

Article

Oneness and Mending the World in Arthur Green's Neo-Hasidism

Ephraim Meir

Department of Jewish Philosophy, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan 5290002, Israel; meir_ephram@yahoo.com

Abstract: This article describes and discusses Green's mystical neo-Hasidic thought, his reshaping of Judaism and his combination of scholarship and existential engagement. I showcase how his vision on the Oneness of all and on the unity in plurality leads him to an appreciation of evolution and to the promotion of love energy in all, to ecological care and to a deep concern for what happens in Israel and Palestine.

Keywords: Hasidism; Kabbalah; neo-Hasidism; oneness; environment; Israel; Palestine

1. Introduction

The Jewish philosophy scholar and neo-mystical thinker Arthur Green develops a sophisticated theology in which the consciousness of Oneness leads him to address issues of peace, equality, freedom, democracy and human rights. His neo-Hasidism goes hand in hand with social justice, with the defense of the rights of women, homosexuals, and queer people and with hearing the voices of the oppressed. Although Green defines himself as a thinker and teacher, and not as a social activist, his permanent search for wisdom has clear implications for the political and social sphere. In this essay, I spell out Green's mystical thought. I describe his vision on the Oneness of all and on the unity in plurality. I further showcase how this vision brings him to care for all, to the promotion of love energy, to the struggle for gender equality, and to an appreciation of evolution. I also discuss his care for the environment, and expound on his concern for what happens in Israel and Palestine.

2. Neo-Hasidism

The fine details of Green's sophisticated Kabbalist-Hasidic thinking will probably escape the understanding of those who are not intimately familiar with the depth of Jewish life and thought that is intrinsically linked to the meanders of the Hebrew language. Yet, his mystical thought that centers on evolution and Oneness may be of interest for all those who want to know how mysticism and involvement in social and political action chime together.¹ For half a century, Green studied Kabbalist and Hasidic thought.² His own creative theology continues this tradition, but also differs substantially from it. Green develops and explains his constructive theology in several books (Green 1992, 2004b, 2010, 2015b, 2020). He is a neo-Hasid, not a classical Hasid, belonging to a particular Hasidic community. He is a nonconventional mystic soul who is interested in the renewal of a world affirming religiosity. He looks for a spirituality that gives meaning to human existence. Like Martin Buber, much present in his writings, Green wants to make Hasidism relevant for broader circles of Jews. He continues a Jewish mystic tradition in a loving, non-naïve and critical way. He follows the footsteps of other neo-Hasidic thinkers such as Zeitlin, Buber and Heschel. He loves the mystical tradition, but is aware of the stains in some of its narratives. He is selective in his reading of the mystical sources. He does not accept the distinction between Jewish souls and non-Jewish souls. He dislikes negative talk of "the goyim". He does not agree with gender hierarchy, and criticizes chauvinism. He does not take the mystical tradition at face value, but reimagines it in view of self-transformation



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and transformation of the world. In his post-Kabbalist and post-Hasidic Jewish mysticism, he goes to the roots of Jewish mysticism in view of mending the world (*tiqqun olam*). In this way, he repackages and recreates Judaism, showing its relevance for the present-day world. His revival of Jewish mysticism corrects a dry, rationalistic Judaism that is remote from life itself, and that neglects emotional profundity and passionate engagement. Green's main mystical insight is the Oneness of all. His nondualism leads him to a merciful and lovely engagement in the world.

Green rereads and reimagines the Hasidic teaching and universalizes it. Jews and non-Jews may profit from this rereading. Hasidism started as a popular Jewish movement in the 18th century with Eliezer the Baal Shem Tov. The great spiritual leaders of this movement, which became known to the world through Martin Buber's writings (Buber 1963), developed the view that God is present everywhere, and that one serves Him in joy through whatever one does. Each Jew had his own way of serving God in concrete, daily life. Today, Hasidim in the United States and Israel are fully committed to orthodox life. Much like Buber, Green reimagines Hasidism and develops a religious humanism in which he finds God in the human (Ben Pazi 2023, pp. 39–64). He wants to inspire Jews and non-Jews outside the traditional Hasidic community by providing them with Hasidic values of wholeness, simplicity, love and joy. He lends a universal outlook to the particular Jewish mystic language.

Kabbalah, as the complex of mystical texts and practices and Hasidism that popularized Kabbalah, provide Green with a language that depicts an inward journey leading to acts. So, for instance, the "temple" becomes the word that stands for inner life, and "Moses" is the liberator in each one of us. Green also switches from the vertical dimension to the internal dimension, leading to care for others. His spirituality is meant to be relevant for the world, as the title of his book *Judaism for the World* expresses (Green 2020). In a world that exists in the One, the task is to discover the divine sparks in all and to uplift them to their divine source.

