

moments to reflect on the mysteries of our being or our humongous human work. This remains the case for us Christians, and I intuit it's still true for you Jews.

Modern America has relegated holiness to just a few days, split the Spirit from the moil that controls our year. I've chosen to break with modern convention and send you this holiday business prayer, an urgent request for your activism in shaping things to come.

This winter solstice I am far from my native Appalachia, visiting my wife Jennifer's family on the rugged coast of Oregon where the hills zigzag down into the water; in Cannon Beach. Here is a salty jewel in the crown of the rural Northwest, a hearty good spot to scribble this letter. The Oregon shore has retained much of its unmolested beauty. Its beaches are scattered with huge rock monoliths, awesome ancient geomorphs jutting skyward from the foam that rolls onto the flat expanse of sand. One of these shapes, nicknamed Haystack Rock, is ranked among the largest coastal monoliths in North America. As big as a mountain, the presence of this landform infuses the senses of the local life. At its base thrive starfish, mussels, and anemones; and its peak houses gulls, cormorants, and even a few puffins, Jennifer says. The rock resonates God-given space with solitary grandeur, mirroring the aspiring souls who make this place home.

The raw beauty here breeds a respectful community of artists, writers, and merchants; it is the foundation for a seasonal tide of discerning visitors. Unlike other travel destinations, Cannon Beach has preserved much of its indigenous charm. This is part of the reason why I'm writing you, now, and here in particular. I figure that if anyone, my rustic King of creation, you will know why I dote upon this rural spot of earth.

The place's elemental grace is reflected by its human economy. Because much that is sold in Cannon Beach is also produced in this region, there is a very high quality of goods and services. Heightened community awareness resides among many of the town's merchants, and neighbors take care to treat neighbors to their most masterful works. I've found in my travels that local owners are usually the best stewards of local resources, and this is affirmed by my experience of life in Cannon Beach.

One of the best words I have found to describe this sensation is a spiritual one I've adapted from your tradition. *Shekinah*. My American Heritage Dictionary defines Shekinah as "a visible manifestation of the divine presence as described in Jewish theology". I think of it as beatific energy that radiates from something when it is in harmony with God. The pulse of this energy is strong when I'm walking hand-in-hand with Jennifer on the beach at night, when the electric white surf and star-freckled sky frame the massive black shape of Haystack. And there are hints of this habitation amidst the town's flow of trade. I testify.

In some ways this place reminds me of an Appalachian tourist town called Gatlinburg, twenty years ago when it was still a quaint hamlet cradled in the Smokies. Back then, the town complimented its lush native environs with an active exchange of the arts and crafts of resident villagers. Like most places today, alas, Gatlinburg has been plundered by prefabricated consumer feedlots selling mostly imported schlock. The heartworms of business, federal chains have sucked and squeezed the spark from local commerce and left mostly packaging. This is undeniably evident in the downtown architecture. Boxy development has obscured the sights and

sounds of the singing streams and verdant misty slopes that were woven with the marketplace, features that once made family visits to Gatlinburg so memorable.

Cheesy traps like Gatlinburg sacrifice their human heritage along with the natural glory which emanates from the Most High.

Absentee investors have built up the place beyond capacity, supplanting Spirit with Mammon. The marred landscape of my memories offers me nothing but grief when I witness the vapid virtual realities of the present. They scrape the scab of desolation against my soul.

Cannon Beach could avert the course of development chosen by towns like Gatlinburg. Governed by fidelity to native resources, locals here could create a wholly different definition of progress. The town is on the right track when it refuses to grant building permits to national chains within the town limits. The roadsides have yet to fall victim to the contractual images of Madison Avenue, have yet to become just another test marketing location for the red and yellow of McDonald's and the red and white of KFC. Here, people dream in their own colors rather than the industrial-strength pigments of mass consumption.

Yet the forces of commercial evil are working hard here. Each year I return to find fewer patches of native life amidst the absentee-owned vacation homes, sterile and vacant, that are enveloping the landscape. Already, local trade is being displaced by imported retail.

I cannot bear to see it happen here, cannot accept the desolation of this glorious unhewn house of God's creation. Non-violent fierce Jesus, I pray here now, help us cast out the money-grubbing robber barons.

