

ELSE

By Hugh Fox

“Well, you can’t see God, the creator of the universe, as some androgynous super-guy up in the sky. How can the creator of eighty million galaxies be seen as Joe Blow in the Snow, some kind of androgyny-animated Macho Snort.....” Still cute-ish at fifty, but maybe she could have worn longer skirts and less fancy-wancy jazz-heeled shoes, maybe some sort of rabbinical robes/costume to enable her to role-play more convincingly. The perfect flushed-up hair and all skin defects concealing makeup. Something more earthen, primitive, desertish, Israelish, not a veil or anything, not necessarily *that* far, but something that said LEAH, SARAH, RIVKA, THE ANCIENT MIDDLE EAST.

A hand up from The Faithful.

Professor Sam Corngold, Harvard Professor of Biblical Studies, 76 now, a widower, retired for twelve years, heart surgeries, radical weight losses, diet-changes, blind in one eye, but like he always said “All you need is one hand to carry a stab-the-enemy sword!”

Totally against the Schul/Synagogue rules. You never *dared* dialogue with the Representative of the Divine...with all the Torah answers up her Chinese sun-flowered semi-transparent sleeves.

“It’s kind of against the RULES....,but OK, Sam...”

“But Moses was talking to God all the time...and *Adonai* is male....all the original Hebrew is male, *melech*/king...this radical feminism of yours...”

“The ancients were the ancients. I can’t see myself wandering around all day wearing a veil, being one of three wives.....”

“No wives. You *were* married once, right?”

Rabbi Shortfall suddenly getting *very* rabbinical, raising her carefully manicured hands, palms up to the heavens /roof.

“Please rise for Kiddush,” mentioning the latest dead, the dead whose death-anniversaries (*jahrzeits*) were in the weekly bulletin, moving solemnly into the Aramaic, the only time in the whole service when another ancient language was used, when Kiddush was finished Corngold still standing as everyone else sat down.

“You forgot to give Larry Berry his say!”

The Rabbi's face fixed, frozen, solid, almost as if she herself were lying dead in a casket, Dr. Super-Smile Berry, the President of the Congregation getting up and giving his usual thanks to the Rabbi, the Cantor, the congregation-members who were furnishing the food for the after-services snack-talk time (the Oneg), mentioning the six o'clock outdoors feast-time next week before services, an attempt to add a little zip and jazz to the usual heavyness of the services.

Then, when he was finished, the Rabbi announcing "We will end services with Shalom, on page three hundred and fifty-two, words by Dr. Bergmeister, music by Hannah Middleman, our pianist-in-residence..." giving Hannah a pumpkin-ghost wide smile.

Hannah on the piano smiling, Maurey Bergmeister getting up, turning around, smiling, a retired professor of Computer Science who also was (oddly) a specialist in African languages.

Hannah begins playing. A tiny woman with huge talents, married to Sam Middleman, a retired professor from Boston University, Mr. Shakespeare, Renaissance theatre, always spelled with an "re" instead of "er," who smiles happily to see his focused on so adroitly wife playing her work, thinking "*Women focusing on women. All within the new feminism...*"

Bergmeister up on the bima now. Him on the right, Cantor Myrtle Langsheim on the left, almost looking like a couple, although Cantor Langsheim was getting oldish looking in spite of the thick layers of makeup she used on her face, her diets, her surgeries, hair dyes. Always used to be Cantor Solemnity before Rabbi Shortfall took over, but since Shortfall took over getting kind of age eight-ish, everything getting kiddie-oriented, like Shortfall always said "We're Mom-Figures, after all, and so many Jews are drifting out of Judaism into Cyberneticism, as if the Computer were God."

The cantor starting out, lifting up her arms and then crossing them back and forth as she began:

BING, BANG, AND A BIG BOOM AS

ADONAI GIVES US THE EYE

AND STRAIGHTENS OUT OUR

BING, BANG BOOM LIVES....

More karati-ish arm exercises, and then as she slid into seriousness, the anguish on Bergmeister's face during the bing-bang-booming replaced by performance-satisfaction /-seriousness as the two of them began to sing together:

BARUCH ATTA ADONAI,

TIME TO MENTAL IT

UP TO THE SKY,

ASK WHO AND WHY,
THE SPIRIT TO FLY,
THE END OF MURDER
THE END OF DISORDER,
TIME TO BE, JUST BE,
AND LET THE MADNESSES
FLEE, FLEE, FLEE....