3. Scholar and Activist

Green is an accomplished scholar in Kabbalah and Hasidism, but he became foremost interested in a creative reinterpretation of this tradition. His personal search became research, and his research became personal search. A rabbi and educator, he brings his personal quest and questions to the texts. His personal religious experience colors the ancient mystic symbolism. He studies Jewish mystical writings not in a neutral, detached way, but is involved in what is written, hearing the living voice through the words. A seeker of spiritual life, he is in a permanent spiritual quest. He even confesses that Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Zalman Schachter Shalomi and mostly Hillel Zeitlin saved Judaism for him. He strives to live and formulate a neo-Hasidic Judaism for himself, for spiritually serious Jews and for contemporary seekers (Green 2015b, pp. 269–70).

Green's creative reinterpretation of Jewish mysticism engages him socially and politically. He stood up for the release of Soviet Jews during the period of the Soviet Union. He raised his voice for gender equality. In 1969 his *Havurat Shalom* group, a community of religious Jews founded in 1968, started counting women for a *minyan* (a quorum of 10 Jewish adults required for public prayer) and invited them to equal ritual participation (Green 2015a, p. 231). Green hears the voices of women and men together. He valorizes the female elements in the Divine: "We welcome the devotion to the one God through the channels of *shekhinah* and *binah*, God as life-giving, nourishing, and protecting Mother" (Green 2015b, p. 273). He admits that "[t]he old Hasidism, born of a deeply misogynist Kabbalah, saw that imbalance, but was still part of it" (Green 2015b, p. 286). Green's neo-Hasidism corrects a patriarchal situation by welcoming female energies (Green 2015b, p. 287). With a God as female and male, he raises his voice against the exclusion and for the acceptance of women in rabbinical schools.

Green deems that scholarship is not enough (Green 2020, pp. 244–53). Study and engagement, for instance for the release of Jews from the Soviet Union, belong together. He

has a decennia long involvement in the training of rabbis. He loves personal study, and complains that in the academy the tree of knowledge is cut off from the tree of life. He contests the bifurcation between wisdom and knowledge at the universities. He is in search of wisdom, which—in his view—is unfortunately not the first priority of the academy. He is interested in transformation by responding to a voice that comes out from texts that become alive (Green 2015a, pp. 222–23, 226–27). As a theologian, he gives attention to the religious experience and its transformative power. His study of Jewish mysticism leads him to activity in society. Spirituality for him is inwardness (*pnimiyut*). Yet, this movement to his innermost self is discovered as ultimately “transpersonal”. Inwardness starts in the self but links the self to other selves (Green 2015b, pp. 296–97).

4. Longing for the Source

In the tales of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, Green finds inspiration for his own journey and search for healing. One of these tales beautifully describes how human beings cry and long for Oneness, for God, for an undivided heart. We are far from the Garden of Eden, but we yearn and long for healing of the broken heart. Here comes the story:

There is a mountain, and on that mountain there stands a rock. A spring gushes forth from that rock.

Now everything in the world has a heart, and the world as a whole has a heart. The heart of the world is a complete form, with face, hands and feet. Even the toenail of that heart of the world is more heart-like than any other heart.

The mountain and the spring stand at one end of the world, and the heart is at the other. The heart stands facing the spring, longing and yearning to draw near to it. It is filled with wild yearning, and constantly cries out in its desire to approach the spring. The spring, too, longs for the heart.

The heart suffers from two weaknesses: the sun pursues it terribly, burning it because it wants to approach the spring. The second weakness is that of the longing and outcry itself, the great desire to reach the spring. The heart ever stands facing the spring, crying out in longing to draw near.

When the heart needs to rest a bit or catch its breath, a great bird comes over it and spreads forth its wings to shield the heart from the sun. Even at its times of rest, the heart looks toward the spring in longing.

Now if the heart is filled with so great a desire to draw near to the spring, why does it not simply do so? Because as soon as it starts to move toward the mountain, the mountaintop where the spring stands would disappear from view and the life of the heart flows from seeing the spring; if it were to allow the spring to vanish from its sight, it would die . . .

If that heart were to die, God forbid, the entire world would be destroyed. The heart is the life of all things; how could the world exist without a heart? For this reason, the heart can never approach the spring, but ever stands opposite it and looks at it in longing.

A deeply religious soul, nurtured by the Jewish esoteric tradition, Green comments that we all yearn to see God’s face and to enjoy His presence. We all want to drink from the divine well, but the gates of the Garden of Eden are closed. However, from the moment we become conscious that we are far from the life-giving Spring, we become aware of the fact that we *are* close to it (Green 2020, pp. 284–86). The human alienation is overcome in the healing power of those who spread love and show mercy.

