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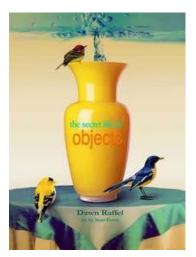
Dear Reader:

In this issue, Lorraine Ash writes, "The function of the mind is to form the right question; the function of faith is to let go of it." That's where Tiferet dwells, at the evanescent threshold separating form and faith, matter and light. We think you'll find this quality of holding two opposites at once, of finding the wisdom in contradictions, beautifully expressed in the offerings below. We hope you enjoy each one.

Diane Bonavist editors@tiferetjournal.com

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# The Prayer Book by Dawn Raffel An excerpt from The Secret Life of Objects

I have very little belonging to my father, who died of a heart attack in the middle of a ballroom dance class. (After his quadruple bypass, he liked to dance to "Stayin' Alive," although he also favored Latin rhythm. At the funeral, the old folks were jealous.) My stepmother dispensed with the bulk of his belongings—the effects, as they say. I don't know where they went. But not long after his death, she led me to a small drawer in their house by the lake, explaining that he had told her it was his private stuff, and he didn't want her looking there. She asked me to empty it out.

I opened the drawer wondering what could be so secret. Inside I found things like batteries and the directions for the Code-a-Phone answering machine. A lanyard and a

wallet I had made for him at camp, with his initials burnt awkwardly into the leather. A keychain my mother had given

him on the occasion of my sister's wedding as a sort of token. An autobiography, typed, stapled – school assignment – written when he was 16 years old. And the thing that shocked me—a prayer book, inscribed to him on his Bar Mitzvah by his paternal grandparents. I'd had no idea that father had even had a Bar Mitzvah. No one in the family had ever mentioned it, and my grandparents did not belong to a synagogue. My father would cheerfully describe himself as a born-again atheist; if you happened to be sitting next to him during a service to which my mother had dragged him, you could hear him muttering "baloney" under his breath.

Yet I don't think he kept the prayer book solely out of attachment to his grandparents. True, I did wonder whether he was laughing from the beyond when I went to a synagogue each week to recite the mourner's Kaddish, the prayer of the bereaved. He believed deeply in science. He talked, despite his professed atheism, about the divinity of subatomic connection, and he told me once that he believed the infinite resided in the infinitesimal. He approached nature with awe. On a postcard sent to me from South America, he wrote only, "I've learned that A SPIDER IS NOT AN INSECT!!! Love, Dad."

Spiders, he respected—ritual, not much. Several times he told me the story of the lost cousin—the child who died because my father's uncle had insisted on going through with a bris in a room full of coughing people, even though the baby was sickly and frail. "What a waste," my father said again and again. And yet, for all his distaste for organized religion, I don't think he could ever be shut of his blood, of his bones, his genes.

The prayer book is old school, insistent on the literal resurrection of the dead, where more reform prayer books lean toward the idea that the dead live on in the living. For a year or so after my father died, I couldn't stop reading books about death, by medieval mystics and postmodern intellectuals, by those

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who believe in reincarnation and those convinced that what comes next is nothing at all. A smidgen of carbon. Maybe, I thought, my father would have liked the death of death theory, which rejects the whole paradigm. At one point, he'd toyed with having his head frozen, freaking out my stepmother. Instead, he'd been cremated. The ashes were buried under a tree, in a cardboard box, in a nature preserve, whether legally or not I do not know.

The prayer book is in my dresser drawer.



Dawn Raffel's illustrated memoir, *The Secret Life of Objects*, was published in June and was on Oprah's Summer Reading List and Best Memoir List for 2012. She is also the author of two story collections— *Further Adventures in the Restless Universe* and *In the Year of Long Division* (which has been reissued as an e book)—and a novel, *Carrying the Body*. Her stories have appeared in O, The Oprah Magazine, BOMB, Conjunctions, Black Book, Fence, Open City, The Mississippi Review Prize Anthology, The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories, Arts & Letters, The Quarterly, NOON, and numerous other periodicals and anthologies. To learn more, click here. Contact: Dawnraffel@gmail.com.

