly.

Johannes is patronizing and unwilling to see how his own lack of ability and skill also contributed to the problem, Is it fear? Timidity? Denial? Ignorance? Yet, whatever the reason, on the surface, and at the time, his initial non-defensiveness seems almost admirable—at least up step upward from how our dad would have reacted to those kinds of comments.

But what did she mean? That when I play music, she can feel me listening to the metronome? Or when I play life? That's not a

very kind thing to say. Is it true? I start to get angry. What happened to Miss Angel Religious Dance of the Blessed Spirit. She's acting more like a devil bitch. Then I remember Ovid. "What works wonders with women is an ingratiating manner. Brusqueness and harsh words only promote dislike. It is not the law that has landed you in bed together. Your law, the law for you and her, is Love....Pleasant words are the food of love."

I take a breath. She's just upset. Let it go. She didn't really mean it. I've had a sample hors-d'oeuvre, and look forward to additional festivities after we return from the Fillmore. And, as Ovid says, maintaining a relationship is not easy. Just like practicing a song, I need to practice patience. "If she is ungracious and off-hand in her manner towards you, bear it with patience; she'll soon come around....if she's obstinate, let her have her way, and you'll get the better of her in the end."

Did Ovid mean that as a double entendre? A pun too gross and outside the concept of any base path even for Johannes to entertain.

I don't want to get into a big fight now. I'm just going to let this go.

It's also positive that Johannes sees his motivation not only as the goal of achieving additional sexual gratification that evening, but also trying to enhance, deepen, and maintain a committed relationship. What he doesn't realize is that he's papering over her criticism, because it stings him so deeply, and there is more truth in it than he can face. Also, he doesn't see the blind spot of his motivation. It's not only the desire for her and relationship. It's also his abject terror at facing a true Kierkegaardian "fear and trembling," confusion, emptiness,

of the abyss alone--facing himself--from which the relationship hides and protects him.

I'm left with the two homosexual guys staring at me. Art students who model. I think of my figure drawing class. We had male and female nude models. I didn't particularly enjoy the male ones. I'd compare their muscle tone to mine. With the females, it was more the 'opposites attract' phenomena. I liked their curves.

I run my hand over the piano keys. This is a beautiful piano. Owned by Pierre, her art teacher. I wonder if the homosexuals model in his class. Then I have a strange thought. I wonder if Mery has ever modeled in his class. At first it seems like a ridiculous idea. Sweet pure Mery. She's much too shy and proper. But then I remember her dancing on the bed at the Fairmont. She said that was a moment of 'grace.' I just assumed it was her way of letting go from all the constraints of her upbringing, a unique event--with and for me.

I feel a panicky jealousy. Is it possible an entire class saw her nude? That her art teacher saw her nude? She is living in his house. Is this the same art professor she teaches the autistic kids with? How does she afford to live here, on a waitress' salary? Stop, stop, stop mind. What am I doing? I see a picture of two males, and my mind just runs away with pure speculation. This is crazy thinking. Stop, thoughts. What's going on?

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Mery returns. I can tell she's washed her face.

She acts as if nothing as happened. "Ready to go dancing at the Fillmore?" She smiles, almost perkily, a word I wouldn't normally associate with either her smile or demeanor. It seems

to me she's trying too hard.

I want to ask her some tough questions, but it seems now is not the time, right before we go out for an evening that she has planned. Also, I remind myself that she's feeling bad because she was wrong on the music. She's probably realized that and is trying to hide those feelings.

"Blame what she blames, like what she likes, deny what she denies. If your battlefield is the chessboard, see to it that your men of glass are mown down by the foe."

Ovid, I follow your advice, and in deference to the efforts she's made to plan a wonderful evening, I try to keep the mood light. "If you'd be loved, be worthy to be loved." I'm just amazing. Definitely lovable. Instead of cross-examining her about her music teacher, I say, as a compliment, "I was thinking about your ability to hear and feel music within you. That's an amazing feat to me." She smiles, right on cue. "Does that make it easier for you to play improvisationally, too?"

"I've never thought of the connection. But yes, I can do that relatively effortlessly. I grew up around music--Christian music, but still music. My brothers and I would create endless variations in harmony and melody. Dad didn't like it, but since they were Christian songs, he didn't vociferously object. Mom encouraged us, even joined in occasionally. It was the one way we all managed to defy Dad, and still have fun. Mom would say 'Just feel the music. Trust. Go.'"

She looks at me with a little softening "How are you at musical improvisation?"

"That's probably a rhetorical question, isn't it?" She

smiles, much more genuinely.

Better. I feel a bit softer toward her, too.

"For some reason, I can't hear music, or even see notes, like I do words. I can read and feel a story at the same time. I can create a story. With music, I feel music I hear, but I'm not able to create music from within. My teacher told me some people hear or feel it inside out. I don't. Maybe it's because of my deaf ear. I don't know. I wish I were better. Lord knows, I try hard enough."

She puts both arms around me and pulls me closer to her.

"Sorry I was so tough on you."

Ovid, you wizard you. Right again.

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"It's interesting that it's so hard for me to improvise with music, and so easy with words. I wonder if there is a connection in me between my ability to remember words from texts, and the ease with which I can play verbal games--like with my brother, or my friend Richard...kind of a verbal improvisation?"

"See, complementary colors, again! You do verbally what I do musically."

"And physically, are we complementary?"

"Why, Mr. White Knight, I can't imagine what you mean by such a statement?"

"Remember that tennis exercise?"

"Oh. How can I forget it." She points to her chin.

"Ouch, sorry." She waves her hand at me, as if saying, it's in the past. Don't worry.

"Physically, you were able to do that so easily, and for me it took lots of practice. Breaking it down into parts. Then

reconnecting to the whole."

"Are you jealous?"

"Maybe a bit. It seems for whatever I want, I have to work really hard at it. And even then, there are some things I just can't seem to do, no matter how hard I practice."

"Like.."

"Singing a round. If I'm the only one singing a part, I can't stay with my part. I end up singing along with the other person."

"I can do that easily."

"I hate you!"

"Why, my white knight, do I see a bit of tarnish--such words coming from your mouth. I'm sure you really feel only happiness for your fair maiden's gifts, don't you?"

"Of course, and I'm sure you feel only delight at hearing all my flaws." She laughs. "All right. Just to continue to prove your superiority, and since I'm totally humbled already, do you want to hear a self-deprecating story?"

"My favorite kind."

Back on track. She wins this chess game, Ovid, as you suggested. I look forward to what the evening might bring. There's no reason why even within a committed relationship I can't get what I want in the end, too--- a dance of the sexual spirits.

I feel back in control.

The rhythmic beat has returned.

I image her head movements on my lingham as regular as a metronome.

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"You're right, I'm not very good at musical improvisation. To try to learn to be more spontaneous, I actually took a jazz improvisation class once."

"Tried?"

"Well, what I realized is that my mind just isn't musically nimble enough. In the first week, the teacher had us listen to what he said was a fairly simple progression: F minor seven, E flat minor seven. He suggested we play along, improvising simply with the root, third, fifth and seventh.

"I figured, how hard could this be? Ok, f minor seven. First I need to find F minor. I know that a minor is 1 and 1/2 keys below, or six keys above the major. So, that's would be A flat major; A flat major has four flats, B,E,A,D,. I know that the 1,3,5,7 notes of F minor are F root, A flat, C, Eflat. (of course that's the natural minor, not the harmonic minor, where you would raise the 7th ascending and descending (E flat would be E natural); nor is it the melodic minor, where you would raise the 6th and 7th ascending (D natural, E natural up) and lower when descending, (E flat, D flat). Supposedly a quicker way was to realize that F minor 7th, (with a flatted 3rd and 7th) is the dorian of the major, that is the second mode of the scale below: i.e, Eflat (which has the key signature of eflat, A flat, B flat; so **voilà**,, there is F, A flat, C, E flat."

As I'm talking, Mery is cracking up. "Oh my gosh, that's the saddest thing I've ever heard. Maybe , because I was raised with music from birth, and we all play and join in all the time, it just comes naturally. You feel it in your heart."

"Right, well, I start with my mind. I'm working on getting to feeling. So, the first time I did this I was confused because there was no D flat in Fm7 when looked at as the dorian of Eflat, whereas there was in the natural minor of A flat (I assume that

was because it was comparing the melodic minor ascending without a 7th). You'll never guess what the teacher said.

"I have some idea!"

"He said perhaps I was being a bit too cerebral, trying to get it intellectually, but I hadn't really digested it yet viscerally. He asked me, actually a reprise--though a bit kinder" I look at her directly "of your question/statement 'Are you a regegitator, a note player, or a music maker? Be a music maker, son! Soar."

"I wonder why he said that."

"Anyway, as you can guess, by the time I'd figured out what the notes were to play in a given bar, much less figure out how I wanted to improvise in that bar, the music was already four bars further along."

She's still giggling. It always helps, when the other person is feeling vulnerable, like she must have been when we were playing bar 4 of the largo, to show some vulnerability yourself. Misery loves company. And as dad drilled into me, "Keep your eye on the ball." Know what your goal is. Same with Ovid. Initially I told this story to help get Mery out of her bad mood. But she seems to be enjoying my misery just a bit too much. I find myself beginning to feel a bit vulnerable, and she's not reciprocating.

"So what happened in the class?"

"Before I get to my fiasco, the teacher did say a couple of things that might apply to us. He was talking about Boulez and Riley."

"I don't know them."

"Two great musicians, he said, who approached music from opposite ends. Boulez saw music as a narrative form of theme and

variation, building to a climax. His music was complex, intensely intricate, like 'Le Marteau Sans Maitre'--mathematically organized. But in 1964 with the song 'in c,' Riley single-handedly toppled the hegemony of Boulez. Riley's music is simple, has a hazy tonality, steady beat, and druggy ambience. Riley saw music as a process of discovery, free form, like a journey, where once you set out, you have no idea where you will end up."

"And which do you like better, preppy boy?" She laughs, pointing to my clothing. That seems a bit taunting. Some of her anger leaking out? I try to follow Ovid and just roll with the punches.

"Duh. Though it's interesting. I thought my life was too structured and that I'd enjoy some freedom. But, yea, I would come down more on the side of-- give me a framework. Though there are limits. Boulez' mathematically organized calculations of rhythms, dynamics, articulation, even tone color seem too much, even for me."

Ortho, like the law.

I purse my lips, and she kisses them. Then, stupidly, I add, looking at her jeans, loose blouse, and sandals, "Soignee you're not, sweetie." Is there some anger still in me, too?

She pulls back. "And I don't want to be, preppy boy."

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There is an awkward silence for nearly a minute.

Finally, she says "An ange passe."

An angel passes. Why did she say that? "What's that mean?"

There is more harshness in my voice that I want.

"I thought you knew French."

"I do. An angel passes. Is that like passes over, like Passover?"

"Maybe, but there's no killing of anyone."

Ouch. Is she referring to the first born sons of non-Jews being killed? That's mean. Is she anti-Semitic? While I'm thinking how to respond, what would Ovid say, she continues:

It's an expression my mom would say when there is a silence. Rather than silence being awkward, it merely means everyone is silent to let the angel pass by. It's a playful, respectful saying."

I know the right thing to say to get us out of this negative spiral is something like "I always feel like an angel is near me when you're around. "It's not a bad line, but might seem too corny, if not sarcastic given the feelings. Instead, I say something I remember from my music teacher

"My flute teacher said there is a fear of silence in contemporary music. Over the last hundred years, there is less and less attention to silence. Violists, for example—are our arch enemy since they are dozens of them in an orchestra to only a couple of us--try to fill every moment with notes. It's the silences, he told which define sounds."

"Interesting." She replies noncommittally, adding, "Though competition still reigns?"

I ignore her question and tone. "Would you like to hear how I embarrassed myself."

Her mood shifts instantly and says, "Sure, that sounds fun."

Now, the vibes are better. I try my line.

"By the way, I always feel like an angel is near me when

you're around."

It works. She gives me a big kiss. It's amazing how easily
and quickly it is to turn things around with just the right bon
mot. She's like a puppet on my strings. Thanks, Ovid.

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"Well, for the midterm the assignment was to improvise with
a piece for one minute. He gave us 8 choices. I chose the
slowest melody, "Slow Blues in G." I listened to it 500 times.
Then I memorized some riffs, a blues scale in G7, c7, d7; a
pentatonic scale; some trills. I knew when each improvisation
would occur. I practiced it another 500 times until I had it
perfect. Then I practiced my tone studies from the master,
Marcel Moyse's De La Sonorité--to feel he was there with me."

"That's some improvisation."

I don't rise to the bait, if bait it be. "My Grandpa used to
say the best extemporaneous speeches are the ones you have pre-
pared beforehand." She smiles.

"I even put the little plastic plugs back into the open
fingering holes in my flute."

"What are those?"

"They're like training wheels on a bicycle when you first
learn to ride. They cover the open holes so that if your fingers
don't exactly hit the key perfectly, no air leaks out to distort
the sound. I hadn't used them in years, but I didn't want to be
worried about missing the fingering."

"You really were nervous, and prepared--covering all your
bases, so to speak, weren't you? Well, I can't wait to hear what
happened."

"I began, and in the first bar, one of the plastic plugs stuck to my finger as my finger lifted up. Now I'm in bar 2, with a plastic plug on my finger, trying to remember what I'd memorized, trying to act cool and bluesy, and debating whether to start over, or just flick the plastic off my finger, or see if I can fit it back in."

She's now laughing out loud. "I can just see you standing there with a plastic plug on your finger, your mind whirring, trying to be hip, and not show your panic. And..."

"I kept going, flicking the plug aside, and 50 seconds later I was finished.

"I waited expectantly. Finally, the teacher said, 'Very good.' I felt so relieved and happy my ordeal was over. I started to sit down. Then the teacher uttered these disastrous words 'What about your second piece?'

"'Second piece? I thought it was just one.'

"'No, the assignment was two, so just pick another piece. Any one is fine. You can do the same improvisation you did with the first.' It had taken me 1000 times of listening and practice to achieve those first fifty seconds. I knew there was no way I could just improvise with a second piece.

"'Sorry, but that's all I have.'

"I'm sorry, too, but in that case, you get an 87-- B+--."

"87 I think to myself? Why not an A? but before I could say anything he continued 'on the first piece, and a 0 (F) on the second.'

"I calculated the average quickly. 'But that comes to a 43.5, an F.'

"That's why I said I was sorry. An assignment is an assignment. Are you sure you don't want to try?"

"I did, and it was one of the more humiliating experiences of my life. I lasted about 30 seconds, feeling totally out of control the whole time."

"'I can see why you didn't want to do it' the teacher said. 'I'm tempted to give you another 0, but I'll give you a 50 for chutzpah. That was embarrassing.'

"And that was the end of my jazz class experience."

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Mery laughs. "You really are like a little boy trying so hard. I'm sorry, too, that your teacher was tough on you. I can see that you like structure, but also like to set your own rules. I'm sorry if I was too tough on you, too. I guess I'm still worried about my job. Also, I felt bad when you said I was wrong about the timing. My therapist has said I shouldn't allow people to treat me that way any more, putting me down, demeaning me. She says I try to please others way too much, and need to stand up more for myself."

I visualize her dancing for me at the Fairmont. I think of saying "We don't want to totally eliminate the desire to please--do we? At least to please me." It's a cute statement, but I know the timing is not good. "I'm sorry I made such a big deal about that. Sorry, I was just trying to play the piece with you well. I'd practiced it so hard, and wanted us to have a good experience doing it together."

"I can see you weren't trying to be mean. Just accurate from your perspective. And it really was a very sweet gesture that you learned the piece for me." She puts her hand on my right thigh.

It's done affectionately, not sexually.

"It's funny that what comes naturally to me in music is so hard for you. I just feel the structure, the notes, the flow. And what is difficult for me--creating a structure in life, at work, verbally-- comes almost effortlessly to you."

"If you're musically fluid, and I'm verbally fluid, does that make us independent or complementary?"

"Unfair, that's a verbal question--your strength. You have to answer it."

I rub my chin, pensively, imitating a gesture I remembered from a sculpture in Grandpa's home of a wise Chinese man stroking his goatee, "Ah, hah. How about if we compromise on a visual simile. Sometimes we're like complementary colors that balance and harmonize; and sometimes like primary colors that can stand on their own or comfortably blend together?"

"Perfect!" She gives me a hug. "Now, that's a great improvisation. What a team. Visually, verbally, musically. Between us, we've got it all."

I hug her back, and give her a kiss. "Don't forget to add, 'physically' to your list."

She kisses me back.

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At best, there really is a harmonious energy between Mery and Johannes. Musically, verbally, visually, and physically. And their differences? They have to learn to build bridges. I'm coming to believe that not all people are born the same. Some are more verbally gifted, others more musically. And then they see the world only from their perspective..

I think that causes them to create an either/or thinking-- in both of them, especially when they discuss music. Yes, sometimes music can be free form. But even in those cases, isn't there a structure--the notes themselves--each with a precise vibration, like A=440? And in jazz, isn't the improvisation made all the more beautiful by the structure and form within which it occurs?

Great jazz musicians, when they compliment each other, say things such as, "He skimmed across the surface of harmonies, subtly enhancing the tune's inner lyricism"; or "He played the melody with a rubato touch, occasionally delaying phrases for emphasis." It's spontaneity within form.

This combination is true in both classical music and jazz. The Italian baroque "style" has beautiful melodies, wildly virtuosic, with a strong improvisational character. The German baroque, on the other hand, has serious counterpoint, and is more intellectual and structured. But Bach would often improvise; and in the Italian baroque, the improvisation occurred within a framework. Both are masterful, each in their own way.

Some classical musicians--like my former flute teacher--feel that great jazz musicians are like improvisers who go on-stage with empty brains and wait for inspiration to strike. But most of the greats practice hard, learn the outstanding solos of their predecessors. There's also a quite complicated jazz theory that underlies many of the progressions. So, the inspiration--new orders, shapes--of the moment comes from the fact they've prepared themselves to be ready and know and feel the basic theory. The improvisation is decoration on structure, not the structure itself.

I think my first realization of all this was from John's

musical dream, where notes emerged from the lines of the paper, gave birth to other notes, soared and danced. It's as if my subconscious was my teacher, showing me this insight. It was the first time something like that had ever happened to me. Now, in Safed, playing flute with a lovely guitarist, and often joined by others, on percussion and additional woodwinds, I am more conscious of this amazing balance between formality and spontaneity.

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I open the door gallantly for her to enter Mr. Red. I am proud of myself for that, because it seems nothing is simple with us. When I arrange an outing, I plan all the details. With Mery, it is different. When we finished our music, and it was time to leave, she says,

"Let me get some change. We'll need to take a couple different buses."

I'm aghast. I've never ridden a bus, and I don't plan to start now. You never know what kind of low-lives take them. Also, you're at the whim of their schedule. I can just imagine being dropped off defenseless and vulnerable in a bad section of town. That is not going to happen. This is hardly a classy way to take me on a date.

I think of offering to drive Mr. Red, but am worried about taking him to a high-crime area.

"How about if we take a cab, and I'll pay for it." I sound grumpy. I restate in a softer tone. "I'd be happy to pay for it."

Now she looks shocked, almost as if I've punched her in the stomach.

"What?" I say.

"I will not take a cab to hear Janis Joplin play at the Fillmore. Not only is it embarrassing and pretentious; cabs also violate my ethical principles. They're completely bourgeoisie."

We agree on Mr. Red as a compromise, uncomfortable for each of us, though for different reasons. As I said, after all that, I am proud of myself for being able to open the door for her--still the gentleman-- and doing so with a gallant, chivalrous attitude. Ovid, I'm having to swallow a lot.

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"I've got an idea."

Mery turns to look at me. I'm trying to keep my eyes on the road, and so can't read the expression on her face. "Remember when I said that next week is our second month anniversary and that we should do something special?"

"Yes." Her voice gives no clue as to her mood.

"How about if to celebrate, next weekend we go to Carmel for a couple of nights. There's a cute little place I know, the Green Lantern. It's charming, unpretentious, and quaint--just your style. We can go to the Tuck Box for tea and scones. Walk on the white sandy beach. What do you say? It'd be fun to have a few uninterrupted days together--just you and me." I'm talking faster than normal, nervous, hoping she'll agree.

She doesn't say anything. I know the words "charming" and "quaint" were good. Did "unpretentious" have too much of an edge given her recent comments about the Fairmont and the cab? I wait, and finally she responds, "I'd love to go to Carmel...."

The tone isn't quite enthusiastic. Is there a 'but' coming?

"Are you sure, though...you know finances and all? And I'd have

to rearrange my schedule...that is if I still have a job."

"With all the money I've saved from the Fairmont tonight, even minus the contribution to the homeless, it'll work out perfectly. Rearrange your schedule. It'll be fun."

Back in control. How quickly he recovers.

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"Turn right here."

I'm amazed how quickly my moods shift. From feeling light and happy at our being a team one minute, her hand on my leg, plans for Carmel, to feeling enraged. Why?

It's not rational, but I hate her giving me directions. It doesn't make sense. She knows the city better than me. But I feel my body cringe and tighten. If only we'd taken a cab. Take a breath.

An image enters my mind of Mery nude. It's not a pleasant picture because it's in front of a class, with her professor leering. Is this just my imagination creating a scenario to upset myself? I want to ask her, but I don't know how. Maybe I can ask her about the queer guys--her gay roommates-- modeling. Then ask her if she ever has.

As we get closer to the Fillmore, I start looking for a parking place under a street light, even if it means we have to walk a long way. "No, its quite a bit further down." Will she please shut up?

"Do your gay friends enjoy modeling?"

"I think so. They're proud of their bodies, and the pay is good."

"Have you ever modeled?"

She says nothing and turns her head away and looks out the window. Silence fills the air. "Look, there's a parking space."

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"I'm gonna try, oh yeah, just a little bit harder so I can show, show show him love with no control, yeah."

As we walk in, Mery turns to me and says, "When I was a student, I...yes." There seems a certain awkwardness and timidity in her voice and face, but it's hard to tell because it's dark and strobe-lit inside, and Joplin's voice is so loud it's hard to hear Mery's intonation.

"Yeah, work on, push on, move on, move on..."

try, try, try, try, try, try."

Mery had said Joplin's voice is soulful, filled with suffering, yet empowering. It sounds like a shriek to me.

"Nude?"

She leans in as if she can't hear me.

I nearly shout, "Nude?"

When she nods, she still seems hesitant, reluctant, even a bit fearful. Then she turns quickly and walks more toward the center of the dance floor, toward Joplin.

"Now...still?" I press forward.

She stops, turns and looks at me directly. Now there is no embarrassment. "Occasionally, if I'm asked."

"Lord try try try try

try oh yea, Lord, Lord, Lord, oh lord."

The song ends. Thunderous applause. Shouting, hooting, shrieking.

I'm undeterred by her look which is almost a glare. "You do? Who do you model for? Why do you do it?" I feel like I'm examin-

ing a hostile witness.

In the moment of quiet, before the next song begins, she says, "I model sometimes for Pierre. The same arrangement he has with my roommates. He deducts some money from the rent."

She stares directly at me for a second. A new song begins, then she turns away toward the stage, raises her arms, and begins dancing.

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"Time keeps movin' on
Friends they turn away..."

Even if I could figure out what to say, it's once again impossible to talk. And I have no idea what to say to her. I am a cauldron of emotions. How do you improvise when you hear that your shy, innocent, loved one has been a nude model. That totally violates my image of her. And what's worse, she's continuing to do it with her former professor. What am I feeling? Violated expectations. Jealousy. Fury. Helpless. "Love with no control."

I look around and it feels like I'm at one of Alice's parties, where I always feel slightly awkward. Only this is much crazier. And I'm not dressed right. I'd thought Mery's surprise would be to take us to a nice place--back to the symphony, the opera, a fancy restaurant. I'd thought we'd be going to the Fairmont after.

So I'm wearing my Johnston and Murphy wing tip shoes, my argyle sleeveless sweater and a long sleeve shirt, sleeves partly rolled up, and gray slacks. That works for the Fairmont, but not for the Fillmore. My clothes seem to shout tourist, like a flowery Hawaiian shirt, tanless arms and a camera around my neck

at a surfer beach. Everyone here is wearing sandals, flowing garments, capes, beads. Even though my hair is longer than when I first arrived in California, it still looks ridiculously short in this setting.

"Kozmic Blues." Got that right.

"I keep movin' on

But I never found out why"

Where's the beat? I can't find the beat. Depressing music.

"I keep pushing so hard the dream

I keep tryin' to make it right

Through another lonely day, whoa"

I can't find my way into the music. Mery's eyes are closed.

She's dancing, if you can call it that. More like soaring, flowing, slowly twirling, arms above her head, an evocative, sensual body movement, floating on the words and music.

I feel passive, lost, confused. What happened to the slow, slow quick quick box step of the fox trot; the bum, bub, cha cha, cha; of ballroom dancing lessons?

"But it don't make no difference, babe, no no no

And it never will, hey."

I try to close my eyes and copy Mery's movements. My shoes feel clunky and heavy. I feel like an automaton. Her words of earlier in the evening echo in me: "Can't you feel it? Can't you flow with it, live in the notes? Why does everything have to be so structured and precise with you. I feel like you're playing to a metronome, even when it's not on."

Even worse, I can't find the metronome's beat to dance to. There's no structure at all. When I open my eyes, Mery's still drifting in the dance, looking peaceful and joyous. Her body is

swaying sensually. Is she even wearing a bra? I know she was at her house, because she wouldn't take it off. Did she remove it when she went to the bathroom? Normally it would arouse me, watching her dance and jiggle like that. But I feel nothing.

I move closer to surreptitiously touch and feel her breasts. She backs away, turning, gyrating. Intentionally? Bad timing on my part?

I close my eyes, try to feel the music, to sway. I think I start to feel something, then I'm pierced by Joplin's voice, open my eyes, see Mery caught up in the music, sweaty, pulsating, erotically moving, her body now gyrating faster, without direction, free, molded by the feeling of the music.

For me, it was as if the music has stopped, and I am supposed to keep dancing. The contrast with her only makes me feel worse. The strobe lights are giving me a headache.

I said you're always gonna hurt me

I said you're always going to let me down...

whoa

whoa

whoa

whoa"

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Mery opens her eyes, soars to a smooth landing, and throws her arms around me. "Isn't she great? What an amazing, voice. She growls, roars, purrs all in the same song. She's such a free spirit! She liberates me. She unchains and releases all of us."

I look at Joplin. She's kind of sexy in an oldish, homely way. There is something about her spirit. Rebellious, defiant,

proud, exuberant, untamed. Even wild. No one will ever tell her what to do. Her beauty is in her energy, and it goes beyond appearances. I think of Ovid. "Beauty is a fleeting boon, it fades with the passing years....Thus, my fair youth, thy hair will soon grow white, and wrinkles soon will line thy face with furrows. Once the rose has blown, its naked stem shows only thorns." I look at Mery and wonder what she will be like old and gray, and thorny.

Johannes, aging applies to you, too. So, I'm following Ovid's advice. "So set thy beauty off with talents that shall mock at time. Enrich yourself with the treasures of the Greek and Latin tongues." And I might add Hebrew and Aramaic.

There is an abandon in Joplin that I'm attracted to, but which I also fear. She seems driven by, or trying to outrun, demons--her plagues. Is that wildness and free spirit also a part of Mery? If so, I didn't realize it was there and it frightens me. I was more drawn to Mery's shy innocence. Or what I thought was shy innocence.

I am in so much turmoil, I'm afraid to speak. I feel passive and helpless, and just want to just curl up in a ball and lie down on the floor. I'd like to say to her, "See what you're doing to me. You're taking away everything I know and destroying me." Almost simultaneously, I'm feeling enraged, as if my father's anger is being funneled into me, and I want to lash out and strike her, mar that false angelic-looking face that lures me to strange places, that models nude, that seems to intentionally try to hurt me.

