

*"Even the enlightened person remains what he is, and is never more than his own limited ego before the One who dwells within him, whose form has no knowable boundaries, who encompasses him on all sides, fathomless as the abysses of the earth and vast as the sky."*

(Answer to Job, par. 758) C.G. Jung

Celan's PSALM

No one moulds us again out of earth and clay,  
no one conjours our dust.  
No one.  
Praised be your name, no one.  
For your sake  
we shall flower  
Towards  
you.  
A nothing  
we were, are, shall  
remain, flowering:  
the nothing-, the  
no one's rose.  
With our pistil soul-bright,  
with our stamen heaven ravaged,  
our corolla red  
with the crimson word which we sang  
over, O over  
the thorn.

Step 2 of the 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous suggests and claims: "we came to believe that a Power greater could restore us to sanity" Pain makes one insane. Four weeks now exactly. Deep gnawing aching pain worse through the night. Pain makes one insane. My question remains what kind of insanity are we speaking of here. So let us begin with definitions. Webster's.

Main...Entry\_: in 'san i ty  
Pronunciation: in-'sa-n&-tE  
Function::noun  
Inflected..Form(s): plural:-ties

Insane behavior is characterized by a belief that repeating the same self-destructive acts would somehow result in a different outcome. We do not need to list the ways we respond to psychic and physical wounds in ways that are so destructive, thinking the next time around the end result will be different! Yet Step 2 in recovery, suggests that after admitting powerlessness over one's life, one's addictions, one's rage and anger, one's work schedule, one's lack of personal time and reflection and meditation, over the bloody pain that will not remit despite all the best

medical devices and technology -X rays CT scans and MRI's- and admitting how one's life had become unmanageable, one was now in a position to turn that life and will over to a Higher Power in step 3. The step between the admission (Step 1) and the action steps of turning over one's life and power (step 3, 4, 5 etc.) was this mysterious step 2 called "coming to believe". "We came to believe that a Higher Power could restore us to sanity" All my life my vision of this "Power Greater" was the Old Testament Lord, who punished the wicked and rewards the righteous. Yet I never felt included in the club. Not one of the saved I guess. My view of God was always a punishing Protestant deity with reward and punishment the credo of the day. At times I felt Him somewhat accepting however, but this required sincere effort and purification. He was a God who may not have accepted my failures and anyway cared only rarely. Mostly silent and often absent and uninvolved I was left alone much of the time in that void and silence. Clearly these responses had some correlation with feelings I had about the earliest caregivers in my life!!!

In my own spiritual recovery I have struggled with the demands of this step in redirecting and re-imagining a divine being that might be more benevolent and unconditionally loving. I so wanted to be able to trust and put my faith in Him and turn over my life to His care. A God who actually forgave me since I was so terminally unique (!) My sins were also beyond forgiveness! A God not of my own invention mind you, rather the God of the mystics like Rumi and Hafez, Meister Eckhardt, John of the Cross and the Baal Shem Tov. Sometimes more successfully than others the path Hassidut/Mysticism has helped me with its (Breslov) insistence on a manual of spiritual discipline such as the rituals and constant demands for *devekut*, or connectivity with God, ritual purity and constant *birur* or self analysis. Through the power of a Master or Rebbe I was somehow able to feel hope in this endeavor that hitherto for decades had left me feeling constantly guilty. I'm still torn between the non-philosophical stance Breslov demands (even resisting all speculative attempts at understanding the world cognitively) and the philosophical implications of this belief.

The Holocaust and modern genocide has thrown out all prior theological claims in the ashes and smoke of a million babies. How can one believe after this event, after the twentieth century of mass slaughter, after such debasement in the value of the human soul? It defies the imagination. The world has become demonic if not absurd. All texts even sacred texts become meaningless in the face of the horror and the indifference of the civilized world. All claims to truth and humanism went up in the smoke. We are living in a nightmarish world where people claim belief but the words are empty shells. In this spiritual post-nuclear nightmarish world this particular step becomes even harder. Coming to believe in a post-belief landscape in a benevolent Higher Power stretches the moral fiber as well. How dare I allow myself the luxury of such belief? Did he come to the aid of my grandparents in Sobibor or Belzec.