Bergmeister for years writing about the madness of man in the free-will universe of beyond-sanity God, one of his books almost making the best-seller list a few (40) years back, *Recreation Re-Creation*, stressing the sanity of golf, football, soccer, swimming, TV-watching, mountain-climbing versus terrorists and anti-terrorists, rapists, street-murderers :

Sometimes I feel like asking Adonai to start all
over again, and remake Mankind into something like
deer or sparrows, instead of gorillas, tigers, mosquitoes....

The melody strong now, a little bit of almost jazztime as they reached the end:

BE, BE, BE, AS FREE AS A FLEA
ADONAI AND YOU AND ME,
BE A BEE AND BUZZ THROUGH LIFE,
THROUGH NEO'S AND STRIFE,
WE SHALL ENDURE BECAUSE WE
ARE PURE GOD'S PEOPLE AND
EVERYTHING ELSE.

Almost applause from the audience, Bergmeister and the Cantor almost bowing, but managing to contain their bows into modest head-bends as Rabbi Shortfall took over again.

“Beautiful. What a talented congregation we have here. So many geniuses buzzing around,” then the final blessing the first time, really, that all liberal-reform-cybnernetic-Hollywoodish-jazzbandish overtones are put aside and the synagogue suddenly becomes ancient, God’s ancient presence suddenly THERE, THERE, THERE:

Adon 'olam, 'asher malakh

Eternal Master, who reigned supreme,

b'terem kol y'tzir niv'ra

Before all of creation was drawn,

L'eyt na'asa v'kheftso kol

When it was finished according to His will,

Azai melekh sh'mo nikra

Then the King's Name was proclaimed,

V'akharey kikh'lot hakol,

When this our world shall be no more,

L'vado y'imlokh nora

In majesty He still shall reign,

V'hu yih'yeh b'tif'arah

And he will be in glory,

V'hu 'ekhad v'eyn sheyni

Alone is He, beyond compare,

Adonai li v'lo 'ira

The Lord is with me, I will not fear.

Adon (Master) turned into God, **v'kheftso kol** (His Will) turned into God, **Melech** (King) turned into God, not "He shall reign," but "God shall reign," not "He will be in glory," but "God will be in glory," not "Alone is He," but "Alone is God," not "The Lord is with me," but "God is with me....," no HE's up in Heaven, no KING'S..... Heaven forbid, just IT UP THERE IN HEAVEN...IT, IT, IT...as if the ancient text didn't exist at all and translation wasn't translation at all, but modification to fit HER view of the world, world, world....

OK, services (intellectual-spiritual tortures) over, time for a little talk-time, snack-time, ONEG, the joy of Sabbath, brownies and cookies and you name it, getting in line, hugging some old pals, Corngold filling his plate with two oatmeal and raisin cookies, some pieces of pear dried-out, a brownie (in spite of it being 9:20 PM and chocolate being filled with caffeine), then a little water and over to his usual table off in the corner, Warren Daper (92 and still zipping) (unzipping) and his

wife, Clotilde (90 and the incarnation of shakiness, a hilltop in multi-directional winds), bushy-white-bearded Dave from South Carolina (a “convert,” he wasn’t sure and didn’t want to push the topic, what was the difference?), his wife and wife’s sister, Dumbo Wolf (retired English professor) and his Indonesian wife, Gema, both of them “converts,” although Dumbo’s grandmother had been Jewish (even though he had been raised a Catholic) so he was , strictly speaking, already a Jew, and there was Fluffy Brownstone, eighty-five and shaky but still the greatest investment genius he’d ever met, probably the richest woman (person) in the state of Massachusetts, or in all of New England...

“Shabbat Shalom! How you guys and gals doing?”

“Are you trying to take over the synagogue?” laughed Warren, “You better watch out, some of these feminists can get really andro-killerish!”

“Fair questions/comments,” said Fluffy, beyond feminism or masculinism or any other “isms” except big-bucks-isms, “you’ve always got to question the questions and face the answers, that’s what it’s ALL about, I re-think the whole stock-profit thing every day, most of the no-sleep night, in spite of all the herbs I take, Passion Flower...although I haven’t felt any of that kind of passion for the last thirty years.”

“Just bank-passion,” smiles Dumbo.

“I hear the most stable economy in the world today is Slovakia!” adds Dumbo’s wife, Gema, a urologist with a degree from the Boston University School of Medicine, hardly an accent any more, Dumbo had met her when he was teaching (English) in Karachi.

“Why? Such a monkey-thumb of a country?” asks Fluffy a little shakily.