Mery doesn't appear to notice my silence, as she sees someone she knows, who offers her a joint. She inhales deeply,

eyes closed, swaying. The man puts his hands around hers, cupping them. Why? To help hold her steady while she smokes? Is he caressing her hands? I didn't know she smoked dope. Who is she?

Mery opens her eyes, and offers the joint to me, laughing, making gestures between me and this new person as the next song starts. Is that supposed to be an introduction? I decline. He laughs. At me? My clothes? Mery again closes her eyes and starts dancing, as does this new long, blonde-haired, beaded, bearded capped stranger. He dances alone, yet much too close to Mery, his body occasionally bumping (caressing?) hers.

Something territorial impels me to move in closer also, to reassert and protect what I feel I'm losing. Mery doesn't acknowledge either of us. She's off in her own cosmic dance.

I close my eyes and try to emulate her.

* * *

I feel a hand rubbing up my arm, then on my back. Finally, some affection from her. I keep my eyes closed and continue swaying to the music.

"Come on come on come on

Didn't I make you feel

like you were the only man"

When I open my eyes, I see that it's not Mery who's caressing my body, but someone with long, lovely blonde hair. As the hair turns in a dancing movement, I see a bearded male face. Her friend is looking directly at me and smiling.

* * *

"I want you to come on, come one, come on

And take it

Take another piece of my heart now baby"

This is not what I am expecting, or what I need. Mery's eyes are still closed. I move the hand away from my body. "Not interested, thank you."

Inside I'm in turmoil, and quickly walk away. I leave Mery on the dance floor and head towards the bathroom. But then I realize that might be sending a mixed signal, given my prior experience in a men's room at Stanford. Strange public bathrooms no longer feel safe.

So I head outside. It's cold and dark. I'm disoriented, in part of the city I've never been before.

I begin to walk toward Mr. Red, blocks away. I need to clear my head. I keep my head down, looking directly at my feet, trying to avoid eye contact with anyone.

* * *

Reaching the safety of Mr. Red, I feel palpable tension within me. I hear the song from Mery's house "Strange days have found you." I put in a Johnny Mathis tape. Finally, something soothing and orderly.

Why was that guy trying to pick me up? Couldn't he see I was with Mery? Did he think I was a homosexual?

Growing up in Kansas City, I didn't even know that there were such things as homosexuals. Sure, I'd heard certain non-football types referred to as fags or queers, but I didn't associate that with sexual behavior, and I'd certainly never ever met a real practicing homosexual.

My first experience, though it's embarrassing to realize I didn't even know it at the time, occurred during the cruise I took with Grandpa and my blue-eyed grandma. Several of the sail-

ors and one bell captain were avid muscle builders. They asked me to join them, which I proudly did. Once, stopping by my room, the bell captain started talking with me, telling me how much he admired my weight-lifting efforts. He asked me to pose in my Speedo, saying I should be very proud of my body. I assumed it was because he wanted to see how muscled I was. I couldn't imagine any other reason. Nothing happened, but later one of the sailors told me to be careful of him, he was a "fag" and likes to have sex with all the teen-age male passengers.

I was shocked. He wanted sex with me? He seemed so normal.

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After the trip, and before going to college, I looked up homosexuality in the dictionary, and learned that it was a mental disorder, according to the American Psychiatric Association. Creepy.

Within weeks of arriving in California, I realized again how extremely sheltered I'd been in Kansas City in ways that I wasn't even aware of.

At college, my homosexual bathroom experience occurred. I was in the restroom at Tressider Union, going, as mom called it, "Number two." My eyes drifted around the stall while I waited for the poo to come out. I saw a small half-inch hole that had been drilled between my stall and the next one.

Someone could be watching me. Even though no one was there, I became so frightened, I pulled up my pants, and left the men's room, rushing outside.

I sat down under a lovely maple tree, and tried to compose myself. I wondered what kind of strange, demented person would

cut a hole in a stall. But I really had to poo. I summoned my courage, and returned to the bathroom. I bent down and looked under the adjoining stalls, saw no one was there, and re-entered my stall. I pulled down my pants, but only part way, and tried again.

I heard someone go into the stall next to me. I pulled my pants higher. As I crouched over, I looked up and saw an eye in the peep hole. My heart was racing, panicking. I put my finger over the key hole so he couldn't see me, and then he started rubbing my finger. I leaped up, poo half dangling and rushed out of there.

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I feel safe in my car. I wonder what Mery's doing, or if she even misses my being gone? I let the tones of Mathis' voice waft over me. "Chances are your chances are mighty good." Normally the song soothes me. But not tonight. I hit the forward button "Wonderful, wonderful." Too schmaltzy. Forward again "Til the 12 of November"....

There's something uncomfortable about the lyrics, and melody. Is it because I'm thinking about homosexuality? Maybe. It also feels old and outdated. Once Davy Crockett was my musical hero, King of the Wild Frontier. Then, when I matured into a teenager, that song began to seem juvenile and was replaced by Mathis' romantic ballads. Now what to replace the old with? Certainly not Joplin's screeching.

I turn the music off. I remember the feel of the blond-haired guy's hand on my body. "No, thank you. Not interested." That response took lots of practice, based on replaying the bathroom memory in my mind, and, several weeks later, a similar

encounter with one of my professors. Both times I reacted with outright panic and flight.

I had approached my dwarf-like five foot Western Civilization history professor for help, after receiving a C- on the midterm. He said he was too busy to talk with me, but invited me to his house for extra help. A few days later, when I arrived, he offered me a drink, as though I were a real guest, not just some Freshman. I was flattered. After several minutes, when I'd unpacked my books to show him my exam and get feedback, he moved over to the couch I was sitting on. At first that seemed understandable. I thought he wanted to look over my test. But rather than review my answers, he looked into my eyes and asked if I was feeling any strange sensations. I had no idea what he meant, but said no, none that I was aware of. He told me how attractive he found me, and that he'd put a special aphrodisiac in my drink. He again asked me if I wasn't feeling anything unusual. Yes, fear, I thought. Get me out of here.

That was the only C I ever received in college.

I've never told anyone. Who would believe it?

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After these three experiences, within months of each other, I began to worry that maybe I was a homosexual. Yes, I did like a strong, well-muscled male body. Especially the abs, and large biceps. That's what I wanted to look like. But did I want to have sex with a male? No. Not at all interested.

Then I wondered if there were something about me, a signal I was giving off, that caused them to approach me. Again, after some thought, I concluded this wasn't the case. no. It's like my

approaching a pretty girl, whether or not she is interested. It says more about me than her.

What I came to realize is that even though homosexuals are different and "queer," they are relatively harmless. Three years later, after practicing and rehearsing hundreds of times in my mind, I am proud that when the occasion arose, I could just gently remove Mr. Blondie's hand and say "No, not interested." I don't need to be so afraid.

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This is not the Saturday night I expected. I'm sitting in a car on Geary, while my girlfriend dances alone, or with who knows whom? Take a breath. I want to just drive away. I turn on the motor, and then realize, where would I go? Not back to Kansas City. My time at the Farm is ending. I'm in no place to go to law school in the fall. And if I don't, Grandpa will take the car away, and the one safe place I'm sitting, will vanish, too. And without a car, I'm homeless. I may even end up like those homeless men on Sixth Street that I felt I was so different from.

I turn off the tape, and the engine. I hear in my mind, Joplin's voice

"Lord try try try try
try oh yea, Lord, Lord, Lord, oh lord."

* * *

What is the song referring to? My first thought is that it's really the same advice as Kierkegaard's Or. Commitment to relationship. The same advice as Ovid's Part Two.

"Lord try try try try
try oh yea, Lord, Lord, Lord, oh Lord."

Patience and practice.

I need to go back in and find Mery.

How quickly he shifts from homelessness to Mery, anything to try to keep him from the abyss...

I image a room full of fragmented, kaleidoscopic sounds and colors and twirling, strange people, sounds of laughter as bodies intertwine on the dance floor, attracting and repelling, exchanging acceptance and rejection. Or too stoned to realize there is a difference, as they listen to Joplin liberate them. I really don't belong there. Where do I belong? Everything is becoming so complicated.

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I'm not able or willing to move from the car. I sit.

Finally, I take out the Mathis tape and put in Sinatra.

This whole California experience has been one long uphill battle. And I'm beginning to be tire. The Fillmore is just one more mountain of newness--the random dancing, the thrashing music. It's making me face all too clearly what's really been true since I arrived here.

I've been coping with living in a foreign culture, a new country. I came here liking the crooning rhythms of Mathis, Sinatra, songs mom played for me. Or cute little skoobee-doo rock and roll songs, "Giddy up 409" by the Beach Boys, "Surfer Girl"; or the wicked "Louie Louie."

Inside I know people are openly using drugs. I'm wearing the wrong clothes. I need to get a pair of sandals. What can I do to fit in?

I hear Sinatra's reassuring voice

"For what is a man, what has he got?

If not himself, then he has naught

To say the things he truly feels
and not the words of one who kneels

The record shows I took the blows
and did it my way!"

I turn the tape off. What is my way? I no longer know. I feel I am kneeling, like a little coward, and taking blows. Literally from Dad, and psychologically from my family, even from Mery. There are so many voices in my head. Grandpa says do this; Mom says do that. Mery says are you sure? Who am I? What and where is me? Everything is getting too confusing. I don't know what to believe anymore. I have no no idea who I am. Too tired for law school. Too straight for here.

It feels like when I try to sing a round with someone. I can't stay with my own part, my own voice in the round. I immediately start singing the other person's part. No matter how much I practice or how hard I practice, I can't keep my own tune. The only way I can do it is plug up my one good ear. But then I sound horrible to me. So, either I listen to others, and can only sing their melody, or I shut the entire world's song out, and have to listen to my own singing, which I don't like.

It feels like life.

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I turn off the tape, and remain seated.

I'm trying to hear, find, see myself. But it's like musical notes....I can't capture them, they keep disappearing, just an echo ringing around in my head. I see my present disappearing into the past, like the vanishing notes. But for the first time in my life I don't see a future coming toward me. My future is disappearing, whether Sinatra's supportive tones or Joplin's

discordant cries.

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I feel scared and alone, shaking with a fear at such a deep
core level I've never experienced it before. What is going on?

I take a breath to calm myself. Don't let your mind start
running away wildly. You're fine. The problem is you're entering
a new territory, relationally, and it's confusing. Remember the
advice of your teachers.

Patience and practice.

Kierkegaard and Ovid are teaching me about a new skill,
relational commitment. It will take time to master.

Their advice is the same counsel my tennis instructor gave
me when he asked me if I wanted to improve my backhand volley, a
stroke I was already comfortable with. My volley was good, but
not forceful, and not well-angled. I agreed to try to make it
better. He told me I had to take less of a swing, to bend my
wrist more as I got ready, but to move my wrist less when I hit.
He pointed out that there is only a six degree difference between
hitting the ball to the left side line or to the right.

I got confused. Not only did my volley become worse, my
confidence plummeted and my entire game deteriorated. Even Rich-
ard almost beat me. My instructor reassured me that you have to
be willing to get worse, trusting that in time, with patience and
practice, you will get better. I did, and returned to regularly
crushing Richard on the courts.

I have to trust that the same will be true with relational
commitment.

But what if "my way" is not relationship with Mery. Maybe

she's not the right one. I trusted my tennis instructor, and knew I was receiving the best advice possible and learning a better, more correct way to hit a volley.

But who is to say that Mery is the right one for me?

Maybe my way is law school. Before Mery, I had a good game, a good life. Getting into law school was the fulfillment of a dream. She's continually challenging me, trying to change me. She makes me feel that everything about me is bad. Studying law was wrong-- it supports the Establishment, is too adversarial, involves I-it relationships; is not humanistic enough, doesn't support the poor and homeless. Going to the Fairmont--and having money in general is not a pleasure, it's something to feel guilty about. I am too robotic, rigid, systematic, and analytical. She makes me think and feel that my whole way of being, my whole life is wrong.

I imagine the room of twirling, dancing people, Joplin's howling voice, Mery fogged out and swaying. Is she really helping me evolve into a better person, or is she just tearing me down one step at a time, with no recovery, no better net volleys at the end?

Why not go to law school? Thank God I haven't sent the letter asking for a deferral. Things could be so simple. Grandpa would be happy. My financial situation would be secure. I'd have a clear direction.

I could do it My Way, not hers.

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I force myself to go back in. I'm not a Cowardly Lion. I don't need to run from law school, and I don't need to run from her. Let's just see how things evolve.

You're like a fish moving, darting to the surface, gulping air, not willing to face its demise. To return to the law, to return to Mery makes no difference. No place to run, no place to hide.

As I re-enter, Joplin is still screaming her guts out.

"Break another little bit of my heart now darlin' yeah

Have a

have another little piece of my heart now baby"

I can only see the top of Mery's head, her hair waving and swaying wildly. She is dancing with a group of people, seemingly totally at one with them. I feel sick inside. Suddenly, the law feels empty, and its importance vanishes from my mind. Not because it's wrong--or right--but because it's demanding and I feel weary and depleted.

For the first time I see and feel what the authors I've been reading, like Sartre and Camus and Kierkegaard, must have meant by "the existential abyss." "Nausea", "Fear and Trembling" the "Stranger" are no longer just an abstract classroom concepts. I don't know what to believe anymore. The river seems to have no banks, the railroad tracks askew. There is no structure, no forward-thrusting energy.

Mery sees me, smiles then runs over, breasts heaving and jiggling with wild abandon. She gives me a big hug. As she comes toward me I can see, and then when she hugs me, I can feel, that she isn't wearing a bra. I image how pleasurable--visually and tactilely--it must have been for the others with whom she was just dancing. I want to cry. I timidly hug her back.

"Never never never never never never Hear me

when I cry, cry cry cry

Baby I cry all the time

Each time I tell myself that I well

I can't stand the pain

But when you hold me in your arms

I'm singing once again."

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lays Well with Others." In grade school, on my report card, I occasionally received a "Needs to Improve" in this category. Sometimes I would just go off on my own at recess. Or that picture of me in second grade, looking in a different direction from the rest of the class.

I can see the same thing in Johannes, seeking the shelter and safety of Mr. Red to escape the feelings of chaos in the Fillmore. He, like me, has trouble keeping his own voice with so many others around him. So he isolates himself, to regroup, like a turtle going into his shell, with no one and nothing around.

He seeks control through manipulating the external world, turning on the radio. But he can't control what the song that is being played, so he turns the radio off and puts on his own tapes. It's a hermetic, climate, controlled environment.

The trouble is that he cannot escape his mind. Talk about a Mery-go-round. Johannes' voices are a whirlwind, an eddy of confusion.

"I need to practice relational commitment, and stay with Mery." This sounds like working on a backhand volley for goodness sake!

"Mery may not be the right one." "I should go to law school."

He's a dying fish, limp, helpless, passive, which all of a sudden shows great life, thrashing about. Mery. Law. Mery. Law. As if there is some answer to hide him from the void, and

from himself.

As he will find out all too soon, Mery can't shelter him.
Human law can't protect him.

All the while the existential abyss, ever closer, awaits.
Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.

* * *

We are in the same sinking boat.

There is nowhere I can run and hide....from myself.

I leave America, alone, and immediately seek the group comfort of the kibbutz. I leave the kibbutz, and set out alone for Eilat. Initially, there, like everywhere, when there are people around, I feel awkward, an outsider. So I seek to find a way to belong, as in that situation, with a group of fellow travelers. Then, when I begin to belong, after a while I feel cramped and crowded and want to be alone. I leave Eilat and set out by myself for the desert. The cycle repeats and repeats.

Even back in Jerusalem, I can't face the aloneness, and seek out the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet's group, and then their individual attention. Now my relationship with them, my only regular human contact, is a fiasco.

The pattern? I withdraw from a difficult situation, both to get away from the group and to find my voice. Then feeling lonely, or that I've learned some lesson, or not able to continue to keep my own company, I seek a group, where I again lose my voice, and, after a time, don't play well with others. Once again I withdraw, usually with bad feelings. The transitions are awkward, in both directions.

Is this a pattern I can make conscious rather than reactive, with more healing, thoughtful transitions? Can I learn to play

better with others, learn to play better with myself, and learn when it is time for which, without undue punishment of others, or myself?

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There are also times when Johannes, and John, and even I, reflexively pull back from intense experiences, even while in the midst of them, and observe as if a detached witness. Often it seems this occurs because of our fear of the heightened emotions, which are too much for us to cope with. Yet, the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet seem to think this observing self isn't necessarily a problem, and that it, too, can be cultivated so that it occurs less reflexively, less fearfully--not as a way to run and hide--but as a way both to be emotionally within the world, and at the same time to keep some perspective and gain wisdom. It's a tricky, delicate balance I'm working on, even as I feel with and observe my two alter egos from the lofty vantage point of Safed.

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And the abyss? I still need to continue to write about my return to Jerusalem in December, where I will find that even divine law can't hide me from the abyss, or myself.

In grade school, on the same report card, under "Follows Directions" I also would often receive a "Needs to Improve."

I guess that's still the case, too.

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Welcome one and all.

"For those of you who are new, this is the beginning of a three week class-- From Darkness to Light: The Message of Chanuk-

kah . For those of you who have been with us for our other classes, and Saturday Torah study, welcome back."

I'm surprised at how many people are in the class. Maybe 40 or 50. It's quite crowded, and I sit near the back. I like that I can be out of eye contact and anonymous. I don't plan to stay for the series, just get a taste--an hors'd-oeuvre-- before the main meal of the authentic Orthodox rabbis. After all, how Orthodox can Reb Jonathan be if he is teaching with a Christian, a psychologist, and a woman, in a room where men and women mix?

It's been almost 7 weeks since I last saw them. I smile--40 days in the wilderness! What an amazing experience. At some point, I do want to share with them what has happened to me, and even thank them for giving me the initial impetus to scale the holy mountain, at their "Climbing Sinai" Workshop.

Although it's crowded and uncomfortable with so many people around, I'm glad to be back in Jerusalem. I'm not really that much of a nature person. But I'm not really much of a people person either.

I wonder if I'm like one of the camels in Sinai? The camel carries its own built-in food supply on its back--a large lump of fat that provides it with energy if food is hard to find. The camel can go for days without water. I'm a social camel, self-contained, I can go days without human contact.

I think what I like best is have people around, feel I'm part of the group, but I don't have to interact with them other than when I want to. I enjoy sitting at coffee watching others. My best interactions are in a clearly defined structure: like having a meal at a restaurant.

That's why I'm glad I can sit in the back in this class. In

a class, I'm surrounded by people, but not required to interact. Though there is some structure here, I wish there were more. That's why studying divine law will be perfect for me. Each step carefully laid out.

Is it possible that no place is exactly right? Too many people, too few people. Or, is it that wherever I am, I am not quite comfortable, and create a reason--a story-- for that discomfort, so I can believe that there is a solution? What I am slowly having to admit to myself is that though I choose different situations, I'm not able to choose--or maybe there doesn't even exist-- a situation that is "once and for all" perfectly comfortable.

Though I don't realize--or admit it then-- that time in the Rebbe's class, I am like the camel in other ways. The camel is not a gregarious animal. It seems to dislike everything, kicks out suddenly and viciously with its hind legs, like a startled mule. It is easily annoyed. It does not work willingly; and it never freely learned to obey man, as do horses and dogs. Follows directions: Still Needs to Improve. It grunts and groans loudly as it gets to its feet, and whines when anyone mounts it.

There is some truth in that view, John, but it's a bit harsh. Since your glasses are so dark and disgruntled, it does make sense that you view not only others, but also yourself in such a negative, punitive light. Consider that once the camel starts walking, it carries it's load patiently. I'm learning to work more willingly, be less reactive to others habits--and my own--that I don't find perfect. Dr. Lisbet calls it breathing peacefully into what is. I'm also learning to balance time with others, and time with self. It's all part of a learning

process. You're initial awareness was a critical first step and building block. So, thank you. Sometimes Needs to Improve is not a punitive statement, but an educational one.

"For those of you who are new, we'd like to say a couple words about how we conduct these classes."

"Maybe for the new ones, we should say a word about ourselves, first." Dr. Lisbet interrupts the Rebbe in her pinched, precise voice. For some reason it reminds me--with annoyance--of Mery saying "Turn right here."

He handles it much better than I did, laughing with seemingly genuine appreciation. "Of course. I was going to say we want this class to be very personal, and oy, if I didn't forget to mention us as persons. Would you like to begin, Dr."

Dr. Lisbet nods. "I was born in Switzerland, studied initially as a journalist, then changed my emphasis to psychology. If I were to label myself, it would be as a broad spectrum Jungian. Raised a liberal Christian, I have traveled a lot. I enjoy seeing and learning about new cultures. I spent several years in Japan, China, and Thailand. Then I traveled and lived in India on an ashram at Pondicherry. I also studied and worshiped mother Kali at Dakshineswar outside Calcutta. It was on the Ashram where I met the Rebbe. I'm a long-time student of eastern religions, including meditation, tai-chi, and yoga."

When she talks, she sounds like a robot. Or a precise Swiss clock. How many thousands of times has she given that "personal" introduction?

"Do Jung and Eastern religions mix?" It's a question from a whiny sounding male voice near the front.

"Excellent question. Let me make it personal. For me they do. And, yes, for Jung, too. I believe I'm merely following in

the footsteps Jung expressed. Ok?" There is silence, so whiny man must be satisfied.

"Let me add just one more personal note. In addition to the positive reinforcement of travel--enjoying learning about new cultures-- I also realize there is negative reinforcement--I don't like feeling I'm being confined in any one place and so keep myself moving forward. I'm not in the householder tradition." She looks over at the Rebbe and smiles--if you can call it a smile. Was that supposed to be a joke? "These last few years here in Israel have been the longest I've stayed in any one place since my childhood. studying Jewish mystical traditions with the Rebbe."

Was that personal? As I'm mulling this over, someone in the front right hand side of the room raises a hand. "I thought negative reinforcement was bad." It's whiny voice again. I still can't see his face.

There is a moan in the room. Or maybe it's just in my head. Pleeeaaaasee. This is supposed to be a religious spiritual class. Not a class on the introductory laws of human behavior and psychology. No wonder I don't like being around other people--especially when they're not at my level.

"I'm sorry," Dr. Lisbet responds. "Since these terms are so second nature to me, sometimes I use them without thinking. Negative reinforcement sounds bad, doesn't it? Technically, positive reinforcement is what occurs after a behavior that increases the likelihood of your doing that behavior again. For example, if you do something nice for someone else, and they say thank you, it increases the chances you'll do something nice for

them in the future. If they are mean to you, that is technically punishment, and decreases the chances you'll do something nice for them. Negative reinforcement sounds like punishment, but that's not what it means. It refers to doing something that increases the likelihood that you will have a positive outcome by removing something negative."

I'm totally flustered. This explanation feels like negative punishment. I'm not supposed to be back in psychology 101.

Chanukkah, people. Enough darkness.

"So, if it's raining, and you come inside out of the rain, you have removed an aversive stimulus, and therefore are negatively reinforced. The next time it rains, you will be more likely to seek shelter. Is that clear?"

No, far from it. Next time I want to be inspired on my spiritual search, this is not where I will come. In fact, I think of getting up and leaving--negative reinforcement, right--removing the aversive stimuli of this lecture. This is the way she shows how to stay focused? Wasn't this supposed to be a personal sharing on her part. Arrgh. It's so hard to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys. What an idiotic, irrelevant question, and I can't believe she took time to answer it.

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"I don't like giving a life synopsis. Let me just say I am from the householder tradition: I have four adult children, seven grandchildren, and one great grandchild." The Rebbe says. "I'm a pretty happy person, even though I've had some pretty unhappy experiences in my life. Like Dostoevsky, I can say that 'My hosannahs have been cast in the crucible of doubt.'

"I wrestle with God a lot, seeking to understand how God

best wants to use me in this life. Sometimes I tell God that, from my limited perspective, if I were God, I would run things differently--and with all modesty--better in many cases."

He looks around the room. There are some smiles, some nods. He said less but it's clear that he's easier to know than Dr. Lisbet. I look at him more closely. He must be older than I thought to have such a clan. Where are they? He continues:

"As you can probably already tell, these classes are very informal. We don't have a set, rigid agenda. We do have some ideas we would like to share with you, and then hear what is sparked in you. In that sense, we invite all of you to apply what you learn in this class to your own lives, your own experience. We hope our time together can catalyze an alive, growing, journey for each of you. Our Torah class tomorrow follows a similar structure, and you all are invited. We see Torah study as a guide to personal living.

"So, with that as a description of our loose framework--and ourselves-- who would like to share what has been your experience, up to this point in your life, of Chanukkah? How was it celebrated in your family? What are the memories that come most alive?"

This is not at all what I am looking for. It feels like a watered down version of a touchy feely psycho-spiritual encounter group. I want to hear precisely when you are supposed to light the candles, how specifically do you light them; what are the proper blessings for each night. I want the structure of divine laws.

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I hold the door open for her, then get in the car and start Mr.

Red. The Sinatra tape comes on and she turns it off, saying "I really hope you had a good time and enjoyed Joplin. It's the first time I've planned something for someone I've been dating. It felt good to do it." She looks up at me. like a puppy dog waiting for praise.

I turn the tape back on, --"My Way"--but keep it softer. She continues "I'm embarrassed to say it, but it took a lot of courage for me to make a plan. My therapist is helping me take more initiative in a relationship, not to be so passive. She encouraged me to pin down my ideas, make decisions, follow through. She thinks I have a lot to learn from you in those areas."

I'm not sure what to say. I like hearing the words that I'm still special, and that Mery's therapist thinks I have something to teach Mery. But I'm not sure I like the idea of Mery and her therapist collaborating on this event.

Right now that seems too trivial to worry about. Inside, I feel sick and dark. Apparently she doesn't notice. Maybe it's like times when I was losing control of my eating, and gaining weight. Even though I knew it, other people couldn't yet tell. I had time to change my habits and get back in shape before anyone noticed. Maybe the same can happen here. I give Mery a pat on her lower thigh, as if I am a confident, decisive person. "It was more than I could ever have expected."

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She rests her hand on mine. As a gesture of connection, or to prevent my hand from climbing higher? Johannes, when I read statements like that, I want to strangle you. Are you so insecure that you can't accept affection? Are you so reflexively and constantly sexually game playing that you see every action as a carnal chess move, either moving your toward or away from your

checkmate goal? And worse, are you excited by this sexual gamesmanship as a challenge? How can you possibly think yourself capable of relationship?

"That makes me so happy. And we're not done. I've got two more surprises for you." I'm not sure I can take anything more. All I want to do is crawl under the covers. "I didn't have time to make a desert tonight. And I know how much you like donuts. So I know a crazy little all night diner--Angel's Cafe--that has donuts and New York cheesecake. Does that sound fun?" She seems so eager, I don't want to disappoint her. And how can I go wrong with donuts. Something ordered and predictable, finally.

"Sounds delicious." I'm starting to feel better already. But to make sure I'm not broad-sided, I say, "You said there were two surprises."

"The second one is that I've got something special planned for you when we get back to the house." And she runs her hand sensually up my right thigh, as she slowly undoes the top two buttons on her blouse. No bra. And, though I hadn't noticed before, there is no gold cross, either. "I haven't forgotten what else you'd like to make it a perfect evening. I went to give everything I have to you. Two surprises. Two desserts."

I'm confused. This seems like an offer I'd normally jump at. But it's almost too simple having it offered to me without any effort on my part. Also, I don't really think of Mery as coquettish. But she seems that way now. Is she trying on new behaviors--maybe inspired by and trying to be a Joplin wannabe. Why? Because she thinks that's what I want? Or is she showing me a previously hidden side?

As I think about it, even though normally I'd prefer to be the one taking the initiative, in my depleted state, I need her reassurance. And I should get credit for just making it through the meal, the duet, and the Fillmore. I HAVE worked for this.

And, no matter what the source, origin, and cause of her assertiveness--I'm too tired mentally to think any deeper now-- I just turn myself over to her stroking hand, and I feel myself becoming stimulated.

Yes!

I'm getting back into shape. No one noticed but me. Maybe Joplin and the Fillmore were just a bad dream. Or the effort and suffering necessary to achieve my just reward.