The Presbyterian in me says my solstice arrival here was pre-destined. During these longest nights, my free will turns inward to assess the tasks that will be necessary to shape a spiritual destiny in the new year. This solstice offers an occasion to reaffirm the convictions that grow forth from Spirit, to ask that these convictions flourish into the next season.

Last week we attended an anniversary performance of *A Christmas Carol* at the local community theatre. While watching scenes of the crotchety Scrooge hum-bugging his way through the village market place, I was struck by his poetic resemblance to today's merchant. Modern business-people have become Uncle Scrooges who by-pass local resources in the pursuit of digits. Blind to the real value of life, he huggermuggers his chief patrons within the lobbied bowels of global commerce.

If Dickens were alive today he'd do well to cast Scrooge as an executive of a multi-national corporation, perhaps an appointed proponent of some officially acronymed leviathan like NAFTA or GATT. Displacing local trade with globalized mercantilism, the modern Scrooge feeds upon consumer lust prompted by mass advertising. A fair title for his modern-day screenplay might be *Supply and Demand of the Damned*. "Once the whole world market is harmonized with our interests", prophesies Uncle Scrooge as he wrings his merged, acquisitioned hands, "our pockets will runneth over. We'll bleach the green meat and sell it under hot red lights; wrap cheap foreign resources in slick packages that say Fashioned-In-America; dispose of durability and invest in waste management stocks. Oh the profits that will be mine the sound of metal jingling, the bright profits shining like the sun!"

Uncle Scrooge will sell anything to appease his appetite for speedy gain. He barbers his birthright for untempered want, sells off

America's genuine culture and replaces it with syndicated homogeneity. Cheapness deposes quality as his gauge for human advancement; packaging is valued above content. And most of us abandon our best ways of living to embrace these bargain-basement standards of existence.

This is certainly true for my generational peers, us electronic tots born after 1960 who were weaned on a blitzkrieg of beta-waved mediations. We were the first slackers to slide through the plastic tubes of McDonaldLand, the first to wolf down a Happy Meal. Many of the jobs created by today's commerce have been filled by us. We drive from our homes in town or country to work along the highways, to serve the bypass economy which ultimately passes us by. Savvy to these modern business workings, we must be the ones to restore the old beyond-modern ways. Help us, Jesus, I beseech you.

The need for this restoration is most dramatically illustrated by today's system for producing and selling food. Over the past year I've heard increasing news of contaminated chain-store meat, milk, and other basic foodstuffs. This comes as no surprise, because I know the average comestible consumed in the U.S. now travels 1400 miles from production to palate. When truckers have more interaction with food than farmers, how can we expect anything but bland farrago to reach our gullets? Today's stores don't specialize in food. They sell gas.

Lord, I feel like a lone voice crying in the wilderness, just another "whiner" in the eyes of those status quo elders who foresake divine love amidst the lust for revenue. When discussing my moral concern for native ecology, I've heard the same seniors who taught me in Sunday school use the instant freeze-dried reasoning of "there will always be trade-offs". Again and again, this twisted logic has been hawked by the powerful economic interests who control society. For most of the year, people fashion this false logic into the crux of human thinking; then, on select occasions, we don our gay Sunday apparel, sacrifice a few tax-deductible tokens in exchange for institutional victuals, and toast a public sacrament of piety fit for film. Believing we can truck away accountability for our greed-wrought actions, we hump it all on your shoulders; then wassail in that comfy "Kodak moment" of moneyed prosperity. Deliver us from this fake grace.

In my family, Spirit is understood mostly within the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Earlier this evening we ate dinner with a friend who is a local cantor. As I explored with him the Jewish rite of Hanukkah, I was impressed with its interwoven themes of resourcefulness, illumination, and miraculous destiny. We must return to these themes in today's time of dwindling resources, when we are broken from the bounty of the land.

For another week I will recharge myself away from the wilted dispirited notions of modern commercialism, in community with family and friends here in Cannon Beach. As I savor the local flavors of salmon jerky and marionberry cobbler, I'm learning that here, as in Appalachia, the joys of bioregion reflect a native genius of life. Call this the Shekinah, the Holy Spirit, or by some other name - I call it here, with passion, to guide the business dealings of our everyday lives.

I know it is truly you who I call for assistance. Please lift these words upwards into the light of heaven, so God will replace the cruel hump of Mammon with wonders like Haystack Rock. Then surely the Shekinah will descend upon our workdays, and make each one holy once more.

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