

which, as he puts it, is to “keep the forever unexhausted and unfulfilled human potential open, fighting back all attempts to foreclose and pre-empt the further unravelling of human possibilities, prodding human society to go on questioning itself and preventing that questioning from ever stalling or being declared finished.”

The goal of educated hope is not to liberate the individual from the social—a central tenet of neoliberalism—but to take seriously the notion that the individual can only be liberated *through* the social. Educated hope as a subversive, defiant

practice should provide a link, however transient, provisional, and contextual, between vision and critique on the one hand, and engagement and transformation on the other. That is, for hope to be consequential it has to be grounded in a project that has some hold on the present. Hope becomes meaningful to the degree that it identifies agencies and processes, offers alternatives to an age of profound pessimism, reclaims an ethic of compassion and justice, and struggles for those institutions in which equality, freedom, and justice flourish as part of the ongoing struggle for a global democracy. □

## To Hope is Human

Zygmunt Bauman

Reports of the death of utopia are (thanks, Mark Twain!) greatly exaggerated. First and foremost, utopia means hope: that things may be better than they are, that evil can be defeated, sorrow and despair conquered, and injustice tamed or repaired. Utopia will never die because humans cannot and will not stop hoping. If we ever stopped hoping, we would no longer be human.

Armed—blessed or cursed—with language, with that curious particle “no,” that declaration of denial, rejection, and refusal to accept which lifts us above the evidence of senses and sets appearances apart from the truth, and the future tense that drives us beyond the immediate and the given—we, the humans, can’t stop imagining things as different from what they are now. We can’t just settle for what “is” because we cannot grasp what “is” without reaching beyond it. We ask the awkward “is” questions, demanding explanation and apology. We expect things to change—and we resolve to change them. Small things and big things alike.

Armed—blessed and cursed—with the knowledge of good and evil, we are judged and sit in judgment—over what has happened and over what have we done or desisted from doing. We place the “should” on the jury benches and put the “is” into the defendants’ dock. We carry the presiding judge (commonly called “conscience”) with us, inside us, wherever we go and whatever we do.

And we believe that judging makes sense: it has the power to change us and the world around us.

As inevitably as the meeting of oxygen and hydrogen results in water, hope is conceived whenever imagination

and moral sense meet. As Ernst Bloch memorably put it, before being *homo sapiens*, a thinking creature, man is a *hoping* creature. It wouldn’t be too difficult to show that Emmanuel Levinas meant much the same when he insisted that ethics comes before ontology. Just as the world out there must prove its innocence in the court of ethics and not the other way round—hope does not and needs not recognize the jurisdiction of “what merely is.” It is reality that must explain why it failed to rise to the standard of decency set by hope.

If the visions recorded in our books and history as “utopias” represented a world that recognized what could be, rather than what merely is, there would hardly be any talk of a crisis of utopian thought. But the term “utopia” went down in public memory associated with a peculiar variety of hope framed at the dawn of the modern era, the time of great expectations and unbounded conceit.

Disgusted by the ever more evident failings of human affairs, while intoxicated with the spectacular accomplishment of the freshly awakened scientific spirit, convinced of the inevitability of change, while worried about the turmoil and risk that change inevitably portends, some of the most valiant and venturesome minds of the early modern era took to painting images of perfection: of a state in which all needed change had been completed, and any further change could only be a change for the worse. In such “utopias” as they came to be called after Thomas More’s book, there was no room for accident and contingency, blows of fate and flights of fancy, uncertified differences, or unscheduled actions. Whatever was not obligatory was prohibited, and whatever was not forbidden was a must. There was a lot of freedom there, to be sure—but freedom meant joyously embraced necessity.

“U-topia” meant “a non-place,” a place that didn’t

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exist. That does not mean that the writers of utopias thought the products of their imagination were unrealistic. They believed in the omnipotence of human reason. Given a ruler with sufficiently formidable despotic powers, and philosophers with enough vision and pedagogic skills to enlighten that ruler about the foolproof ways of forcing or cajoling people into doing willingly what do they should, these modern utopian thinkers believed perfection would be just a matter of time.

We know now how things ended in the cases (fortunately, a few only) in which the promise of utopia was taken seriously and "enlightened" despots took it upon themselves to bring perfection to our unclean, messy, and unpredictable world. Hitler was such a despot, as was Mao. And so we came to believe that the utopia writers were misguided: they promised happiness, while the roads to happiness that they suggested were shortcuts to totalitarian hell. We no longer believe that a perfect society is feasible or viable. Most up-to-date thesauruses cast the "utopian" in

case of humans (if not in that of angels and beasts), can be attained only in a good *society*. It is that ancient wisdom that is now in danger of being forgotten.