Everything's going to be fine...things are definitely on the rise.

* * *

As people spew forth their stories, I find myself studying Reb Jonathan and Dr. Lisbet. Although I've seen them twice before--at the Fall Preview on the kibbutz, and at their "Climbing Sinai" workshop. I've never really looked at them, other than as old people.

The Rebbe's looks are familiar yet unique. At first I think he looks like a fiery Old Testament prophet.

Old Testament. Oops. Hmm, too much Christian influence from Mery. That's not the way we Jews are supposed to call the Bible. The New Testament doesn't exist for us. Ok, a fiery, Biblical prophet: longish gray beard, hair wild and falling nearly to his shoulders.

There is something about him that reminds me of my grandfather. Though my grandfather wore a clipped mustache and tightly

slicked back thinning gray hair, I can see the ancestral similarities. The bushy gray eyebrows, longish, wide nose. The Rebbe smiles much more easily than my grandfather, more like my father's quick smile and ready laugh. I guess the similarity is not so astonishing given the Semitic heritage.

The Rebbe wears a tallit, prayer shawl, of many colors. At the little store where I'd bought my tallit, I was told that there is really only one traditional type, and that is the kind I purchased. The store owner said some are trying to break tradition with different types and colors of tallit. I wonder if he knows, or was referring to Reb Jonathan?

Why does the Rebbe do this? That's one of the problems, once you start down the slippery slope of non-observance. Who does he think he is to break the rules like that? Does he have a need to stand out and be special?

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Dr. Lisbet is maybe a few years younger than the Rebbe. Perhaps it's her short bobbed blondish/gray hair. Is it dyed like mom? That doesn't seem very spiritual. She is clipped, tighter, in her speech than the Rebbe. Because she is from Switzerland? She is quite thin, and, in contradistinction to the Rebbe's rainbow colors, is dressed simply in white, flowing top, and long white pants. The outfit looks silly on an older woman.

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I debate whether to raise my hand and talk about my family's mix of dreidels and Christmas trees, but decide against it. It would just be adding one more cluttered story to the many I've had to listen to.

"Tomorrow's parashah is about Joseph in Egypt. We read it every year around Chanukkah. As Dr. Lisbet and I have said many times, we believe there are no coincidences. Everything happens for a reason. For those of you who are mathematicians, in geometry, angles that 'coincide' are ones that are next to each other. Keep an eye out in your own life for events that intersect. Are they really just random?"

"Why Joseph at Chanukkah? On one level, he makes us ask the question how do you live as a Jew in a culture in which you are not the majority? For those of you who are Jewish, and don't live permanently in Israel, but live in the Diaspora, that is a fact. What is your strategy? To what degree do you seek to assimilate? To retain your Jewish identity?"

The Rebbe's questions are irrelevant to me --I'm clear on my Jewish path and identity. I don't need him as a mediator. Not now.

But I wish I someone had asked me these questions when I was younger, especially around Christmas time. If I'm honest, though I'm not sure I would have been willing to think about these issues then from a Rebbe.

Do you even realize the irony of the closed loop you've created, John, in which it is never the right time for you to learn? You say you don't the Rebbe's Socratic wisdom now when you are present to hear him offer it. You think it might have helped earlier, but not only wasn't the Rebbe there to offer it, but you might not have been able to hear it. I hear the questions when I don't need them, and wouldn't have been open to them when it might have helped more.

When the teacher is there, but the student is not ready,

there is no transmission. The irony, John, is that it's still more true, in December, than you realize. You are still closed to the questions, even though you really do need to hear them. And even you, John in February, don't see --and comment-- on the irony, because you also are still too close to the wrestling, and too personally conflicted with the Rebbe to hear his wisdom.

* * *

I listen halfheartedly as the Rebbe continues mumbling from a lecture he must have given 100s of times.

"Historically, that was also the issue facing the Jews in the 4th century BCE--before the common era. Alexander the Great had conquered the Hebrew land of Judah. The Jews had invented monotheism. The Greeks worshiped numerous gods. The Jews dressed modestly: the Greeks dressed lightly and wrestled in the nude."

Johannes would have liked that. Or maybe his homophobia would have been too high. I like that the Rebbe calls it BCE, rather than BC, before Christ. It's amazing that even our calendar is based on Jesus. Talk about being controlled without even knowing you're being controlled.

"In 167 BCE King Antiochus IV desecrated the Jewish temple and tried to convert it into a temple for Zeus. The Maccabees fought against the Syrians. They took back the Temple from Antiochus and Judah became an independent state.

"But the Chanukkah story you hear doesn't say that a number of Jews in Jerusalem at that time felt more or less at home with Greek culture and viewed the Maccabees as extremists. These were Hellenized Jews."

"So, in one way, Chanukkah has been framed as a battle between Jews and the outside culture that didn't want to let them

practice their freedom of religion. There is a truth in that. But it is also a battle between fundamentalists and assimilationists. The Hellenistic life was attractive to many Jews. What the fundamentalists said then, and now, is look at any time when it seemed assimilation was working: the golden age of Moorish rule in Spain; the Weimar Republic in Germany. Those eventually crashed down. As did the situation where Joseph became the first assimilated Jew, in Egypt. Some say America is unique. Those who have a more fundamentalist, Orthodox point of view, say don't be deceived.

"Now, let me give the assimilationist's viewpoint."

I tune him out. Again, I am so glad I'm going to study with Orthodox Jews. Some might call them extremists--those with watered down, wishy-washy views. Someone has to preserve our authentic heritage from the assimilationists. What the Rebbe is saying only reinforces (like my word choice, Dr. Lisbet?) my resolve not to study with the two of them.

No coincidences. I am clear I'm on the right path.

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"Onion rings and cheesecake. That sounds like a strange, but delicious combination. What a great improvisation!"

"I was inspired by the great onion rings from Winstead's in Kansas City--and the magnificent cheesecake from the stage Deli in New York. Creativity within structure!" I toast to her with my coffee cup. "Someday I'll take you to both. But for now it's perfect to be sharing them in California with an angel at Angel's cafe." She snuggles closer to me. We share bites. I'm back in my element. Food and women. I mean, food and ONE woman.

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Mery takes a forkful of the cheesecake in her right hand, and picks up an onion ring with her left. She has a mischievous expression. She looks around the cafe to see that no one is looking, then with a lewd smile, runs the fork through the onion ring all the while staring at me. "What is your favorite sexual fantasy?" she asks, then holds up her hand. "Don't answer immediately. I want you to think about all of them, and pick the best."

I nearly choke on my onion ring. "Mery, this is the Angel Cafe, what's gotten into you?" I've never seen her act like such a temptress, a little devil. It's erotic, but a wee bit confusing.

She removes the cheesecake from the onion ring and slowly inserts it sensually into her mouth. "I want this evening to end perfectly for you." She winks. "My final surprise present of the night--whatever you want, and I mean that, whatever you want tonight, is yours."

This is a real dilemma for you, isn't it Johannes? Why don't you tell her that your fantasy has been the conquest of women, and bending them to your will. Whatever base they "allow" you, you seek the next one. Controlling them one step at a time, seeing their limits and then encouraging them, with every chess move you have, to concede even more, so you can conquer new territory.

Sometimes I think you only want what they don't give you, so you can practice your masterful seduction strategies. That way you feel it is your own power and will that gets you what you want. "Not thy will but my will" is your motto. You set the rules of the game. They play on your ballfield, by your laws, which of course you don't tell them. They are nothing but little sheep

that you train, and then discard for the next lamb.

And you like finding that beneath the innocence of each one, there is a hungry, animal-like sexual nature. I find both your seduction, and that animal nature disgusting. In them, and in you.

Tell her that you need the tension of that challenge for your arousal and excitement, followed by resolution. Tell her it's hard to have a fantasy when she says she'll do exactly what you want. Then what? Why don't you explain that to her and see how loving she feels toward you. And as for her--those motions with the onion ring and cheesecake--her offer--what a complete slut she's showing herself to be.

John, I'm more struck by your self-righteous anger, than by their sexual issues. He's trying to change and become more committed relationally. She's trying to give herself to him in a way that she feels would please him. Take a breath, my spiritual warrior. Let's bring a little more compassion to their struggles, a little more forgiveness to their weaknesses. Theirs, yours..and mine.

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"You have the smile of a contented little child on your face. Is that the inevitable effect of cheesecake and onion rings, and me?" She smiles flirtatiously. She follows the direction of my eyes, and can see that I am staring at the opening in her blouse and the barely revealed tops of her breasts. She starts to close one button, but stops, and stares at me.

"So, now, tell me, big baby, what about your sexual fantasy."

"Actually, it's nothing fancy. I'm sort of a plain, simple,

Kansas City guy."

"Cop out."

"No really, right now I'm in fact looking right at my fanta-
sy--it...them." I nod toward her breasts, discretely. "I'm imag-
ining uncovering your second bases."

"Second bases? What are you talking about?"

I tell her about the sexual bases metaphor that Dad and I
developed. "For me, each base is fun, although, as you may have
guessed, I think second base is my favorite."

She takes a bite of cheesecake, she says, "Remember that
picture you showed me of your mom holding you?" I nod. "She
looked very pretty, and, well, I don't know how to say it deli-
cately," she looks away from me, "quite large breasted."

"Yes, she was. Is. But I'm not sure what you're suggesting.
That I like well-endowed women because my mom had large breasts?"

"Did she nurse you?"

Haven't I told her this? Has she forgotten? Or did I just think of
telling her? "I was bottle-fed by maids. Because of what happened with
my older brother, mom was pretty scared around me. She was always
afraid she'd make a mistake, do something to harm me, so she
didn't hold me close very often. I told you what Dad said, that
is just a posed picture."

I take a sip of tea. She nods, starts to say something,
but I interrupt her. I don't want to paint too dark a picture of
mom. "At night, after the maids--or Dad--had put me to bed,
she'd come in and sing to me. 'Frère Jacques.' 'Que sera sera.'
'I see the moon.' We'd say a prayer. Then she'd always give me a
hug and kiss."

"That's beautiful, so sweet." She pauses, then says, "Maybe

what I was thinking doesn't make any sense, then."

"What?"

"I was wondering if our psychological dynamics aren't similar in this respect. My therapist says until I met you, I'd been seeking the approval of a kind, father figure, whom I never had and who was unattainable while I was growing up. Do you think your attraction to big breasts is from seeking the kind of nurturance you never received from your mother--her breasts were unavailable, not attainable."

I look at Mery with a deepening respect...and fear. I guess what she's saying is obvious, but I'd never really thought about it like that. Maybe she knows me too well, even a bit better than I know myself.

"That's impressive, Dr. Freud. Do you think you should become my therapist?"

"Would you like that?"

"I don't know if I'd be able to concentrate on the therapy--but I do know what my fantasy would be."

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I take a sip of tea, and look around the room. It's pretty quiet. I glance at my watch. 3 a.m. No wonder. Way past my bedtime. I think of Mery's comment: Seeking the breasts that I never had. An intriguing idea.

"You know, Mery, I think there is something to what you just said. The unattainable breasts. There was a photograph in a French men's magazine I saw one time, where.."

"A French men's magazine. That sounds naughty. You?"

"Is that the way a therapist is supposed to respond? Any-

way...a guy is walking on the beach in the south of France, holding hands with a gorgeous topless woman. The woman is on his right, looking straight ahead. On his left, walking toward and past him, is a woman in a bikini, also very pretty. The picture shows the man, while continuing to hold hands with his girlfriend, turning to his left to look at the other woman passing by. The caption was something like 'Men: always wanting what they don't have.'

"Are you like that? Should I be worried?"

"Before I met you, yes. Now, never."

"Tell me about before."

That's a pretty bold request. Should I tell her about my past?

How honest should I be? I deflect: "You think here was a before? I'm shocked you would even think that. My life begins with you."

She sips her tea, looks over the top of her cup, and then says

"Please, I want to know you better."

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"When I was younger, yes. It seems like I was on, pardon the expression, a merry-go-round, going round and round in circles, though I didn't really realize it. There was the tension of will she allow this; what's the best move; should I try, shouldn't I try. If I go for third, will she stop me, and even take away first and second. The thrill and excitement and challenge of being so close to a goal. Think of a bathing suit. You are within an inch of seeing third base; an inch or two from second. Tantalizingly close. How do you unlock the entrance? What I wanted was to get to first base; then second; then eventually a home run, each time achieving what I'd never had before."

She just sips her tea, quiet, listening. I'm actually enjoying

sharing my craft and process with her, and eagerly continue.

"Then, it became about the novelty and challenge of getting to each base with new girls. And once I succeeded, always seeking the next challenge. One base, then the next, then when I'd circled the bases, starting again with a new person."

I look over at her. She seems intent, listening closely.

Finally, after a long silence, she asks,

"And once you reach your goal?"

I pause. What is going on? Is she my father/mother confessor? A therapist? Why am I telling her all this. Showing off? Wanting to be completely transparent and honest to see if she will still love me? Am I ashamed? Proud?

"The fun is in the seeking." I immediately, though too late, see the problem. Duh. "Of course, as I said, that was until I met you. Now I'm changing all that. With you it's different. You made me realize that I want to go deeper and be more committed to just one person--you. The only fantasy I have now is uncovering the inner you. Getting to know and be with you, and you alone."

"Oh, you really are my White Knight. What a romantic. I love that about you. And I love you."

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I leave some money on the table to cover the bill, and think we're about ready to leave. But Mery picks up the money and gives it back to me "No, this night is completely on me."

I'm exhausted. But Mery is not ready. She stays seated, saying, "You know you saved yourself, oh white knight--buddy boy. You were getting into trouble. So let me see if I understand...your fantasy was always the unknown, the mystery, the new--and especially the new uncovered

second base?"

I smile and nod. I want to get up, but see she is still not ready. She places her hands on her blouse, and unfastens another one of her buttons.

"And always wanting what's just out of reach?" She slides her chair a little further away from me. "You naughty little boy, always seeking what you don't have."

I move my chair closer, reaching toward her. She moves back a bit more.

"No fair using it against me." I move closer. "You're beginning to understand me too well." She laughs, wickedly. "Mery, you're acting like a little devil--in Angel's Cafe. You understand, it can't be unattainable. You're driving me crazy. I need to know I can have it, with enough effort!" I'm raising my voice, teased, excited, flustered.

She starts to fasten the previously closed button, but instead runs her hands through her hair, which causes the fabric of the blouse to pull tightly against her breasts, accentuating the nipple which I can barely discern through the fabric. "Always wanting something to strive for; something new, novel, hidden" she repeats. She shakes her head, causing her breasts to jiggle slightly. I see my challenge. To keep things fresh and new, I'll just always have to keep me, --and them- a bit out of your reach...so you can't quite possess us."

I feel she's one move ahead of me in the chess game.

I like it....I think.

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I bet Dr. Lisbet would have a field day with this conversation. Unattainable mother's breasts; unattainable fa-

ther's love. Does this seem like a solid foundation for relationship where one seeks what he doesn't have, and the other, to keep his interest, stays just out of his reach? I wonder if I now know enough to be able to understand and untangle myself what's happening between these two. I guess if I could, I'd cease and desist instantly from my pan scrubbing job. I'm still at it. Scrubbing pots? Trying to understand what happened. Scrubbing my mind?

You're right, Dr. Lisbet did indeed have a lot to say about these dynamics. And she even connected Johannes' interest in photography to his desire to seek and capture the seemingly unattainable breasts. In real life, even if he reached second base, it could be taken away at any moment. With a picture, Johannes can look and enjoy as long as he wants, with no fear of being pushed away. From his perspective, the picture gives him complete control. Of course, she wryly noted, that is only if you consider relating to a human through a two-dimensional picture as relationship. And only if you believe it is desirable or ever possible to achieve complete control.

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At the end of the last class, the Rebbe gave us an assignment to explore in a short paper our relationship to Christmas, as a child, and now. The topic interested me, and though I'd planned for that to be my last class, I decided to do the assignment and return one more time, curious what he might say about my paper.

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When I was growing up, I remember feeling awkward when we would sing Christmas carols in school, as if I were violating my Jewish identity. All that stuff about "Away in a Manger, the little Lord Jesus laying down His sweet head; Silent Night, Holy

Night; Joy to the World, the Lord is come.

Was I being faithful to my tradition if I just mouthed the words? What if I thought the name Jesus Christ in my mind? Jesus the man seemed ok. He was just a historical figure, a Jew at that. But Christ, or any word referring to Jesus as more than man, that seemed like trouble.

I asked my parents, and they said that I shouldn't worry about it, that America is a a Judeo-Christian country. They even told me that both Chanukkah and Christmas are really about the same thing--a time for family and presents. Where they saw a Christmas tree, we saw a large Chanukkah bush. "Same difference" Dad chuckled.

My wealthy Grandpa Julilu\$ pointed out that my most important identity was being an American. "Your family has been in this country for several generations. We are proud to be Americans." And I believed them. In an early school picture with shining face, I am proudly reciting the daily Pledge of Allegiance.

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Some parents of my Jewish friends talked about the difference between Goy and Jew as a sharp dichotomy, emphasizing the anti-Semitism of "them" toward "us." During grade school and high school, this wasn't a topic allowed in my family, and it wasn't my personal experience, either. I never felt Christians were out to get me. In fact, other than at Christmas and Easter--when we dyed eggs, which was fun -- not an issue) and when I played golf at "my" country club, I could ignore Jewish/Christian issues, not think about them. They didn't even exist. Of course, I would have also preferred to ignore religion entirely.

My parents' view was comforting. Rather than feel that we were one percent surrounded by ninety percent Christian I could feel we all were just one big happy Judeo-Christian family, all playing on the same team.

And the other team? I wasn't exactly sure, but I guess it must have been strange religions, that had even fewer players in America than we did-- like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam. It's not like I was against adherents of these faiths, since I didn't know actually know any. But they were the others.

I only learned in college that the very name Judeo-Christian was developed by Christians as a way to make it easy for Jews to eventually convert. I'm so happy I'm going to be learning true Jewish laws, the laws of my people. The road to perdition begins with all the little slippages. Eventually you have a CHRISTmas tree and are wishing everyone salutations of a day celebrating Christ's Mass.

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That's enough for this essay. Let's see what he says. I can always say, like me, it's a work in progress. And heh, it's not like they give grades in this class.

I make a note in my journal that I don't plan to share with the Rebbe or the class. Sort of like an update. Once I learned from my study of Greek, that Christ means "Anointed One." I want to shout out to God, "Are all my efforts moving me any closer to You? I have removed all the Levitical intermediaries--I'm calling directly to You. It's You alone I seek. Please, give me a sign that I am on the right path. Show me that I am pointing the way to, evolving into being Your servant, one of whom You can feel proud, a person whom You can one day anoint, as --or like-- the Lamb of God."

I hear the seeking, the yearning to be called into the tent of God for instructions, for a sign. I also hear the desire to transform, evolve into a better person. The dust I still see is that egoic desire for specialness, still wanting to be the Father's favorite son.

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"If you are comfortable, I'd like to invite someone to share their religious background, and an experience that stands out in their mind about assimilation, Orthodoxy, and Jewish identity. Any takers?"

There is a silence in the class. I think of raising my hand, but I don't really want to draw attention to myself. Further, I know where I'm heading and don't want to offend the Rebbe. I wait. Finally, someone in the front row says her name. She is completely catty-corner from me ---as a bishop would travel. In fact, she could not be further from me-- exactly opposite sides of the room.

She starts talking, Her voice is too soft. I can't hear her. The Rebbe asks her name again. Finally, he asks her to stand up. She is tall, statuesque. She is facing the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. It's still hard to hear her. Does she have an accent? She has long, reddish brown hair. Though my view is partially blocked by others in the class, and I can only see her from the waist up, I can tell she's lean, like an athlete, and seems comfortable with her body. She is very poised as she speaks. I realize I shouldn't be looking at her in this way.

She turns and addresses the rest of the class. Her eyes are a dazzling blue. I know she's not looking at me, but I turn away,

in embarrassment and awkwardness. I really don't want to be looking at women any more. That's the problem with a co-ed group. The women make it difficult for me to concentrate.

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"If anyone is interested, I'll be singing some songs with a few friends this evening at the Shalom Cafe. Please come join us."

It figures. Singing on the Shabbat in a cafe. I'm sure that's not according to the rules. This is clearly the wrong group for me to be in.

"Your background?" It's Dr. Lisbet, in her no nonsense, stay on message tone.

"My mother is Irish--on the Protestant side, and a novelist; my father, Jewish, but has never been observant, and sometimes he calls himself Zoroastrian. I think he's joking, but I'm not sure. He's a mathematician. His grandfather, my great-grandfather was a socialist revolutionary in Rumania, who had to flee for his life to America when he joined an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the government."

"So, why are you here? Both in Israel, and in this class?" Dr. Lisbet asks. It sounds almost like an interrogation.

"The only Jewish identity came from my grandmother. She lives in Israel, now, and I've come to visit her over my Christmas break--I'm a high school teacher--we get generous time off this time of year. " She looks at the Rebbe "Is that ok to say."

"Sure," he smiles. "I understand."

"I feel a bit like a 'mongrel' pup, and I'd like to learn more about Judaism, especially its spiritual side. My grandmother knows the Rebbe, and gave me this flier, so here I am."

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The Rebbe thanks the teacher for sharing. He then asks several other people to discuss their upbringing. Maybe a dozen people take a minute or so each. I keep from getting bored by timing how long each one takes.

Finally, he turns and says in a kind, inviting way, "I've asked Joie if she would share an experience she had last year that relates to our topic."

I turn to see who he's speaking to. The school teacher stands up. I notice my attention becoming much more focused. I'm angry at myself. Old reflexive habits die hard. And what kind of a name is "Joie" pronounced as if it's French. How pretentious.

"This happened on Shabbat last year, when I was in the Soviet Union with my grandmother. She'd been selected by our temple, back home in New York, for a clandestine trip to the Soviet Union, to smuggle in certain 'illegal' items--Bibles, prayer books, Menorahs--to the refusenik Jewish community.

She presented herself as having impeccable credentials for the trip, a perfect cover, since Yankee, her father-in-law, had, as I just said, been a socialist atheist Rumanian Jew kicked out of his country for fomenting rebellion. Further, she herself had long-standing connections with several Marxist causes. though she never joined the Communist party. Who better to visit the great Russian proletariat experiment. The Russians would never suspect her true mission. And her past associations--in the 1930's, before World War II, were distant enough that she could fly under the American State Department radar.

I like this grandmother. She reminds me of me as

Johannes--always looking for an angle. But she's doing it for spiritual and other-serving reason, not selfish, but giving.

I listen intently, as Joie proceeds, "Though a spiritual woman, she is iconoclastic, free spirited, and adventurous. My brother and I begged to go with her. It sounded like it was going to be an incredible experience. Dangerous, but exciting. My brother especially liked the risk element. Grandma said no. But we pleaded, and she relented. She decided that having us along might make the whole mission safer--make it look more like a normal family trip."

I look toward her hands, but they are hidden. Does she have a ring? Is she married? Why do I care?

"Although we had some trouble at customs, my Grandmother knew a bit of Russian, told her 'story,' and we eventually got through with all our contraband. Though my brother and I were often scared--he tried not to show it-- my grandmother was in her element, loving the excitement and daily challenges. She said she felt like a double agent, encouraging the faith of the refuseniks, while talking to any authorities she met about her beloved father-in-law and how he would have enjoyed seeing the success of his vision here in the USSR."

I bet she either is or would be a great chess player. I'm not liking her granddaughter very much--too much of a showboat: singer, story-teller; likes to be center stage. But I really like her grandmother.

"The experience I want to share with you occurred on erev Shabbat. It was about 9pm, but the sun was still up and we were

making the last stop of our trip. We were in the outskirts of Moscow, going through windy streets and alleys, exhausted, partly because of the physical travel, partly because of always on the lookout to avoid being caught and expelled, if not jailed. Also, listening to the sad stories and individual bravery of the people we were meeting was exhilarating and inspiring, but draining and sad as well. Jews in the Soviet Union were only trying to practice their religion, but by bad luck they happened to live in a country where their religion was illegal and they were threatened with brutal punishment and imprisonment if they were caught.

"Anyway, we finally arrived at our destination. Three brothers greeted us and invited us in for the Sabbath meal.

"We gave them Shabbat candles, which they received with gratitude. I could see tears in their eyes. We were honored when they asked my grandmother and me to light them, which we did, singing the appropriate blessing.

"Singing is one of the joys of my life. It is when I feel most in touch with God.

"In my home, after Shabbat dinner, when my grandmother is visiting, we all sit around and sing Shabbat songs. So, after a delicious dinner, we suggested singing zemirot. The brothers looked at each other awkwardly, shook their heads and said 'No, thank you.'

"I thought perhaps they just didn't know the songs, so my grandmother said we'd teach them. I began singing, and they all jumped up from the table and moved back.

"When we asked them what was the matter, they replied that

they couldn't sing with us. It was a sin for a men to sing in the company of women."

There is a brief silence, then angry gasping, and shaking of heads in the class. All except for me. The law is the law. They should have understood that men do not mix with women during prayer because spiritual energy distracts them from their pursuit of spiritual connection. This woman, who leaves her child behind, now has a second strike against her--insensitive to her effect on men's spiritual practice. And whining about it to boot. I can't believe the Rebbe actually asked her to talk. Thank goodness I'm celibate now and not interested in women. Thank goodness I'm going to move on from this disappointing, Orthodox-bashing class.

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"Somehow that seemed so wrong to me. Personally, I was really hurt. We'd traveled all that way to support them, and their response was to leave the table and refuse to sing in the presence my grandmother and me."

There is a shaking of heads and even a hiss or two from the group. The Rebbe, in a paternal gesture, goes up to her and gives her a hug. It seems to me he is inappropriately crossing boundaries between student and teacher, man and woman. I can see that this woman is sad. I feel a little pity for her, but she really brought it on herself.

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"He's cute. Though isn't he kind of young for you?"

The taller of Mery's roommates shakes my hand. What does he mean, 'young for you?' I know Mery graduated a few years ago, but I'd never really thought of the age difference.

We tell her roommates good night. She hugs them. They move

closer to me. I allow them to give me a hug, too, but turn my shoulder and stick my buttocks out to minimize physical contact. A trick I learned from countless women when I've tried to hug them.

We head to Mery's room.

When we enter, I lie on the bed and she lights some candles. As she does so, I notice for the first time a painting over her bed. "Starry Night." Has it always been there, and I just never noticed in my desire to get her into the bed, or is it new.? When she returns, I point at it. "If this relationship ever goes sour, I at least already have a useless ear. An easy sacrifice to assuage my anguish."

"Nasty boy. What a horrid thought. Sometimes your sense of humor is really morbid." She climbs under the covers. "Remember when I asked you about fame in this lifetime? Van Gogh was never famous in his lifetime. He never sold a single painting. Yet, what a gift he gives to us, now recognized over a century later. What do you see in the painting?"

I turn and look more closely. 'Swirls, weird, a little off center. Confusing. Somber colors, even with the yellow."

Mery contemplates the print as well. She has a strange, almost ecstatic expression I can't completely decipher. "I understand his world. His passions. His pain."

She then turns back to me, climbs into bed, pinches my cheek, and says, "So, cute young little boy, after all our psychological probing, one last chance-- have you thought of your most exciting, adventurous fantasy?"

I start to rise to the bait, but see she is just being

playful, and is maybe still a bit stoned. I actually have no fantasy. Nothing comes to mind. I tell her that.

She turn away from me, gets out of bed, goes to a book shelf, pulls down a rather large book, which she begins to thumb through.

"That picture of you and your mom reminds me of a Madonna and Child I saw in one of my art history books by an Italian Renaissance painter, Duccio Di Buoninsegna. Here. Look." She flops the book down on the bed and points to the picture.

"See, there is the same eye contact. And look at the baby boy reaching up to tug at his mother's clothing, and there, her fingers are tickling His feet."

"Cute, but.."