#### In Sorrow (The Seeds of Change) by Susan Jackson

We carry the sorrow
of the mothers
who came before us
we carry the sorrow
of those mothers
and their mothers
the sadness of the old
grandmothers
who tried to carry it alone.
We carry it in our bodies
in our hearts
in our heart's body

the sorrow of those whose babies died and those whose mothers died in childbirth, the woman who grieved for the child she couldn't heal or the child she couldn't have, those whose husbands went to war, those whose husbands beat them, those who had no power, those whose power isolated them or caused them to be burned as witches, those who couldn't read or write, those who wrote in secret or took a man's name for a pen name, those who were silenced, those who would not get off the bus or sit in the back of the bus, those who could not vote or own property or were owned as property, those who tended the farm, birthed the children, whose men were in the mines, the ones who watched history being written, whose ideas became laws, those who were kind and those who became locked in their own grief, travelers from far places who never saw home again, women who didn't speak the language where they lived, women who wrote the language and the songs, those who sang the songs, those who wanted more or had more, who watched a child starve or could not find clean water for her family, those who went to the well and drew the water and baked the bread and cradled the child and spun the yarn or learned to drive when driving was punishable by law, those who prayed, those who swore or cursed, stoned or were stoned, women whose lives were hardened by loss, deformed women, beautiful women, women behind the veil, the widows and the brides

we carry the sorrow
of the mothers
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we carry the sorrow
of these mothers
and their mothers
the sadness of the old
grandmothers
who tried to carry it alone
we carry it in our bodies
in our hearts
in our heart's body

but if we release the secrets, let the small seeds pass into sunlight if we bless them as they go we free the long line of our women a whole lineage so we are free to be ourselves and love the world as it is.



"In Sorrow (The Seeds of Change)" first appeared in the chapbook *All the Light In Between*, Spring of 2013. Susan Jackson's first collection of poems, *Through a Gate of Trees*, was published by CavanKerry Press in 2007. Susan serves on the boards of Poets & Writers, Inc., the Yale University Art Gallery, and the National Arts Club Literary Committee. She is the mother of four grown children. Susan and her husband have recently moved from New Jersey to Jackson Hole, Wyoming.





### Soul Circle by Lois. P. Jones



While traveling in the Czech Republic, I spent time with fellow poets in Terezin, the holding camp for children and artists during WWII. Tens of thousands of people died there, some killed outright and others dying from malnutrition and disease. More than 150,000 other persons (including tens of thousands of children) were held there for months or years, before being sent by rail transports to their deaths. While taking photographs inside the

camp's prison I glanced at the viewer and noticed the thousands of circles caught in the camera's lens yet not visible to the eye. Later, while creating a video I came across this beautiful photograph of Anne Frank. While Anne was never at Terezin she could have been, being both young and creative. Somehow these images seemed to blend in a collage of souls, a Circle of Souls, for we never know how one life will touch another.



Lois P. Jones hosts KPFK's Poets Café in Southern California. She is the Poetry Editor of *Kyoto Journal* and co-produces the Moonday reading series. A multiple Pushcart nominee, Lois has published in *Narrative Magazine*, *American Poetry Journal* and others. She is the 2012 winner of the Liakoura and *Tiferet* Poetry Prizes.

#### An Atheist's Midrash, or Questions to My Keyboard by Charlotte Mandel

Atheistic surety neatly ensconced in my cerebral thoughts since collegiate teens, what draws me to re-vision in poetry the consciousness of a Mary, a Rachel, a Leah? How do I explain the genesis of two poem-novellas based on biblical women—The Life of Mary and The Marriages of Jacob? And why are the words and images of my re-tellings taken by others to be elaborations, dreamings and storytellings that resonate, almost snugly at times, with their own deist religious sureties?

Tone deaf to belief, perhaps, yet I carry a tune that others seem to hear, whose thoughts harmonize in some way with words I've set into poems. What unwitting "yes!" do my poems resound within the "no!" I think to say? What language born of body-rhythm belies my lifelong conscious non-belief in a capitalized One, or scripted dogmatic history? Do I spell with silent alphabet a name too sacred to be uttered?

