Text, Teacher and Student: Enhancing Spiritual Development

By Jeffrey Schein

Relationships are critical in the development of a spiritual, Jewish human being. Our first instinct as educators is to value the relationship between a student and a teacher as the primary source of that spirituality. If "life is with people," spiritual life is with the people who have enough spiritual presence to draw us into a meaningful relationship. In valuing this element of spiritual dialogue, we might legitimately call ourselves the children of Martin Buber, the master of human and religious dialogue.

For a strict Buberian, though interestingly not for Buber himself, the raw materials for spiritual growth are present in the persons of the student and the teacher, a potential "I" and a potential "Thou." Buber himself, however, understood that the world of education is a world of mediation. Character is built through what Buber calls the "effective selection" of the material and cultural worlds in which we live, as well as the unmediated dialogue between human beings.[1]

Text as Mediating Force

In Jewish tradition, the mediating force between human beings, or between the individual and the community, is often a Jewish text. A triangle among teacher, student(s) and text is formed when two or more people engage in study. This dynamic triangle unleashes spiritual potential. Yet the role of text within this dialogue is itself multifaceted and complex. The proper use of Jewish texts presupposes an awareness on the part of the teacher of overarching spiritual purposes.

In this article, I will:

A. suggest that there are at least three valid, distinct and irreducible goals of education for Jewish spirituality. These three goals can be subtitled as: narrative and peoplehood, Jewish values and ethics and rela-

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tionship to God.

Spirituality has both communal and individual dimensions. Spiritual potential is unleashed in the encounter among the three parts: teacher, learner(s) and text. This occurs through:

- linking teacher and learner to a narrative in which the Jewish story and its many chapters or sub-stories unfold (narrative and peoplehood);
- challenging the teacher and learner to discover the values that make Jewish/human living worthwhile (Jewish values and ethics); and
- pointing the teacher and learner to *mekor hahayim*, the Source of Life, the source of one's spiritual connection to God (relationship to God).

B. surprise the reader by turning to the centrality ascribed to "texts" by two Christian educators, instead of drawing on expected quotations from our own Jewish tradition;

C. offer two extended examples of teaching, with a view toward addressing each of the three purposes of education for nurturing Jewish spirituality. One example is of a communal spirituality that arises from *Shirat Hayam*, the song at the Sea of Reeds, and the other focuses more on individual or personal spirituality in connection with *teshuvah*, turning or repentance;

D. conclude with a few suggestions about how teachers can strive toward educational *shlemut* (completeness) in regard to teaching Jewish texts and promoting a Jewish child's spiritual development.

Much of what I describe in this chapter is based on my own experiences preparing teachers on how to promote spiritual growth.

The Text in the Triangle

Text-centered Jewish learning has much greater currency today than in the recent past. One can see this most clearly in regard to adult Jewish learning. When I began my teaching of Jewish adults several decades ago, aside from *parashat ha-shavuah* (studying the weekly Torah portion) it was rare to see text courses offered. Great Jewish ideas, history survey courses or Judaism and contemporary dilemmas were far more common foci for adult Jewish learning.

The rediscovery of texts as central to the Jewish enterprise has led to our own share of clichés and banalities. The leap, for instance, from making texts a "central feature" of Jewish study to the "most authentic form of Jewish learning" is significant, but often unexamined. Rather than recycle the obvious, I find it helpful to look at the role of text anew from the perspectives of two Christian educators.

Parker Palmer, in *To Know As We Are Known*, reminds us that texts create a bounded space in which teacher and students can dwell. He writes:

> Where schools give students several hundred pages of text and urge them to learn speed reading, . . . monks dwell on a page or a

passage or a line for hours and days at a time. They call it *lectio divina*, sacred reading, and they do it at a contemplative pace. This method allows reading to open, not fill, our learning space.

When all students in the room have read the same brief piece in a way that allows them to enter and occupy the text, a common space is created in which students, teachers, and subject can meet. It is an open space since a good text will raise as many questions as it answers. It is a bounded space since the text itself dictates the limits of our mutual inquiry. It is a hospitable, reassuring space since everyone has walked around in it beforehand and become acquainted with its dimensions.