She interrupts me, saying, "'What I love about this picture is that it works on a many levels. On a human level-- it's a picture of a mother dandling her baby, with gestures and gazes we can all recognize. But it also works on a spiritual level, as a representation of the Mother of God and the Savior of the world."

"Interesting. But why are you showing this to me? Are you suggesting, based on my picture with mom, that I have great things in store for me? You sound like Grandpa Dave. You remember, me and a Jewish messiah and all."

She laughs, somewhat awkwardly.

"Or, are you saying that I'm a naughty little ordinary human baby and that are my Mother, Mery?" She laughs again.

"I give her a squeeze. First on her arm, then slowly began caressing her braless, though still covered, breast.

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Dr. Lisbet, where are you when I need you. What would

Freud say? Jung? I keep scrubbing.

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"Now, now. She puts her hand on mine. Nice try. But I want to hear a real fantasy."

"I told you," I say with some annoyance at being thwarted, "I don't have any."

O come on, don't all men have fantasies?" What does she mean by that? Has she played this fantasy game with other guys? She may think she's being cute and coy, but I'm not finding her boldness at all sexy. I want to tell her she sounds like a slut. I also want to ask her what have been the fantasies of other men she's been with. Exactly who has she been with? How many?

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I think of Ovid and know that if I ask what I want to know angrily, it won't be a good move. Instead I say, with a gallantry I'm not feeling, "Being with you, sexually or not, is my fantasy."

"Oh, you White Knight, you. You make me even more willing to give you everything I have. Come on, out with it, what do you want?"

Ovid, you're right. Charm works. But I don't like her response. Who is she? Joplin incarnate? Where is the shy innocence that attracted me to Mery in the first place?

"Why don't you tell me some of the fantasies of other men you've been with?" I find the thought painful, yet somewhat arousing.

She pauses and ponders. She seems taken aback, and looks at

me questioningly. It's clear she hadn't planned that this is what I might ask for. "Are you sure that's what you want to hear?"

I like that she seems confused, and less certain of herself.

"You said anything. Yes, I want details." I am aware, though, that I'm less interested in the other men's fantasies, than I am in how many other men there are. I realize I'm not going to be able to stop thinking about this until I find out. "But first, how many have there been?"

"Would you like something to smoke? I think my roommates might have some shit." She's had enough, I think, and I still don't want to touch the stuff, though I am a bit curious.

But it's a drug, and I saw how addicted mom got to legal, prescription drugs, and this is worse because it's illegal. I remember when mom first told me about an illegal drug, heroin, I was about ten. We were on vacation in Miami. I was amazed there was something so powerful that humans could not control themselves around it. There was something attractive about that, as well as overwhelmingly frightening. "There are some things we can't control" mom told me. "And it's wisest to never place yourself in the first place around something so powerful that it will cause you to lose control."

I never ever came near heroin. Fear overcame potential allure and mystery. Where am I on that continuum with Mery? I feel something of the same attraction and fear asking Mery about her past boyfriends. Is this knowledge something I can handle well? Do I feel similarly about Mery herself? Is she dangerous, like an exciting, mysterious drug? Is this more than I can handle, and still stay in control?

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"What do you mean, how many? Costumes?" She smiles awkwardly.

"You know what I mean... people you've dated?"

"Dated?"

"People you've slept with."

"I don't like that term. I don't sleep around."

"Sorry. How many relationships have you had in which sex...I mean love making, was involved."

"Not very many."

"Come on now, particulars, you said whatever I wanted."

She's looking increasingly uncomfortable, which only adds to my arousal.

"There have only been...."

Is her hesitation to count? How many could there be? Another thirty seconds pass. Finally she says. "Three. Besides you. But you...." she puts her head down on my shoulder.

I pet her. "That wasn't so difficult." I'm comforting her, but I'm also wondering how I feel about all this. What was I expecting?

"Actually, it was hard. My therapist says I still have my dad's strict 'I should have stayed pure for my future husband' tape running through my brain.' She calls it the Madonna and the whore complex. Black and white thinking. Either I'm a virgin, or I'm a trollop."

"Cute. Virgin Mery or Mery Magdalene?"

"Thanks, go ahead, rub it in." I reach for her breasts, and begin rubbing.

"Um," she cuddles into me. "You take everything so literal-

ly, don't you?" She starts to laugh, then with a serious, almost tearful expression, she says, "Thanks for being understanding." After a slight hesitation, she murmurs "You're the only one I've ever had an orgasm with....that night at the Fairmont."

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I'm flattered to hear this, though I'm not sure she's necessarily telling me the truth. She may just be trying to lessen the stigma that since she's been around a bit--certainly not a virgin-- that I'm still "special." I feel like I'm back in my pre-law mock trial classes. I'm cross-examining a witness, and know not to get distracted by what they say, or even if they are feeling uncomfortable.

I press on.

"What were their fantasies?"

"The one most into fantasies was an older man." She looks at me with a timid expression. "This isn't going where I thought it would. I wanted to do something nice for you to let you know how special you are for me. But this feels so awkward..."

I decide to show her some sympathy, but only to get her to keep talking. I put my arm on her shoulder "This is just building trust between us, letting me know more about you. Don't feel awkward." Slut. Back off, Ovid.

"He liked stories and costumes, wanted to see me...are you sure you want to hear this?" I nod reassuringly. She continues, "He wanted to see me to be a sweet little comforting nurse in a uniform he purchased."

In spite of myself, I ask "What did the uniform look like? I guess like a regular nurse's. Perhaps the skirt was bit shorter--it was blue, with a Red Cross on it; and a white cap."

So, shy modest Mery indulges in costume fantasies with older men?

She pauses and looks over at me. "Actually, it's kind of cute....I still have it somewhere. Would you like me to put it on? I can show it to you?"

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Several more people stand up and tell stories about Jewish identity and assimilation. Unfortunately, they all have a common thread. Although some mention anti-Semitism, each has an Orthodox-bashing component to it. One woman who wasn't allowed perform an aliyah (the guy next to me explained that meant going up on the bima to read from the Torah), while both her brothers had a Bar Mitzvah. Another guy was gay and disowned by his family for committing a sin against God's word. What's wrong with these whiners?

I've never had any trouble with an Orthodox person. In fact, I've never really met one. Why is everyone here filled with so much anger? This class is supposed to teach us about how to move from darkness to light, yet the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet are doing to stop the class from dwelling on these dark stories.

Instead, after each recounting, they nod sympathetically and only ask, "Anyone else?" Finally, no one says anything. Dr. Lisbet looks at the Rebbe, and they confer in whispers. Are they confused, not sure where to take the class now that the complaining has stopped? Have they completely lost control of the class and its direction? Finally, he speaks,

"We have a loose outline that we like to follow in each of our classes. We also like to leave room for honoring the interests of the particular class. Perhaps this is a good time to give

a brief overview of the three things that we hope to cover today. First, as you have seen, we want to give a brief historical overview of the events leading up to Chanukkah, and have each of you think about your own life experiences in terms of assimilation, Jewish identity, and Orthodoxy."

You must be kidding. This was actually part of their plan? I'm shocked, but if I'm honest, a bit admiring. It's interesting to discover someone has a framework that I hadn't recognized. Could he be more organized than he appears? Then why didn't he share this at the beginning of the class? That's a question I'll ask him during the break.

"Next, we will talk about what most of you probably associate with Chanukkah, the lighting of candles, and the miracle of the oil lasting eight days. We will give a mystical interpretation of that miracle, including why "festival of lights" are common in so many traditions during this dark time of the calendar year. Finally, we have homework for you."

There are some calls of "No, ugh" from the group. I join in, finally saying something. I add a "boo" while staying hidden and anonymous among the chorus of cries. I'm venting annoyance not just at the idea of assignments, but at the way the entire class is going.

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The Rebbe holds up his hand and smiles. "You've probably heard this before, but this time it's true--the homework is for your own good. There are three parts: 1) We invite you each to get a Menorah and candles. Chanukkah begins in 13 days. Each night that you light a candle, we'd like you to image one good thing, one blessing in your life. In fact, you may wish to start

practicing saying one good thing each day as a practice--and we can talk about your reactions at next week's class. See, not so hard, right." He smiles again.

"Secondly, we'd like all student to purchase a journal. If you're Jewish, we'd like you to write down not only your blessing each day, but also to write an essay on your views of where you are now, in terms of Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstruction, and Reform Judaism."

A hand goes up.

"Can you hold your question for a second? Let me just say the third piece. We have a picture here by Devu Grebis which we would like each of you to take home, and meditate on." He holds it up. It's hard to see from the back of the room. I see light at the top, darkness at the bottom. "Write about your reactions to this picture. If there is time at the end of this class, we will break into dyads and have you discuss the picture in class."

"Ok, now, any questions?"

"What about those of us who aren't Jewish. Which parts should we do?"

"I'm sorry, how many of you here are not Jewish?" About a dozen hands go up. I look toward Dr. Lisbet to see if she raises her hand. But she's behind the Rebbe, and I can't tell.

"Welcome one and all. We invite you to light the candles, too, if you are comfortable doing so. Certainly to look for 'more light' in your life, saying a positive blessing each day, cannot violate other religious traditions. Then, instead of writing about each the branches of Judaism, you can write about why you are in this class, why you are here in Israel, and any experi-

ences you have had with different types of Jewish teachings. For example, you might write about your feelings regarding Jews as the 'Chosen People.' You could consider is there anything in your own religion that is a similar self-praising and exclusive epithet?

"And, of course, there is no reason why you can't comment on the Devis picture. So, plenty of work for you, even if you aren't Jewish." He grins. "Ok? Other questions."

"What's been your experience with Orthodox Jews." The question is neutral in it's words, but is expressed somewhat hostilely in its tone. "And a follow-up. What does this Orthodox-bashing have to do with darkness and light in Chanukkah?" The second part of the question is hostile both in tone and content. Several people in the class turn to see who asked the question. It violates both the kindly mood set by the Rabbi, and also the seeming group norm of resentment and aversion toward the Orthodox.

I set my face in a determined, stoic mode, and meet the stares of the classmates. I'm a little surprised at myself for asking the questions, as I'd planned to remain anonymous. But I don't plan to be in this class much longer anyway, so I really don't care what they think of me. Someone has to take a stand.

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"Perhaps you'd like to stand, share your own experience." I shake my head no and remain seated.

"Ok, then, if I understand your question, you are wondering what have been Dr. Lisbet's and my experiences with Orthodoxy, and what connection I see between the pain people have expressed about some of their experiences with Orthodoxy, and Chanukkah. Do I understand you correctly?" He has understood the content of my

question, but has ignored my tone. I merely nod yes, and hold out an open palm, as if signaling him to proceed. Even to me, the gesture seems a bit pompous, like I'm giving him the floor.

He takes a few seconds to compose himself, then begins speaking slowly. "Because of my current teachings, my study of other traditions, as well as" and here he points to Dr. Lisbet, "our relationship, I and to some extent both of us, have had similar experiences to those expressed here today. Yes, they have been hurtful and wounding. Initially, we, too felt frustration, anger, and judgmentalness.

"However, after nearly two decades of such treatment, and after several years of our relationship, the shock of the rejection and judgment has worn off. It's like, to mix religious metaphors, 'Is the Pope Catholic?!'" He looks around the room and smiles. "Of course HE is. Popes are Catholic and male. That is built into the Catholic way. Similarly, the Orthodox believe in their way. They're judgmental because God is, among other things, a God of judgment, and they know that their way is the right way, the only way, the true, authentic way. It is built into their belief system, their very core."

I hear murmurs, and see people nodding in agreement. It's almost as if we're at a subdued version of the Glide church service. I wait for someone to shout "Right on, brother." He's preaching to the choir, and he must know it. Present company excluded.

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The Rebbe holds up his hand. He is not smiling now.

"No, no. Please, listen carefully." He looks at each of us

slowly "It's ok to acknowledge your feelings. But let me advise you against what this gentleman called 'Orthodox bashing.' It's very easy when someone acts judgmentally and harshly toward you--especially when you're reaching out and being kind--to respond in as judgmental and angry and rigid way as you're being treated. That's just human nature.

"But, what Dr. Lisbet has taught me to do, is stop, take a breath, recenter myself, and try to look at the situation from the other person's perspective. Without in any way diminishing the pain that has been caused to many of you--let's look at them and their life, and their situation.

"For example, let's look at the situation Joie and her grandmother encountered in the Soviet Union. Your perspective is clear and understandable. But what might have been the perspective of people you were visiting and trying to help? They are practicing their faith at great danger in a Communist country where the practice of religion is outlawed. If you were going to be religious, under those circumstances, wouldn't you want to select the most rigorous and observant path possible? And wouldn't you feel a need to believe in its absolute truth?"

The Rebbe pauses, seeming to take stock of the puzzled looks on many of the student's faces, although not mine. Choosing Orthodoxy, if you really want to be committed, be authentic, and be the best, just makes perfect sense, no matter what your circumstances.

He looks over at Dr. Lisbet. "Dr. Lisbet has told me it's called cognitive dissonance theory in psychology. Applied to this situation, I would imagine they don't want to feel that you are risking their lives for anything less than God's true, authentic

law. To risk punishment for anything less than being fully observant would create mental turmoil, and it would be nearly impossible to stay committed. Imagine the level of belief and commitment involved in staying observant under such dire punishing conditions."

He looks around the room again. "If the tradition says to keep men and women apart and not to sing with women, they are not going to question this or anything else because to do so would be to question the bedrock of their life. So, we need to be very careful when others act in ways that hurt us. We should try to understand them. See their viewpoint--even, sometimes especially--when they aren't seeing ours. Later in the course Dr. Lisbet will discuss the psychology of what people get out of their beliefs that their way is the absolute truth, the best and only way possible. Hearing and understanding their viewpoint doesn't mean we have to agree with them, as Dr. Lisbet will discuss more with the concept of "tai chi dancing." But we should always start with understanding as a way to build bridges.

"Does that make sense?"

There is quiet, some nodding of heads. Others shaking their heads. Are they confused by what he said, or that he said it. For me, his response is better and wiser than I had expected. For some reason, that disappoints me.

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"So, you wore the nurse's uniform for him?"

"Eventually. I told him I' think about it. But before I did, I talked with my therapist. We had been working on my freeing myself from the domination of my father, and I was afraid this might not be

the right thing to do. She asked me if I felt it was demeaning, being too submissive to a man. I knew she might say that. I told her I felt torn. I understood her view, yet I wanted to accommodate and please him, if she thought it was ok.

"She told me 'It's not what you do, but why you do it.'

"For me, the why was I could see how being a nurturing nurse helping a poor suffering person was really just giving joy and compassion to someone. There's really nothing wrong with that."

Talk about great rationalizations. What a crock of a therapist.

I agree. But how do you know what's self-deception, or what's a reasonable reason to act?

"How old was he?"

"He's an art dealer; owns several galleries. He was maybe mid to late forties. We never discussed age. Pierre, my former art professor, introduced him to me. My therapist said I was trying to find a kind father substitute--a way to work through my father issues, searching for approval from the older father that I never got because my Dad being so strict. "

I don't know whether to laugh at her therapist, at Mery, or ask for another costume fantasy.

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"This may seem like a stupid question." I turn and see a studious-looking man, bearded, perhaps a few years older than I am. I hate when people ask a question that begins with a pseudo-obsequious introduction. It's really false modesty.

It always ends in "but..." and they ask the question anyway. He's just trying ingratiate himself with the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet.

The beard continues, "but" just as I thought "can you tell

us the difference between all those branches of Judaism? I've never been quite sure."

"Not a stupid question at all," the Rebbe responds. I knew it. Mr. Suck butt was giving the Rebbe a soft ball to get praised, and the Rebbe hit it right back to him, filled with flattery, as expected.

I wonder how the Rebbe will respond in terms of content. Will he give an accurate, intellectual overview? I doubt it. He's not that precise a thinker. Will his own views be expressed transparently? I suspect he won't do that either, at least intentionally. He seems to be leery of sharing his personal life. I expect a mishmash, hiding his own views behind a watered-down intellectual discourse.

But, to pass the time, it might be fun to see if I can glean where his sympathies really lie, and see how he slants it to subtly, if not overtly, criticize the Orthodox.

No matter what he says, I'll be able to use the nuggets of information--if there are any-- for my own purposes--to confirm why Orthodoxy is the only real path to understanding and living divine law.

I've been asking him his view of the nature of the universe for the past two months, and have yet to get a direct answer. It was the main reason I went into therapy with Dr. Lisbet and him. I still don't know what his specific background and training was as a Rabbi.

Though, now that I know him better as a person, I guess I too, am less interested in what he would say. I would agree with my earlier assessment about his intellect--he's not that precise or original a thinker. He may not even know himself well enough

to be able to accurately articulate what he actually believes.

Patience. Both of you. You will find out. And the answer is worth waiting for.

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"So why did the relationship with your old man patient end? Did he pass on?" I'm trying to be humorous, but realize there's more harshness in my questions than I want to reveal.

"Now, now, he was--still is-- a nice man. We're still friends. But he's awfully materialistic. Even his art galleries were more about paintings as a commodity than a passion. I began to feel I was just an object for him, too, another pretty possession. Something he could show off to his friends."

She pauses as if she is going to say something, then seems to decide against it.

"What? Another fantasy costume?"

"Well, yes and no. The final straw was when he bought me a cheerleader uniform--which represents everything I hated and was repulsed by in college. Cheerleaders--pardon the generalization and my Hyde Park soap box-- are empty-headed, body obsessed, silly girls who allow themselves to be viewed as objects and routinely sexually exploited. No way was I going to put that on. "

"No wonder we get on so well."

She looks puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"I wouldn't wear a cheerleader outfit, either."

She laughs. "Thanks, you're so empathic. Have you ever heard them talk to each other. Mery adopts a squeaky, silly voice 'What purse are you taking tonight? Will it match your shoes?' That's not who I am."

"Seriously, that is why I do love you." I think of mom's

frivolous conversations with her friends. She cuddles into me.

"But are you saying it was this particular costume that ended it?

I thought it was not 'what you did, but why.'"

"Exactly. His why. He told me he wanted me not only to put the uniform on without...." she pauses awkwardly. I motion for her to continue "...without panties. And then, he said to make it more authentic, he wanted me to do to do a cheerleading show for he and his friends."

"A show?"

"I asked him what he meant. He said, a show, no panties, do the splits, bend over, you know, a show. He could tell I was upset, even angry. I felt he was trying to make me act like a stripper. That's where I drew the line. He begged, pleaded, but he knew it was to no avail."

I think about asking her why draw the line about wearing an outfit in front of a group of people when you're willing to model completely naked in front of strangers. Isn't that sexual exploitation, too, being ogled and viewed as an object. I say nothing. I'm glad I kept my mouth shut.

"Can you believe he even tried to argue that dressing up for him and his friends was no different than modeling. In fact, he pointed out, I'd have more clothes on. That really hurt me. My modeling is my way of being a muse. In terms of the WHY, there was nothing nurturing or compassionate or artistically inspiring about what he was asking of me.

"Once I refused, he just stopped seeing me. He found someone younger, more malleable, I suppose."

Does she have a wistful look? Who are the other two? I am

like a moth to a flame, becoming incredibly aroused and jealous and confused all at the same time. I say nothing, merely put her hand on my lingham to show she's having an effect.

A pox on both their houses. They deserve each other. I am going to change channels to the Rebbe's class. That I can control

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"Jews have always disagreed and argued with each other. The joke is, two Jews, three opinions. In the Pirke Avot, the Wisdom of our Ancestors, it says that there is no problem with arguing so long as it is for the sake of God." In other words, we need to make sure we really are trying to bring the highest wisdom to the discussion, not just gratifying our own ego or showing off our intelligence. The Talmud is filled with point, counterpoint. What is important is to make sure that the discussions are for the sake of God.

"So, to your question. I see different particular traditions as a point-counterpoint debate, all within a large umbrella to address universal human concerns. If God, as it says in the Shema, is Echad-One, then all approaches to faith are part of God, and seeking a path toward God. Of course, this is only my view, and others, within each tradition, sometimes do not take such a tolerant position toward each other."

How timid. First he says "If God, as it says in the Shema"...so he's not willing to state his own position. Then he engages in fallacious reasoning based on a conditional clause. He needs a course in pre-law logic. Just because God is One, it does not automatically follow that all approaches to God are equally valid. That would mean those that who don't believe in God are also part of God's way. Would he then say Hitler is part of God?

No, some ways are better than others. Tolerance has its limits.

I wonder how he would reconcile and address these questions. But I don't ask them. Not because I don't want to, but because I am not sure he's intellectual and courageous enough to have really thought them through. And then I realize I'm not asking because I wonder if the anger in my counterpoint is entirely for the sake of God.

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"Ever been a maid?"

"Are you asking as a job, or as a costume?"

"Either. Have you?"

"Where did the idea of a maid come from?"

"I'm not exactly sure. Just trying something on...you...to see how it would feel. It probably comes from childhood, from Louise our French maid, all the way through Christina, Oreba, Mildred, and a succession of nurturing black maids, whose job it was to take care of me and make sure I was happy."

"What are you thinking? Was there anything sexual with any of them."

"Now who is the naughty maid? No, no, not at all. They just took care of me. Made me feel safe." I pause, then say, "Thinking about other guys getting excited having you dress up for them is arousing to me. Although I have to admit, I'm a bit jealous, too. I was just trying to imagine if I were to pick out a costume, maybe that's what I would pick. a maid in one of those frilly little black outfits with a little white apron. And a cap. At my beck and call, laundry, cleaning, cooking, and whatever else might pop into my mind. And maybe she'd belt out Joplin songs while doing all those chores."

"That's sick, bourgeois and perverted, not to mention probably sexist and racist."

"Which parts? The black maids, the Joplin singing, or the beck and call?"

"All of it." Mery interjects, wryly. "Yes, I was a maid--before I modeled. To help play my way through college. Believe me, that's not what I wore when I cleaned people's toilets. Talk about demeaning."

"Point taken. Kind of kills the fantasy to think of you scrubbing toilets. To be truthful, I was just trying to play your game. For me, costumes as fantasies don't really do anything for me. My fantasy has always been about removing the girl's clothes, finding out what's inside the package wrapping, not the wrapping itself."

What Johannes is really talking about is yearning and mystery. Once the package is opened, the mystery is removed, and he feels bored, ready to move on. I wonder if what we both want is the unwrapping process. When he's close to his goal--when the nipple is just an inch away, or her hand is on his thigh, close but not touching him, he's most passionate. Then, after orgasm, he could care less. His body is satisfied, resolution has been achieved.

Although with different content, I'm realizing I'm still much the same. I want to see what, if anything, is hiding behind the curtain. Who is Oz, or is anybody there? Sometimes, the present is disappointing, less attractive than the packaging, not the great gorgeous body Johannes expected, or the great authority I hoped for. But I, like him, keep seeking, yearning to uncover and have the mystery revealed. Maybe that's the problem with

God's laws. In and of themselves, there is no mystery, just mechanical behavior. My younger self in Jerusalem hasn't yet realized that. Maybe that's the fantasy--and the illusion. It's not resolution I seek, but the aliveness of yearning, the process of discovering and seeking what's missing, hidden. The actual unwrapping--with women, with Rebbes--seems anti-climactic.

What about You, God? You're the last rung on the ladder.

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I look around the class, and see that almost all of the students are busily writing notes. I feel frustrated that I can't do likewise, because of my hand. I'd like to write down what he's saying so that I can refute it. It seems like a lot to remember his points, then my refutations. I stand up and, from the back of the room, look caddy corner. I see that the high school teacher is busily writing. I could ask her for her notes. Then I sit, and push my second fingernail into my thumb, hard, enraged at myself. Angry that I looked at her again, using notes as a ploy...a sexual energy resurfacing? It's not what I did, but why.

And I am also angry that I would even think of taking notes on such drivel. It feels like some reflexive vestige from my old student days mentality. And then I become upset with all those busily writing. There is no test, students. Don't try to be so ingratiating, and look so serious.

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"Until the mid 1800's, there was no such thing as Orthodox Judaism. There was only Judaism (though as noted, debates aplenty). The name 'Orthodox' was given, somewhat pejoratively, by the German "Reform" Jewish movement, which felt the time was right

for Jews to come out from their self (and other) imposed ghettos, and bring the enlightened, scientific teachings of the times to bear on Jewish religious thought and practice. Whereas Orthodox Jews believe the Torah is God-given and infallible, the Reform movement feels the Torah is, at best, God-inspired; certainly it was human-created; and perhaps it was and is just an interesting historical-literary document."

"Does that mean Reform doesn't believe in God?" Am I asking this question for the sake of God, or in anger at how I was raised? "Or just that you can believe whatever you want? I remember our family's rabbi talking of the Ten Commandments as 'Ten Suggestions.'"

There is some chuckling, and I smile sheepishly but secretly pleased.

"Excellent question." Why is he so enthusiastic about my barbs. Then I realize he makes some kind of kind comment to everyone who asks anything, no matter how stupid. This time, of course, he's correct. But I feel myself becoming even more annoyed.

"Reform does allow each individual to existentially choose the nature of his or her relationship to and belief in God, as well as which rituals and practice they believe are meaningful to them. On the one hand, Reform believes in progressive revelation...that God didn't just speak once and for all from 3000 BCE to 500 BCE, and then stop, but can still speak to us today.

"On the other hand, Reform allows room in its large umbrella for no belief in God. Many Reform Jews were and are drawn to the social conscience embedded in the Torah, like in the late-middle--Chapter 19--of Leviticus--the golden rule, "Love your neigh-

bor as yourself" and the related Laws of Holiness--such as not picking your vineyard bare, but leaving fallen fruit for the poor and the stranger. Therefore, in Reform, there is a strong emphasis on social action.

"However, the other Laws in Leviticus--those surrounding the Golden Rule, were and are felt by most Reform to be antiquated and outdated. Let me invite those of you who are interested to read the book of Leviticus. It's the middle Books of the Five books of the Bible, and the shortest."

Several students continue writing note frantically. Mr. Bearded Suck Butt has now put on a pair of glasses, and raises his hand. "Could you give us a couple examples of the laws that don't make sense? And secondly, is that why some Christians criticize Judaism as being too legalistic and outmoded?"

How can people stay focused on this. I want to get up and leave. Although part of me is curious about animal sacrifices. I think of the ants in Golden Gate Park. Poor scapegoats. *

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I stroke her hair. "How about Little Red Riding Hood and the big bad wolf. Grrr."

She laughs. "Now we're getting warmer."

She strokes my lingham a few more times, then stops and asks, seemingly out of nowhere, "Have you ever been in therapy?"

Talk about a mood killer. Is this a ploy to frustrate me. I feel like I'm in bed with she and her therapist looking over our shoulder. I want to tell her I'm not comfortable with her dependence on her therapist, and how frequently she refers to her. But I know, Ovid, that would be a further mood killer. "Mom made me

go one when I was younger."

"Why?"

"You know, adolescent rebellion, parent/child issues." My being kicked out--exiled--from the house still seems too much to share.

"You, a rebel? You're such a good boy," She teases. "What do you think of my being in therapy?" It's like she's reading my mind.

That you need it. Not the right answer. That it hasn't made a difference for mom, who is still suicidal and depressed. Not a good answer, either. Maybe I can share a bit more about mom. "My mom's in therapy now. She's struggling with what's going on in her life. It's hard to say if it's helping. But maybe if she weren't in therapy, she'd even be struggling more." Not bad.

"The separation must be hard on her. What happened between them?"

I know to mention Dad's philandering here is not the right answer. Too much. Too scary, the old like father, like son adage. "Just difficulties living together. They don't talk about it with us."

"You said your dad was angry at your mom. Does he have much of a temper? I know my father does."

I think back to my own experience on the couch. I remember a story my brother told me. I was asleep one night when mom first started to date again. Dad came by the house and saw that another man was there. He went out to his car to get a gun and threaten him. My brother said they fought bitterly. Dad got whooped, and then threatened to call the police for assault. Another time I saw him punch his new girlfriend. Clearly these are not good

stories to share with her. Instead, I say, with some truth in content, if not in tone:

"Yes, you could say he's been known to throw a tantrum or two." I smile as I say it.