I do believe in co-existence of soul with this body. Otherwise, what speaks? A spark of life, too transparent to be seen, chime of wind striking a cloud, a hand that wills mine to the keyboard, where I wait for the name of a stranger to appear on the screen as on a ouija board.

I had explained, or so I'd thought, at a reading where I discussed the reasons a Jewish wife-mother-poet identified so deeply with the Virgin Mary, or with Rachel and Leah, that my emotions were secular and angry. I had never read either the Hebrew Bible or the Christian Testament. Yet all my life had felt controlled by the power of their stated or implied decrees prescribing elixirs of female virtue. A good girl, I drank from the cup set before me on my mother's kitchen table. Not any Alice in Wonderland concoction that might send me into giant size or shrink me useless, but a sugar-and-vitamin mix that enabled growth to "just right" housewife-size.

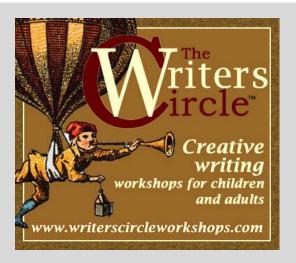
But my vocabulary went awry—it was ever a problem to stay within the confines of *Good Housekeeping's* guidelines. I tried, often with too much success, to tamp thoughts down—shaping my brain as though it were the dough my mother would roller-pin flat for cookies and pies.

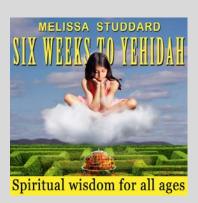
Poetry, allowed to rise at last in midlife, opened guidelines to infinity. My writing moved to challenge images of patriarchal ideal. When writing of biblical Mary, or of Jacob's wives, I was responding with empathy ignited by anger. Apart, I thought, from any religious intent.

But somehow the work, like a dowsing rod, has divined an unsuspected spiritual source. It is not scripture, not ritual, not the tremble of hope on syllables of memorized or freshly composed prayer. Not the begging of alms, not treaty negotiation—so shall I be, this will I give if you will perform that for me. I do not seek self-blame or submission to sorrows because of some ungraspable ur-epistemology beyond human ken. Writing poems, I articulate thanks for love blessed in my life coeval with alarm for the politics of the wider world my grandchildren will inhabit. Each poem is a turning point, a test for hidden springs, and a prayer for easement of thirst.



Charlotte Mandel's eighth book of poetry, *Life Work*, has just been published by David Robert Books. She is winner of the 2012 New Jersey Poets Prize. An independent scholar, she has published a series of essays on the role of cinema in the life and work of poet H.D. Visit her at www.charlottemandel.com.





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## Pátzcuaro by Lois P. Jones





#### Dear Kinfolk, poems by Gail Fishman Gerwin Reviewed by Therése Halscheid

I climb over the hedge that separates/ the old real from the new real writes Gail Fishman Gerwin in Dear Kinfolk, — a poetry collection that embodies her family at large, and all who have influenced her past, present, even future. They becken, they know I didn't/forget their lives, I recorded them (Prologue 19).

And she has. In Section I, *Looking For Me*, the writer searches back in time to call forth school days and summer camps. She does so vividly by way of everyday objects that serve as honest emblems. Her mother's black shoes with rounded toes and thick heels that make her stand *taller than her genes allowed*; a metal box for coins hidden in a maple bookshelf—are the very objects that inform her life (31). They place us inside time, the decades of her youth in Paterson, NJ.

From immediate family members, the we are introduced to a family tree of of an old photograph, we see a white-haired with his wife's small hand like a feather on his detail that calls up the past. In another poem writer's father, mother and sister, enough to eyes, her mother's waist cinched by a slim belt child: Platinum braids wrap my skull (49). Gerwin's poems. Digital photos in "Behold" (127) share the varied ways this writer uses close-up.