Too often we fail to capitalize on this space-creating quality. We hold students individually accountable for what they read in texts, but seldom allow their reading to create a common space in which the group can meet in mutual accountability for their learning.[1]

Alliances in the Triangle

The Christian scholar and educator Walter Bruggemann suggests that the triangle-creating capacity of the text allows for fruitful argument and debate. Borrowing from the work of family-systems theorists such as Murray Bowen and Rabbi Edwin Friedman, Bruggemann writes:

> Consider what happens in such a conversation when it is seen to be a triangle. There are, in fact, in most church situations of interpretation three voices, that of text, of pastor, and of congregation, three voices creating a triangle. The text continues to be present, but it has been usurped by the pastor. Our standard practice is for the pastor to triangle with the text against the congregation, that is, to make an alliance so that the voice of the pastor and what is left of the voice of the text gang up on the congregation and sound just alike. This process automatically generates controversy because, completely aside from the substance of theological or ethical conflict, nobody wants to be the lone one in a triangle. Predictably, the third party, the congregation, becomes a hostile, resistant outsider who will undertake reckless, destructive action in such a triangle where one is excluded by the other two.
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> If, however, the text is as scandalous as we suspect it is, then we need an alternative strategy. We are aware that the text is in fact more radical and more offensive and more dangerous than any of us, liberal or conservative. As a result, it is not honest to ally with the text, because the dangerous text is not anyone's natural or easy ally. I suggest, then, let the pastor triangle with the congregation against the text, so the text is the lone member of the triangle, and then see how

> the text lives as the odd one in such a triangle. I believe that the textual conversation in the church would be very different if pastors were able to begin with the awareness that the text is too offensive for the people, but is also too offensive for the pastor, because it is the living Word of God, and it pushes always beyond where we want to go or be. Such a posture honors the great authority of the text. It also acknowledges our restless resistance to the text and lets us enter into dangerous textual conversations with some of our best friends as allies.
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> The proposal for alternative triangling requires, however, that the text be permitted its own voice, apart from our creedal impositions or critical reductionisms. There can be no genuine triangle unless the text is permitted a voice other than our own. Thus, this strategy calls for some interpretive distance between pastor and text.[2]

One notes only somewhat parenthetically that in Jewish education, teacher and text also triangle against the learner. A teacher angered or frustrated with the lack of Jewishness or *mentshlikhkayt* of his/her learners can always find a text that will underscore their shortcomings. The intimacy and energy of being jointly held to a higher standard — the text, tradition or God — is then replaced by platitudes and recriminations from the teacher and can result in students shutting down, withdrawing from the learning process.

Three Goals of Education

Three distinct goals exist for promoting the Jewish spirituality of our students. These involve: 1) narrative and peoplehood, 2) Jewish values and ethics and 3) relationship to God. The three goals are presented here.

• Narrative and Peoplehood

The Jewish "story" has a life of its own. The primary actors in this story — God, Torah and the Jewish people — play unique roles within the master stories that link Jews to one another and their tradition. Before critiquing and analyzing these narratives, we need to step inside them sympathetically.

One goal of Jewish spirituality is to acculturate the learners, to invite them to live as participants in the narrative. "Peoplehood" is a good shorthand term for this educational purpose. Whether "belonging" is more central to Jewish life than "behaving" and "believing" is an interesting but academic question. What is important is the awareness that Jewish children and adults in spiritual formation rarely ask questions of behaving or believing until they feel themselves belonging to the Jewish master stories.

• Jewish Values and Ethics

Jewish life is values centered. Many a *midrash* begins to make sense only when we switch from the *mashal*, the ongoing story being told, to the *nimshal*, the value being strengthened through the story. The ongoing Jewish struggle to understand and actualize these values and remake the world *b'malkhut shaddai*, in a Godly image, is a significant second goal of Jewish spiritual education.

We sense some of the complexity of this goal in the *Ahavah Rabbah* prayer of the *Shaḥarit* service, which speaks of the revelation of Torah to the Israelites as a sign of God's love for us. In regard to the teachings of Torah, we are exhorted in this *tefilah* to:

le-havin, to understand;
le-haskil, to distinguish its different applications;
lishmor, to treasure;
la-asot, to act on the words;
le-kayem, to make them realities in the world.

Each word seems to demand a different teaching/learning process. If this is correct, then the gifted spiritual educator will need to be nearly as long in pedagogic repertoire as he/she needs to be deep in personal commitment to Jewish spirituality. We will return to this point near the end of the essay.

