

# Editorial

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This issue of **Self and Society** brings together a number of articles in which psychotherapeutic insights have been brought to bear on our present relationship to the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. They have all been written from an individual personal awareness: each recognizes that the power of the religious symbols, deities, myths that we grew up with, which prevail in our cultural environment cannot be dismissed but may be challenged, shifted, revitalized. We can draw on these sources of spirituality, which are rooted deep in our psyche, our collective and inherited symbols, and still develop new forms and ways of being to meet our present needs, individual, communal and universal.

The transcript of my talk on "Psychotherapy, women and the Feminine in Judaism" (Self and Society Sept/Oct. '86) aroused some lively reactions, suggesting many fruitful directions to pursue. One thought-provoking comment came in a letter from Maurice Clarke, hinting at some reevaluation of the matrix of Christianity, at an unacknowledged matriarchy:

*... "If you develop your thesis, a chapter on Mary, the Jewish Mother, might be appropriate. Jews do occasionally remind Christians (quite rightly) that Jesus was a Jewish boy, and a chapter on his mother (ignoring or encompassing the stated nature of his conception) would be valuable. Mothers show tremendous fortitude in supporting their sons. Mary was no different being beside Jesus on the cross, but perhaps a Jewish mother might have felt especially poignantly at an execution "organised" by the leaders of her own people... . With the emphasis, since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in the Roman church on the virginity of Mary - though she is supposed to have had other children - some correction is needed".*

Since my article appeared there have been two significant related events. At the AHP 'Hebrew Goddess' workshop which I conducted in November, it was abundantly clear that there is a wealth of creativity available and waiting in many people who are disaffected from orthodoxies yet wanting to find a medium for meaningful 'soul-making'. It was a spirited, innovative, day. Then, at the end of that month, the AHPP held its annual conference, the theme this year 'Violence and Spirituality'. Our meeting was down-to-earth, inspiring and heart-warming. For many of us it felt like a 'coming of age' of the AHP movement in Britain, as we acknowledged our struggles, achievements, disillusionments, and assessed the realities and fantasies of our relationship to the dangerous world we live in. We seem to have gained a new humility and with it a new strength.

That conference drew on many cultures for its spiritual symbols, but inevitably the legacy of Western patriarchal religion was painfully present to us. The anger with its God, his rigidifying disciples and their violent practices needs still to rage, and to explore its own violence, a potential medium for transformation. Present also was an essential, inviolable spiritual energy, with its power of stillness, joy, love, aggression, its acceptance of diversity. This found its most meaningful and delightful form in the ritual of the circle dancing we took part in at times during the weekend.

We each have our particularly significant memories of such an event. For me personally two experiences are not to be forgotten, moments, I now realise, of spiritual regeneration. I saw two women in a workshop coming into close contact: one was the daughter of catholic Nazis, the other the daughter of Auschwitz victims.

I looked at one of the grandest and most beautiful of trees in the grounds of Hawkwood College and suddenly saw the natural reality, the felt presence - incarnation? - of the Tree of Life, for centuries a mystic symbol of Kabbalah, a map of spiritual progress. It was a moment of insight into the mysterious relationship of the transpersonal and the substantial. At the same time it suggested to me how the Shekhinah, exiled deity of my race, might come to earth and find her Jerusalem in a green and pleasant land. For British culture still allows us to meet freely, speak freely, breathe freely in such environments, and to find voices for our truth in a world where the enforcement of silence and the tyranny of lies continues to violate and threaten humankind.

**Alix Pirani**