An emotional motif runs throughout the

# Dear Kinfolk,



Gail Fishman Gerwin

circle then broadens like rings on a tree, and grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. By way grandfather, full bearded on a damask sofa forearm (47). Again it is the attention to "In This Photo" we peer deep into the catch sun flecks bleaching her sister's blue of the war years (49). We see the writer as Photographs appear time and again in (135) and "I Find My Aunt Frieda In Sepia" pictures to bring her close; to bring us

entire collection by way of lines that call

attention to pogroms, the Holocaust, and faraway relatives whose lives were taken. They too live on the page, are paid homage. Of those who survived, like Aunt Rose in the poem "A Pogrom is A Pogrom," readers learn of oral traditions, family histories that are luckily passed down to the scribe of the family, the writer, Gerwin, who then turns these oral tales into verse (55).

Each family member in this collection—and there are several—is given a vivid depiction. Such as Delly (for Adele) who walked strangely, moved her head forward / and back like a lonely chicken along a barnyard path and who sells paper red poppies each May (67). The writer's level of specificity keeps these figures alive in me; long after the poem has ended.

It is also fitting that many poems of kinfolk are clothed with accessories, as Paterson was known for its silk weavers and lace factories where so many immigrants worked: tatting, crocheting. Each is dressed on the page by way of poetic lists that carry a lyrical quality.

As in Aunt Elsa's friends who wore hunter green /crepe dresses, stoles with staring fox heads and paws, /hats with demure nets shading eyes that had seen / pogroms, eyes that had escaped the gases (53).

As in Aunt Helen who is planted poolside in her skirted bathing suit, black faille, / white piping and a built-in bra (53).

Throughout, Gerwin maintains a steady cadence. Her narrative style is mainly comprised of long lines that sweep across the page. While some poems are written in sections, many fall naturally into measured stanzas, thick with images, tightly woven. It is this attention to balance and detail that comprises a collection wearing a narrative look with a lyric voice.

I smell them – June hedges. They take me back / to Madison Avenue, Paterson, where hedges / mark the boundary between Grandma Decker's / house and ours, writes Gerwin in her last poem "Hedges" (153). ... don't cross, my mother says, / you'll get run over (153). Luckily, Gerwin has found another way of crossing. Relying on memory, oral tales and photographs —she bridges her kinfolk together and gives us their lives.



There'se Halscheid's poetry collection *Uncommon Geography*, received a Finalist Award for the Paterson Poetry Book Prize. Published in several magazines, including *Tiferet*, she has been writing in varied locations, as a house-sitter, for several years. Simple living has fostered a connection to the natural world. Her new work embodies a stay with an Inupiaq tribe of Alaska, as well as a collection of essays about her father, who suffered brain damage for thirty years.



#### When Angels Are Born by Ron Starbuck Reviewed by Adele Kenny

It is arguably true that nearly all poetry is "spiritual," but there is something more specific about the term as it relates to a particular *kind* of poetry. In these spiritual poems by Ron Starbuck, we find a sense of the *nature* of spirit, the intangible as it relates to deity, to humanity, and to all that is.

In this beautifully designed and produced volume from St. Julian Press, Starbuck invites us to journey with him on the inner path that "walks" us through the created world with one another toward God ...

Who is always with us, who is always at work in the world, God who is both noun and verb. (65)

Powered by faith and buttressed by grace, the poems in *When Angels Are Born* point to the truth within us—the realization that the body is not who we really are, that we live in connectedness to greater reality, and that there is no

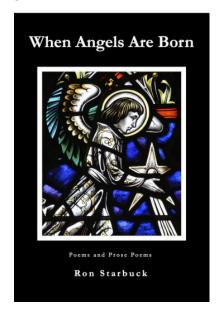
separation or death. Most importantly, this is a book about love:

It has come to me, not suddenly at all but slowly and perfectly throughout all the years that the heart is the first instrument of heaven. (49)

In this collection, Starbuck invites us to share the deepest values and meanings of our human existence: our relationships with one another, relationships with the natural world, our understanding of humanity's immanent or transcendent nature, and our belief in higher truth.