"He looks so gentle and kind, a great smile, in that picture you showed me of him in a baseball uniform as your coach."

"I guess there are different sides to everyone, huh?"

"What is that supposed to mean?" She sounds upset.

Why did I say that? Maybe I have some anger at her being a fantasy plaything for these guys. Maybe I am frustrated at her removing her hand from my lingham and beginning this conversation. I need to once again smooth the water. "Woah, Nellie, nothing about you. Sorry if I sound accusatory. I was just thinking that people are complicated, and probably Dad should go into therapy. It might help him understand himself better."

"Would you ever think of going into therapy now, as an adult?"

Not on your life. "Do you think I need to?"

"My therapist says you don't have to be sick to get better. I was just thinking that you're going through a lot of confusion now about your direction and goals, and to have a safe, objective, trustworthy person to talk to about it might be helpful.

Not that you need to or anything." She adds, as if an afterthought, "Of course I'm here for you. But maybe it would be helpful for you to talk to someone better trained than I am who can offer you more than I can."

"All on our own, you've helped me figure out one thing. I guess I love big breasts because I'm still searching for the good mama to let me suckle them." I snuggle into her cleavage with my head.

She places her arms around me. "Maybe that's why you keep seeking and never want to ever finally arrive. 'Fear of getting what you want' is what my therapist calls it. And, 'fear of if you get it, it will be taken away.' Don't worry. I'm yours, and here for you." She pulls me tighter. I feel secure and protected, a little baby being nurtured.

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"You're asking two questions, Peter. Let me deal only with the first one here--laws that don't seem to make sense any longer. Dr. Lisbet and I will talk next week about your second question when we discuss Christmas, Chanukkah, Christian-Jewish views of each other, and the universal/particular.

The questions interest me. But I'm more interested that the Rebbe knows Mr. Suck Butt's first name and speaks to him in such a friendly manner. Peter. Peter Jason. What kind of name is that? Why does that bother me? I'm in a group I don't care about, taught by teachers that I don't even admire.

"In Leviticus, there are chapters about the sacrifices of animals in the Temple. Nearly everyone agrees these have little meaning in the modern world. The Orthodox agree, although some sects believe that when the Temple is rebuilt, then animal sacrifices can once again begin.

"Chapters 12-15 deal with defilements by skin diseases, fungus, menstruation and genital discharges. In chapter 12, there is a 'terrestrial omen series' of defilements. This series is different from the series devoted to astrological omens and freak births. In the terrestrial omen series, a fungus--Katarru-- is discussed. If the fungus is found on the outer north wall, the owner of the house will die, according to

Leviticus. To prevent this, the owner must make six axes of tamarisk, scrape away some of the fungus with them, recite an incantation, and slaughter red male sheep.'"

Someone in the class giggles. I must admit, it doesn't exactly sound relevant. But I'm sure there is a good explanation which my new--yet to be found-- teacher in Mea Shearim can explain to me.

At the very least, I can see a lawyerly trick the Rebbe is using--picking a small and basically irrelevant piece of information, but giving it a lot of attention.

I bet most of the class would think the sexual taboos and topics were irrelevant, too--the discharges from the sexual organs, or the nature and punishment of sex offenses. But to me they're far from irrelevant. The message I hear is: Be careful of the body and sexuality. They bring trouble and keeps you from your spiritual path.

Two months later, I still agree with those thoughts about sexuality my younger, spiritual seeking self uttered in the Rebbe's class. I'm also still celibate and trying to create further distance from Johannes and his constant, obsessive, sexual dialogues and actions. However, I no longer have the same optimism I once did about finding a relevant explanation for fungus and animal sacrifices. Nor about finding Levitical intermediaries to help me on my path.

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"You still haven't told me your current fantasies. If costumes aren't, what is?"

"My fantasies? I told you. I'm not sure I really have any

anymore."

"Sure right, liar. We've agreed we're going to be totally honest with each other, remember." She chides me. At the same time, she starts stroking me. I feel back in control. The rhythmic beat has returned. Her hand movement once again as regular as a metronome, or a conductor's hand on the wand. I deftly seek to unbutton the two buttons that she has since closed. As I begin, she wiggles out of my embrace and says, "Your turn, now. Who and how many have you been with?"

"I honestly don't know off hand. A lot. If it's important to you, I'll tell you another time. I actually keep records of everyone I've seen. I can look it up when I get home."

She looks shocked. "You keep records? Does that mean of me, too?"

"Yes. But don't make it sound so clinical. Think of it as a journal. It's my therapy. I talk to my journal like you talk to your therapist--about me."

She wrinkles her nose, cutely. "I guess that's fair." For an instant, her hand motion stopped, so I place mine back on it to resume the regular beat. She complies, but asks,

"So with all that success, you're saying they're no fantasies left?"

"Not really, I've been pretty lucky. Almost every time I can think of a fantasy, it's happened. So, there's nothing that I haven't wanted to do sexually, that I haven't done."

She asks bashfully for some specifics and I share a few things like my first unexpected orgasm, and accommodating the sisters in Berkeley.

"For me, before I met you, it was a lot about getting what I

couldn't have sexually; then once I got it, moving on."

"Have you ever not gotten what you wanted?"

"Of course. Sometimes you can see it's just not going to work out. Of course, with you, it was always easy, you were a push-over." She giggles and punches me in the arm "Brute. Tell me about a failure."

Her request makes me a little uncomfortable. I'm not sure why she really wants to hear about my successes, and even less clear why does wants to hear about my failures? But, overall, I like the direction of this conversation--sex--and I decide to indulge her.

"Alright, since you insist. In high school, there were lots." I tell her about New Year's Eve at sixteen, and other lonely thwarted encounters that ended up at Winsteads with frosty chocolate malts. She's giggling and hugging me. "I never did well, especially with the sophisticated, wealthy girls in Kansas City, especially Jewish ones. In fact, there was one that I had to wait six years for, and then she sort of literally and symbolically fell in my lap." I think of Sarah in Kansas City, and her pearl earrings, her hair pulled behind her ears, her head bobbing up and down on me.

Mery can feel my excitement. Although she has been open and playful as I was discussing my foibles, suddenly her tone turns sharp, even accusatory. "Did you have sex with her when you were back in Kansas City."

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"The Reform movement also felt that laws pertaining to the treatment of women were wrong, and that the avoidance of secular

education and self-imposed ghettoization was no longer needed or advisable for the Jewish people."

"Conservative Judaism, which began in the early 1900's, believed Reform had swung the pendulum too far in the liberal direction of diluting standards. Reform basically said the burden of proof was on a given ritual to show its relevance to modern times. If it did, it could be added back into worship and observance. If not, out it went, to be remembered only as a historical curiosity.

"Conservatives, on the other hand, argued that we need to start from the other end. The responsibility was on us to follow, maintain, honor, and respect the tradition. But, in contrast to the Orthodox, Conservatives held that traditions do evolve in response to historical context, and can be changed if it can be demonstrated that they are somehow harmful. One clear example is that in Conservative Judaism, women are called to the bimah to read from the Torah, and men and women pray and sing together in synagogue. Conservatives decided that the segregation of women during services, and not allowing them to participate fully in worship, was harmful.

"Further, as I noted, whereas Orthodox Jews claim that revelation ended two thousand years ago, Reform and Conservative traditions both talk about progressive revelation, an evolution of consciousness. You keep the trunk and roots of the tree strong, but you allow for new growth, new branches, and when the time comes, the pruning of branches that are no longer helpful. The emphasis is on choice and personal responsibility, not blind following, as John" he nods toward me, noted regarding his family Rabbi's idea of 'Ten Suggestions.'" Of course I'm pleased to be mentioned in front of the class. Take that, Mr. Suck Butt.

"Orthodox tradition counters that there is a danger in over pruning, and that such an attitude can be an excuse for laziness as well as putting human will above God's commandments.

"Rabbi Hillel was once asked to give a brief summary of Judaism standing on one foot. You have just received, standing on one foot, my ten minute version of the three main traditions. Any questions.?"

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Did I have sex with Sarah in Kansas City? I sense trouble, but I am basically innocent. That's not completely true.

I am not innocent, but I shouldn't be considered guilty.

A lovely turn of phrase, but I don't think it will have the desired effect.

When I was in Kansas City, less than two months ago--it seems like Years--Mery and I had only know each other a week. We hadn't really made any firm commitments to each other then. I specifically remember thinking that when I decided to go out with Sarah, and later became amorous.

Even as I think this, a very clear memory appears in my brain. I hear mom explaining to me what her therapist had said about rationalizations. But this isn't a rationalization, it's true.

But I'm also aware that in the current situation, with the deepening of Mary and my relationship, a discussion of my sexual escapades with Sarah probably won't go over well.

I could easily lie, and say our encounter occurred during the Christmas break a few months earlier, before I'd met Mery. That wouldn't be technically true--in a legal under oath sense--, but it would be true to the spirit of my relationship

with Mery as I saw it at the time.

But I don't want to lie, not even technically. I remember Grandpa saying, "Up to the fine line but don't cross it. Your father has crossed it too many times. Don't be like that." I remember Grandpa talking about the deflection technique, to avoid a question you don't want to answer.

"I'll answer your question if you first answer a question of mine."

"What?" She sounds suspicious, on-guard, wary.

"Tell me why you want to know. I hear an edge in your voice. What's going on?"

"I'm feeling close to you. Thinking about you with another woman during the time that we've been together makes me vulnerable. I want to know I can trust you, Don Juan, as we become more committed to each other."

I hug her closer to me. She resists slightly. "You want to feel that you are my primary relationship, and that my days of running around and chasing other women are behind me, right?"

"Right. Exactly."

"Mery, look at my eyes. I can tell you in all honesty that I have never felt this way before about anyone in my life. I am fully committed to you, and you do not ever have to worry about my being with another woman."

She snuggles deeper into my shoulder. I can hear her soft purr beginning.

Phew. Thanks, Grandpa.

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"What about Reconstructionism, and this 'Jewish renewal' that you have mentioned in other classes?" It's Mr. Peter Jason the Nerd

again. So, he really did know more than he was letting on. What an ingratiating suck-butt.

The Rebbe turns to Dr. Lisbet and begins to laugh. "We should pay him to be a shill!" He then turns back to the questioner: "Thanks, Peter. That is an interesting question, and shows an impressive understanding of Modern Jewish Thought." Mr. Nerd smiles with pleasure while I grimace.

"Reconstructionism began in the early 1920's. Like Reform and Conservative, it is also egalitarian in practice, and stresses community involvement and social action. In America, the Jewish Community Centers are a direct result of this Reconstructionist philosophy.

"Now, why we laughed and thanked you for being a shill-- for you non-Yiddish speakers a plant in the audience --who asks the presenters the questions they want to answer anyway. Most of you have probably never heard the term Jewish Renewal. It's an idea an idea a few of us--friends and colleagues--are kicking around. It's not really a branch of Judaism at all. Rather, we like to think of ourselves as 'ruach'--breath, spirit--seeking to encourage and helping to invigorate all the other branches of Judaism. We believe, as I hope our class will show, that we need to re-infuse Judaism with the contemplative tradition that has always been at its core, but that has sometimes been lost amidst a more legalistic, halachic emphasis.

I don't think the Rebbe can see his own blinders. Isn't he really making another dig, albeit subtle, toward the Orthodox tradition?

"We believe in bridge-building and inclusivity among the various Jewish traditions, and in learning from our fellow travelers who follow other, non-Jewish spiritual and contemplative

paths. But let me stop there, for what we really want is to help you feel and experience this sense of renewal, particularly in this class as it relates to the mystical meaning of Chanukkah. So, enough didactic talk. In fact, I'm wondering if we're ready for a break."

He looks around the class. Some nod in polite agreement. I nod fervently. Before anyone can move, however, Dr. Lisbet stands up and says, "One good question deserves another. Your assignment for next week is, given what you know about yourself, and what you know about the different Jewish traditions, write an essay about which parts of each speak to you and why. The why should involve a discussion not only of the tradition --out there--but something about you--in here." She touches her heart. It's the first quasi-human thing I've seen her do. For all their talk of egalitarianism, she seems more like a puppet by the Rebbe's side.

"Given your experiences, your hopes, your goals in life--who you want to be as a person, and the kind of world you want to live in--how and in what ways does your personalized 'creation' of an ideal Judaism-- drawing from whatever sources you wish--reflect you.

"For those of you who are not Jewish, please feel free to comment on which of the different Jewish branches most intrigue you; and also, any similarities you see in the different branches that are reflected in your own tradition along a progressive--fundamentalist continuum. Next week, we can use your responses as a basis for the discussion. Any questions?"

Peter the Nerd Suck Butt ingratiatingly raises his hand.

Enough is enough I want to shout. I take and breath and try to temper my judgmentalness. Why am I so angry at him? Is this just old reflexive competition from my school days? What's wrong with me? I don't care about impressing the Rebbe or Dr. Lisbet or him or anyone in the class. Since I know that intellectually, why does my body still feel so enraged.

Dr. Lisbet nods toward him and he asks,

"How long should the paper be?"

Everyone spontaneously begins to laugh. I join them with a smug, self-satisfied, though clearly not my higher self, smile.

At the same time, I feel almost a companionship with Mr. Peter Jason the Nerd. Although I hate to admit it, that's the kind of question I often asked in college.

Dr. Lisbet holds up her hand. "It should be as long as your legs." Some laugh. Others look puzzled. She actually smiles: "Long enough to touch the ground!"

A joke from Dr. Lisbet. Amazing. She adds, "Remember where you are. There are no grades in this class. You are here voluntarily. Ask yourself why. And remember, this class doesn't 'count' for anything--except maybe our own increased wisdom."

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"What does it feel like when you model?"

She pulls her head off my shoulder. I don't want to talk about modeling tonight. I'm really tired.

I'm undeterred. "I thought we were supposed to be speaking openly."

"Why are you asking? Does it bother you?" Her tone sounds cautious, even harsh.

First she used deflection. Now, she is using another coun-

ter-move: answering a question with a question. I could say "Nice try, Socrates, but I asked first." But I, too, am tired, and decide not to engage in gamesmanship. Also, her question is interesting for me to think about.

Why did I ask? Probing my past relationships, like Sarah, put me on the defensive and I want to turn the tables--a good lawyer's trick. Also, I'm confused. Where is the innocence that I thought I saw in her at David's? The innocence that I fought so hard to overcome? I feel like an idiot. When I took my art class, I was motivated less than ten percent by an interest in art, and 90% by desire to stare at naked women. If I had known she was a model two months ago--rather than tonight--I could have paid to be an art student and seen her nude....with no effort. Just like people pay to see a stripper, or even a prostitute.

Listen to yourself, Johannes, and try to hear deeply what you are saying. Yes, you enjoy overcoming resistance. That's your competitive nature, like a good tennis or chess match. But there's more. You're saying you like overcoming innocence. That's more than a game. That's corrupting someone. You want to bring out the base, animalistic sexual nature in women to show that they have it and that you can. Once you've debased them, you move on or, in this case, when she can act even more free-spirited than you, you feel angry and out of control. Shame on you, self-deluder, corrupter of others, plague.

"I have to admit, I was surprised to hear about the modeling. It just doesn't seem like you. I would never have guessed that when I first met you. You seemed so shy and reserved. I remember thinking you'd never make it as a waitress at David's."

I'm rather proud of my response. It's cute, masking my annoyance and jealousy, but still makes its point.

"That answers my first question. But does it bother you?"

She's surprisingly articulate and quite focused given that she's smoked dope, earlier this evening if not later. Maybe my efforts to conceal my true feelings weren't so successful. I decide it's time to turn the tables and quit being such a nice guy. Sorry, Ovid.

"You haven't answered my question at all. Now it's your turn." I feel like I'm watching a tennis match: volley, counter-volley.

"Fine. The first several times my professor suggested modeling to me as a way to pick up eta case, saying it paid much more than being a maid. I was horrified and said no. I saw my father's contorted face and heard his screaming voice shouting at me when I'd wear outfits he didn't approve 'It's a sin to reveal your body. Go change right now."

A wise father. He and I have more in common than I realized at the time.

But the professor said in class that great artists have always painted the female figure. He told me I shouldn't be embarrassed but proud of my body. It was flattering to hear, and such a different message than Dad's.

When I went into therapy, my therapist was surprised, too that I modeled. But after we talked it through, she interpreted it as a way for me to rebel against Dad and at the same time to own and, yes, be proud of my body." She pauses and looks at me as if to gauge my reaction. I nod, trying to appear non-judgmental, and motion for her to continue. Grandpa always said you learn more by being quiet than by talking.

"You asked what it feels like. It varies. Sometimes it's

just boring and I let my mind drift to trivial things, like what I'll make for dinner. Sometimes I wonder if I'm too heavy; or getting too old to model. But then I think of Joplin and feel empowered and accepting of who I am just as I am.

"Sometimes I wonder who the people in the class are, and will one of them be the next Klimt, or Matisse. Sometimes I'll even recite the Song of Songs, as though I'm a goddess being worshiped." She pauses, "or Joplin on a stage, being adored."

That glazed look appears in her eyes again. As if she's both here and not here. After about thirty seconds, she refocuses. "Now, your turn. how do you feel about my modeling."

"You are an adored goddess, no question. I guess what you did before we knew each other is irrelevant. What's happened since we've known each other is what matters to me. But most important is our future." I consider carefully what I'm about to say. I want to get it just right. "I'm not sure I'm really comfortable with...or want the person I want to spend the rest of my life with displaying her body...standing naked... in front of a group of strangers."

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She puts her head back on my shoulder. It's a tender gesture. "I understand what you're saying. Yes, that makes sense. I've actually been talking to my therapist about stopping modeling altogether."

"Really? Why?"

"I feel, and my therapist agrees, that I've proved something to myself--and my father-- by doing it. Joplin would be proud of me. I've owned my body. I am no longer ashamed of it. But now

that I've done it, there is no need to do it anymore to prove anything. And, yes, these questions came up in therapy because of you, especially after the Fairmont. I want to be your beloved, only yours."

I stroke her hair. Maybe the dancing at the Fillmore was more my insecurities than her abandoning me. Maybe she's not so dangerous after all. "Thank you. You are my beloved."

I continue to stroke her hair. I have a fleeting moment of discomfort—her soothing words feel a bit like a chain potentially trapping me. Just as quickly another thought pops into my head. I know it will change the mood, but I'm not able to resist.

"I have to ask. If you felt so free and comfortable with your body, why were you so shy with me when we went swimming...that one piece bathing suit, for instance?"

"I don't know. Do I have to be consistent? Are you cross-examining me again?" I start to respond but she seems not to want or need an answer and continues, "I guess just different sides of me. Like you were saying about your dad. My therapist says we all have different selves. We just need to try to have them make peace with each other as best we can. I'm still a work in progress. Don't you have different sides that don't always fit together?"

"Not until I met you!" I again playfully try to unbutton her Blouse, softly saying "I hear second base calling, the coach is telling me to try to advance on the base paths and steal second." This time she allows me. As I start to move my hand into the opening, I ask, "Tell me about your fantasies. I can listen and rub at the same time."

With my left hand I continue to stroke her hair, a dark red-gold reflected in the candlelight.

"I thought you'd never ask." Her mood brightens.

"What does that mean?"

"My therapist said we needed to make sure we were able to talk openly about everything, including sexuality. She role played with me how I could take the initiative to ask you what you found exciting; and how I could answer that question, too."

So this has all been a set-up? I've been a pawn in her chess game? I don't like that feeling at all. Ovid? Take a breath. Ok, open communication is good, I guess. But not bringing me along isn't fair. Then I think of my family, of Sarah, of my own mind's workings. I'm not exactly a model of forthrightness and honesty. I remember something about glass houses and stones, and so say, simply, "And what response did you come up with?"

"An honest one. I hope it's ok if I share it with you."

"I want to know everything about you. Bring it on."

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"As you can probably guess by now, my father always taught me a very strict almost Puritanical view of sex. The body is a necessary evil; sex was for procreation only, never fun. It was something dirty, wrong, not really to be talked about."

I definitely should have met this father.

"That doesn't sound like a fantasy."

"I want you to understand my background. I'm trying to explain my first orgasm."

"I thought that was with me."

She buries her head in my shoulder, not looking at me. "It was...with a man. But the first time I had an orgasm I was only 17, reading a book about a Mexican revolutionary, fighting for 'La Causa.' He had a free spirited artist girlfriend who wanted to help him liberate their people. She was captured and tor-

tured."

"This is sexy?"

"Please. This isn't that easy to share. You're the first person, besides my therapist, I've ever told."

"Sorry. I'm all ear. Please..."

She pets my one good ear. "My therapist says sexual fantasies are hard to shift because they are so deeply embedded in our psyches, and are associated with such a powerful reinforcer--the orgasm. Part of my sexual dynamics, she says, tap into a deep need of mine to be a loving, giving, person to others. I want to help everyone I can. So, some of the fantasies that others have about me--being a nurturing nurse, a helpful teacher, even a kindly maid--even if others might see that as submissive and not liberated, fit in with my desire to give, to take care of others, to make them happy."

"Sounds good to me. I'm always in need of comfort." I take her hand and place it on my lingam. She starts to pull away, she leaves it and strokes me. to rub it. "That makes me very happy, and if giving to me makes you happy that seems perfect. A win-win." But is she talking about why she buys into other people's fantasies, or is she saying this is her fantasy. I'm unclear, and not sure how much I really care. I'm caught between curiosity to hear more, understand how the torture, pain, and La Causa fits in, and wanting to have her stop talking and use her mouth for more pleasurable purposes. I wait, patiently. She says nothing. Does she want encouragement. Fine. "Please continue. Happiness, suffering, giving, and torture. I do want to hear how this all fits together."

She ignores my chiding and says directly, "While I was reading about the pain of her torture--she may have been raped,

but the book didn't make that explicit-- I had my first orgasm.

"Before it happened, the visual images the book created were quite clear in my mind. I could have easily drawn them. I saw each character, their facial expressions, their bodies. But as I felt myself becoming excited, I put the book down. My mind became foggy, diffuse, I don't know how to explain it. I had these powerful sensations in my area 'down there'--I wanted to touch myself but I knew that was wrong. I gripped the bed posts to keep my hands away. I pretended I was captured, being tortured. The images in the book dissolved, became diffuse. My hips began to writhe. I turned and twisted, pressing my thighs together hard, feeling my stomach contract."

She's trembling, speaking faster, softer. I strain to hear.

" My experience was of being the suffering servant. I thought of Abraham, and the pain he must have felt at the idea of sacrificing his son. I thought of Jesus on the cross. I felt his excruciating pain, His being forsaken, His aloneness, His abandonment. I, like Him, was suffering to bring peace, healing. And forgiveness. Yes, forgiveness. I felt compassion for my torturers. They, too, were victims. Like Jesus, I forgave them, forgave the world. And that suffering led to a remarkable feeling of pleasure and peace and ecstasy."

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What a strange compilation of combinations inside these insignificant bodies. Johannes the little baby side by side with Johannes the Don Juan the seducer. Mery as a shy, innocent little lamb, and masochistic sexual ecstatic. Clearly a winning team, a pair that has a great happy future together.

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I have no idea what to say in response to her fantasy. It sounds crazy to me. Weird. But it's late. I'm tired, and I'm also incredibly horny. Enough talk. I place my hand on her head, and with gentle pressure start guiding her down toward my stomach. She doesn't resist, and unbuttons my shirt, one button at a time, leaving a liquid path of saliva released from her licking tongue.

Once her tongue has reached below my navel, she starts to unbuckle my belt, and unfasten my pants. She looks up at me, with those innocent, shy, womanly, suffering, Christ-like eyes. She swings my legs off the bed, and pulls my pants down. Then she gets off the bed, on her knees. She is looking up at me with a supplicating expression, her mouth open, tongue out, stroking me. Her breasts are dangling, wobbling, accessible but hidden. This is my fantasy. My reward for staying in good shape. And following Ovid's advice.

Fantasy made reality.

Who could ask for more? Why would I want to make her crawl around submissively in a nurses uniform, like some docile, obedient little dog--arf arf? What weird guys she went out with. Weird that she'd go along with their creepy ideas. Especially for someone so shy she calls her yoni region "down there."

As she closes her eyes, and starts a long, slow stroking and sucking, I glance around the room--at the candles, at Van Gogh's Starry Night. At the art book still open to the Madonna and child painting. Out of nowhere, I hear opera. I start laughing. The fat lady is actually singing! I look at the clock: 3:16.

Then I hear moans. Two male voices. I realize the music and moans are coming from her roommates. That's a visual I don't care

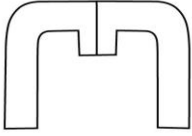
to entertain. I look back at Mery on her knees. She's moving
her head in and out, with the regularity of ye ol' metronome. I'm
again feeling the beat!

I hear the high throbbing notes of the Fat Lady. I remember
the earlier strobe-lighted screaming of Joplin. Male moans. The
tag in the park, the emergency room, the stitches. Orpheus' Dance
of the Blessed Spirits. Mery's blonde haired pot-smoking friend.
Asparagus without hollandaise to dip into it. Angel's Cafe's
cheesecake and onion rings. The Jesus blessing before the meal.
My moans. Mahimahi. Van Gogh's swirling cometed night sky.

Strange days indeed.

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"



an, aren't they great?" I hear a female voice. I can't tell where it's coming from. I turn and see Monica and Jeremy coming towards me during the break. Where have you been?" Jeremy asks "You disappeared during class two months ago. We thought maybe you'd gone back to America. How's your hand?"

"Great to see you guys. My hand's almost well. I was so inspired by their class that I actually went to Sinai." Though probably it was just that I was ready, and it was less them than my own inner unfolding.

"Cool. We want to hear everything. Reb Jonathan and Dr. Lisbet are so amazing. Everyone who meets them is heartened and encouraged, no matter where they are on their life path, no matter what religion. They're such great models of interfaith dialogue, real bridge-builders, not only within Judaism, but across traditions. We love them." Monica's beaming. I find her enthusiasm overblown.

I look around and see that the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet are talking to several people, including Joie, the girl who went to the Soviet Union. I have an urge to go up to the Rebbe and share about my Sinai experience, and find myself drifting in that direction.

As I do, I can now see that Joie is wearing a short blue velvet mini-skirt, and yellow stockings. She has long, lean legs. I feel a palpable urge of eroticism, which stuns me. I feel a yearning for the hidden mystery toward which they point.

I'm embarrassed at my gaze, and turn away, inhaling deeply. That's why the Orthodox are right, and these classes should not be co-ed.

Where do these unbidden feelings come from? How can I remove them? One way is to stay far from women. But how, like now? Somehow I have to learn to remove this reflexive, emotional surge that occurs when I see large breasts or long legs.

Monica and Jeremy have followed me. They are still chattering, but are on my wrong side, so I can't hear them. What I do hear is the Rebbe inviting Joie and her grandmother to come to their house tomorrow, after the Parashah study, for a Shabbat meal and singing.

I feel jealous. I turn toward Monica and Jeremy, who are still talking. I apologize, but tell them I'm in pain, and I need to go wash. I realize they assume it's my hand in pain. But my statement really makes no sense-- washing it has no medical value. Even my untruths don't ring true. But they don't seem to notice or care. "I'll talk to you more after class."

What's wrong with me? I don't care about meeting a new woman. And I don't really care about the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet. But I do know that I am confused, and need to clear my head, and don't want to be talking to the only people who want to talk to me.

* * *

I lock the bathroom door. A place of refuge. The inchoate feeling of yearning and longing hit me like an ocean wave, overpowering me,

I wash my face, as if that could remove the confusion within me. Where does this sexual longing come from? Why would a pair of

legs do that? They are just body parts. Yet, having them hidden under a skirt, revealed and concealed, nearly overwhelms me. It's worse than if she was wearing a bikini. Or even shorts. There's something about the short skirt. Why is that? How can I remove these feelings without giving into bodily release?