In Rabbi Nahman’s story, Green appreciates the longing of “the heart of the world” for the “Source”. We long to be healed and to be whole again. This healing is done in mending a fractured world (*tiqqun olam*). Yet, he himself develops an alternative way of speaking about God. In his radical theology, nature, God and the evolution of humankind are intimately linked. Green’s search for wisdom leads him to a deep inner reality which

manifests itself as the unity of all. In his personal interpretation of Hasidism, he calls for the unity of all within the Oneness. In his unitive vision, the other human being is no other, since I am part of the whole (Green 2015a, p. 232). This vision lies at the root of his humanist care for all. Good care for others expresses the love for God. Others are “our fellow limbs on the single Adamic body or Tree of life” (Green 2015b, p. 273). Green finds in the daily prayer *Shema’ Yisrael* “Listen Israel, the ineffable Name is our God, the ineffable Name is One” (*Shema’ Yisrael YHWH ‘elohenu, YHWH ‘èhad*; Deut. 6:4), a reminder of the unity, which commands the creation of unity: “Thou shalt love” (*ve-‘ahavta*; Deut. 6:5) (Green 2020, p. 110). In love and care, we testify to the One beyond naming: “In caring for the other, we reassert the One” (Green 2015b, p. 285).

Green calls himself “a mystical and panentheistic theologian” (Green 2015a, p. 237). He quotes the Zoharic expression “no place is devoid of God” (*let ‘atar panui mineh*; Tiqqune Zohar 57). The one underlies everything; transcendence is present within immanence (Green 1995, p. 15; 2015a, pp. 234–36). He is fascinated by God’s glory manifest in everything, and goes from monotheism to monism.³ In his theology, the nondualistic Oneness is “the unity of all being in God”. In moral behavior, “you bear witness to the One who dwells in all” (Green 1995, p. 15). God is “world-filling” and “world-transcending” (Green 1995, p. 15). A religious person is the one who perceives the holiness of life and who testifies thereby that being or YHWH underlies and unifies all that is (Green 2015a, p. 119).

In Green’s nondualistic Jewish spirituality, God dwells in us and inspires “Moses” in us to rebel against every Pharaoh, and to strive for the liberation of all (Green 2015a, p. 309). God is not a *deus ex machina*, but the One manifest everywhere and discovered in the sparks in the human beings. God (JHWH) and Being (HWYH) are One, two sides of the same reality (Green 2015b, p. 309–11). In his recreated Hasidism, the physical and the spiritual go together. The world is within the divine Presence (the *Shekhina*), but God is also beyond. “He is the place of the world, but the world is not His place”) *hu meqomo shel ‘olam ve-‘ein ‘olamo meqomo*; Midrash Bereshit Rabba 68:9). Jewish life is dedicated to the unification of male and female within God (*le-shem yichud qudsha berikh hu u-shekhinte*) (Green 2015b, p. 277).

Close to Rabbi Nahman, but different from the Hasidic master who personalizes the Divine, Green imagines God as loving energy. God is a mysterious transcendent entity in every human being (Green 2015a, pp. 233–34). Transcendence “dwells within immanence” (Green 2010, p. 18). Its full presence is ungraspable and ineffable. There is only One, undifferentiated whole. Through contraction of divine presence (*tsimtsum*), we see ourselves as separated, but ultimately there is only One and we are all one. The great Hasidic masters joyously served God and knew that there are several ways to be in service of the One (Green 2015b, pp. 271–72). Green has his own way, in accordance with the utterance of Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol, who said: “When I die and go the world to come, they will not ask me, Zusya, why were you not Moses? They will ask me: Zusya, why were you not Zusya?” (Sacks 2005, p. 252).

Green proposes to think about God not in terms of higher and lower, but in terms of inward and outward. Instead of a God as a Supreme Being, on the top of a (Sinaitic) mountain, we may discover the deepest reality as a well that flows freely. God is not the “whole other” of Rudolph Otto (Green 1995, p. 12). Inheriting the sense of wonder of his teacher Heschel, Green repeatedly says with the Bible: “The whole world is filled with His glory” (*melo’ kol ha-‘arets kevodo*; Isaiah 6:3), and with the Zohar: “There is no place devoid of Him”. God is unutterable, approached as “filling all worlds and surrounding all worlds” (*memaleh kol ‘almin u-sovev kol ‘almin*. Zohar 3:224a), manifest in the world. In Ezechiel’s vision, in which the prophet sees God as “an image like that of a human” (Ez. 1:26), Green finds support for his daring interpretation that puts the Divine and the human together (Green 2020, p. 80). Nevertheless, saving transcendence, he emphasizes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Green 2004b, p. 18). Humans are not the organs of God, but his garments (Magid 2013, p. 101).

Shaul Magid has described Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Arthur Green as radical theologians, who moved beyond monotheism, undermining in this way Assmann's Mosaic distinction (Magid 2013, pp. 79–88). He explains that in Schachter-Shalomi's pantheistic vision, the divine–human relationship has overcome its vertical metaphor, since *'efes biltekha* (there is nothing beside You) means that there is really nothing else that exists (Magid 2013, pp. 75, 78–88). After Schachter-Shalomi, who broke free of the monotheistic paradigm, others developed a nondualistic Judaism. The most known representative of this new trend, after Schachter-Shalomi, is Arthur Green (Magid 2013, p. 97). Green developed his own personal theology, but is part of a group of Jewish intellectuals who represent a new trend in Judaism that is nondual (Magid 2013, p. 288, n. 122).