While they are not mutually "spiritual" and "religious" poetry, the expressions of particular faiths. journey, and "religious" suggests a system or organizational structure, enlightenment than belief. While the spiritual traditions and language and other contemplative wisdom of Starbuck's poems focuses on a

To re-create a spiritual (sacred, does not necessarily take the reader experience; instead, the poet offers dimension of mind that is charged the experience. Starbuck's poems do Lightening" is a poem that begins by



exclusive, there is a difference between latter being more specifically individualized "Religion" is part of the larger spiritual belief system. "Spiritual" exists beyond any and spiritual poetry is more about poems in this collection "draw upon the found in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, traditions and faiths" (93), the particularity language of the spirit.

mystical, visionary) experience in poetry directly (or through minute details) into the the reader an opportunity to reflect upon a with the emotional and subjective energy of this often. For example, "Dancing Like recalling childhood lightning storms and

ends by comparing that lightening to how we might choose to live and our responsibility for humanity's condition.

you are the center of the storm in all its majesty and in all its might

that brings the rain to both field and garden feeding the whole world

think about this please if you could live your life with such power and purpose (35)

Starbuck always maintains a perfect balance between the spiritual and temporal worlds, at the same time creating a sense of wonder and awe as in "The Perfection of Wisdom—Heart Sutra."

Where all sense of self dissolves away as we welcome the embrace of heaven found in a single moment of breathing in and out. (71)

The poet is generous with caesuras and line breaks that allow the reader to spend time in each poem's implicit silences. He also leaves the holes and gaps that Dylan Thomas noted, "You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it tick ...You're back with the mystery of having been moved by words. The best craftsmanship always leaves holes and gaps ... so that something that is not in the poem can creep, crawl, flash or thunder in." Starbuck's

poems, which are both lyrical and narrative, create a poetry of relationships that often points to a particular truth or leads readers to think more deeply about their own truths. What is most striking about these poems is that while they incorporate profound theological ideas, they are genuine, heartfelt, and eminently accessible.

Starbuck interweaves sacred literature as a basis for integrating ideas, feelings, and beliefs. In "Fall Has Finally Come" (which is equally about the coming of autumn, aging, and old friends), we find a quotation from Judeo-Christian scripture after the text of the poem (a technique that Starbuck uses several times). The scripture (Psalm 133) ends with what might be considered the message of the seasons' continuum and the focal message of both the poem and the collection:

For there the Lord commanded the blessing— Life forevermore. (83)

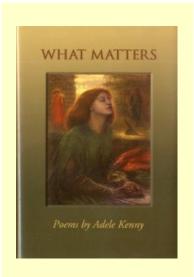
These poems are reflections, affirmations, and prayers. They rejoice with both poet and reader.

They rejoice. They rejoice Because they have seen the truth ... (85)

Personal, non-dogmatic, non-denominational, and inclusive—they are everything that spiritual poems should be—a light in the world (precisely what Starbuck urges his readers to become in the book's title poem).

Is it any wonder, that both Christ and the Buddha told us to be lights of the world.

Let your mind become a light and let your heart shine with the light of love. (91)



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There is, throughout the poems, a strong sense of clarity that invites reflection and meditation. Accordingly, the poems do not end with their last lines but, rather, they remain with the reader long after the book is closed.

In reading these poems, I was reminded of the Tree of Life aspect from which *Tiferet Journal* takes its name. In both Hebrew and Christian associations, Tiferet (Tiphereth) lies at the Tree of Life's heart and represents spirituality, integration, beauty, and compassion. These are Ron Starbuck's subjects in *When Angels are Born*. This book also reminded me of a passage from the Book of Revelation that suggests what Starbuck has done so admirably in this collection: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter..." (KJB, Cambridge Edition).



Adele Kenny is the author of twenty-three books (poetry & nonfiction) with poems published in journals worldwide, as well as in books and anthologies from Crown, Tuttle, Shambhala, and McGraw-Hill. A former creative writing professor, she is founding director of the Carriage House Poetry Series and has been poetry editor of Tiferet since 2006. Among other awards, she has received two poetry fellowships from the NJ State Arts Council and the 2012 International Book Award for Poetry. Website: www.adelekenny.com Blog: www.adelekenny@blogspot.com

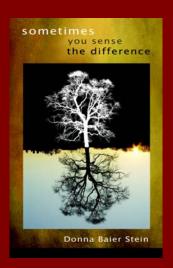
#### Melancholy by Leslie Morley



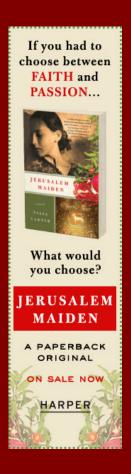


Leslie Morley works as a Naturopath in private practice in Kent and a visiting lecturer at the University of Westminster in London. In her spare time, Leslie enjoys nothing more than going for long walks in the beautiful Kent countryside. It is on those walks she utilizes her love of nature and wildlife and her creative outlet of photography to get a deeper understanding of our connection with the natural world and with all that lies in between and beyond.