I can't run away from my body and this surging visceral feeling. I somehow need to face it and come to grips with it. What am I seeking? It's as if something outside of me--her legs--causes unbidden impulses and feelings within me. In the past I've felt that I needed to try to capture or possess this external object of my yearning--whatever the mystery is under her skirt toward which the legs point--as a way to receive and resolve the internal tension--through orgasm. Using the outside to stimulate my mind to release the inside. What a strange, circuitous--and illusory-- route.

Now when an outside object stimulates my body, I want--need-- to find a new and better way to address these feelings. I need to learn to use my mind to understand, and then stop those feelings. That's it, analyze. That helps create some distance.

I'm going to go back in and observe her legs-- and my feelings--dispassionately, until I can settle myself down.

As I leave the bathroom, I glance in the mirror, and am shocked to see a bearded, scraggly haired, bespectacled shadow of myself staring back.

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Mery is sleeping peacefully, but I am not able to. Everything seems so unstable and off balance in my life now. What a crazy

love-making. All the images, ...It's amazing that I had an orgasm
The blessing over the meal with her references to Jesus; her criticism of
my music playing; the craziness of the Fillmore; her anger at me that I
wasn't more forceful with her physically. Talk about great focus. I just
decided to make it like a tennis match, with an unruly crowd.
You just have to ignore the people, put them out of your mind. I
put the negative events of the evening out of my mind. I thought of
Sarah's pearl ear rings; I felt the warm energy of the two sisters in
Berkeley passing through me as I thrust into Mery. It was not a great
orgasm. I needed it too much, but I was still able to have it.
Something still worked like it should.

Something was normal.

Yet, the orgasm seemed in some ways like a note of music. I
couldn't capture it, either, and it, too, disappeared, like a vanishing
sound.

It's now 4:30 a.m. I raise up on my elbow, and watch her by the
final light of the candles. This would be a lovely picture if I had my
camera. A quiet, peaceful moment to remember forever. She has a cute
habit of rubbing her nose in her sleep. She takes her index finger
and rubs it back and forth underneath her nostrils a few times,
relieving an itch, but never awakening. She looks lovely, framed by
her reddish hair, the soft freckles on her cheek. An angelic, innocent
young woman holding a soft white teddy bear, like a little girl. This
is the essence of Mery, the inner and outer beauty I'm in love with, the
one I want to make a home with.

With other girls, I was consumed by the chase. Then, after
reaching home plate, I was done with them. Home was a place I
touched, then moved on. But with Mery, I can see home as a final
resting place--making a real home with her. There are so many

good times with her--not just the sexual times. Lying next to her and just looking at her makes me happy. Not just her body, but her face, her hands playing the piano, her giggle, her artistic, creative, intelligent mind. She's really someone with whom I could spend a life together.

It will take practice, --learning to live together -like playing our duets together. But practice is something I am good at. With her, I can see us achieving stability, harmony, balance.

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It's fascinating the way the mind works. Dr. Lisbet says the most important thing to notice is where, how, and why we focus our attention. Johannes is focusing his in a soft, loving way on Mery to create a sense of peacefulness within himself, a way to find some permanence in his life, a sense of control. Ortho John is focusing his in an analytic way to create distance from both Joie's legs and to reduce the internal tension within himself. He is really trying to address, how to you deal with bad, unwanted feelings, and gain self-control. Both are using their minds, focusing on the external, to create internal feelings.

Aren't we all seeking something? What?

On a simple, concrete level, it's like when we decide what movie to go see. There is, at some unconscious or conscious level, a choice made about what kind of stimulation or sensation we want. To laugh, to be moved, to be excited. Are we seeking to match our internal state, what Dr. Lisbet would call maintaining homeostasis? For example, if we're happy and in love, would we then choose to see a romantic movie?

Or do we choose something in order to change our internal

state--growth, or a return to homeostasis? For example, if we're bored, would seek out an adventure movie? If we're sad, a comedy?

What she said is that even though radical, early behaviorists like B.F. Skinner say we are determined by the environment, she says we humans do have free will to an extent. We can choose the environments we place ourselves in, and create certain events in life--such as a mood altering movie-- as a way to modulate, modify, and even produce feelings within us.

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I remember her saying what follows from this view is that the more conscious we can be of ourselves, the more clearly we can see where, why, and how we focus attention outside as a reflection of the internal states, and ensure we make wise choices. She told that cute, though wise story of a person asking a wise man in the Himalayas the secret of happiness.

"Good choices" the wise man said.

"But how we learn to make good choices," the seeker queried.

"Experience" the sage whispered.

"But how do we gain experience" the supplicant probed.

"Bad choices."

* * *

I wish she were here so I could ask her, at a deeper level, what are we really seeking? John and Johannes are both realizing, from different perspectives, that it is not the breast or leg per se that is being sought, it's a deeper feeling within that those body parts create and represent. Deeper, Johannes realizes, than sexual release. Deeper, John will realize soon than pride at sexual suppression.

What are those internal feelings we want? Aliveness, joy,

energy? Yes, and still deeper seekings. Peace. Gratitude.

To love, to be a beloved; to find home and belonging. Can we find that without first seeking and discovering our self--our meaning, our calling.

How much are the answers to be found outside us? within us?

So many questions. Where is she when I need her?

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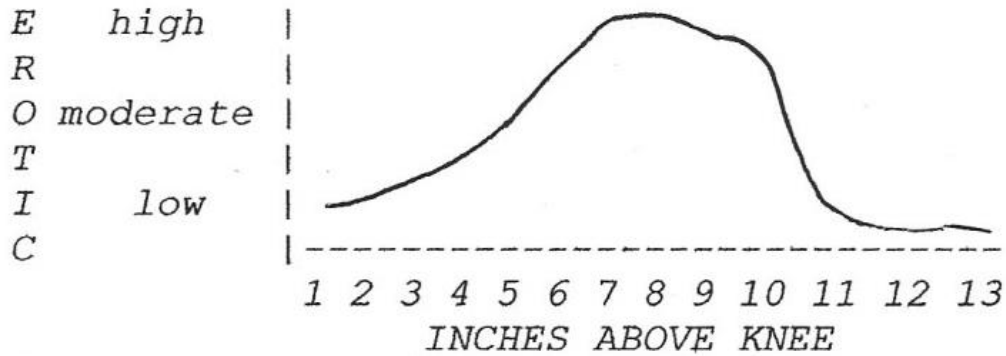
I return to the class, walk towards the group around the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet, but stop about five yards away. I act as if I'm looking at the blackboard. Joie is in conversation with Monica and Jeremy. I look at her legs. They are long, but not infinite. I imagine there is approximately thirteen inches between her knees and her groin. How many inches above the knee is her skirt? I'd say over six. Probably closer to seven.

About a fifty percent, 1:1 ratio of stockinged leg above the knee and hidden leg under the knee. That is the ratio that creates eroticism.

I image a graph, with inches above the knee (1-13") on the bottom horizontal axis, eroticism (low to high) on the vertical axis. As you move from one to four inches above the knee on the horizontal axis, you see a slight, modest rise in eroticism on the vertical axis. The eroticism continues to rise, and peaks at a about the middle, like a bell shaped curve. This was what drove Johannes crazy with longing. When the dress would be about ten inches above the knee, (and two inches of cleavage) he would assess how slutty the girl was and how likely the conquest.

Then, as you get to 11,12,13 inches above the knee, eroticism

falls. It is just too slutty, revealing too much.



It's all a calculation--by the skirt designers, the woman who wears it--to create the maximum emotion and yearning. But by analyzing their chess moves, I can remove myself from that emotion they want to create in me.

Better. It's just a matter of numbers. That definitely helps remove the feeling of being swept away. Leg/knee/skirt: It's just a precise, calculated distance that creates an erotic tension. I take another slow inhale. Johannes used these numbers to maximize arousal. I am using numbers to distance from arousal. So clearly the important issue is not the numbers but the intention behind using the numbers.

The feelings of sexual longing and yearning are receding. I feel proud of myself. I'm facing down the demons. Legs. They are just a body part. And what do they lead to..at 13"? A curly jungle of pubic hair. That is definitely not erotic. It's actually disgusting.

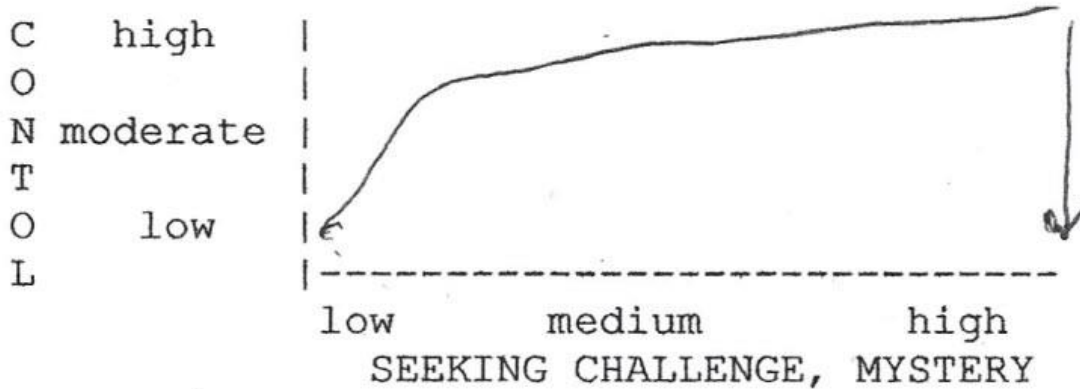
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I wonder if the chart doesn't have a parallel in the way Johannes seeks control. I know that he--and I-- desire control, and push ourselves to gain more, seeking the edge. But there

seems a paradox. As we seek to gain more control, get closer and closer to the mystery, try to find what's behind the curtain, we come closer to falling off the edge of the cliff.



That moment of highest increased control simultaneously brings us closer and closer to becoming completely out of control. How do we learn to calibrate when you're at the proper state, and when we've pushed too far into a free fall?

Are we doing something wrong in seeking? Is it that we lack a foundation, and so we're really a house of cards, and one more might topple it? Or is it part of the nature of reality. The abyss is real, you may fall at any time. As I re-read this, I realize Dr. Lisbet would say I am using "we" and "you" to distance myself and I should be saying "I."

I glance around the room, looking for and finding a large breasted woman. What is her bra size? Is she 34cc? 36d? Breasts, even large breasts, are not infinite, either. They are certain precisely calculable size--that are contained in finite containers. Even if a woman chooses to tantalizing reveal part of the flesh, what is it in fact that is shown--nothing but globs of fat tissue. Hardly the cause for yearning.

Excellent. My calculations are helping me to create distance from the emotional and sexual surge, to realize It's all proportion and rations, following precise laws. The feeling of being overwhelmed are receding. Maybe I can master this after all.

* * *

I awake with a start. 5:45. In my dream I was back at Stanford, but already have my degree. I've signed up for additional summer classes, but for some reason I've stopped going after the first few weeks. It's now the fourth week of class. I know I'm going to fail. I'm walking among fellow students, but realize I'm no longer one of them, that I don't belong, and eventually will be found out, caught, and expelled from the Farm. I know all this, but my fellow students don't yet know, and look at me as if everything is ok.

I'm not able to get back to sleep. That almost never happens to me. I sleep like the proverbial baby. I get up and go downstairs. Why? For food? For space--to clear my head?

There is something stark and sad about an uncleared table after a meal. Napkins stained dark with the wipings of left-over food. Remains of various carefully prepared taste treats nudged around in random patterns. Part of a fish, lying underneath a half-eaten asparagus. The unconsumed Chardonnay. Chairs pushed aside helter-skelter. I look over at the piano, my flute on its stand.

We're trying.

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Upstairs, in bed, looking at Mery by candlelight, Johannes is feeling in love, peaceful, happy, as if he has found

his home. An hour later, downstairs, he's felling sad and confused, focusing on the detritus from the prior evening.

What has changed? Nothing but a dream, and a new environment. Which is true, upstairs or downstairs? Or are they just different perspectives? After the fact, with 20/20 hindsight, I can say that downstairs is the reality. The relationship is headed for the garbage heap, with the left-overs. But could I have known that then? Yes, there are signs of problems, but there are also signs of working things out. Johannes would feel like a quitter if he just stopped the relationship without trying to correct the problems. But what a lot of wasted effort he expended because of his determination to try to push things through.

How do you know at the time? Can you only tell based on how things end up? Is that fair?

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John, you only have 20/20 hindsight based on where you are. How do you know the story is over, or what lessons can be learned? Be careful of the habit you criticize in Johannes of black and white thinking.

* * *

Even with the fat lady singing, love making tonight was awkward. At least for me. I guess it's all about parts of the whole (hole). Cute, pun intended. My psychology teacher called it the reactive self-conscious effect. When we focus on our behavior, even a natural one, like swallowing, the very act of awareness initially effects the behavior. "Try consciously swallowing three times" he asked us. When I tried, I noticed a tightness and constriction in my throat. Yet I'd been swallowing perfectly well all morning before that. If

that happens with a natural behavior that we're just observing, how much more difficult it becomes, he noted, when we try to change an intricate, learned behavior.

I experienced that trying to improve my net volleys. At first, it's necessary to break down the motion into its component parts: realizing that my ready position was too much in the backhand position; my footwork was off; where my eyes should be focused; the flex of my wrist. Then each part has to be analyzed and placed back in a better way. But before it gets better, things will get worse--whatever fluidity in the stroke had previously existed disappears--and you feel awkward and self-conscious. But with practice, things improve, and I've learned I just have to endure the disorientation phase. I've seen the real progress that comes on the other side.

I think even Mery also felt uneasy, a little nervous, making love after we'd broken down the component parts of the images and thoughts that arouse us. This is new territory for me. Are we learning something that is going to make this better on the other side?

Being more open about our sexual desires, styles, and fantasies was confusing. Did we share too much with each other? I felt uncomfortable. How is seeking mystery and novelty new and exciting if she is simply trying to enact the scene per my request?.

Worse, I feel caught between worlds. After Mery told me about her first orgasm--associated with torture, rape, suffering, and bondage--I had no idea what to say. I just wanted my own needs met. Her fantasy is not arousing to me. I don't like feeling pain as foreplay. I hate the idea of administering pain to someone else. That's not erotic at all to me. Anger is not good for sex. Anger is not good for me.

But what I also realized is that my new goal of a more committed, intimate type of love-making is not erotic either. Commitment is a nice idea to cuddle to, with soft music and candles. But it's disappointing as foreplay, and there is simply nothing exciting or arousing in it. I missed the feeling of passion, excitement, conquest, novelty.

As I looked down and saw her grimacing from the stitches in her chin as she tried to service me, I couldn't tell whether that brought her pain, or pleasure, or both--pleasure because of the pain. Her idea of passion and sexual adventure is too dangerous and uncomfortable. For me, anger is not good for sex. And I know anger is not good for me.

* * *

Caught between two worlds is a perfect description, Johannes. Mery's erotic mental processes are still a mystery to me, but let me focus on your sexual dynamics, which I'm beginning to understand better.

By the candlelight, you're being forced to clearly confront the limits of the stories and motivation you've been creating to help you have an orgasm. Whatever they offer, you take as a given, and look for the next base. It's still context driven, not what do you want, but what do they offer and then what more can you get.

Look back less than two months ago, at your self-serve fantasy-- with Elaine in the library--as I was forced to do reading your journal. What would you see? You would realize that you never arrived at your "destination" (third base), yet you had an orgasm. That passage should show you that the base you are seeking, outside yourself, is not really what you are physically

after. You want an orgasm. Period. In your fantasy, it is the chasing after the goal, the striving, but just falling short of attaining, that creates the tension that produces the orgasm. In Elaine's case, it was the mystery under the short mini-skirt.

But it could just as easily be the mystery under the sweater.

It's the same with your fetish about breasts, and the nipple, your acme of second base. Before your orgasm, there is an inchoate longing. You think that's what you want. And look how powerfully that desire motivated you. You'd spend hours strategizing about how to achieve it, willing to drive miles and miles, and even to spend lots of money on your dates. You feel you'll be happy once you can uncover and possess the breast. You image the first touch, feel, caress. The first intimation that your ploys may work brings ecstasy, hunger, throbbing. But once you get there, and her breast--and its mystery is uncovered--then what?

You never stopped to ask the question, so I will do it for you: Is this all there is? Is it more enjoyable to seek the erotic mystery, than to find it?

Let's look at the breast. What you feel you want--the cleavage, is nothing but an illusion. The breast itself, that you want to uncover and reveal, is just a piece of fat, as my younger self in Jerusalem,--Ortho John-- two months ago, so aptly described it.

But even if you see it more erotically than that, you never spend more than a few seconds resting on it. The soft nurturance of the nipple brings you almost no satisfaction. You turn from it, cover it up. Once the mystery is revealed, it no longer is enticing, and You keep going for one more rung on the continuum,

one more base, keep moving forward seeking greater conquests.

Why? That external striving is merely a means to increase internal tension. Once you can create enough tension through the story--- conquest, adventure, naughtiness, mystery, whatever story you use--and there is a summation effect and you have an orgasm, you are satisfied, and the external you thought you were seeking becomes irrelevant. There is no arrival outside of you, only internal pleasure. The orgasm was your goal, and women and their parts/bases --in real life, or in fantasy--are only a means.

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And what happens after your orgasm? At that point, it's if someone snaps his fingers and you wake up to the same physical scene, but now everything has shifted. Your interest in the breast, and the female body, changes completely depending upon your physiology--before or after the orgasm. After, there are just lines and forms, nothing exciting, breasts just pieces of flesh hanging from a body. How could that have once been the source of such longing and desire? You're ready to move on. There is nothing that magnetically draws you. There is even some anti-magnetic property-- you want to make as swift an exit as possible. Breasts are in this place, and you don't care.

Until next time....with a new person.

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That was the old world. But you became wise enough to realize the emptiness of that cycle. You began to realize that a few seconds of transitory pleasure is not a goal that can provide you much meaning or satisfaction. Before, while you were pursuing

the pleasure, you were motivated and had a goal, so your thoughts didn't endlessly multiply and drift. Tension/release. Tension/release. **What Dr. Lisbet calls the samsara--repetitive, trapped--quality of that behavior.**

Now you're trying to shift. Dr. Lisbet told me a Chinese proverb about the finger pointing to the moon. For you, the finger was the woman's body, and the orgasm was the moon. Now, you're thinking that the moon is committed relationship with the same person. And you're using Ovid as the means: trying to develop relationship skills and think of someone else's pleasure besides your own.

I'm on a different relational path than you--celibacy and no female relationships.

I can see from one perspective, however, that it is a wiser choice for you, and others, to seek a monogamous loving relationship. But now, in a committed relationship, you're faced with what happens to the newness, conquest, excitement, and striving which were the *sina qua non* of your previous style and necessary to achieve your real goal-- orgasm's pleasure (positive reinforcement) -- and tension release (negative reinforcement) Thanks, Dr. Lisbet.

You're asking, what do you do if your life is built on conquest--unwrapping the package to find the breast--and now you're in a relationship where the goal of your pursuits is freely offered? Where is the conquest in that? And how worthy is the goal: a yearning after pieces of flesh that dissipates as soon as you attain release? If you can have it without the chase, without the games, can you still have the release if there is no tension

build up? Where does the excitement come from?

You're lost your illusions, your old motivations. And you have not yet found a way to create new ones within the context of a committed, loving relationship. You do not feel erotically stimulated by the romantic idealism of candles.

I will tell you--with 20/20 hindsight--or Monday morning quarterbacking- that you are looking in the wrong place. First, as you are aware, but lose sight of, Mery's fantasies are not a good answer for you as a way to increase sexual passion.

Secondly, I agree that you are asking a deeper question--how to maintain a loving relationship with one woman--Mery--rather than merely seeking sexual pleasure with lots of others. However, you're still asking the wrong question. Just as the orgasm passes away, all relationships, no matter how good, or how long--a half century or more-- will eventually pass away, bringing sadness and pain. Just ask Grandpa Julius and Grandma Dorthy.

The deeper question --the real mystery and the one I'm seeking-- is how do you move beyond both sex and relationship with a woman, and find a loving, permanent relationship with God.

My younger Ortho self in Jerusalem is still infused with optimism, excitement, and awe at exploring that question. Now, I'm more like you, Johannes, confused and caught between two worlds. My motivation is flagging, and I sometimes doubt whether the mystery is worth uncovering. But as long as I am alive, what choice is left to me?

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Saturday Morning. I had trouble sleeping last night, I was and am so excited about today's adventure. I have decided this morning that I am going to spend the day praying with the Orthodox, and

see if I can't find my Mea Shearim teacher.

Since the Rebbe and Dr. Lisbet are going to be having Shabbat with that girl Joie who went to the Soviet Union, I will find my own Orthodox family to adopt me. After all, don't they (we!) believe you are supposed to take in the stranger on Shabbat? It's a mitzvah--a commandment and a blessing. I'm really just doing them a favor, allowing them to take me, a stranger, into their home. Though I may not like being told what to do--anyone controlling me--I don't mind that God is telling others what they should do to benefit me--give me shelter and a good meal.

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It's not that I didn't I enjoy the second part of the Rebbe's Chanukkah class yesterday. I did, especially his teachings about how to spiritually internalize the lighting of the candles--find something you feel blessed about and image more internal light within you. Also, his teaching about the mystical inner symbolism of the miracle of oil--we have more strength, determination, and compassion within us than we believe.

Both great lessons for me. I feel the determination for finding my true teacher. I know that will be the blessing I seek, the one that will create additional light within me.

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As soon as I awake, I dutifully and meticulously put on my tefillin and tallit. I am a little more skilled with the intricacies of the tefillin, but I still have some trouble figuring out the exact right way to tie the knots. I then carefully go through the morning prayers.

Suddenly, I decide that, like a homosexual coming out of

*the closet, it is time for me to come out of the closet spiritu-
ally. Because it is the holy day of Shabbat, I will wear my
tefillin and tallit out of my YMCA room, and on my walk over to
the W. Wall where I've seen the Orthodox praying. I'm not sure
what to call it--some say Weeping. Sounds kind of Job-like wussy,
but I can go with that. Some say Western, probably the Reform, to
be historically accurate. Or maybe it's to feel that Jews aren't
weak and sobby. Whatever. I know it's holy.*

*On my way out, I get a few strange glances from other
residents at the Y, but I'm not bothered because they are proba-
bly Christian and don't understand that I'm following God's law.
In fact, I take pride in owning my Judaism--unlike Joseph being
assimilated in Egypt.*

*I also get strange glances as I walk to the wall, and that
surprises me, but I try to ignore them, too. When I arrive at the Wall,
I see several older men, as well as some younger ones, in different
groups, praying, as I'd expected. I survey the group, asking God to
guide me to the one who is to be my teacher. I remember Reb
Jonathan's statement, "When the student is ready, the teacher appears."*

*I re-adjust my tefillin, and spot a lean, gray-bearded man,
maybe early 50's, who is fervent, reverent in his prayer and
devotion. I decide he will be my teacher.*

*I walk closer to him, slowly and patiently. I don't want to
distract or disrupt his prayer.*

*I wait. I watch. I can feel the excitement and anticipation
building. I know God will have him pause at some moment, and look
toward me. This rabbi will see a willing student. Though he won't
know I am Phi Beta Kappa from Stanford, or have been admitted to*

Harvard Law School, he'll intuitively sense how intelligent I am, how eager, how willing. Though he also wouldn't know I've climbed Sinai and experienced G-d, he'd feel my spiritual nature too. He would be ecstatic that God, on this Shabbat, as the miracle of Chanukkah is approaching, as the days are getting shorter, as light is disappearing, has sent him such an eager, ready pupil, one switching from human law to divine law.

Finally, the moment arrives. The wise man pauses from his prayers. His eyes slowly and gently open. He turns to his left and sees me. He looks me up and down, as I expected he would. I smile, spiritually, and wisely, but humbly, too.

He looks again. Finally, he says, in accented English "No tefillin on Shabbat. Go."

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"How does it feel to be awakened with kisses, sleeping princess?" I've been up a couple hours, took a nice walk and now watch as she rubs her eyes, moans, and pulls the sheets about her. I give her some more kisses, on her hair, her eyes.

"Perfect. This is how I want to be awakened every morning."

"Ma'am, since you let me sleep all night in your soul kitchen, I'd be much obliged if you'd find it in your heart to accompany your hungry, humble servant and fair prince for an old fashioned, glazed donut."

Her face lites up, and she offers her hand to be kissed,

"Why kind knight, this little milkmaid would be right honored."

"Though I do know the fair damsel needs her beauty sleep. So, would she prefer breakfast in bed?"

"I could get used to this. Don't tempt me." She pulls me

down for a hug.

I feel myself becoming aroused, but consciously try to restrain myself, thinking of last night's sexual antics. Instead, I jump off her, and say, "I'm going to take a quick shower. You can sleep some more, or come join me if you'd like."

"Mmm. My therapist said that psychologists call that an approach--approach: two good choices, but it creates confusion." She pulls the covers over her head. "I'll do both. Rest a bit more, then I'll join you."

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It's annoying using a shower I'm not familiar with. I know at the shower at my house, and at the Stanford swimming pool, just how many turns of hot and cold are needed for perfect warmth. I'm having to learn all over again with hers.

I adjust it, re-adjust, wait. Frustrating and confusing. And requiring extra effort and will take time to learn to get just the right combination of hot and cold that works best.

Like last night's love making: complicated, frustrating and confusing. And needlessly so, from my perspective. I don't know if Mery sensed it, but I sure felt it. Sometimes, like playing music, it's easier to just do it alone. Self-serve.

She'd serviced me--funny word-- served me, in a submissive way, willing to do whatever I asked her to. It's not that it wasn't enjoyable--and Lord knows after the park and dinner and the Fillmore, I definitely needed tension release.

But then she wanted me to accommodate her desires. She wasn't direct about it, just said obliquely and as a kind of joke--and subtle criticism?--: "I know at the Fairmont you didn't want to get your Countess Mara tie wrinkled." I just looked at

her, as if confused, though I sensed where she was going.

She pressed forward, saying "You thought you were being a gentleman. I know from your quoting your journal to me that you learned from your parents at an early age that tying people up is wrong." She smiled. Trying to be coquettish?.

Not only did I "think" it, I was in fact being a gentleman. For those who have eyes to see.

"But I hope after sharing my fantasy with you, you will interpret what they said to you as a general rule, but not as a hard and fast law." She's still smiling. I can't tell whether she sounds more like a Harvard trained lawyer trying to make a point; a Rabbinic scholar arguing at Talmudic principle; or a New Testament disciple expounding the freedom Jesus brought from confining laws. Or perhaps a harlot trying to seduce a John into some sado-masochistic ritual.

She pulled my good ear toward her, and told me that she'd really feel pleased, "oh King at his table; oh so handsome beloved...if you'd help me with my.....desires.

"It's only because I trust and love you so much that I'm willing to place myself in such a a vulnerable position with you. I know you won't take advantage of me."

I feel the water drops dripping off me, cleansing me. I pull out a bar of soap.

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I untie, unwrap, and remove the tefillin. "Go." I feel like a teacher has just criticized a term paper I'd spent a lot of time preparing. Worse, the paper is me, and the teacher is dismissing me, sending me away. Though the words hurt, at the same

time they almost feel pleasurable. I said I wanted to follow the authentic law of God. And here is a no-nonsense teacher who is not going to molly-coddle me. He is tough, and you either do it right, or you don't play the game. He doesn't realize that his rejection is only going to fuel my determination.

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I feel an intense hunger and realize I've not eaten since yesterday. I leave the Wall, walk through the Shuk to the first open store--an Arab coffee shop. Then I realize, of course, most of the stores are closed. It's the Shabbat. I shouldn't be spending money today. That's work.

Fine. I leave without ordering anything. I'll just fast today. More purification. Determination. A new beginning.

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I continue to soap off, replaying last night in my mind.

She raised her hands over her head, and following her lead and instructions, I'd held her arms for her. That wasn't a problem for me, though I felt self-conscious, like we were enacting a play, her "La Causa" story.