• Relationship To God

The third goal of Jewish education for spirituality is to facilitate the learner's search for the source of his/her own spirituality. In a Jewish context, this inevitably points us to God. The wide array of understandings of God and Godliness in Jewish tradition, from supernatural to transnatural, from person to process, from immanent to transcendent, is a rich resource for this teaching. The questions here are ultimately very personal: When in my life have I encountered forces greater and grander than myself? What experiences are so touched by "holiness" that I recognize them as emanating from God? When has God entered my life?

The strategies appropriate to teaching in this third domain of Jewish spirituality range from gentle coach to prophet or social critic. The gentle-coach approach is the strategy employed by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner when he teaches with a mystical orientation, and by Rabbi Harold Kushner when he urges and guides from a more rationalist orientation.

Lawrence Kushner uses storytelling and a poetic style of writing, simultaneously revealing and concealing the mysteries involved in seeking and encountering God in our lives.[4] Harold Kushner's theology of "when is God" rather than "where is God" leads to intricate correlations between the child's exclamation of surprise ("I've grown in knowledge, caring, etc.") and traditional Jewish *brakhot* that sanctify moments in time.[5] Rabbi Sandy Sasso utilizes the same gentle-coach approach as she encourages children's imaginations to picture the colors and names of God's presence in the world.[6]

Finally, we recall that Buber sees the role of teacher as a combination of prophet and social critic. In his famous essay on the education of character, he counsels educators that the only possible way to move people away from the grip of conventional wisdom and the "collective idols" to a life of God and spirituality is to hold a mirror up to them (one's students) and allow them to see the distortions in their own images of God.[7]

Education and Spiritual Wholeness

What follows are two lessons or unit plans of topics and texts that I have felt are particularly central to Jewish spirituality. One example, *Shirat HaYam*, the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15:1-23), focuses on the communal dimension of Jewish spirituality. The other, on *teshuvah* (change and repentance), focuses on the individual dimension of Jewish spirituality.

In both units, I have been guided by the challenge of working in all three domains (narrative and peoplehood, Jewish values and ethics and relationship to God) simultaneously. Yet I have deliberately not labeled each domain within the lesson or unit plan. I imagine that many readers will approach the material at the level of *assiyah*, wise practice; therefore, labeling the domains would be an impediment. For those who understand it at the level of *beriyah/yetzirah*, creative thought, the labels are probably unnecessary.

The Song at the Sea

The curricular outline of materials developed on the Song at the Sea includes three distinct lessons, each of which is described below.

• Lesson 1: The Song Itself

Activity 1: Explore *Shirat HaYam* in the actual *Sefer Torah*, the Torah scroll. Invite students to comment on the shape of this poem as written in the Torah scroll. Why is it not lined up evenly as are other sections of the Torah? If the words in the *Sefer Torah* are thought of as objects, of what do they remind you? (While it is said in a traditional *midrash* that the columns look like the bricks of slavery, a common suggestion is that they look like the waves of the Sea of Reeds.)

Activity 2: Read and chant *Shirat HaYam*. Begin to discuss what particular phrases from the song fill you with (e.g., awe, terror, disgust, joy.) According to the text, Moses and the children of Israel did the singing. Why is it significant that Moses did not do this alone? At the conclusion of the song, Miriam and the Israelite women break into dance. Does this mean that they were not singing?

Activity 3: Play "Miriam's Song" by Debbie Friedman on the recording *You Shall Be a Blessing.* If yours is a particularly spirited group, invite people to join in the dancing.

Activity 4: Create a hand-made *midrash* in response to the phrase or verse from *Shirat HaYam* that people find most moving. Handmade *midrashim* are pictures interpreting a text, using construction paper, and other materials. Jo Milgrom, who originated the technique, recommends tearing, not cutting with scissors (hence, "handmade"). (For more details on the technique, see *Handmade Midrash* by Jo Milgrom [Jewish Publication Society, 1992]).

• Lesson 2: Responding to the Splitting of the Sea

Explore three different theories of how the splitting of the sea might have occurred. It is important to keep people open to the possibilities inherent in the other explanations. So I create a challenge for each group.

Theory 1: Students who choose the explanation that attributes all that happened to God's power must write about this question: Why, if God is all-powerful, could God not save the Israelites without drowning the Egyptians?

