

where people shared certain basic values and operating principles, I now work in a political context that is much more diverse and where the emphasis is usually on getting the job done, no matter the personal damage along the way.

My Black feminist principles have been sorely tested, but I also find that these movement values are extremely useful in the very different world of electoral politics and government bureaucracy. Something as simple as making sure that everyone at a community meeting gets a chance to speak once, before an individual speaks repeatedly and monopolizes the discussion, can change the dynamics and make people feel respected and heard.

The women in my family continue to be my role models for how to be in the world. Their kindness, diligence, and integrity gave me a foundation upon which to build. I have found these qualities in many other Black women, including those who have led the way. I never met Ella Baker, but when I saw the documentary film “Fundu,” I was struck not only by her political brilliance but by the depth of caring that radiated from her. When I met Fannie Lou Hamer when I was still a teenager in Cleveland after a Civil Rights rally, I sensed the same thing.

Successful organizing depends a lot upon the quality of the relationships we build. We can show how much we value others’ humanity by how we treat each other every day. ■

# Fear and Consequences: Healing from Jewish Historical Trauma

by Wendy Elisheva Somerson

**A**S A JEW, THE MOST IMPORTANT HEALING WORK I can do for both myself and the world is to work with other Jews to move through our historical trauma, thus finding the strength to combat the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In doing this work, we are often literally creating a space to both love ourselves as Jews and protest what is being done in our names by the Israeli and U.S. governments. Centuries of persecution and genocide have left many Jews so fearful that we see ourselves always and forever as victims, which blinds us to our role in the current oppression of Palestinians. Our families have often passed on Jewish trauma to us through the notion that any criticism of the Israeli government is an attack that will lead to our imminent destruction and through the related feeling that we are always in danger.

Even as I overtly contest this thinking through my politics, the fearful feelings lie inside me, ready to seep out when I am least prepared to feel them. Trying to remain rooted in a positive Jewish identity while so many Jews are visibly supporting Israel’s immoral actions sometimes awakens my fear and makes my head spin. I feel dizzy when I participate in a protest against the siege of Gaza and see a sign with a circle of swastikas and Jewish stars with recycling arrows going around and around. It both evokes and oversimplifies the cycle of trauma. Yes, the Nazis enacted violence



*“Dressed in our kippot and tallitot, we recited the Mourner’s Kaddish for all the victims of the attacks on Gaza.”*

against Jews, and Israel is now enacting violence against Palestinians. Yet not all Jews are Israeli; Israelis are not Nazis; and not all Israelis support their government. The sign catapults me into fearfulness about being visible as a Jew, shame about Israel, and even more shame that I am focused on my own historical trauma when I am there to speak out against Israel’s current aggressions. A few days later, when we protest a

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pro-Occupation event at a local synagogue, my dizziness is reactivated when I see a Jewish person holding a sign that equates Palestinians with Nazis.

When the forces of politics, history, and identity pull me in so many directions that I fear losing my balance, I try to remember the handful of moments when living inside these contradictions has felt like home. Right after the horrific 2008-2009 Israeli attacks on Gaza, a group of anti-Occupation Jews joined in downtown Seattle to protest against the attacks. Dressed in our *kippot* and *tallitot*, we recited the Mourner's Kaddish for all the victims of the attacks on Gaza—the more than 1,400 Palestinians and eleven Israelis who died. Saying the Mourner's Kaddish in prayer shawls at a protest was powerful; our visibility as Jews undermined the notion that

Jews mourn only for the loss of other Jewish lives. At a time when so many synagogues were lining up to support Israel, we reclaimed the power of our spiritual heritage by demonstrating how the Israeli government's actions distort our Jewish values. Standing on our makeshift *bimah* on that cold winter's day, I felt rooted in my community, grateful, and unafraid.

As anti-Occupation Jews, we honor the legacy of Jewish resistance when we consciously choose solidarity over fear. By focusing on a present that is informed but not dictated by the past, we are creating a Jewish culture that can help heal a small part of the world. I look forward to the day when Palestinians gain self-determination, Israel is forced to change its ways, and we are all released from the cycle of reenacting historical trauma. ■

# The Relational Worldview

by Charlene Spretnak

A FEW YEARS AGO, I STARTED NOTICING SMALL articles in newspapers about surprising discoveries in physiology and health care, in education and child-rearing, in community design and architecture, and in various quarters of the economy. They were all examples of the relational nature of reality poking through the mechanistic assumptions that have caused so many of the crises we face. For instance, people working in “daylighted” buildings experience less illness and absenteeism than those working in artificial lighting (a body-sun relationship). People with many friends catch fewer colds; later on, elderly people with at least a few close relationships are less prone to develop dementia (our bodymind falters when deprived of social relationships). Towns with thriving community-based economics, including local food security, exhibit a more resilient social fabric and less depression (cultivating interconnections pays off in many ways). Granted, I've been tracking such developments for decades, but even I was astonished by many of the recent findings, especially in the fields of physiology and education. Apparently, the world is far more relational than even we relational thinkers supposed. I've gathered scores of such examples in a report titled *Relational Reality*, which will be posted on the website of Green Horizon magazine in mid-April ([green-horizon.org](http://green-horizon.org)). I hope that document will help to convince activists of the virtues of identifying and cultivating the interrelationships involved when they try to analyze ecosocial problems or to design solutions.

The difficulty is that our education and conditioning in modern societies work against our being able to grasp the profoundly relational nature of reality. We tend to perceive only aggregates of seemingly separate, discrete entities and to miss the inherent interrelatedness animating all living systems, both human and more-than-human, both social and individual. Consequently, most of our institutions, laws, public policy, and reform movements address problems through a mechanistic lens that makes analysts feel terribly rational but badly distorts their perception of what is actually going on. In fact, nothing exists apart from its internal and external relationships: the world, and every problem within it, is constituted entirely of relationships. How effective is activist work that misses, or ignores, that core truth?

As more and more discoveries are made about the relational nature of reality, young activists will find it easier to employ a relational analysis and vision. Our hypermodern selves are pretty much at a kindergarten level now regarding the understanding of how dynamically interrelated the world is (not to be confused with the sort of connectedness the Internet affords, useful though that may be). Humans will never nail down a complete grasp of the vast and miniscule complexity involved, yet young activists will be bringing society closer in sync with (relational) reality if they craft solutions to society's problems that include attention to the interconnections involved. Simple solutions to seemingly simple problems will fail, once again. Organic thinking that perceives, repairs, and creates interrelationships through new approaches, however, might just save the day. ■

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