She then wrapped her hands around the bed post, while I placed mine over them. She began moaning. On one bed post was the yellow scarf she'd worn to the Fillmore. There was a purple one casually and "accidentally" draped over the other one. I hadn't noticed it when I first came in the room, but assume it had been there. Had she been planning this the whole evening, complete with stage props?

I can feel that the shower is running out of hot water, and hurry to wash my hair as the images continue to drift within me

Nothing was said, but I understood by her arm motions, the

scarves, and her first orgasm fantasy, what she wanted-- to bind her to the bed post. After her telling me how much she trusted me, I didn't feel I could refuse again, so I loosely bound her hands around the posts, trying each with a bow in an effort at playfulness.

She moaned, and thrust her breasts upward. "Now, squeeze my breasts. Please." Again, I felt like an actor, and she was the submissive actress. I moved my hands down to her breasts. Again, common ground.

But she was more than an actress, she was also the stage director giving me orders. I disliked the feeling of being a puppet, a pawn, being moved willy-nilly at her commands, being told what to do.

I applied a soft pressure. "Harder, yes. Oh, yes. More. Please." I ratcheted up the pressure, slightly. Her moaning intensified. Her pelvis was beginning to thrash about. She pulled her hands, as if she were helpless and trapped, trying to escape, only to be forced back by the scarves to her submissive posture. Her moaning intensified. I worried what her roommates must be thinking.

"Harder. Suck them now. Harder." I did this for about fifteen seconds, and remembered the picture of her from Golden Gate Park with the hickey above her right breast. "Harder, harder. Please." I pulled my head up and said "If I continue, you'll get a hickey there." Who gave that to her? Was it the same scenario being enacted with someone else? I feel an indignant agitation in my loins. Have the roommates heard this before, too?

"Please, keep going. YES. Harder. Make me black and blue.

From love." I've given a few hickeys in my time. Usually there is an exciting aspect, something to do with marking my territory.

Like a dog peeing on the fire hydrant? Very romantic image, Johannes.

But I'd never done it hard or angrily. More as a lingering, slow sucking, a furtive, subtle, crafty territory-marking, while distracting them by rubbing their necks, or moving my hands slowly toward third base.

"Yes, more. HARDER. please, more. I'm yours only. You are my beloved." I continued sucking harder. I began to think that if I sucked hard enough, and left a dark enough mark, that would prevent her from modeling, at least for a while. I felt anger at the thought of her posing, and sucked more earnestly, aggressively. That only fueled her passion. She continued and accelerated her thrashing to such an extent that it was hard to enter her.

Once I did, it was like riding a wild mare. If I didn't know this is what she wanted, I'd be uncertain whether she was enjoying it, or trying to buck me off.

I felt increasingly self-conscious about the noise she was making. I again wondered about her roommates, and what they were thinking hearing her scream like this. Had they heard her with others, too?

The question angered me, made me jealous, more intensely passionate. Was anger fueling arousal? Why? It was inchoate. It had something to do with her modeling, her other boyfriends. The rage simmered, threatening to bubble forth. I felt fury at her giving me orders. Why was she making me do something to hurt her when I didn't want to?

To stay inside her I had to hold her tightly. But I knew I

was grabbing and pressing and encircling her much more firmly than was really necessary. "Yes, perfect. Where do you pasture your flock, beloved?"

Fear arose as well. I was afraid of becoming so enraged that I'd lose control, access some part of me I didn't want to admit was there. Really hurt her. I continued pinching her nipples--hard; catapulting and heaving myself into her.

This wasn't at all pleasurable for me; this wasn't lovemaking. She was forcing me toward a line I swore I would never cross--becoming like Dad and his violent, vicious rage.

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"Vayeshev--and he settled-- is the name of Today's Torah portion." There aren't as many people here as in yesterday's Chanukkah class. I obviously didn't expect to be here, but apparently my plans--to find my teacher--will have to wait until tomorrow. God obviously felt I didn't pick the right day. As I look around the Parashah class, I'm happy to see that the girl the Rebbe's going to share the Shabbat meal with isn't here. I'm happy because I really don't want to be distracted by her. But I'm disappointed, too. With myself--that I even looked or cared. I remind myself: celibacy...purification.

"We are going to ask you all to complete an inclass homework based on names from last week's and this week's Torah portions. Therefore, please listen attentively as I review. As you remember from last week's Torah portion, Jacob meets his older brother Esau, twenty years after stealing his birthright. Jacob not could go home, could not settle himself until he first met and reconciled with his brother.

The night before the meeting, Jacob wrestles with an angel at the River Jabbok--an eastern tributary of the Jordan, twenty-six miles north of the Dead Sea. Jacob's name is changed to 'Israel--for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed.' (Genesis 32.29)

"Jacob calls the place Peniel, meaning 'I have seen a divine being face to face--the face of God.' ((Genesis 32.31).

"Later in last week's portion, God tells Jacob to go to Beth-El--the House of God-- and build an altar, 'to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing your brother Esau.' (Genesis 35.1;7). So far so good?" He looks around the room. Everyone but me is taking notes. No one raises their hand.

"Excellent. Now, in last week's Haftarah portion, Hosea (11.7-12.2), Hosea says 'In the womb he tried to supplant his brother; Grown to manhood, he strove with a divine being...At Beth-El <Jacob> would meet him...' (Hosea 12:3-4)

"Now, remember, twenty years earlier, when Jacob was fleeing Esau, he had the dream of angels and the ladder going to heaven, and he named the site 'Beth-El.' So, Jacob has two visions of God--each twenty years apart. Only the second time is his name changed.

"Crossing the river Jabbok symbolizes Jacob's emergence into a new consciousness. Now, the question we want you to write about is name changes." And Dr. Lisbet adds "and their relationship and meaning in terms of human growth and development."

"Yes, exactly." The Rebbe looks over toward Dr. Lisbet. Do I notice some annoyance and impatience in him at her embellishing and refining his assignment? The first crack in the Rebbe's polished armor?

* * *

" First, why in this week's Torah portion, does it say that Jacob has gone down to Egypt to find his son Joseph, and 'Jacob was settled' (37.1). Then a few lines later it says 'Israel loved Joseph (37.3).'

"In the Torah, everything can be read on at least four levels. We'd like to ask you to each take out a pen and paper and write for about fifteen minutes about the name changes. Why is he called Jacob again. Then called Israel two lines later. Talk about what four different levels you think might be going on--literal, relational, symbolic, esoteric. As you consider your answer, also consider the name changes of the place where the wrestling with the angel occurred, and twenty years later, the meeting with Esau at the River Jabbok, which he calls Peniel and also Beth-El, the same name used twenty years earlier."

I can't believe he's having them write on Shabbat. And what an unbelievable complex question. Of what interest could all those name changes be; and four different levels. I imagine a huge chart with names on one side, and different levels across the top. Ugh. I'm glad I can't write. Even if I wanted to, I wouldn't have any interest in filling that in. Too much intellectual sophistry, and I'm sure would bring me no closer to God.

Maybe this would be a good time to go talk to him, and tell him where I was last week-- coming up from the Dead Sea. I must have passed the River Jabbok when crossing the Jordan. The literal level?! And where, he will ask, was I coming from?

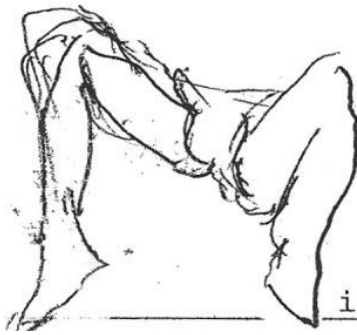
I will answer, from Egypt and climbing Sinai.

How impressed will he be!

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ⁱdway in the love-making, I had one of my experiences again, like I did when we were horseback riding, or when Dad was threatening me. I withdrew from my body, and I was an eye on the ceiling. I was watching a carefully prescribed, calibrated "sexual" play.

The woman opened and lifted her legs, his hands on her knees, pulling her legs back, making the letter M.

As the play unfolded the woman's spread-M shaped legs took on the appearance of the wings of a butterfly, and the man was like a student in a science project pinning the butterfly with a sharp pointed object to the mounting board.

The butterfly was still alive and struggled for life, thrashing about. He continued to pin her, like a trapped animal he'd caught.

I could feel myself shudder while watching. I worried and was concerned about her. Would a butterfly, much less a person, voluntarily choose this? And who would do it to someone else? I didn't like him. He seemed much too mean, hard-hearted, and controlling.

But I also worried about him. He was too vulnerable.

The pin sticking into the woman had disappeared completely, swallowed by the dark inner depths beneath her reddish pubic

hairs. How safe was it in there, a shadowy, unknown place I
couldn't see into? How safe was he around this tied-up bucking
animal, crying out and moaning and shouting?

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Sunday morning. A new start. The excitement I'm feeling is palpable. Today I go to Mea Shearim.

Yesterday, while other's were writing, I charged up to the Rabbi, to tell him that I couldn't write because of my hand. (I used that reason, so as not to embarrass him about having people write on the Shabbat). I also told him I wanted to thank him for his Sinai workshop of a couple of months ago and share my own experience going up and down the mountain.

He was very friendly when I introduced myself, but he had no idea who I was and didn't recognize me, even though I'd been in a couple of his classes. Perhaps that was just as well, because I wasn't exactly as friendly and supportive in yesterday's Chanukah class as I might have been.

Before I could say anything about Sinai, he asked where I was staying, and I told him the Y.

"Nice, and not too expensive." He smiled warmly, and I felt myself smiling back. "Have you noticed their dedication motto, a quote from Field Marshal Edmund Lord Allenby sometime in 1933."

I said I hadn't. He recited it easily, with a certain pleasure. "'Here is a place whose atmosphere is peace, where political and religious jealousies can be forgotten and international unity fostered and developed.' Beautiful, isn't it? We need every bit of interfaith and political dialogue we can get."

I nodded, somewhat brusquely, and tried again to tell him

about the Sinai workshop, but he was interrupted by Dr. Lisbet who said there they needed to confer about where to take the rest of the Parashah class.

"Sorry, she's right. I can't talk more now, but Dr. Lisbet and I are having a few people over later this afternoon--Shabbat Mincha--prayer, singing, great food. Please come join us."

He took a piece of paper and wrote down his address and gave it to me.

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He turned back to Dr. Lisbet. I turned to go back to my seat, but instead, I kept walking, and left the classroom. I really wasn't interested in what some group of students would have to say about Jacob, Israel, names, and four levels.

I walked outside, and returned to the Y. I was angry. Why? I should have felt appreciative at his kind invitation to join him at his home on Shabbat. But I didn't like being interrupted by Dr. Lisbet. What is she, his mother, ordering him around? I didn't like that he wouldn't listen to my experience when I wanted to share it with him. And he wrote--and had others write--on Shabbat, which even I know is forbidden, a sin, a violation of the rules saying you should not work on Shabbat. I had to ask myself why I even cared about sharing my Sinai experience--or Shabbat--with someone who can't even keep the Shabbat laws. Further, I knew the girl in the blue dress would be at his home, and that would be a distraction.

I want to keep myself focused only on God and God's laws.

Instead, I went back to my room, and immersed myself in studying, in preparation for today's upcoming "holy" encounter that I am hoping to have at the Mea Shearim. I studied all

afternoon and most of the night, as if cramming for a final exam.

I didn't eat last night, and decide this morning to skip breakfast. That makes my fast forty-eight hours. I'm purifying and preparing myself as best I can for the sacred meeting G-d has in store for me.

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"Way too cold. Brrr!" Mery gets into the shower, interrupting my thoughts of our early morning--what should I call it? It certainly didn't seem like "love making." Our encounter? Wrestling match? Certainly not wrestling with an angel.

Her nipples crinkle and rise beautifully as the water splashes on her. Her body is one of the few I've ever seen that looks even better out of clothes than in them. I start to become excited.

"Aren't you freezing?"

"No, it's perfect for me. I don't like it too hot. Here, I'll warm you up." I pull her to me and give her a hug. I see the reddish black and blue mark on the flesh of her right breast. I point to it. "A red badge of courage."

She doesn't smile. "This temperature is way too cold for me." She pulls away from my embrace, and steps out of the shower. I feel both relief and sadness. Sadness because it feels as if she's dancing away from me, just out of reach. "Why don't you finish? I'll clean up a bit downstairs. Call me when you're done, and then I'll take a quick shower."

Relief because I can take a shower in peace, at my preferred temperature.

When she leaves, I turn the hot water faucet a bit--a

half inch. Ouch. Too hot. I turn it back. It seems like some-
times so little distance is separating us. But even that small
gap is hard to bridge.

Relief because I can have the shower the way I like it. I
guess you just have to sing your own voice--at least those times
when you know it.

I feel the water splashing over and cleaning me, washing
away the tumultuous ugly emotions of the evening. Sunday morning.
A new beginning.

The temperature is perfect.

Much better.

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*Before I leave the Y, I take one more look at the laws of
Leviticus. I feel I'm so ready to begin my quest for the law of
God. I even know at some deep level, my grandfather will be
proud of me. I will be the best here. I'm not trying to under-
stand God through watered down Reform--the 10 suggestions; not
through Conservative which, while maintaining some religious
roots, still has more "allowances" and permits change and "organ-
ic" growth--the slippery slope to Reform. But I see this as just an
ambivalent attempt to be both Jewish and modern, and the Torah becomes
just one set of values among many, something that can be changed
according to the whims of society and culture. Where is stability and
structure in that?*

*I will pursue the best--the most rigorous--the Orthodox.
Those who really truly follow the law of God. And, of the Ortho-
dox, I've been told that in Israel, those who most rigorously,
devoutly, and faithfully follow the law of God are living in Mea
Shearim.*

Conceptually, and emotionally, this path seems like it will be a perfect fit. Things have become too unstructured and disordered--not only in my life, but in the world in general. The "free love" of the Haight Ashbury, San Francisco, and even Eilat ultimately lead nowhere meaningful, only to purposeless sexual gratification. The watered down, anemic, cultural assimilationist Judaism of my Kansas City family leaves nothing of certainty to hold onto. There has to be more than just "Don't let Hitler win." The materialism, social striving of the U.S. and the adversarial nature of secular law leave me empty. There is a void to be filled.

I think back to my hobbies as a child. I would spend hours with a set of "paint by numbers." If you follow the directions, sunshine appears, shadows, trees, water. Life. What's missing in my life are directions. Where are the "numbers" now? What I'm looking for is not just any numbers, not just order and structure--that's why I left the atheistic, physical survival model of the kibbutz.

What I need is a way to translate the feeling of Sinai into daily living. Everything in its sacred place, a structured life directed toward G-d and following G-d's laws is the way to fill the canvas of my life. And that is where I'm heading.

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I need a plan.

While Mery showers, I sit on the bed alternately looking at Starry Night and the Mother and Child.

What a crazy night. I feel stretched to my limit and have had enough chaos. I want to return to some structure, like the verdant rolling hills of the Stanford golf course and my Sunday

buddies. But I don't want to run away from Mery.

How about if I offer to take her to breakfast--something short and quick, like donuts--and then tell her I have to head back for some golf. Or maybe some studies. I can thank Mery for planning such a stimulating evening, and then re-enter my once regular framework.

Inamatsu told me that he and Richard have decided that it's been so long since I've played with them, they'll give me a couple strokes aside...if I dare show up. He even said I don't need to call if I'm not going to show up. They've got a comfortable threesome, and a single forth will often join them at the last moment.

It has been a while since I've played, but if I leave by 8:30, I can get in a couple hours of practice. Won't they be surprised when not only do I show up, but when I crush them all--especially Richard.

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"Does it bother your parents that I'm not Jewish?" She takes a sip of her tea and lemon.

I look at her, while dunking my old fashioned glaze into my coffee. Just before I take a bite I respond "No, they're bothered because you're not rich."

I smile and place the donut in my mouth. Pretty witty comeback, if I say so myself. And I do.

She doesn't hear it as so funny. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Down, tiger, or should I say bucking bronco? It was a joke." She still doesn't smile. At either remark. I drink some milk to wash down my donut. Yummm. I tear off another section of the donut and place it on my plate, ready to eat it as soon as

the bite in my mouth disappears. I formulate a response.

"My family doesn't pay all that much attention to religion. Jewish is better. But if the girl is rich, then Jewish is less important. Rich is best."

"Cute, kind of. But not really very flattering of your family. You're making them sound pretty materialistic. What do they think of me?" Before I can frame an answer that isn't a lie, but smoothes over their harsher comments, she continues, "And please, the bucking bronco reference." She looks down at her tea, and stirs it. "I'm feeling very tender about what I shared so openly with you last night, and what we did."

She touches herself above her right breast, near her heart, where the hickey lies. "Tender in a lot of ways." She smiles vaguely. "Please be careful of what you say. That comment, and the one in the shower--red badge of courage-- I know you mean them lightly, but they hurt."

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I see my bite of my old-fashioned glazed calling to me. I'm torn. I know I should immediately say something Ovid-wise and loving, but I really want that bite.

With my right hand, I reach out and pat her hand, giving her a sincere, loving look. With my left, I place the donut in my mouth. A win-win.

Even though I'm not a big fan of Elizabeth, I find your behavior rude and disgusting, Johannes. You are so self-focused. Even as you say you are trying to deepen and commit to a relationship, the majority of your attention is still on how to have a perfect bite of donut and milk.

Yes and no. Yes, Johannes is self-focused. But, John, it's trickier than you realize. It's easy to criticize when, like you, your only task is self-exploration. Balancing and juggling self-focus and other-focus is not a simple endeavor.

Perhaps to fill the silence while I'm munching, she continues,

"I don't know how to say this...and I don't really like to talk as openly as we did...though my therapist says it's important to be able to....But thank you. You were wonderful, masterful last night. You truly were my beloved."

I nod my head tenderly, still stroking her hand, while with my left I grasp my milk container, to make sure I have a swig before the donut completely disappears from my mouth.

"I know it's not your style, but you really satisfied my needs. I've never had such a good experience. It just keeps getting better and better with you."

I feel like choking on my donut/milk combination. I want to make a joke, but can't think of any. Yes, the bucking bronco was a snide comment about her sexual antics. But when she's so open and reinforcing it's hard to tell her how uncomfortable I felt, and that I'd like nothing more than to go play golf right now.

I smile, with my Ovid-heartfelt face, and say, with just a moderate pushing of the envelope "My family <Grandpa Dave, for sure> thinks you sound wonderful....and I know you--oh my dove in the clefts of the rock, are magnificent."

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I walk first through the stone-curved archways, and narrow Streets of East Jerusalem, seeing vendors, shuks, all kinds of wares. I'm feeling a lightness in my step. Shalom. Salaam. Peace to one

*and all. Peace inside, peace outside. "Unity fostered and developed."
Reb Jonathan was right about that--the Y's dedication is beautiful.*

Peace inside. Peace outside.

I love this feeling of a new adventure, new exploration, and a challenge and focus worthy of me. This was often the feeling I had when going out with a new woman, and I have a certain self-satisfied pride knowing that I can get the same feeling with a much more elevated goal.

Eleven more days until Chanukkah, the darkest time of the year. Each day will continue to become shorter, each night longer. But for me, personally, my life is taking just the opposite slope. I'm increasingly filled with light and hope. The darkness is disappearing.

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As I near the Mea Shearim district, I start walking down small, Ghetto-like alleys. The architectural and structural ambience reminds me of my travels in Eastern Europe with my grandparents. Houses are decaying. Men wearing long black frock coats, and big fur hats, like Russian Cossacks, walk along purposely. They don't make eye contact with me.

Although I'm convinced of the rightness of my path, there is a part of me that's feeling a bit awkward, like K approaching the Castle. The small alleys seem foreboding, as if there is an implicit No Trespassing sign.

I continue to walk down them anyway, trying to push aside feelings of not being wanted, not belonging. I must continue forward, for I have reached the point where I see value to life if I can't find and deepen my spiritual connection. There is no choice--no going

back. I hear Joplin:

"Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose."

Or am I being drawn forward, toward a culmination of my quest. Maybe I value life so highly that I want to live it as fully as possible.

I walk into a synagogue. There are only men. I like that there are no women around. The Orthodox rule separating the sexes makes sense to me. It reminds me of my all-boy high school where women were considered a distraction to academic pursuits. Although in college I was still able to maintain my grades, I can see that it will be simpler praying to G-d, studying the texts, purifying myself - without female distraction.

The men all have prayer shawls wrapped around them, and are wearing Tefillin. They are moving back and forth and up and down, turning and bending from their hips while saying reading from the Torah. When I listen more closely to the mumbled Hebrew, I realize they are reading from Genesis, the same Parashah Rebbe Jonathan was discussing.

Unity.

New beginnings.

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I notice the back of one man in particular, who is moving with increasing rapidity, rousing himself into a state of ecstasy. Moaning, crying out, he reminds me of someone reaching a climax. I quickly banish this thought as unworthy of the new purified me.

When I look more closely at him, I realize it is the Rebbe I saw at the Wall yesterday. I knew it. He is my teacher. I watch his lean, athletic body swaying in fervor to G-d's teachings. That's what a Rebbe should look like. Not some chunky

chuckly--and hen-pecked-- person like Reb Jonathan.

My sense of rightness and fit grows.

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I let my gaze wander outside, watching the people pass. I like sitting next to the window. It allows maximum light in, and gives a view onto the outside world. When I look back at Mery, I see that she is looking over my right shoulder.

I follow her eyes and see two people sitting in the corner, an older man and, I assume, his grandchild. The man's face is heavily lined. He has a ragged, hard look as if he had spent much of his life on the sea. How I imagine the Old Man in Hemingway's book.

The child is tiny, maybe a little over one, and is dwarfed by the man's shadow. The boy has short cropped red hair just a bit lighter than Mery's. He too has smiling brown eyes.

Seated, the top of his his head and eyes barely reach the top of the table, so he has crossed his boots under his seat so that he can sit on his heels and see his granddad. The two sit wordlessly, staring around the room and out the window. The child squeezes his lips and draws a lemon colored drink into his mouth. I am amazed that someone so small knows how to suck liquid through a straw. Like a tiny baby at the mother's nipples, the instinctive desire for the comfort and nurturance of a female breast is still subliminally present.

The old man is eating his donut, and has gotten down to the part where only the thick jelly center is left, that point in donut eating where all the gooey red jelly is just urging you to take a bite.

Instead, he offers it to his grandson.

I take Mery's hand and point out the old man's gesture. "Not Isaac, not Jesus, but that, Mery, is the supreme sacrifice."

The child takes a bite, and smiles at his grandad, showing red-jellied teeth. A switch is thrown, and the old man's face is set aglow. The wrinkles disappear. The tired face has a youthful luster. Still no words have been said.

The power of a donut.

The power of love.

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I take another bite of my old-fashioned glazed.

"Why do you wear contacts?"

"Huh?" I continue chewing. Is this her segue from my telling her what a lovely dove she is? From pointing out that beautiful moment between grandparent and child? It seems she wants to change the subject from last night, and is using a legal trick of distraction, with a bit of challenge thrown in.

What would I have liked her to say, instead? Should she just repeat about how wonderful I am, too? Or tell me how sensitive I am to not only compliment her, but to feel the grandparental love? I guess I can never get enough compliments. Ok, I'm ready to move on.

Maybe she wants to change the topic from last night. Maybe she is annoyed that you mock and belittle Her Savior by saying he is outflanked by a jelly donut. Who knows? You just assume, and don't ask. Of course, she doesn't say anything directly either. Great communication style, guys.

You each could have profited from the severely presented, but helpful communication skills that Dr. Lisbet taught me in

therapy. Although I resented it at the time, now I'm beginning to see wisdom in what she taught me.

I'm not particularly interested in discussing my contacts. I'd rather discuss how I'd like to move on to my golf game. While I'm musing, she responds to my befuddlement:

"I saw you took them off last night. But you didn't put glasses on. I didn't even know you wore them. Vanity, cute one?"

"No. Yes. No. I wear them because it's easier in sports. In golf, when I take a full back swing, while watching the ball," I illustrate by moving my chin far right, keeping my eyes on my coffee cup "the glasses get in the way. Also, in tennis, glasses are heavy, and don't allow as good a peripheral vision."

"I assume those are the no's. The yes must be why you didn't wear glasses last night before you went to sleep?" She looks at me over her cup, as she drinks more tea. There is a smiley crinkle in her eyes. "Or were you afraid they might fall off last night in 'that sport' as well?" She blushes.

"Point for you. I'll add that to the list of sports reasons. But, all right, caught me. Yes, there is vanity. Don't I have adorable eyes?" I blink them several times at her.

"Your eyes are like doves"--though I think you're the one who is supposed to say that line." She smiles and takes another sip of tea, and "borrows" a bit of my old-fashioned glazed.

"Hey," I raise my hand as if to squash hers "People have lost fingers for less."

"You know, if you wore glasses, you'd look good, scholarly. In fact, if you grew a beard, you'd look like one of those young Jewish rabbis in training....hardly!" She laughs and "borrows" another bite.

Ovid, what I don't do for relationship.

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It seems this might be a good time to let her know that, with my contacts in, I plan to head back to play some golf. I approach the subject gingerly.

"So, what's on Mery's agenda for today?" This seems like a good segue.

"Church. Then maybe an art gallery, if that sounds fun to you. Then, back to work."

Church sounds about as much fun as going to feed the homeless yesterday, which I skillfully avoided. That leaves art gallery. I weigh church and art gallery on one hand, golf on the other. The scale is decidedly tilted toward golf. If I leave now, I can get back a couple hours early, and really go through a precise, detailed practice. I need it. It's been a long time.

"How would you feel if I headed back to play some golf today with my buddies? I haven't really done that in almost two months."

She looks at me like a little waif. "Sad. I thought we were going to go to church together this morning. And I thought the art gallery would be fun. My art professor, Pierre, has an opening. I wanted you to see his work, and meet him."

Is this the art professor for whom she still models? Is he one of the "older men" with whom she's had a relationship? Wouldn't he be the last person I would want to meet? And a bonus reward for meeting him would be I'd get to go to church first? Ugh. I take a bite of a chocolate-old fashioned glazed to sweeten the sour taste in my mouth.

"You really want me to go?" I'm stalling for time. I don't like the idea of letting her go alone to Pierre's opening, feeling abandoned by me. I also feel like a coward, afraid to confront a person who may be a former rival. Is he a rival? I never asked her who the other two men were. Stop mind.

But she has modeled for him and lives in his house. Like a moth to a flame, I want to see and size up this person. And maybe tell him enough of this modeling with my girlfriend. In fact, not just a girlfriend. Next week in Carmel, I'm going to ask her to marry me. My fiancée-to-be. I'll need to find a ring this week. Stop mind. Too many jumbled thoughts.

Oh, Ovid, where are you when I need you. Golf. Fiancée. Golf. Fiancée. Not really a choice, is it?

"You are such a powerful force. I can't pull myself from your energy. Of course I'll go to church and the art opening. I'd love to meet Pierre. But I love even more having additional time with you."

From the smile on her face, I can tell, Ovid, that I just won several relational points with that move. But probably added another stroke or two to my golf handicap. I take another bite of old-fashioned chocolate. A swig of milk. I'll need all the fortification I can get. It's going to be a long day.

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I realize this is not the time to approach and bother the Rebbe, my new teacher. I watch him for a few more minutes, then begin to feel embarrassed, like I'm watching a private act.

I leave the synagogue walk outside, and into the next building, which looks like a class room. There are several young men studying. Some are in groups, pouring over several books at

once, talking and gesturing. In the corner, I see one in particular, that I am drawn to. He is few years older than me--maybe as old as 35, studying a single book with an earnest, absorbed, pinpointed focus.

I wonder if G-d placed him here as the older brother I never had. Someone to shelter and guide me through this next step of my evolution. Maybe he could tell me the best way to approach the Rebbe.

I try to imagine this man's daily life. I bet there are no surprises. He wakes up in the morning, washes his hands to a blessing, says the morning prayers, eats, studies, prays. I assume the community has found him a spiritual, devoted woman to marry and carry and care for your many children. His life course is clear, free of the unruly moral relativism of the life I have been living. Paint by numbers. Each part of the day is painted in a holy way. He is the brush, guided by the divine Hand, the Rebbe, and the Holy rules.