Theory 2: Students who choose the *midrash* about divine/human partnership, God waiting to split the sea until Naḥshon jumps in, are asked to write about: What was going through Naḥshon's mind the moment he jumped into the sea?

Theory 3: Students who prefer the more naturalistic explanation of the Sea of Reeds must write about how to explain the "timing" of the splitting of the sea. How can something so "natural" be so well timed in terms of the needs of the Jewish people?

• Lesson 3: My Own *Yam Suf*/Sea of Reeds

Activity 1: Identify times when you were witness to a "miracle." A miracle is when there was a victory moment so important to you, your family or your community that you might have broken out in song or dance.

The range of possible responses is always uneven, with some people focusing on victories over cancer and others on the time they scored an "A" on a test or their team won the Little League championship. Draw a picture or make a collage of the "miracle" moment and calligraph *Mi Kamokhah* in Hebrew or English at the bottom. Have each person share his or her event and picture with the group. After each person has described their victory or deliverance moment, the group calls out *"Mi Kamokhah."*

Teshuvah: The Personal Side of Jewish Spirituality

The curricular unit on *teshuvah* includes four lessons. This set of lessons was originally developed for teachers as part of a conference on teaching Jewish spirituality.

• Lesson 1: *Teshuvah*: Getting Started on Change

Activity 1: Participants write a journal about the nature of changing oneself for the better. The journal entry consists of the participants completing the following phrases:

"The most meaningful 'I'm sorry' (not my own) I ever witnessed was . . . "

"The most meaningful act of (turning, repentance) I ever did was . . ."

"The older I become, the more *teshuvah* . . ."

"Like Maimonides, I know that *teshuvah* is never complete until I have been challenged by the same situation and respond differently (see "Laws of Repentance," *Mishneh Torah*, chapters 3 and 4). The hardest thing for me about completing the cycle of *teshuvah* is . . ."

"Like Rav Kook (see his *Lights of Repentance*), I know that the yearning for return is deeply implanted within my soul. I feel the impulse to return to God most powerfully when . . ."

Activity 2: Tell the following story about the Ḥafetz Ḥayim (Rabbi Israel Meir Kohen) interspersed with discussion about key issues. The inspiring but enigmatic character was a late 19th, early 20th-century rabbi, educator and codifier of laws surrounding *lashon ha-ra* (evil speech).

The story goes like this: An ordinary Jew was traveling in Poland to Radnetz to visit the great Ḥafetz Ḥayim. He happened to sit down on the train next to him. When he began sharing his excitement about seeing the honored sage, the Ḥafetz Ḥayim said that the man really was not so great at all, too much was being made of him. The ordinary Jew flew into a fit of rage and slapped this fellow traveler across the face. How can you speak in such a way about a *tzaddik*?

Question A: If you were the Ḥafetz Ḥayim, how would you respond?

The story continues. The ordinary Jew eventually shows up at the door of the Ḥafetz Ḥayim. When he sees that the *tzaddik* and the person on the train whom he had slapped are the same, he immediately drops to his knees and begs for forgiveness.

Question B: How should the Ḥafetz Ḥayim respond now?

The story ends in this way. The Ḥafetz Ḥayim thanked the person who had slapped him saying: "You have taught me an important lesson. The laws of Naḥshon also apply to oneself. It is forbidden to speak falsely or in a degraded way about oneself even if it is to preserve humility."

Question C: What does this story say about the process of *teshuvah*? How might one relate this teaching to the better known one of Hillel's in *Pirke Avot*: "If I am not for myself who will be? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

- **Lesson 2: Forgiveness**

Activity 1: Study Maimonides' selection about *teshuvah* in *Mishneh Torah,* chapters 3 and 4, on whether an individual is commanded to accept a person's request for forgiveness.

Activity 2: View and respond to the Ray Bradbury film, "All Summer in a Day." Focus on the last scene, which brings to a close the *teshuvah* drama between the protagonist Margaret and her rival, William. Margaret is an earthling from Ohio who has seen the sun before. None of her friends on this "other planet" have. They are doubtful that the sun will appear as forecast. William is particularly cynical.

William takes the lead in playing a joke on Margaret, locking her in a closet. When the sun actually does come out, William leaves Margaret in the closet in his excitement to get outside to witness the sun. Thus, Margaret, who most passionately believed in the sun's appearance and wanted most to re-experience the light, is the one deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the sun.

