 Readers Respond

A NOTE ON LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
We welcome your responses to our articles. Send letters to the editor to letters@tikkun.org. Please remember, however, not to attribute to Tikkun views other than those expressed in our editorials. We email, post, and print many articles with which we have strong disagreements because that is what makes Tikkun a location for a true diversity of ideas. Tikkun reserves the right to edit your letters to fit available space in the magazine.

CONGRATS TO TIKKUN
Thanks in part to the efforts of Tikkun, other Jewish progressives, and—to be sure—many others, AIPAC endured an unexpected defeat. More significantly: the world is somewhat safer due to the negotiations with Iran. If all goes according to plan, nuclear proliferation will be curtailed for a decade or more. Critics of the deal are not clear on alternatives: war advocated by some Lukinikis and our domestic hawks might well have proved catastrophic for all involved.

Unfortunately, the jeremiads of nuclear abolitionists are ignored regardless of their prestige and credibility. In his last public speech at Brown University, McNamara advocated for abolition. And General Lee Butler, former Supreme Commander of the Supreme Air Command, became an abolitionist.

This victory shows what those of us on the margins can do—with a little help from our friends.
—Ron Hirschbein, Chico, CA

TRANSFORM THE LAW
I was pleased to see two discussions of restorative justice in the Summer 2015 issue of Tikkun: in Peter Gabel’s visionary essay, “The Spiritual Dimension of Social Justice: Transforming the Legal Arena,” and in Al Hunter’s reviews of two new books on prison abolition. Restorative justice has played a major role in transforming the criminal justice system in countries such as New Zealand, and it is making an impact in jurisdictions throughout the US. It is more than just an alternative approach to crime and punishment. Restorative Justice is an international movement for social transformation.

Embracing this paradigm shift is particularly important in America’s urban centers where the widespread disenfranchisement and despair wrought by mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline is most keenly felt.

There are networks and coalitions of restorative practitioners and supporters working tirelessly in states and cities across the country to build broad-based support for restorative practices. The Restorative Justice Initiative in New York is among them. By linking the restorative justice movement to more visible movements for education and criminal justice reform, we will begin to see substantive change.

All successful social movements embrace a variety of tactics and strategies, but there is no substitute for the mutual recognition, empathy, and healing that can result from face-to-face dialogue. This is the unique contribution of restorative justice.

—Mika Dashman, Lead Organizer, Restorative Justice Initiative, Brooklyn, NY

I would like to respond to the wonderful article by Peter Gabel called “The Spiritual Dimension of Social Justice: Transforming the Legal Arena” in your summer 2015 issue. For many years I have been working with the World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA) to promote the study, dissemination, and ratification of the Constitution for the Federation of Earth, and am currently president of the WCPA.

Peter Gabel’s analysis for the framework of our legal institutions in this country is very much on the mark. The historically “liberal” assumptions that inform the US Constitution and our legal system derive from certain seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social contract thinkers like John Locke who assumed that we are isolated individuals following our self-interest with individual a priori rights vis-à-vis one another and the government that we create to protect those rights.

As Gabel points out, the consequences of these assumptions influence criminal law, tort law, contract law, and property law to the point where the law itself militates against establishing loving and harmonious communities. In such communities, people who break the law are not alienated and ostracized but brought back into the community through compassionate mediation, loving restitution, and the embrace of a larger social justice framework. The social contracts in which we participate, and through which we place people in power to promote social justice and the common good, should not be contracts of isolated individuals defending a priori rights competitively and antagonistically, but rather social communities in which people need to cooperate economically, politically, legally, and culturally to live together in harmony and freedom.

The prophets declared that we are commanded to establish God’s reign upon the earth. We need the vision of a “practical utopia” as a guide toward that divinely inspired end. The Constitution for the Federation of Earth envisons a planetary justice-as-love correcting that which revolts against love. Let us affirm the “spiritual dimension of social justice” for our entire planet. The success of “transforming the legal arena” within the US is fundamentally linked to our capacity to transform the legal arena for the earth. It will be “one world or none,” as philosopher Errol E. Harris declared. If we do not create “one world,” it is likely that we will have none.

—Glenn T. Martin, President, World Constitution and Parliament Association (WCPA); Professor of Philosophy, Radford University, Radford, VA

*Editor’s note: To read the full text of this letter and other responses written in reaction to Peter Gabel’s article, visit tikkun.org/gabel.

DE RIGUEUR
In stark disagreement with my conclusions, Rami Shapiro characterizes Nancy Abrams’ book as “rigorously scientific.” Shapiro notes...
that, “the God that Nancy Abrams found is different” from the host of imagined Gods on which people project what they desire or need. Abrams’ God is not an “echo of desire” but a “necessary condition of an evolving universe.” What puzzles me is that no scientific theory has said, or can say, that God is a necessary condition of the universe. So, whether Abrams means God has been found to be the necessary condition or that the necessary condition ought to be called “God,” neither statement is scientific.

—Alan Soffin, Doylestown, PA