

Daily Meditation 11/12/2022

In Memoriam: Peter Gabel, Part II

Good morning.

In today's meditation we're continuing our memory and reflections on the life and work of Peter Gabel who died last week, suddenly, of a heart attack at 73 years of age.

And I tell some of the stories that came out at his memorial service, held in his close friend Rabbi Michael Lerner's home, but streamed to the rest of us online.

Peter's most recent book is called *The Desire for Mutual Recognition: Social Movements and the Dissolution of the False Self*. So even in that title, there is much richness: that people look for mutual recognition, this is part of being human. And social movements are meant to gather that common energy and to turn it into something positive.

So that mutual recognition does not mean that some people are stars, some people are billionaires, and everyone else is supposed to honor them, project their greatness onto them. Rather, we need to cut through this need to project on others, and to look to our own depths for our own gifts and our own blessings. And we need to be encouraged to do that by the society in which we live, including its institutions of education, and media, and of law, and of religion, and of art, and of parenting and grandparenting and the rest.

In this book he creates, then, a political vision: what Congressman Jamie Raskin calls "a thrilling and comprehensive take on how to create a different kind of politics in America." And theologian, Cornell West calls Peter "one of the great prophetic voices in our day."

Peter encourages us to think with both our heart and our head, which is very much in the Jewish tradition and was very much picked up on by Thomas Aquinas, who says that truth and justice are the proper objects of the heart.

And Aquinas also says, "Faith resides in the heart--" notice, in the heart, that would mean faith is not a series of dogmas and doctrines to memorize. Faith has something to do with the heart. And of course, that is comparable to saying that trust is the deep meaning of faith.

Trust: it's a heart issue. It's not a head issue.

Now like to share a personal story that I had with Peter Gabel, maybe two of them. When I was teaching and overseeing my master's program in creation spirituality, called the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality. It began in Chicago with Mundelein College, where it thrived for seven years and then we moved to Oakland, California. And it thrived there for 10 or 11 years, but the 12th year was very dire. We were essentially expelled under the pressure of the Vatican, because the Vatican was trying to shut down our program for 10 years.

This is not the present version of the Vatican, Pope Francis, but it was the previous two popes' who called my work "dangerous and deviant."

The idea of creation spirituality -- beginning our religions with the idea of original blessing instead of original sin (in other words, beginning our religions, not anthropocentrically but as the Bible begins in Genesis 1 with the goodness and the *very* goodness of all of creation) -- that was considered dangerous and deviant by two popes over a 34-year period.

When we were expelled from Holy Names College under the pressure of the Vatican, I got a phone call out of the blue from someone I'd never heard of. And that was Peter Gabel's office inviting me to visit with him in the New College, where he was a leader. So I went there and in this very small, very crowded office was he and Rabbi Heschel, neither of whom I'd met before.

But to make a long story short, they said, "We think you've been treated unjustly at Holy Names. We want to invite you and your new University of Creation Spirituality to join us. We will accredit your program, just as Holy Names accredited your program."

It was a very, very generous offer on their part. And of course, they were Jewish, and I was Catholic. And so we had that marriage for a couple of years, then WASC, the accrediting body, in its infinite wisdom, told New College they had to shut down all their new programs, and that certainly included us. Then several years later, they continued their attacks on the alternative and value-oriented, value-oriented work of New College and ultimately pulled the rug out from them, pulled accreditation away from them.

But all this was a prophetic work of Peter Gabel and Rabbi Michael Lerner, and I'm very grateful to them. And also they blessed me and honored me with an award, a *Tikkun* award for ethics, an ethics award in *Tikkun*'s name, for which I too am very grateful.

So I owe Peter and Michael a lot. And I admire their courage and their outreach to someone of another tradition, because we do share common values and common foes.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.