Green's radical Judaism, and especially his views on the Divine, have been criticized from an Orthodox viewpoint. Rabbi Daniel Landes, director of the Jerusalem Pardes Institute, challenged Green's original thoughts in his review of *Radical Judaism*. Green responded to Landes's rather unpleasant article.⁴ Thereafter, Landes's critical review and Green's response led to a public conversation on the Internet. The controversy shows the divergences between Landes's traditional Orthodox standpoint and what Green calls his "monist theology". Unlike Orthodoxy, Green has a nonliteral understanding of creation and revelation. For him, there is no outside, personal and commanding God. The world derives from God. He develops a Jewish, nonreductionist version of pantheism, retaining transcendence that does "speak" through our "inner voice". To my mind, this view of a Jewish seeker of Unity (*dorshe yihudèkha*) has an honorable place in the plethora of views on God in the pluralist Jewish tradition. Green, as an open-minded religious humanist, reconfigures religious imagination that fits our postmodern period.

Alan Brill too discusses Green's radical theology. Instead of a sky-God and God as King, Green suggests a pantheistic oneness of being, an energy for evolution. Brill himself sees advantages in continuing the image of a hierarchical God, and asks if Green's *Radical Judaism* is "a vision for the 21st century future of Judaism or was it just the spiritual autobiography of a baby-boomer?"⁵ I think that Green's theology, with a view of God as an energy that lends meaning to life, remains highly inspirational for all those who are in search for a different language than the traditional one in view of giving meaning to their religious life. Leaving aside parental and royal imaginary of the Divine, he writes about his experience of the Divine within all.

In response to Green's review of his *Hasidism Incarnate*, Magid discusses the differences between Schachter-Shalomi's organistic pantheism and Green's pantheistic monism (Magid 2016). For the first one, God is a divine body as a living organism, and the community is part of that body; multiplicity is part of God. For the latter, the One is a transcendent, undifferentiated being and differentiation is not essential revelation, but stems from the "inner call" of the self. Magid notes that Green prefers Moses Cordovero's access to divine energy (*shèfa*), whereas Schachter-Shalomi follows Isaac Luria with his theory of divine contraction (*tsimtsum*) and rupture of the Godhead (*shevira*) through the divine sparks. Magid deems that the Hasidic masters adopted the Lurian model, which created the possibility of an incarnational model, to which Green objects.

The many reactions to Green's work illustrate how Green's theology aroused great interest among Jews who want to deepen their spiritual life. With his mystical theology, Green takes seriously Rabbi Ishmael's saying that the Torah speaks in human language and offers his unique, original interpretation of the ancient Jewish wisdom.

5. Divine Image, Equality and Democracy

In Green's theology, the Divine is not personal, nor does it command or elect. The pantheistic One unfolds and becomes; it is present in the evolutionary process, in everything. The human beings respond to a universal, inner divine call (Magid 2013, pp. 97–101).

As a consequence of his monist worldview, Green develops a religious humanism. Mysticism and humanism complement each other (Green 2015a, p. 110). He deems that God *has* an image and it is the human being. Being created in the divine image means that

there is something divine in the human. The human being creates the image of God in herself (Green 2015a, p. 231). Since every person is in the divine image, Green stands up for the uniqueness and equality of all.

If all human beings are created in God's image, one has to come up for equal rights for all, for rights of women and of minorities. Green's resistance and social activity stem from his belief in each person as in God's image. Values of democracy and equality are part of his worldview, since all are in the divine image. With his belief in evolution and of the uniqueness and dignity of each human being, he welcomes those who were once rejected (Green 2015b, pp. 288–89).

Green's commitment to ancient Judaism within the bounds of today's ethics is part of his neo-Hasidic credo:

"Yes, there are ethical limits to our traditionalism. We are not ashamed to say that we have learned much that is positive from living in an open society that strives toward democracy and equality. These values should become part of our Judaism. Ultimately they are rooted in the most essential Jewish teaching that each person is a unique *tsèlèm 'elohim*, divine image. Traditions that inhibit the growth and self-acceptance inherent in that teaching must be subject to careful examination and the possibility of being set aside. New ways of thinking that enhance our ability to discover the divine image in more ways, or in people we once rejected, need to be taken seriously as part of the Torah". (Green 2015b, p. 288)

6. Judaism as Counter-Culture, Healing Power, and Open, Spiritual Reality

Green reshapes Judaism as a religion that promotes quest and a vision of life. The Jewish mystic literature, with its symbolic language and imagination, helps him in the reconstruction of Judaism (Green 1995, pp. 12–13). He believes that "postmodern Jews' recovery of the kabbalistic-hasidic tradition is a decisive event in our ongoing spiritual history, one that should have a great impact upon the future of Jewish theology" (Green 1994, p. 5).

Green's Judaism is not a Judaism of fear, nor a mere set of rules. Rather, it bears a message of love, compassion and healing. It is self-transforming because of the primordial question "where are you" (*ayeka* Gen. 3:9), to which one responds in mending the world. Work or service (*avoda*) consists in self-transformation and looking for the divine sparks in everybody and everything. Green's Judaism is foremost a counter-culture, to stand up against the mighty, like Jeremiah, Yeshayahu Leibowitz and the writers Amos Oz and David Grossman (Green 2020, pp. 237, 287).