George Steiner has eloquently mirrored my sentiments in a tribute to Elie Wiesel<sup>1</sup> by attempting to complexify the human/divine relationship using the image of paternity and commenting on Exodus 4.24. He wrote: "and it came to pass by the way in the inn that the Lord met him and sought to kill him" "I gloss this to mean that God suffers gusts of murderous exasperation at the Jews, toward a people who have made Him a responsible party to history and to the grit of man's condition. He may not have wished to be involved: the people may have chosen Him, in the oasis of Kadesh, and thrust upon Him the labors of justice and right anger. It may have been the Jew who caught Him by the skirt, insisting on contract and dialogue.

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<sup>1</sup>Language and Silence , George Steiner Yale University Press 1998, "A Kind of Survivor" 140-154

Perhaps before either God or living man was ready for proximity. So as in marriage, or the bond between a father and child, there are moments when love is changed to something very much like itself, pure hatred.” In this post holocaust essay this voice of sanity midrashically misreads the text to suggest that we are the people who decided on our own choseness for better or worse and suffered the consequences of insisting on a relationship with the divine. Entering such relationships are fraught with dysfunctional implications including the murderous rage of the more powerful partner.

So how do I reconcile my philosophical resistance to believe with the demands of step 2? My perception and my relationship to God must be informed by the paradoxical state of His total absence yet the in His absolute immanence. In this space of emptiness where God is apparently absent indifferent or worse cruel, the test of faith remains as always whether the trial was Abraham and Isaac, the Ten Martyrs, the Hurban , Chmelnicki Gonta or Holocaust as to continued Presence and Providence in this world. In Haddisut we are taught by master such as the Izbice (Rabbi Leiner) and the Rebbe Reb Nachman how to train ourselves to see God in the vacuum of this-worldliness even of the demonic, for there is no place devoid of Him.

Relevant here is a comment by Hasidic master Rabbi Jacob Leiner of Izbica in his gloss to the Passover Haggadah. The Haggadah contains numerous rabbinical liturgical inventions coupled with literary (midrashic) renderings of biblical verses, all focused on the story of the Israelite exodus from Egypt. One of the early liturgical flourishes in the Haggadah says: "Blessed be the place (makom), Blessed is He. Blessed be the one who gave Torah to Israel His people." The use of the term place to describe God is based on a rabbinic midrash from the third century brotherhood and eco-sensitivity to the divine nature of the planet and its resources. Above all it will need to shout and scream against torture genocide child slave labor and child prostitution. This new ethic is the only hope for the future. We cannot regain the lost central European humanism. It is lost forever. Only the fear of God can now overpower the demonic forces of evil in the world as Heschel stated. For me recovery of the lost world of texts must be accomplished for the future generations. We must add our voice to the thousand year old textual tradition since we are the People of the Book and the logos must be recovered and discovered anew. Despite the loss of the word despite the emptying out of all meaning for a transcendence we still need to retain the shell the shard and the keli for filling with new Torah, the messianic torah that will be unsullied by the demonic within. If nothing else recovery work shows how powerful baffling and cunning the addict/demonic is within all of us. The Hitler/Nazi/ongoing genocide with my indifference other than listening to NPR is shocking. The banality of evil remains and is alive and well, now exercised and fueled by the mass hysteria and addictions of the twentieth century. We need a giant 12 step program for all those who live in hate!

In my pain physical or emotional I come to believe in the only way I can, in the very paradox of belief, despite the world and the experience of horror, despite the sleepless nights, I come to believe that there is a deeper meaning despite all this absurdity. This is the gift of mysticism. This is the gift of the paradoxical Rebbe. This kind of God I could possibly turn my life and will over to since he encompasses the very complexity and mirror of our humanity. If this be the God of my forefathers then I am ready for step 2.