“They manufacture everything they use, no international nothing, totally self-contained...Banska Bystrica towers, Kosice ethnicities, Bardejov cathedrals...it’s time-travel back into sanity....,” tears in Gema’s eyes, a moment of silence while everyone sympathizes/identifies with her, all of them full of huge ethnic European, Middle Eastern, Israeli smudges of memory, except for the converts....and even they could never depart entirely from their old(est) country smudges of the past.

Corngold taking advantage of the pause to step in.

“My interruption of the service....I feel ‘ashamed,’ or if not ‘ashamed,’ let’s say ‘repentant,’ I’d like to apologize to the Rabbi...,” looking all around in the lounge for her, but she wasn’t there, neither was the Cantor, and they usually hung around at least for a while (there was a Saturday morning service after all) and played chatty-watty with everyone, never really quite ‘*them* there,’ but professionally effective.

“So try her office, that’s where she probably is,” suggested Warren Daper with his usual pontifical/ Adonai-ish finality, “we’ll save a few pickled beets for you...”

“Pickled YOU!” laughed his wife, everyone always surprised at how well her brain worked in her decrepit, decomposing body.

Corngold up, a quick smirk.

“*Molto Grazie!*”

“*De Neante,*” answered Gema, always playing total Euro-omniscience, in spite of her obsessive self-contained Slovakian nationalism.

And off he went, smiles and hugs as he went, all the old gang, missing Steve, who had died (ruptured ventricular aneurysm) the week before, but everyone else there, all the old most unmistakable Jewish faces, the genetic survivors of thousands and thousands of years of genetic one-way-streetness...down the hall into the long, dark hall that led to the Rabbi’s office.

She was there alright, the door open, the light on. Talking with rabid certitude, words engraved on the hallway walls. He stopped. Reluctant to interrupt her, at the same time gravely seriously. Engrave, grave, Rest not in Peace but Turbulence.

“I mean how can there be a God at all? Everything has to begin...*n’est pas*...and how can God just begin, from Nothing to Everything, and then create eighty billion galaxies, and what can they be contained in?”

He can see the Cantor’s beautiful legs, seated in a chair in front of the Rabbi’s desk. Legs that looked like twenty-three, a twenty-three year old basketball player, instead of...how the hell old *was* she anyhow.

“What about the seeds in Papayas?” asked the Cantor, “You cut open a papaya and it’s full of a hundred seeds for procreation, continuing the species, if there wasn’t any magic design in the universe, OK, but design equals designer. What about sperms and eggs and fallopian tubes and uteri, that’s the plural, isn’t it, ‘uterus,’ ‘uteri...?’”

“Whatever,” the Rabbi obviously turned off by any incursions into even remotely-related intercourse implications....

“Well...maybe I should go now,” the Cantor obviously turned off by the Rabbi’s concrete sidewalks to suddenly hardening, “I have to drive back to Medford and then be back here in the morning...”

The two of them flash-embracing, a moment of incandescence, and then the Alaska coastline again.

“You really ought to get a place in the Boston-Cambridge area, lots of good deals these days now that we’re all on the edge of Pharonicuptcy...”

“Pharonwhat...?”

“You know, the early Moslems taking over Egypt...mineralizing all over the Cairo landscape....so Moses was forever talking to God, so the Jews were held captive in Egypt and God killed off the firstborns and the Pharaoh let them go....Mount Sinai, the last time I was there, it couldn't have been less deified....,” a silence, another coldish, quick embrace and the Cantor started for the door, one last little joke-smile, Hebrew mixed in with Arabic “Shalom...Salaam...Shalom...”

The Rabbi trying to smile, not making it, one last wave and suddenly Corngold was fifteen again, no knee- or back-pain, out down the corridor and out the doorway, back to the Oneg Goodtime Palace, only all his buddies were gone, just his pal Dumbo and Dumbo's wife waiting for him, a few oldsters still left at other tables, *you'd think they'd have enough social-life in their elderly care caves, wouldn't you?*

“So how did it go?” asked Gema, as always-always-always the soul of concentrated interest.

“Go....that's the word....” More waves, “*Zayt gesund...*,” giving both Dumbo and Gema a hug, then out into the cooling-off parking-lot night, negatively anticipating the big not cool-down but cold-down in another week or so, a month.... his grandparents' Yiddish never quite leaving him, the Yiddish and all the rest, the beards and shawls and food, goodnight kisses, parks, swings, saxophones (his uncle Jake)....a million years of cultural-genetic continuity, regardless Who was Up There or Down There or Anywhere Else.

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