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#### From Self and Soul: On Creating a Meaningful Life by Lorraine Ash

In her new spiritual memoir *Self and Soul: On Creating a Meaningful Life*, Lorraine Ash brings her life experiences, including the stillbirth of her only child, onto inner landscapes—the places where divine insight resides. They are the places, she writes, where we make our own meaning.

One to three years after Victoria Helen's stillbirth, when it was clear I would not conceive another child, I became preoccupied with the question of whether I should become a mother anyway. In retrospect, I can see the question arose in me, framed as it was, because others asked me, "Will you become a mother?" or "Will you finish what you started and adopt?" I replied, "I don't know." To adopt or not to adopt? I searched out others' stories of adoption and how their arrangements had worked out. But no matter what they said, I didn't come closer to an answer.

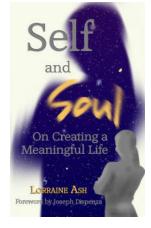
The question kept floating in my mind like tumbleweed, disrupting my inner peace, until finally I visited an ashram to talk to a swami. When I told him about Victoria Helen, his face screwed up in pain. "Oh, that's rough," he said. When I articulated the question that plagued me, his face brightened. "Oh, that's easy."

"Easy?"

He reminded me of a lesson I once had heard him present about the atma, the "I" self that is our ultimate identity as opposed to the smaller personality-bound "me" self. Questions that are mind-numbing conundrums for "me," with its penchant for gathering information and endless thinking, are a piece of cake for "I." He bid me to present the question to the atma. No searching is required, he said. No thinking, either. Atma just knows. I closed my eyes and inwardly asked the question: Should I be a mother? An answer instantly surfaced: Invalid question. You ARE a mother. I had forgotten that atma resides at the core of myself. My answer came when I "remembered" (to use a term from author Maureen Murdock). In spiritual terms I think of

it this way: "Me" comes up with a question circumstances and asks it of the divine "I," my question and answer, moving toward each different directions, interlock like two puzzle function of the mind is to form the right function of faith is to let go of it.

Swami Dayananda, the guru of the swami wrote a tract called *The Fundamental Problem*, bought at the ashram during my visit and library. From time to time I take it off the remind myself the core problem of human



from its life soul. Then other from pieces. The question; the

I visited, which I keep in my bookshelf to existence is

forgetting the atma is embedded in the self and the core desire of the human heart is experiencing the fullness of the self. Swami Dayananda writes:

...this urge to be full, complete ... is, in fact, the desire, behind all topical desires, the fundamental desire, the mother desire, for it is the desire which gives birth to all desires and motivations.

So when we get the car we covet we momentarily feel good. Not because we have the car but because at the moment we get it our mind stops whirring with discontentment that we are incomplete because we don't have it. Ultimately what we want is the calmness of mind that comes when we remember we need not desire anything to be full. We are full by virtue of who we are—atma and all. (On the same theme, spiritual teacher and author Rick Jarow says abundance is "the deep realization you have everything you need to be you.")

When my atma helped me remember I already am a mother, my role became clear: I need to be the kind of mother I am and, in so doing, inevitably help validate the motherhood of every woman like me. What I truly sought was my best self, an idea that was wrapped up with conventional motherhood. I learned I could only achieve that goal by accepting myself as I am and proceeding from there.

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An author, journalist, and writing workshop leader, Lorraine Ash has spent thirty years exploring the power of stories. Her new book, Self and Soul: On Creating a Meaningful Life, helps people direct their lives inward to find their true value. Learn more at www.LorraineAsh.com



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