No wonder he is able to be focused and content. There is none of the empty, useless, masturbatory questioning I've been engaged in. No feelings of being lost and confused. The void is filled by a religious framework which dictates every waking moment. At any time in the day, he knows he is living G-d's laws and fulfilling G-d's rules. The external structure is created to purify our inner natures, which are unbridled, untrustworthy, in need of reining in. We need to build that fence around the Torah, surrounding ourselves, protecting ourselves from ourselves, so only G-d can get in.

Looking at him, I can feel the depth of the teaching he--and his Rebbe-- have to offer me. Everything is falling into place

perfectly. Amen, I say silently to myself. And then a little louder:

"Amen."

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What a beautiful picture Ortho John paints. It's too bad the expectation and vision always exceeds the reality.

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"Hallelujah."

I hear several discordant, unpatterned, unrehearsed, unsystematic, but bold shouts as the minister continues "It's the spirit of love that Jesus brought. The spirit of love."

"Right on." "Say the truth, brother." I join with a "You betcha." I have nothing against love.

"In the Gospel of Mark a man with a withered hand approaches Jesus in the synagogue on Sabbath. And He said to them 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or do harm, to save a life or to kill?' And they kept silent. He grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, stretch out your hand, and he stretched it out and was restored (Mark, 3--5)."

"Praise Jesus." "Hallelujah."

Uh-oh. I remain silent. I'm not liking where this is going. It is clear to me who the "they" are who have "hardness of heart." They aren't the good guys in the story.

"And in Matthew 12, the disciples were hungry on the Sabbath and picked heads of grain and ate; And the Pharisees said: 'Do your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.' Jesus knew that the laws were only a means, not the end. That's why those who could not see beyond the rules condemned him.

The law will strangle you without the love. Where is the love?

That is Jesus' message."

More shouts of "Amen"; "Right on, brother"; and the apparently omnipresent "Hallelujah."

I look over at Mery and her face is beaming, as she amen's and hallelujah's, too. I'm feeling very uncomfortable. Does she realize that it's my team, and me, who is on the wrong side of all this? First she tells me that human law is bad; now, Jewish law is bad.

Practically, I am not in disagreement. For goodness sake, of course you try to heal if you can. And what's wrong with picking food to eat on the Sabbath. Love over law. Who can argue with that? But somehow I feel a sting in the words, as if they are directed at me, by Mery, through the minister.

I feel awkward and excluded, aware of the dividing line between me--even me the secular Jew--and her and this church. It is the country club and fraternities all over again. I'm not on the right side of the divide.

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The room where he and his fellow students are studying looks like a library. All the walls are lined with books containing wisdom. I continue to watch him, imagining him to be my wise older brother, as he reads intently from his sacred text. I remember hearing in a psychology lecture that it takes ten years to achieve mastery of a field, no matter what the specifics: art, science, chess, sports. I can see myself in another decade, looking and acting just like him.

As I watch him, I feel like when I tried to join fraternities at college. During the "open" houses, no one would really talk

to me, or if they did, they seemed distracted, looking over my shoulder for the "cooler" guys they wanted to attract to their Greek house. I was never invited back for any subsequent visits, not by a single one. I brushed the rejection off, attributing it to the fact that I didn't like to drink beer. My family firmly told me it was because they were anti-Semitic, and didn't let Jews in. It was just another country club experience. It had nothing to do with me, just my Jewishness. We Jews had to create our own organizations. Well, here I am, now trying to join an exclusive Jewish "fraternity." And I'm Jewish! It should be a perfect fit.

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Still looking so hard to find a place to belong. The exile from the home and needing to be voted back in, just before I left for college. Not getting into a fraternity. Trying to follow all the rules at the kibbutz to join that family. Following the rules of the secular law to fit into society. Even though I don't drive now, I feel like I'm always trying to merge onto a freeway from an on ramp. Would the car approaching let me in? If I cut it too close, they would press me until I picked up speed and could feel I belonged. But I had to go at a certain pace to ensure that belonging continued. With my own family, it was the same thing. I had to keep driving through life at a certain pace, progressing, rising, becoming a star, to feel loved and accepted there. In Eilat, I initially felt loved and accepted as I was...didn't have to wear contacts, worry about my hair, lift weights, try to be academic, do anything really but enjoy each day. And nothing was expected of me, by anyone, including me. But that wasn't enough, either, a meaningless sybaritic drifting. And now John is trying to conform to the rules of the Orthodox to

fit in and belong to the potential "home" and "family" they offer.

And I know how that turns out.

God? Is it only with You that I will find ultimate,
meaningful belonging?

* * *

In the background, as the minister talks, there is a jazz
combo playing. Their music greeted us as soon as we entered the
church. After last night's fiasco with music--first our duet,
then our fight about improvisation and beats; then the Fillmore;
and even the fat lady and opera--the last thing I wanted to hear
was jazz. It strikes me as way too disordered and unstructured,
especially this early in the morning.

A tall, blonde gal is on the guitar. She's cute.

There's a long haired white hippie on the bongos, a heavy set,
shaved-headed black man on bass, and a big-Afro, bearded black
man, maybe early 30's on the saxophone. His eyes are closed as
they play, and he is swaying rhythmically to the music.

I turn to watch the blonde, but the sounds I hear are those
of the saxophone--dark, mysterious, earthy, lusty. They cause a
vibration, a tingling inside me, creating a much different
feeling and mood than my flute. I hear myself playing the flute
with their group, and for some reason, the saxophone's sound
seems to diminish the flute's, which suddenly strikes me as too
feminine, high pitched, squeaky, like a hyper-sensitive wail.

Why did I choose the flute? Maybe I need to re-think my
instrument. It's not really very phallic. It's certainly not as
suave as that saxophone, with its more earthy male resonance. And
why did I let Mery name my flute "Grace"? I feel like a sissy.

Thank goodness my camera is called Mr. Cannon.

Yes, Johannes, very wise indeed, letting names of you and your possessions define you, and your manliness.

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As I'm having these thoughts, I see Mery out of the corner of my eye look up at the group, nod, then quickly look away. I see the black saxophonist, his eyes now open, smile and nod back.

"You know him?"

"Al. I didn't know he was going to be here," she whispers back.

"Who's Al?" My voice is rising.

"Shh, a former boyfriend."

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When the young man pauses from reading his text, I approach him and deferentially try to ask him about how to go about joining and studying with his group:

"Ani rotzeh lerot..."

He turns toward me abruptly, as if he's been startled by an electric shock. "Never speak in Hebrew about everyday things, American" he says in heavily accented English. "Hebrew is reserved for the Divine. It is the tongue of G-d. Do not degrade it by using it to speak about the profane, everyday life."

That's a lovely concept and right away I'm ready to follow this new rule. But how does it make practical sense in a country where people speak Hebrew as the national language? How does he converse...in Yiddish? I decide to save the question. I don't want to get side-tracked from my goal. This doesn't seem like an auspicious start. Like yesterday at the Wall with the Rabbi. But

I remember hearing Dr. Lisbet talk about tough Zen masters who try to discourage prospective adherents from joining to become monks in order to test their stamina and resolve.

I'm not afraid to be tested.

I feel, once again, like K, outside the Castle, now talking to a gatekeeper. The gatekeeper, big and powerful, says there are more gatekeepers within, and they are all even more fierce, tougher, and more foreboding.

I am not to be deterred. After all, I've been rejected many times--by my family, by Mery. No wishy-washiness. I will act like I deserve to belong, and I do. I'm Jewish. I'm spiritual. I'm determined. I won't pretend I'm not interested and don't care about getting in, like I did with the fraternities. I want in. I need to get in. My life depends on it. I want to be a student, and learn. And with that will, nothing can stop me.

Standing before me is my older brother, my fellow Jewish spiritual-seeking comrade. In a few years, we'll look just alike. Even now there are many physical similarities. He just isn't as aware of our brotherhood as I am....yet.

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"The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 shares words of love.

Compare it to the Book of Leviticus. Our Jewish brothers--and never forget they are our older brothers and sisters-- were on the right track. In Leviticus 19, the root is there--Love thy neighbor as thyself. A beautiful message. And what is the root essence--the forest-- of Leviticus? Again, it's beautiful: There are three parts: purification, sanctification, and holiness."

Hurrah. I've been elevated to older brother status. I hear that as a compliment, kind of. But it's hard for me to listen to

the minister, as my attention is divided between him and watching
this fellow Al. She dated a black man? What were his fantasies?
Why isn't she still with him?

"But the problem is all of the trees. Laws, laws, and more
laws! Where is the love? Only that one small inkling. We need
love, not rigid laws. The content is both outdated and unneces-
sarily legalistic. Most of our Jewish friends now acknowledge
that. Jesus goes to the essence on the other side of legalism,
the original intent, what really matters to the Lord.

"And what is that essence?"

"Love. Say it with me. Love."

"Love" screams forth from rows and rows of happy faces.

"Love your neighbor every day of the week. Extend a helping
hand to someone --whether he or she be Jew or Christian-- every-
day. On the day of rest, if someone is in need, give to them. The
only law that matters is the law of love."

Chords and shouts of "Love. Love. Love." resonate throughout
the Church. Some are on their feet, clapping and hooting.

I sit silently, thinking, Am I supposed to love Al?

Who is there to love me?

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*"Isn't it possible to speak Hebrew about everything, there-
by hallowing the everyday, and seeking divinity in finitude?"
Pretty good, a splash of Buber, some Kierkegaard. Subtle Talmudic
reasoning. I have even out-divined him. Careful, you're competi-
tive side is creeping in. You want to belong here, not "win."*

*The young man still seems annoyed at my presence, but also per-
haps slightly interested as well. He looks at me askance, and*

says nothing.

I'm thinking to myself, is that consubstantiation? I want to impress him with my knowledge, but then I feel unsure, and think, maybe it's the right term, but wrong religion. I keep silent also and look at his pale face, the long side curls emerging from what appears to be an otherwise shaved head. Though we are not yet complete physical mirrors, I can easily see myself looking like him in the not too distant future. We are both slightly built. The excitement at meeting my potential older brother I had lost and never knew nearly overwhelms me.

* * *

I reach over to take Mery's hand. She allows me, but her hand is limp. I place it on my thigh. She removes it.

"I am not alone because my Father is with me, as it is said in the Gospel John, 12:14."

I don't feel close to God the Father. And I really feel displaced by His Son. My biological father is not with me; my biological mother is not with me. Kansas City is no longer my home. And I certainly don't feel this church is my home, either.

And as I glance at Mery so completely focused on the black, gray-bearded minister intoning his sermon, I don't feel she is exactly with me, either.

I notice her cross hanging around her neck, its deep brass gold highlighting the yellow blouse she is wearing. I don't remember noticing the cross last night during our love making. Was she wearing it at dinner? Did she take it off before we went to the Fillmore?

Does she have any idea how it feels to me to hear these words of the sermon? It's like her blessing at the start of the

meal. "We commit to Thy service in the Name of Your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ." I don't think she was being intentionally insensitive to me, then or now. But it's like a wall is created. Once Jesus is brought into things, there's a line between "us" and "they." Me.

I wonder if that's why I made that "innocent" jibe at the donut shop this morning about sharing the red gooey jelly being the ultimate sacrifice, even better than God giving up Jesus. Sort of saying to her, in joking form, of course, let's not take this guy too seriously.

At the time, I thought I was being humorous. If I'm totally honest, it wasn't only clean playfulness. There was an edge. I knew it, and, at some level, so did she.

I'm not allowed in. Not really. Unless I change and sing their voice completely, and renounce my people.

Why is it ok for "them" to sing our voice, and enjoy it as part of their foundation, but it is an apostasy if we sing their voice? It's like a one way blood-brain barrier. Something is wrong with that.

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What am I doing here? I have no safe place to focus.

I look back over at Al. His eyes are again closed, his head nodding up and down. as he sways to the music. He actually looks like a nice guy, although my feelings are obviously more complicated than that.

I look over again at Mery. Am I trying to catch her looking at Al?

I see that she now is watching an old lady seated in front

of her. Her eyes seem glued to the lady's yellow hat. My eyes watch her watch the lady. I wonder what's going through her mind. Does she see herself a few decades hence, like that lady? What is she thinking? How much do I really know her?

I watch you, and reflect on you Johannes. As you look outside yourself: Al, the minister, Mery, the congregation, the lady's yellow hat. No wonder you can't find a safe place to focus. How clear it is to me, now, that you have no real self any longer. The signs are clear. Dr. Lisbet calls it "giving your eyes away." When you don't have a self, you look reactively to see how others are reacting. You, Johannes, keep looking to see how Elizabeth is viewing the world, what she's looking at. You no longer have your own perspective with which to see. You're so busy looking outward, you never look at the one place that is causing all your turmoil and disturbance--you and your mind.

The congregation rises to sing a hymn. The motion seems to startle Mery. I see her jump. I put my hand on her shoulder and gently ask, "What were you thinking about while when you were watching that lady in the yellow hat?"

She turns to me "Shh after the service. Listen to the music."

I feel like a bad little boy first admonished, then left alone in a corner.

I'm frustrated with Mery as she rises and begins to sing. I also feel isolated from her. She's now totally immersed in the melody. I'm an outsider who is twice--even three times-- removed. She's singing, and I have such a horrible voice I hate to sing. She's singing a Christian song. I can't sing, I'm not Christian. And the third remove--she's smiling, and I'm not.

Is her enjoyment of the singing, the smile on her face,
intended to make me feel even more awkward? Everyone is singing
and clapping. I stand straighter. I feel elevated. I'm taller
than anyone in the congregation.

I will not be bowed down by them.

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"What texts have you studied? Do you daven daily?"

I know enough to realize this is a "test" question. He wants to understand my background and readiness. I'm pretty sure telling him about our Christmas tree won't win me too many points. Nor that I've been reading the New Testament in Greek. Even my Jewish acts--that I went to "Sunday" school and was confirmed (Bar Mitzvah lite) don't really pad my resume very well. Especially since I skipped a year in my confirmation education and only went back to get confirmed as a way to meet girls. I don't know what he means by daven. I'll just answer the first question simply. Reb Jonathan had told us the book of Leviticus is about laws. I read it yesterday and this morning.

"Leviticus."

He seems to soften. "Hmm, not bad. We often begin our children's Torah studies with the Book of Leviticus. Pure young souls should first learn about sacrifices which were brought in purity. Have you studied the commentaries on Leviticus?"

I shake my head no.

"Perhaps that's where you should start. Rabbinic commentaries for adults studying Leviticus are critical. Of all the commentaries on the Five Books, they are the longest. There are two: the Torat Kohanim and those by Rabbi Akiba and his disci-

ples. Every word and letter of the Pentateuch is charged with rich and varied meaning. You must not skip a word. You must read their Midrash carefully."

I nod excitedly. "Perfect. I'm ready." I venture a question: "Midrash?"

"Midrash means search, interpretation. Your Hebrew is pathetic."

I nod in agreement, a scolded, but eager puppy. I want to say that even though that may be true, I am on a Midrash-search-for God. But I don't say anything, because I'm not sure that's quite the right usage, and I don't want to do anything to hurt my chances of being accepted.

I'm on a midrash—an interpretation of God.

"It's only the beginning. "You must follow the Mitzvot, the commandments."

Finally, some rigor. No more "suggestions." Commandments. Yes.

"You must daven. If you want to understand the law and receive G-d's inspiration, you must daven three times a day: forty-five minutes in the morning, fifteen in the afternoon, and ten before bed. If you are to be Jewish, you must do this, and you must say the Eighteen Prayers, Shmonah Esreh."

I pull out my notebook and start taking notes.

"Every moment you stand before G-d, you must recite thousands of blessings a day, hallowing every moment as divine. You must follow and obey all of G-d's 613 commandments." He is repeating himself, but I love it. He's preaching to the choir.

I feel a sense of joy. This is what I want. G-d's law in everything, every moment sacred.

We are on the same page. I knew it. I nod eagerly, say nothing, and he continues.

"These are the commandments that He had Moses write in the Torah. The righteous Jew lives by these words of law; for as it is written, 'He who despises the word of the law and has broken His commandments, that person shall be utterly cut off, his iniquity shall be upon him.'"

I again nod in agreement, showing my interest and enthusiasm. I feel like a puppet head going up and down. I'm not sure he's actually looking at me anymore. He seems to be gazing, not over my shoulder, but almost through me. But he is animated now and speaking more loudly.

My first existential encounter with an authentic Jew. Talking about God's law. I'm ecstatic.

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The eloquent, passionate, fire-breathing black preacher has the congregation with him now, their faces raturous as they intone "love" and the combo crescendos. He is now nearly screaming with passion. "Jesus sees the multitudes and feels compassion for them, because they are distressed and outcast like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus is our Shepherd. But we all have to do our part. Remember as Matthew said, 9:36 the 'harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.' Send out workers unto His harvest; all of you, be workers for God's and Jesus's harvest."

"Amen, Hallelujah, brother, Jesus loves me."

"Let the love of Jesus Christ unfold within you, fill you. See Him everywhere."

I think back to last night's dinner. Fish, wine, bread.

Jesus is all around me. Mery's cross; some people wearing little fish symbols. The minister talking of wine as the blood and bread as body of Jesus. "Don't be deterred. Remember they arrested Jesus and bound him. John 18:11."

Bound him.

I look at Mery with a smile, pleasant, but touched with a tinge of sarcasm. She keeps looking straight ahead. Is she ignoring me? I nudge her with my hand, poking her in the rib. She shushes me and pushes my hand away.

"Jesus saw suffering. He saw the poor, the hungry, the sick. He was Someone who understood and felt the suffering of others. He didn't try to flee suffering for personal happiness. He faced it. You can be like Jesus. Don't flee the racism, the homophobia, the poor and homeless around you. Fight intolerance. Embrace and feel the suffering of the poorest of the poor, the most outcast among us. Feel the love of Jesus for all God's children." The band is crescendoing, the people in the pews are standing and swaying shouting in conflicting harmonies; "Amen," "Tell it, brother!" "He speaks the truth," "Hallelujah."

Is this message for me? Is he telling me I'm not doing enough?

Mery seems in ecstasy. Her eyes are beaming, focused, intent. I think I see her look over at Al. But he is still swaying eyes closed, seemingly floating on the depths of the rhythm he is creating.

Will this service ever end?

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I wonder if Mery's face and this sermon don't help explain why she enjoys being tied up and bound and suffering to enjoy love making. I have gingerly, and somewhat embarrassedly brought, this topic up

with Dr. Lisbet. She did say I could share anything with her, and it would be kept in confidence, and I should be totally honest. Initially, she thought Mary's sexual "fetish" she called it, reflected a fear of taking responsibility for her desires; or a masochistic desire to be hurt for doing something illicit, based on her father's morality. But as we talked further, she said her desires, her eros may be intertwined with being a suffering servant, almost as if she is acting out Freud's eros and thanatos battle. I think of Johannes and his learning about orgasm through the pain of situps, and pushing through that pain until pleasure overwhelmed it. Layers and layers.

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"I want to learn to pray like the rabbi I saw next door in the synagogue."

"Ah, you saw our Rabbi davening." So, that's davening. I nod.

"A great man. He is so much wiser and more learned than any of us. He studies Kabbalah, which he says I'm not yet ready for. He knows all the laws and also has mystical powers."

At this moment, I realize I want to study with the rabbi, not with the student. Although this person is older than some of my teachers at Stanford, I realize he's not the teacher I'm meant to find. I wonder how I can use him to get to the Rabbi. I also wonder how long it will take me to become the Rabbi's personal favorite.

I keep finding I'm more complicated than I realize. I say I want an older brother, and yet as soon as I believe I've met him, another part of me is wondering how long it will take me to replace him as the number one son in the fathers eyes. I'm

more like the Biblical Jacob than I want do admit.

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"And here to speak truth to us this morning is our righteous brother, Stokley Carmichael. Brother, share the cause. Let them hear your word..."

Carmichael begins speaking, his tone and intensity the same as the pastor's but there is less God and love talk, less Jesus. For which I am grateful. But there is more anger. More blame. Listening to him, I start to feel guilty, like I used to with mom. It's not a feeling I like.

I pick up the hand out describing the service, intending to look inside to see how much is left. Before I open it, though, I am struck by the cover. Under a totem pole with outstretched wings is a little child facing and mimicking the totem pole by stretching out his arms towards it. Behind the child is a man the child can't see. The man is imitating the boy by also extending his arms. Father and son?

If the child were thirty feet higher, made of wood and painted, he would be an exact mirror-image of the totem pole.

Who says I'm not improvisational?

A parable for our times? With Carmichael as the bass background notes, I let my mind wander, continuing to improvise on the picture. What if the boy could really see the father, but only as reflected in the totem pole? Perhaps the totem pole is only a mirror--an existential projection--which takes its shape by reflecting the father. Then, the son would only exist as a mirror image of the father.

But if the child were in fact the mirror, and was mirroring

the totem pole, which in turn is also a mirror, then the father would see himself inversely in the totem pole and he would see the inverse reflection of his inverse reflection in the son. Thereby, he would see himself in the son for the mirror image of a mirror image is itself.

I don't know whether to be impressed or appalled. What a creative visual and mental improvisational riff on the picture of a father and son. But what a convoluted non-mystical way to get to Jesus' "The Father and I are One" (John 10:30). Reflection on reflections on reflections. And yet, is my path that much different? Reflecting on John reflecting on Johannes?

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I come out of my reverie when after a few more "Hallelujah's" and "Right on, brother Carmichael" the invisible baton is passed back to the pastor.

Ever closer.

"Brother Carmichael is right, we can never give up the fight. Awaken your brothers and sisters, one at a time. Once they've seen the light, once they've crossed the Red Sea, they can't go back. They'll try. They'll whine, like the Israelites, 'Oh, Moses, at least we had certainty in Egypt, don't make us wander in the desert.'

"But don't be fooled. There is a Promised Land, and we will get there together. Trust in yourself, trust in each other, trust in Jesus. Jesus knows. Jesus in your heart will lead you forth, will heal your doubt, will console you in the struggle, will awaken you to what you need to do."

I'm noticing that there is not much mention of the Jewish

contribution. At least he didn't mention Judas.

More amens, clapping, and Hallelujahs. The combo takes over. They begin playing the final hymn. Jacob's Ladder.

"We are...climbing... Jacob's ladder..." I like the way the blonde guitarist sways, her head tilting left, her hair flowing behind, then head nodding forward, and the blonde mane covering her face. I find myself becoming aroused....my lingham is rising....

"We are climbing higher... higher...."

She is quite attractive. I stand as tall and straight as I can. I sing out loudly and forcefully. This is a safe song. My people's song.

"We are brothers and sisters all."

The blonde. The song. Jacob's ladder. My being taller than everyone here. My lingham rising. Finally, an oasis in all this wandering in the desert.

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"Jews are G-d's chosen people. We here in Mea Shearim, are the chosen among the chosen. If not for the Jews, the world would sink into evil. Without us, the Jewish religion would wither. We are the key."

I've never liked the concept of chosen people before. It always seemed snobbish, and isolating. But I can see now there is a certain appeal in it. It's really just a variation of my grandfather's injunction to always "be the best." And how special to be the best of the best, the most chosen of the chosen. I nod appreciatively.

"That's exactly what I'm looking for." I want him to see what a worthy student I'd be. A great addition to their fraternity. Finally, someplace I belong.

"The task is not easy. We must know all G-d's words perfectly so that we can conduct ourselves exactly according to G-d's laws. G-d makes it harder for the Jews because we are His chosen people. And, following G-d's laws with complete accuracy is our task, our only task."

Knowing precisely and exactly G-d's law is not only the challenge I want, it is my life's mission. The new challenge, the new yearning, replacing human law, replacing searching after women. And the difficulty of the task not only is not a deterrent, it is an incentive.

He's saying all the right words for me. I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. Reb Jonathan was correct. When the student is ready, the teacher appears.

I feel myself taking one step higher on the way up Jacob's ladder to G-d. Finally, I've found what I'm looking for. Someone who's not afraid to proclaim the truth of God's law. A clear path and a direction. I feel like I'm finally in the house of God.

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Even though I'm over nine months removed from Johannes, and two months removed from my spiritual aspirant "Ortho-John," I feel sad for both of them. Watching each of them is like observing a dying fish lying helpless and passive at the bottom of the tank. Then, suddenly, with one more surge of will, it dashes toward the surface, rises up, begins opening and shutting its mouth in frantic motions. At first you think it might be re-born.

Johannes stands straight. Existo. To stand out. To stand forth. He is trying to develop a self, or revive the last fragments of a dying self. He is watching the cute blonde guitarist

sway. He is singing loudly. Ortho John is in the yeshiva, feeling like a revitalized, new born person, excited at the prospect of studying G-d's laws with authentic Jews.

If I were to take a snapshot of both Johannes and Ortho-John, both would be smiling, happy, standing tall, and feeling they are back on their feet.

Yet, for those who have eyes to see, the signs of their demise are obvious. Each is one week from entering the wilderness, joining me in wondering. Each of us, for different reasons, is lost.

I really have nothing much to offer them except awareness of the fall. So, rather than continue, I leave them both suspended while I leave my little room to follow the law that has been set for me: returning to the King David Hotel's kitchen, once again to begin cleaning the grimy, oozy, bean-infested pots and pans. And trying to see, in handling trash, the hand of God.

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John, I want to follow up on those thoughts, and your musings about Johannes and Mery the night before. Without hindsight, how does one know in the present whether one is acting wisely and for a positive future outcome? I can look back at each of you and see your blinders and limitations. But what about me, now? How do I know what I don't know?

Even as we seek to climb Jacob's ladder, at our different rungs, there is that limitation in all of us.

Interesting. John has spent most of his journaling distancing himself from Johannes, and pointing out how he is such a different person. And in many ways he is. And I have done the same, trying to separate and differentiate from each of you. And yes, I believe I have evolved in some ways past each of you. Yet, I'm noticing some empathy-

for all of us. Each of us in our own way is lost, is searching, is wandering in the wilderness. Yes, us. I have never said "us" or "we" before. I am not you. But I am not totally separate from you either.

And even though there are clear differences between each of us, we also still have some similar qualities, and challenges. There's never been anything any of us has ever done in life that hasn't involved setbacks. How do we know when those setbacks are a sign that we need to try harder, with more determination, to push something through? There's a basic optimism each of us has that, with tenacity, skill, and perhaps a bit of luck, the situation can turn around. How do we know when we are really following the wrong path, when further effort and determination are merely self-defeating, and it's time to change course? None of us is a quitter. We only stop when we've learned, and more than learned, that a certain path is clearly wrong.

And even wrong paths with bad choices sometimes lead us to experiences and wisdom that we can learn from for the next time. We never have complete information until the end of the story.

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Cycles and revolutions. Evolutions and revelations.

Johannes is happy, Johannes is unhappy. John in Eilat is happy. Ortho-John is happy. John cleaning pots is unhappy.

All of us, in our own ways, are seeking--wanting to be called toward our destiny. The difference between seeking and being called? Seeking is striving, the positive assertive Dr. Lisbet talked about. Being called is receiving, the positive yielding she spoke about.

Johannes in May, in church, singing Jacob's Ladder, is trying to seek comfort relationally in the house of Beth. Ortho John--a cute name, I like it--in December is seeking comfort literally in a yeshiva, a house of God, striving to climb higher on Jacob's ladder. And what does John in February have? Beans.

Yet, John's cleansing may be having a more positive spiritual effect than he realizes, bringing him ever closer to God. For those who have eyes to see, the signs are obvious. If only John could foresee the future, maybe he would be able to understand that even a lowly kitchen job could be part his ascent up the ladder. As Jacob found out when he had the dream of the ladder to heaven, "God was in this place, and I did not know it." Years later, he returned to the same place, and wrestled with an angel, and was given a new name--Israel. And where was this place he returned to? The site was called the House of God-- Bethel.

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