When the rain resumes, other friends help Margaret out of the closet, but she has missed her opportunity to see the sun. Unrelenting gray and rain have returned. William is repentant and approaches Margaret on two different occasions, asking for her forgiveness. The film is particularly poignant because the request is nonverbal, in the form of a bouquet of flowers that he picked when the sun appeared.

The film is an eloquent visual *midrash* on the suggestion in *halakha* that one need not accept a person's apology immediately, but must by the third time. Connect the dilemma of the film to the *halakha,* exploring the ways in which the *halakha* might help us either understand or critique both Margaret's and William's actions.

• Lesson 3: Forgiveness and Compensation

Activity 1: Study the selections about forgiveness and monetary compensation from *The Book of Legends* by Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky.[8]

Activity 2: View and respond to the movie, "The Unforgiven," directed by and starring Clint Eastwood. Rated R, this film is especially appropriate for mature teens and adults.

The *teshuvah* focus is the two individuals who were involved in the beating of a prostitute when she teased one of the men about his sexual prowess. The particular scene related to the Jewish text occurs when the two men return to pay their debt in the form of horses, which the sheriff mandated as adequate repayment.

Is this *teshuvah*? Of the two men, the one who stood by at first and eventually stopped his more brutal partner is the one who is most repentant. He brings in a particularly beautiful horse as an expression of his sorrow. The prostitutes respond as a group with great anger. The woman who was beaten never has a chance to respond. But whether or not she should have accepted the payment is a question worthy of exploration.

The film and the text can be highly interactive. For Jewish purposes, the film illustrates how complex *teshuvah* can become when multiple characters are involved.

• Lesson 4: Looking Ahead

Activity 1: Reflect in writing on what you have learned about *teshuvah* from the previous three lessons. Try to connect them to your own struggle to return to God, holiness and righteousness. Put the reflection in an envelope marked "Elul." Return to your reflections early in the month of Elul.

Reflections on the Role of Teacher

There are two frequently heard assertions about teaching that *al aḥat kama v'kama* (all the more so) apply to the teaching of spirituality. They are: 1) good teaching is more often "caught" than "taught" and 2) you cannot teach what you do not believe. To these aphorisms, I would like to add the absolute imperative of teacher self-awareness in the domains of both Jewish thought and educational philosophy.

In regard to the former, I am much indebted to my own teacher Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, *z"l.* Rabbi Eisenstein believed that there indeed are many different ways to understand the spiritual topics of God, Torah and Israel. One could employ naturalistic, transnaturalistic or supernatural strategies for teaching any of the concepts.

The key challenge, he taught, is congruence of the three concepts. A supernatural God is congruent with the notion of a divinely revealed Torah and a chosen people Israel. An equally congruent example from a natural or transnatural perspective is that of a people Israel who searched for the Divine and developed the Torah out of that search.

Congruence

When a teacher is reasonably "congruent" (which is not the same as fixed or static) in his or her beliefs about these three related and fundamental Jewish ideas, good teaching can take place. When, however, incongruent concepts about God, Torah and Israel are employed (e.g., Torah is the product of human wisdom, but God must have revealed it), teaching often becomes either contradictory or insipid.

In regard to pedagogic assumptions, I now return to the opening of the essay. A teacher must be self-aware about his or her goal in relationship to a given Jewish text is to promote Jewish belonging and peoplehood, teach particular Jewish values or help a student explore his/her relationship with God. As I hope I have shown in the lesson plans regarding *Shirat HaYam* and *teshuvah,* these goals are not mutually exclusive. But to be taught effectively, there needs to be a "bracketing" off of the two other goals in order to focus on the third.

What happens when a teacher crosses rather than separates these pedagogic purposes? I offer now as testimony the story of "Aaron and the Wrath of God" (see Appendix). The story portrays a father who, as the informal, bedside teacher of his son, has crossed his pedagogic wires as he presents the God of the "Shema" and its blessings, the succeeding three paragraphs, to his son.

A Story

Aaron's father starts out by treating the second paragraph as narrative for a bedtime story. The telling itself is all bound up with the narratives of peoplehood: "This is something I remember my parents doing with me." The father wants to initiate the son into the same Jewish traditions that were part of his childhood.