Moreover, Green considers the Jewish mystical tradition as conveying a great healing message and a wisdom that he wants to share in order to help broken spirits to become whole again through human caring and relationship:

"It surely is [. . .] no coincidence that I was drawn to the figure of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, whom I depicted as the great wounded healer of the Jewish tradition, in a book I called *Tormented Master*, back in 1979. The accounts of Rabbi Nahman, uniquely among hasidic sources, depict a childhood of great psychic pain, marked by loneliness, doubt and a constantly gnawing sense of inadequacy. His disciples claimed that he had overcome all of these, becoming the greatest of hasidic masters, one to whom countless thousands, both in his lifetime and even more today, turn for blessing and healing. As his biographer, I understood that he had not truly 'overcome' any of this pain, but that he had learned to turn it around and use it as a tool of empathy, allowing him to soothe the pain of so many others, 'to pull them out of hell by the *peyos* [forelocks]', as he once said". (Green 2020, p. 289)

Green himself knew a long period of caregiving for his ill wife. As opposed to mystical healers, he writes about healing without pretending to cure. Prayer "heals the one who prays, restoring a wholeness or a balance that can be lost when we are beset by concern or

worry" (Green 2020, p. 283). Given the One who lies in our heart and in the heart of the one for whom we pray, Green believes that the love energy, expressed in prayer, reaches the other. He interprets the *'amidah* phrase *refa'enu ha-shem ve-nerafe* to mean "'Soften us up, O Lord, so that we may be able to receive healing'. Open our hearts so that we can receive the gift of those who seek to heal. Help us to break down our own resistance to Your healing love! This was a message I needed to hear then and still could use to listen more fully today" (Green 2020, p. 283).

In traditional Judaism, the divine commandments occupy a central place. For Green too, outer deeds are important, but they are means, not ends. They are "vessels to contain the divine light that floods the soul". *Mitsva* (commandment) is linked to the Aramaic *tsavta* (togetherness): God and the human are together. One is called to serve the Holy One (*'ana 'avda de qudsha-berikh hu'*) by respecting the holiness of all life. Love of God is witnessed in the love of all creatures (Green 2015b, pp. 272, 281–83). Green loves the Jewish tradition, but does not think in strictly legal categories. In Boston, he created a transdenominational, pluralist rabbinical school. His entire work consists in translating the tradition into a viable Jewish spirituality for today. He envisages a revival of *Halakha* (literary: a way to walk; the normative path) that is noncoercive and inclusive, embracing a plurality of approaches. Such a *Halakha* is a path "that we are not yet ready to define" (Green 1992, p. 72; 2020). He does not think primarily in today's Halakhic categories, and deems that the praxis depends upon the individual. Judaism is, for him, not a legal system that one must observe. *Mitsvot* and *Halakha* are not interchangeable terms. The 613 *mitsvot*, corresponding to the 248 limbs and 365 veins in the human being, are knowable before Sinai, whereas *Halakha* is already institutionalization, which was necessary given the weakness of the human being. *Mitsvot* are spiritual needs of the individual and not a command of an external God. Already as a third-year student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Green conceives religion as based on Unity, in which there is no distinction between within and without.

Whereas the Orthodox position usually approaches *Halakha* as the Law, Green regrets this equation. For him, *Halakha* is a way to walk through the world, a path and a discipline that one *may* choose. He emphasizes that all Jews are heirs of the Jewish tradition, not only the Orthodox.⁶

Green has a welcoming attitude towards people who are close to Judaism or who come to Judaism and want to creatively live out of the Jewish tradition (Green 2015a, pp. 246–47). At the same time, he widens the meaning of Israel, as does Emmanuel Levinas (Meir 2008, p. 108). Israel stands for humanity (Green 2020, p. 323). In a radical way, by reimagining Judaism and translating the particular Jewish language in a universal language, he calls for a new religious awareness. He sees evolution in the people of Israel, for instance, from an eye for an eye to compensation, and from a tribal God to a universal one. He universalizes Israel, which becomes every community of righteous people that testify to the One in engagement for others (Green 2015a, pp. 111, 131). Israel, for Green, is a spiritual reality, started by Jews, but not restricted to them (Magid 2013, p. 105).

