

I marvel at the marble stairwell in this 17 story hotel  
as I descend in the hope of losing a few calories-  
each counts these days-  
where one wakes to the magic number on the glucometer  
to review the sins of the previous dinner.

What it must have taken to hew and quarry all this marble  
and the granite being placed all around the main downtown post office  
as I walk to the lake this cloudy morning before Chicago awakens:  
Was this TARP money being put to use?

I walk by a quarry near my hospital at times  
and marvel at the depth to which man has gorged out of the earth  
for his building projects, chosen for the granite and stone hardness  
it is prime building material and mechanically crushed to the size demanded by the  
contractor who sends in lorry after lorry, winding their way down the spiral dirt path to  
the depths of the excoriated gray landscape  
as if Mother Earth  
gives of Her own body, now willingly  
so that we can build huge skyscrapers to our egos.

Then I think of the hole in the earth across from my shul  
where the Rabbi is building his new edifice  
a gaping disgorgement of Chicago clay, soft and brown  
a violation once more but just a few feet deep, enough for the foundation  
where we will all stand above  
one day  
in the artist's rendition sent out to fundraise  
manicured pews of cherry wood  
ladies gallery and all  
just like a Lutheran chapel.

Which brings me to the collapsing building of my soul  
as chunks of debris slowly come crashing down to earth  
the attempt was made to build  
but failed  
the material was grade B  
the engineer was incompetent  
and the workers drunk.

Yet there is something right about this  
a sort of hubris  
that is appropriate  
something that feels justified in a weird way  
when something is dreamed of, executed and yet collapses.  
when the earth will eventually claim all for itself

either naturally or through it cataclysmic paroxysms  
in quakes and other “disasters”. When she is unwilling to stand for all this human  
arrogance anymore.

I too was built on a foundation not of my own choosing  
but then began the laborious work  
of building structure upon structure  
in my effort to reach out to the divine  
heavenwards,  
to this angry punishing skyGod  
who rages at us with a wagging index finger  
in sacred scriptures.

Then having discovered Midrash  
and its poetic beauty  
its irony and hidden protest  
its textuality and deconstruction of  
the heavy revealed word  
its playfulness with the Logos  
then next story was built  
towards Him.

Finally after crisis in life  
when one dis-covers the darker side  
of one’s soul  
Hassidut and Kabbalah provided a narrative  
that framed these impulses and feelings  
about me and the divine  
in a holographic image that provided comfort and validation  
of the very struggle. It turns out that He too has His issues  
and this world was born out of His desire to expel His dark side.  
Mother earth represents that dark desire in the cataclysmic chaos  
that followed His birthing.

But now all is crumbling  
the edifice is losing height  
falling, falling  
back down to the cthonic depths  
in a free fall  
and on the way down all is being stripped away  
except the idea behind the words.  
except the feeling and the once fresh desire.  
The structure is broken  
like the way my grandson impulsively tears down  
his lego construction  
suddenly without warning, on impulse.

Back on the ground  
Mother Earth caresses all this with a knowing nod  
Her daily rituals and cycles  
light and dark,  
sleep and wakefulness,  
hunger and satiety,  
the warm shower and the deep cool mikvah waters  
the air breezing on my face in the green cornfields  
the awakening of desire in the loins,  
now and then  
and the persistent seeking of beauty despite age.

These always-present  
but newly dis-covered silent presences  
give me comfort  
and the realization  
of the vitality of Her apparent passiveness.  
She is the silent witness to all this  
She bears the blood of our hubris  
She accepts us after all is done and we lie without further breath.

Where the shul becomes erect in its move to become  
a place of worship  
I become bent over, like an old shaman  
with the weight of my past, and others,  
of my failure,  
and yet my new found sense  
of earthiness.  
Contrary to what I was taught about "gashmius"-physicality  
and the evil of desire,  
I now wait for it and welcome the very feelings  
of hunger and thirst, the aching limbs that need their daily  
limbering up,  
the morning misty moist air,  
a beautiful girl passing by,  
as if this is the very blessing of life and Mother Earth

"They" call it Malchut and Schechina in other texts  
but for me  
having crumbled  
it's just what I have right now  
and that is fine.  
For 2000 years we in the synagogue and church have imaged the divine  
in His masculinity.  
Recently Meister Eckhardt, Baal Shem Tov and their disciples  
think otherwise

but we get stuck in the wire diagrams  
of this or that theosophical system  
ignoring the explosive implication of this.

So I need to continue to just hold this paradox  
hold the divine images  
negotiate His/Her modus vivendi  
inside me.

Allow Her to be present to the kiritik inside  
to be present at Her desire  
in the temporal seasons that characterizes Her cycles  
be present to Her feminine rage  
as different from His  
and wait.