Nine out of ten nights, seven-year-old Aaron would simply have processed "*vehayah im shamoah*" (Deuteronomy 11:13-21) as part of the Jewish initiation as well. This passage connects the Israelites' listening and following God's commandments to God's causing natural things to occur, such as rain and the growth of plans. Reciprocally, the Israelites' ignoring of God's words and commandments is linked to the precipitating of God's wrath.

But on this night, Aaron processes the God who rewards and punishes, who shows generosity and anger, through the more intimate and vulnerable sense of spirituality. Aaron's dad must then sort through the different modes of experiencing God, in order to teach his son. Since his son has perceived God in the values and spiritual modes, the father, too, moves the story into the mode of seeking God as the divine support behind the values of compassion and justice.

We learn from the story that good insight can come out of our naiveté about teaching God if we 1) roll with the punches as lovingly and openly as does Aaron's father; and 2) distinguish between "primary" and "secondary naiveté" in our own teaching. "Primary naiveté" is the result of not having confronted rational contradictions in our own understanding of prayer, while "secondary naiveté" is a commitment to surprise and wonder once such a rational examination has actually taken place.

Although these lessons are of great value, I trust that teachers might avoid such dilemmas if they develop congruent Jewish understanding of related conflicts and greater awareness of how they relate to the three goals of spirituality discussed in this article.

Appendix

"Aaron and the Wrath of God"

Ninety-nine nights out of a hundred, the seven-year-old son would have processed the *va-hayah im shamoah* — a symmetrical affirmation in Deuteronomy of just and unjust rewards as a consequence of the observance or flaunting of the *mitzvot* — in a narrative acculturation mode. But on this particular night, Aaron processes the God of the second paragraph of the *Shema* through his more intimate and vulnerable sense of spirituality.

"Who's going to punish us?" he asked, his voice and gaze still far away.

"What?" said his father.

"You said if you're bad you get punished. Who?" He seemed a little annoyed by my apparent dullness.

"Now let me see if I understand your question. You mean . . ."

"Daddy! Who punishes us? The police?"

"No, son, take it easy. God says

that . . . "

"God punishes us? God does it? God?. . ." He was actually huddled up in a ball and his eyes were welling with tears.

[Aaron's dad must then sort through the different modes of experiencing God in order to teach his son. Since his son has perceived God in the values and spiritual modes, the father, too, moves the story into the mode of seeking God as the divine support behind the values of compassion and justice as embodied in the story of Abraham, God and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.]

"Dad, can you argue with God?"

So, what could I say? I told him briefly the story of Abraham arguing for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. I've never seen such an enraptured audience for that tale, either before or after.

[Spirituality is as much hard work as it is an effortless appreciation of God's gifts, so Aaron must work all these thoughts over . . . in his mind and in his dreams. Before going to bed that evening, Aaron announces that he plans to argue with God.]

"What are you going to argue about with God, Aaron?" I asked seriously.

"About this business of punishments. I'm going to tell him to stop it."

"Why don't you ask him to stop it? That seems a lot more polite."

"Okay. But if he says no, I'm going to argue."

"Aaron?"

"Yes, Daddy?"

"Why shouldn't God punish?" I wanted to hear what the Lord would be up against.

"Because it's just not fair. God is too big to be punishing people. People get too afraid of God for that. It's not good. God is too smart for that. God can think of something else to do, instead. I'm going to tell God that."

I listened and I knew. God had no chance in this argument. God was clearly outmatched. "You'll let me know what the answer is?"

"I'll tell you in the morning. Good night, Daddy." And he left.

"Good night, little prophet," I called after him.

The next morning, Aaron came downstairs a little draggy, but clearly happy.

"Well," I asked.

"God said yes!" he told me brightly.

"God won't punish anymore?"

"He promised *me*."

I sat beholding him over the cornflakes. My small giant, ready in the name of justice and mercy to take on anyone, including the Almighty. Tears welled up in my eyes. "Aaron," I said, "you are the best."

"I know," Aaron said.

I kissed him. I watched him as he walked off to school. And despite my will to disbelieve, despite my wish to laugh at this childish nonsense, despite my strong desire to attribute it all to an overactive seven year old imagining a voice in his head, despite all this, I found myself feeling incredibly good and very much at ease,