7. Ecological Crisis

One of the highlights in Green's radical poetic-theological thinking lies in rereading the evolutionary theory in light of the Kabbalah. He wonders at the evolutionary process that brought us to where we are now and that guides us to an unseen and unexpected future. This process is meaningful. It contains a struggle for survival, but it also has cooperative elements. In the process of interaction and interrelatedness of all, we are "called" (by an inner voice) to care for the survival and maintenance of our biosphere and of the cosmos (Green 2015a, pp. 126–27). Mystical thought and ecological activism go hand in hand for Green.⁷

Against the Platonic dualism between spirit and matter, his spirituality embraces nature. As a student of Abraham Joshua Heschel, he is attentive to wonder: the divine presence fills the world, but the pursuit of success and comfort blinds us.⁸ To my mind, his nondualism is close to the Advaita Vedanta monism and to Thich Nhat Hanh's interbeing

(Rambachan 2015; Meir 2021a, pp. 89–95). On the backdrop of an all-pervading Oneness, Green calls for a change in our attitude to the environment. We will have to take full responsibility for our natural home instead of destroying it in overconsumption and greed. Green looks for a community of all and celebrates evolution, in which the Oneness manifests itself. Ecological sustainability and vegetarianism will have to complement or perhaps replace the laws of kashrut (Green 2015a, p. 41). In his theology of creation, he is conscious of the destruction of the biosphere and of our obligation to preserve it (Green 1995, p. 17).

Green's book *The Heart of the Matter* contains a chapter entitled "A Kabbalah for the Environmental Age" (Green 2015b, pp. 313–24). He writes on the holiness of the natural world. He approaches God and the universe as deep structure and surface. The multiple comes from the One. In Green's Kabbalist terminology: The ten *sefirot* (numbers) flow from the One. Mending the world (*tiqqun 'olam*) is the ascendance, the uplifting of the lower worlds towards the One, towards Unity (Green 2015b, pp. 314–15). The letters Yud-He-Waw-He form the verb "to be". It is the holy, ineffable verb-name ("I shall be whatever I shall be" of Ex. 3:14; 'èheyè 'asher 'èheyè) or being itself, HaWaYaH. From the silent *alef* comes all language (*bet* of *bereshit*) (Green 2015b, p. 316). Therefore, all that exists is less a Darwinian struggle for life than a journey towards oneness. In Green's vision, the first chapter of the Bible (*bereshit*) is not about cosmology, but about multitude stemming from oneness and about protecting what is, in the consciousness of the primacy of the one to the many. The one underlies the many (Green 2015b, p. 318).

Green's thought on ecology follows from his vision on Unity, on the One in the multicolored coat of being. Behind any dualism (*bet* = two) is the One (*alef*). Behind diversity, there is oneness, to which all returns. The One is behind evolution as life energy and life forms. It is the *telos* of existence in which humans represent a developed stage, as in "God's image". Harmony with the nonhuman world makes us stewards of nature. We discover the unity of all (*yichud*). Humans are a microcosmos as a replica of the One. Recognizing Oneness in humans, plants, animals and minerals, Green perceives the one light in the multiplicity. This is a consciousness of "miracles" that are daily with us, as we say in the daily prayer of *shmone 'èsre*. Green's reformulation of the new path (*Halakha*) responds to the new challenges. He refers to sensitivity for the suffering of other forms of life. In *torat hayyim* (teaching of life) he opposes wasting living resources and appreciates forests, water and air. Limiting our power and opening our eyes to the marvel of existence brings about a renewed sense of wonder. The earth is threatened by human action. Consciousness of the unity of all leads to a change of our economic system and puts limits to consumption.

In the volume *Judaism for the World* we also find a chapter on religion and environmental responsibility (Green 2020, pp. 214–22). Here, Green defines the environmental crisis as the most serious challenge of our age (Green 2020, p. 215). He deems that we are too much concerned with internal problems, and that we do not see the deadly threat of the environmental crisis. He addresses Jews and Christians, but in fact all religious people, to take global action for the protection of our biosphere and against the abuse of the planet. Jews and Christians share a language of creation and, therefore, they share a common concern for the future of the planet.

Green refers to the Jewish consciousness of our belonging to nature. Shabbat calls for the respect of nature. Before reciting *Shema'* each morning, we pray that God "renews every day the work of creation". We will have to take care of it. Green notes that the creation is brought about by God's word. He argues that since words are the beginning of symbolism, the divine word that creates the world says "that all existence is potentially *meaningful*, translatable into categories of speech" (Green 2020, p. 217). In Israel's credo, *Shema' Yisrael* ("Listen strugglers") we are invited to listen (Green 2020, p. 218).

Turning to Christians, he mentions Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudatio Si* of 2015, with its concern for the environment and the poor. The encyclical criticizes consumerism and calls for a common home and economic justice. The wealthy society has responsibility for the Southern Hemisphere, with its climatic disasters and poverty. Green criticizes

politicians who contrast business interests with earth-friendly behavior. The environment is not a priority for them. Green asks, how will the business of the wealthy thrive on a scorched planet?

To the concern of *Laudatio Si*, Green adds his concern for freedom and liberation. We have to be freed from Egypt (*mitsrayim*), from constriction and narrowness (*me-tsar*). We hear the Sinaitic voice “I am YHWH your God who brings you out from Egypt, the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2), out of economic and political oppression, free from addiction and divisiveness, from inability to control our passions, from our drive for success toward the wide-open spaces. We share values of democracy, gender egalitarianism, care for our natural home and for the freedom and liberation of all.