Like so many other aspects of human life, the pursuit of happiness in today's world has been deregulated and privatized. Whatever the politicians may say when addressing their prospective voters, their practice when in office implies that "great society," if such a thing still exists, has washed its hands of the misfortunes its members may suffer. Citizens are now abandoned to their own cunning and guts while held solely responsible for the results of their struggles against adversities not of their making. Peter Drucker crisply summed up our attitude as: "no more salvation by society." Though declared to be in full charge of their life pursuits, individuals are neither invited nor encouraged to think of the conditions under which their life purposes are pursued—let alone to contribute to their revision and reform.

Instead, citizens' rights and duties tend to be reduced to

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the unsavory vicinity of the "impractical," and "fanciful"; those of us with lingering experiences of failed utopian projects might also use the words "portentous," "sinister," and even "genocidal."

There were more than enough good reasons for the idea of "utopia" to fall into disrepute. And yet, when the experience one wishes to exorcise is particularly gory and bitter, and past frustrations exceptionally degrading, it is all too easy to avert the attention from the baby when in haste to get rid of muddy bathwater. The story of utopia's falling from grace was not an exception to that rule. The baby in question, needing undivided attention and loving care to unravel its remarkable promise and formidable potency, is the idea endemic to all utopias that is worth saving: that everyone's happiness depends on the happiness of all, that anybody's happiness can be secure only in the company of secure people, and that pursuit of happiness worthy of that name needs to be aimed at the ways and means of human togetherness. That, in other words, pursuit of individual happiness is a collective affair. Not a novel idea, as a matter of fact. The ancients realized that goodness, at least in the

those of the consumer; they have the duty to "lead the economy out of depression" by manifesting their willingness to buy more even if it means going deeper into debt; the citizenship rights of those who cannot do that because they lack credit cards and have no access to banking loans, are cast in doubt, publicly questioned, and threatened to be revoked or suspended. The side effect of such a surreptitious and tacit re-formulation of the meaning of citizenship is the diminishment of the public sphere. What was once a place of shared deliberation—where private interests were translated into public issues and public needs recast as individual rights and duties—has become at best a stage on which politicians reconfirm the incurable privacy of individual interests.

The public sphere has changed beyond recognition. It is now little more than a playground of private interests. The art of mutual translation between private interests and public issues, the great achievement of ancient and modern democracy, is fast falling out of use; seldom practiced, it is no longer learned and tends to be forgotten. The trend towards the public responsibility for survival and welfare of

each and any member of the community, which progressed in leaps and bound across the modern part of the globe since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, is now gradually, yet relentlessly, being reversed.

Drawing maps of utopia came to their draftsmen easily; they were just filling the blank spots or repainting the ugly parts in the grid of public space whose presence was, for good reason, taken for granted and seen as unproblematic. Utopias, the images of good life, were matter-of-factly social since the meaning of the "social" was never in doubt—not yet the "essentially contested issue" it was to become in the aftermath of the neo-liberal *coup d'état*. The question of who was to implement the blueprint and preside over the transformation was not a problem: king or republic was firmly in place, waiting for enlightenment and signal to act. No wonder that such a *public* or *social* utopia became the first casualty of the dramatic change undergone by the public sphere.

## The trend towards public responsibility for survival and welfare of each and any member of the community, which progressed in leaps and bound across the modern part of the globe since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, is now gradually, yet relentlessly, being reversed.

Like everything else once securely located in the public sphere, utopia has become one of the many spoils of the conquest and annexation of the public by the private. The grand social vision has been split into a multitude of private, strikingly similar, but decidedly not complementary portman-teaus. Each one is made to the measure of the consumer's bliss—meant, like all consumer joys, for utterly individual, lonely enjoyment even when relished in company.

Can public space be made once more a place of lasting engagement—the space of dialogue, discussion, confrontation and agreement—rather than casual and fleeting encounters? Yes and no. If what is meant by "public space" is the public sphere wrapped around and serviced by the representative institutions of the nation-state, then the answer is, probably, no. Those public stages, constructed originally for nation-and-state political purposes, remain stubbornly local—while contemporary drama is humanity-wide, and thus obstreperously and emphatically global. The answer "yes," to be credible, requires a new global, public space. Any contemporary public endeavor requires a truly planetary sense of responsibility, an acknowledgment that none of us can any longer seek and find private shelter from storms that originate in any part of the globe. In short, to quote Habermas, the logic of planetary responsibility

requires the development of a "politics that can catch up with global markets."

Unlike the logic of local entrenchment dominant in the nation-state era, the logic of global responsibility ushers in utopia, an unknown territory—and opens an era of political experimentation. It rejects, as an admittedly blind alley, the road of local defense against planetary trends; it abstains (by necessity if not by reasons of conscience) from falling back on the moderns' imperialist strategy of treating the planetary space as a "hinterland" onto which the problems home-produced yet unresolvable at home could be unloaded.