8. Love of and Critique of Israel

Green’s consciousness of Oneness also has implications for his view on Israel and Palestine.⁹ He situates himself on the left side of Zionism, but he lives mostly in the United States. He writes about “our beloved State of Israel” (Green 2015b, p. 287). Israel, he notes, is a haven for Jews. His criticism of Israel is one that has its source in his love for Israel. This love leads him to active involvement in struggle against injustice. After 1967, Jews are the stronger ones who do not give equal rights to Palestinians. The Palestinians, from their side, are not ready to offer peace to the Jews. Green supports the two-state solution, and reminds us that we were called “merciful sons of merciful fathers” (*rahamanim bené rahamanim*) (Green 2015a, pp. 251–52). He does not lend a messianic significance to the state of Israel, as is usually done by religious Jews in Israel, and he criticizes the lack of proper relation to the Arab population in Israel and in the occupied territories.

He deems that the best security for Israel is to abandon the West bank and to help create a viable Palestinian state. He refers to the prophets who taught us to care for social justice and to promote peace. He speaks truth to power. One cannot leave the peace process to the Israeli leaders. One has to create an atmosphere from the bottom, in view of promoting peace between Israel and Palestine. The compassion of the Jews does not have to stop at the borders of Gaza. We have to care for those living in Gaza and Westbank. Like Judith Butler, Green problematizes the word “security” (Green 2020, p. 135; Butler 2020).

Israel is great as a place of refuge for Green, but it is also a challenge. It has not been a great success as a welcoming society. Green takes justice and the proper treatment of the stranger very seriously. He talks about a kind of colonialism in the West bank. A struggle for the soul of Judaism is going on (Green 2015a, pp. 249–50).

Judaism for the World contains his letter with the title “Dear brothers and sisters. A letter to Israelis” (Green 2020, pp. 254–72). Green writes the letter as “one who loves Israel and is gravely concerned about its future” (Green 2020, p. 254). He believes in the legitimacy of the state of Israel “as a nation of all its citizens”. He regrets that the dominant perspective in Israel is that first of all, one has to take care of security since you cannot trust people. This does not leave room for Jewish values and questions of ultimate meaning. Green deems that the memory of our own oppression forbids the oppression of others. After 1967, there are the territories and settlements. We must remember that all are in God’s image (*be-tsèlèm ’elohim*).

Will there be a Palestinian State, or an annexation that leads to one state with all the problems of inequality? Green deems that nothing less than the image of the Jewish people is at stake. Self-critically, looking at his own country, he recalls the major American sins: they took the land of others and imported African slaves. “This is the lesson to be learned from the history of America” (Green 2020, p. 271). He mentions the shortsighted Israeli governments, the poverty in Gaza and the degradation of Arabs in the West bank. There is “moral blindness” and a lack of opening “our hearts to the wounds and needs of the other, with whom we are destined to live side by side” (Green 2020, p. 271).

At the end of the letter, he returns to the question initially asked: why should Israelis listen to him, an American Jew? He answers that he has “love for Israel” (*ahavat Yisrael*): “We love you, despite all that has come between us [. . .] The ones who really love you are

these troubling and sometimes annoying cousins from across the sea. *We are still family. Listen to us*" (Green 2020, p. 272).

Green's care for all human beings stems from his deep religious feelings. He refers to the Talmudic question: why are the human beings created as stemming from only one human? The answer is: so that nobody can say that his father is greater than the father of others. In the same universal vein, Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai thought that the basic principle of Judaism is that God created every person in His image (Bereshit Rabba 24, in reference to Gen. 5:1–2) (Green 2015a, p. 251). The divine is in every human being. Even beyond the human being, the divine presence is in everything. The marrow of Green's spiritualism is profoundly humanistic. He is a religious Jew, but a secular, nonmessianic Zionist. From his teacher Abraham Joshua Heschel, he learned that the exclusivist affirmation that "my God is not your God" is idolatry (Heschel 1967, p. 86; Green 2010, pp. 102–3). In the land, Muslims and Jews are called to serve God in cooperation with each other: they share the land.

9. Conclusions: Celebrating Diversity and Loving Oneness

Green celebrates diversity in the unity of all. As a result of his promotion of a diversity of lifestyles, he perceives truth beyond all religions. This insight contributes to a dialogical theology (Meir 2015). He opposes exclusivism and superiority. He lives his Judaism profoundly, in great openness to the plural manifestation of religious experiences. He develops a transdifferent view in his pluralist theology. He mentions Franz Rosenzweig, who developed a Jewish theology of Christianity (Meir 2018), and writes that we have to do this for other religions (Green 1995, p. 21).¹⁰ Like his mentor Heschel, he becomes active with religious others (Green 2015b, p. 289). Against exclusivism, he quotes from the Sayings of the Fathers "Who is wise? One who learns from every person" (Avot 4:1).

More generally, Green believes in the underlying unity of all, not a struggle and survival of the fittest. There is a common source for all that exists. The One wants the many (Green 1995, pp. 19–20). "We worship the One manifest in all the many traditions of humanity" (Green 1995, p. 22).