We feel, guess, suspect what needs to be done. But we cannot know in which shape and form it eventually will be done. We can be pretty sure, though, that the shape will not be familiar. It will be different from all we've gotten used to. Political institutions at our disposal were made to the measure of the territorial sovereignty of the nation state. They resist stretching, which means that the political institutions

serving the self-constitution of the planet-wide human community won't be, can't be "the same, only bigger." We may well sense that the passage from "inter-national" agencies and tools of action to "universal"—all-human—institutions must be a qualitative, not merely a quantitative change. So we may ponder, worryingly, whether the presently available frames of "global politics" may accommodate (indeed, serve as an incubator for) the practices of the emergent global polity. Can the UN, for instance—briefed at its birth to guard and defend the undivided sovereignty of the state over its territory—possibly serve a global community?

Even though we cannot see ahead, we will move ahead if only because, as Reinhardt Koselleck once pointed out, we cannot stand still for long. This necessary movement into the unknown has been prophetically put in writing by Franz Kafka—as a premonition, a warning, and encouragement:

So if you find nothing in the corridors, open the doors, if you find nothing behind these doors there are more floors, and if you find nothing up there, don't worry, just leap up another flight of stairs. As long as you don't stop climbing, the stairs won't end, under your climbing feet they will go on growing upwards.

Hannah Arendt called compassion and pity "animal

instincts," meaning that it takes a lot of "societal effort" to stifle them, and it is true that such impulses are oozing from every pore—and if you wish, they may offer "ground for hope." In a larger piece, beyond the word constraints necessary for this eighteenth anniversary issue of *TIKKUN*, I would certainly include such evidence. In this case, however, I wished to make just one point: that hope is valid and real even if groundless, that hope needs no proof—it is the world that needs to prove (and will not!) that it is beyond

redemption and salvation. Hope is stronger than all imaginable "testimony of reality." Hope is the destiny of humanity, one feature that cannot be defeated.

For eighteen long years, *TIKKUN* magazine has kept our hope alive, and with more determination and effect than most other books or magazines I happened to study or browse during that time. This effort will not by itself make our world more hospitable to humanity; but no attempt to make it such would start without it. □

## Meet the Messiah; Kill the Messiah

Rami Shapiro

**L**ate at night on the eve of my sixteenth birthday, my mom came into my bedroom and asked me if I was the Messiah. She was serious. I put down the Zen text I was reading and we looked at each other with an intensity I have not experienced since. "No," I said softly, "I am not the Messiah." She started to cry. We both did. Then she went back to her bedroom. We never spoke of this, but I have never forgotten it.

Did Mary ever wake Jesus up in the middle of the night to ask if he were the Messiah? Did Bar Kochbah's mother know before Akiva that her boy was the one? What about Shabbtai Tzvi's mom? Did she have to wait for Nathan of Gaza to inform her as to the status of her son? What did Mrs. Frank think of her boy, Jacob? Or Mrs. Of Bratzlav of her son Nahman?

Maybe my mother knew what I refused to know. Maybe she was right. Maybe I was the Messiah, or could have been if I had only answered differently. What would my life have been like if I had answered, "Yes, Mom. I am the Messiah"? Would I have gotten out of gym class? What about wood shop? Jesus was a carpenter after all.

Why do people want messiahs, anyway? Everyone does. The Jews have the Son of David; the Christians have the always-soon-to-return Jesus; the Muslims have the Mahdi; the Buddhists have Maitreya Buddha; and the Hindus have avatars popping up from time to time. Messiahs are incarnations of the human need to hope, and we can't seem to live without hope. Too bad.

The whole point of messianism is to perfect the future and rescue us from our imperfect present. To make this hap-

pen, messianists work tirelessly to free humanity from its *yetzer harab* (capacity for evil). This is not only ridiculous, it is dangerous.

We cannot have good without evil any more than we can have in without out, or left without right. Nature is a swirl of opposites, and the messianic ideal is a violent distortion of the very fabric of existence. To place one's hope in such a distortion is to lay the foundation for dystopia. This is why every messianic movement ultimately becomes fertile soil for the very evils it seeks to uproot.

People are not meant to be perfect, if by perfect we mean good without evil. People are meant to be the image and likeness of God; and God, as Isaiah tells us, is the source of both good and evil. People are meant to be just what we are: holy rascals with the capacity to praise God as we pass the ammunition.

Humans are the way nature does Gauguin, Chagall, and paint-by-numbers. We are the way life composes Beethoven's Fifth and Lennon's Number 9. We are the way the universe writes *King Lear*, the Bill of Rights, and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. We are the way she builds skyscrapers and melts them down. We are the way the world becomes conscious of itself and all its dimensions. We are the way life imagines utopia and oblivion, and, if we are lucky, avoids both.

When we place hope in messianism we pretend we can be other than we are. We can't. When we imagine that we can be only good, we excuse the evil we do in the name of some higher purpose. Read your Torah: Moses is always condoning violence in the Name of God. Read your Church history: the God of Love is forever used to sanction torture and tyranny. Read your morning newspaper: the God-intoxicated are alive and well, perpetuating evil in the name of good, and sanctioning slaughter in the name of holiness. The greatest evil is always done with messianic hype, claiming to cleanse the world of that which the mes-

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