Ariel Evan Mayse rightly characterizes Green as "a religious seeker" and "a religious humanist", whose theology is "a mystical and monistic panentheism" (Green 2015a, pp. 1,15, 26). Green is indeed a seeker, who pursues God's presence, in answer to the call "Seek His face, always" (Ps. 105:4). He also takes his personal search for spirituality seriously. God for him is not outside, a Supreme Being, who governs history. Green believes in the Oneness of all, and this leads him to active involvement in the world, which he greatly loves. In his creative reinterpretation of Hasidism, he invites people to follow the footsteps of Abraham as the "classical Jewish seeker", and to continue the journey which is still unfinished. Open to the values of our world, he formulates and lives a nonconventional "seeker friendly Judaism" that impacts the world and is impacted by the world (Green 2015b, pp. 270, 286). The particularity of such a Judaism lies in its universality. In a time that we witness religious fundamentalism and the politization of religion, Green's heterodox radical theology is an invitation to discover again loving religious energy that enlightens our world.

Through his nontheistic approach of God as the "inner force of existence itself", Green testifies to that force in his loving care for all human beings and in his engagement for our environment (Green 2015a, p. 120). With his radical idea that there is no being other than God, he values that each person is truly God's image, and that nature with its earth, air and water is holy. Since transcendence dwells in immanence, since the One underlies the many, he fully appreciates the evolutionary process which made possible the life that we live. The evolving life energy, the *dynamis*, is for Green the self-manifestation of the One Being. It is not a violent struggle, but a meaningful process. Much as Brahman in Hinduism, the One garbs itself in multiplicity. This harmonic vision of all that is, born in wonder, does not resemble Darwin's struggle for life. It allows for our participation in an endless meaningful process. Care for our natural home and interconnectedness with other human

beings contribute to the positive development of that process, that is, the development of Being itself (Green 2015a, pp. 121–25). As in process theology, Divinity is in a state of becoming (Magid 2013, p. 99). The Divine is a process without end. We are responsible for the self-articulation and self-fulfillment of the One (Green 2015a, p. 128). In the process of the free, unfolding and unnamable One, we are paradoxically “commanded” to be free and to free others. In Green’s spirituality, human beings are not determined by fate and condemned to live a meaningless life. In treating others in justice and love, and in saving and maintaining our environment, we testify to the One and its miraculous evolution.

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Notes

- ¹ He expresses his active spiritualism in several works: (Green 1992, 2004b, 2010, 2020).
- ² (Green 1979, 1989, 1997, 2004a, 2015b). Green is also the editor of *Jewish Spirituality* (Green 1986, 1987). He was ordained a rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He taught at the University of Pennsylvania and at Brandeis University. He was president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and created a non-denominational rabbinical School at Hebrew College in Newton, Massachusetts. Apart from his scholarly work, he is much involved in Jewish education. For instance, (Green 1999) is dedicated to his sister Paula. In fact, this lexicon of Jewish words is for all the women who could not receive a Jewish education as their brothers.
- ³ Ariel Evan Mayse qualifies Green’s theology as a “monistic pantheism” (Green 2015a, p. 15). Cautious theologians interested in boundaries could object that this is a problematic expression; they could ask for a clear decision if Green is a monist/pantheist, or rather a pantheist. In my view, the question whether Green is a more classical pantheist or a radical monist who believes in a developing and self-articulating God is not quite relevant here. As I will show, Green’s texts go in both directions and testify to a unitive and nondualistic vision that implies a profound humanism. In an interview with Alan Brill, Green defines his theology as a “mystical and monistic pantheism” (See Brill’s blog “The Book of Doctrines and Opinions. Notes on Jewish theology and spirituality” of 18 February 2021).
- ⁴ Landes’s article appeared under the title “Hidden Master” in the *Jewish Review of Books* of fall 2010.
- ⁵ Alan Brill’s discussion of Green’s radical theology appears in his blog “The Book of Doctrines and Opinions. Notes on Jewish theology and spirituality” of May 1, 8 and 22, 2010. The quotation is from Brill’s blog of May 22.
- ⁶ So in his interview with Alan Brill in “The Book of Doctrines and Opinions. Notes on Jewish theology and spirituality” of 18 February 2021.
- ⁷ For environmentalism in Jewish studies: (Tirosh-Samuelson 2011, 2012).
- ⁸ For Heschel, nature refers to God. His theology is essential for the construction of a full-fledged eco-theology, in which nature is not merely an object of manipulation. Following Heschel’s sensitivity to the religious dimension in nature, Schachter-Shalomi, Green and Arthur Waskow developed a Jewish eco-theology (Meir 2020, pp. 60–3).
- ⁹ For a discussion of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: (Sokatch 2021).
- ¹⁰ For a detailed and critical discussion of Rosenzweig’s treatment of religions in the *Star of Redemption* in the perspective of an interreligious theology: (Meir 2021b).

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