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THE FIRST DRAUGHT  
THE BREW, THE BRU'S,  
AND THE KING OF THE JEWS.  
THE END IS NU!

To Gal Shlomo

The essence of peace is to join together two opposites.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav

*Os caboclos já chegaram  
De braços nus e pés no chão*

*Eles trazem remédios bons  
Para curar os cristãos*

The caboclos are arriving  
With empty hands and  
feet on the ground  
They bring good remedies  
To cure the Christians

Mestre Irineu

When I was 16, and a nervous cocktail of hormones, my parents sent me on a three-week rite of passage through Israel with a bus full of other Jewish teenagers. They did not do this out of malice, nor did they mean to test me, but I failed the test all the same, and large groups of Jews have caused me to tingle with neurosis ever since. Perhaps it was the machine guns everywhere or the inability of Israelis to form queues, or to discuss anything without being utterly offensive, or perhaps it was the desert sun beating down on my pasty Eastern European skin, but I came home certain that it would not happen again. I chose against the Chosen, and on Friday nights I traded my skullcap for a silly hat, candles for strobe lights, and kosher wine for ketamine, amphetamine, and, ooh, maybe another line back at mine.

I turned my back on rationalism as well at the age of twenty at the Chaos Crèche,<sup>i</sup> at the same time as beginning Buddhist meditation. I squirmed around in half-lotus for years, my legs in agony and my mind crying out for a tune or a spliff, or anything rather than the deafening silence, but I kept up my practice along with my devilish incantations when I moved to Japan three years later. One day my girlfriend invited me to some kind of party, piquing my interest with the promise of strange new drugs. She didn't speak enough English to explain any more, and I was already sold, but when I arrived it didn't look much like a rave. The men and women were separated, there were pictures of Mary and Jesus on the walls, altars laden with crystals, candles, and funny looking crosses.

Suddenly feeling very Jewish again, I made a beeline for the only other white man in the room, who was tuning his guitar. He was dressed in blue slacks, with a white shirt and tie, and as I approached I saw he had a silver Star of David pinned to his chest.

'Is this some kind of a church?' I asked, not entirely happy with the prospect.

'Yeah,' he said, smiling. 'It's a funky church.'

I sat uneasily, watching people arriving and hugging each other, and stood quietly contemptuous as they prayed to open the ceremony, but within a few hours and a few glasses of the foulest tea imaginable, I was rolling around on the carpet, with a circus in my head and a riot in my stomach. I was not sure what to think any more, or even how to think. Ayahuasca, Daimé-style, has to be the strongest, most incredible, most cathartic and ecstatic eye-opener in the universe.

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<sup>i</sup> See chapter 12

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After what felt like a six-month crescendo, the music stopped and I was helped to my feet. The psychedelic Christians were clearing away cushions and hugging again. Thank fuck it's over, I said to myself. And thank that other dude as well. I was still extremely fried, so I lay down in a heap to one side, but after a while, someone came round serving again. I thought it was a joke. The idea of drinking even more ayahuasca was quite ridiculous. I had already puked my lungs out several times, skimming past the bucket as I bounced between the edges of the galaxy, but sure enough, people were fixing their ties and standing in orderly lines. I could barely sit, let alone stand. I could barely lie down. I was in an absolute state. Of course, I had been in an absolute state before, but this was different. This was a bunch of Japanese in school uniforms in a state, banging drums and singing Portuguese to Jesus, and now there was a tall, white haired Brazilian telling me to stand up and drink more loopy juice. He looked quite serious. Ignoring the objections of my stomach, my brain, and my legs, I stood up for just long enough to gag down my medicine, and retreated under my blanket.

I can't put into words what went on under my blanket, but an eternity later someone was helping me to my feet to stand for the last song. I noticed to my surprise that there were other people in the room, singing and dancing from side to side in formation. Someone steadied me on my feet as I explored my new body. I was a bit wobbly on my new legs, but they were functioning. The visual field bore a close resemblance to the one I was familiar with. We prayed to close the ceremony, and then they all started hugging again.

The meal afterwards was like a feast of the gods, every mouthful an explosion of wholesomeness. As trails flittered around the dining room, I met the few foreigners, who turned out to be the most animated people I had met since arriving in Japan, but more impressive were the Japanese without the layer of formality, who didn't tense up when you said hello, who asked questions and made silly jokes. I wasn't too sure about this Jesus cat, but the rest of the gang was brilliant. There was no comedown at all, the tunes and the buzz stayed with me for weeks afterwards, and everything was sweet for a time with my demanding job and even more demanding girlfriend.

For the next year and a half, I spent my sessions rolling around on the floor, catching glimpses of heaven and tumbling through the sewers of hell. It has all faded into a blur now, with disjointed memories, cowering in terror as the jug came round, watching the grain in the wood of the ceiling twisting into vortexes, climbing along the edge of the abyss with nothing but trumpet notes as footholds. It was frequently

horrendous, but I always felt much better for the journey. One afternoon I was swimming through the cesspit of my mind, with perversions of every description and chunks of gore on the internal cinema. This was not unusual, but this time I had also worked myself into a horrible philosophical conundrum. Predators have always hunted, and man has been enthusiastically murdering his own for aeons. Murder is one of the fundamental rites of animal existence, and I needed to know how it felt. I needed to taste the full range of human experience to really understand what it means to be human, which is, surely, what life is all about.

Murderous urges had always haunted me. Whenever I had a hammer in my hand, there was always a part of me thinking about crushing skulls, but I am not a bad man, just a man with bad thoughts. I had no desire to actually kill people, I didn't even eat meat, but neither did I want to be an incomplete human. This mental dialogue disgusted me so much that I hid under my blanket, ashamed to show my face. I pondered ugly thoughts alone as others sang beautiful melodies together. I was in a hell of questions, *but-what-if's*, *how-can-you's*, and *what-about's* pinging endlessly around my miserable skull, and I could find no way out.

And then I farted. It was really smelly. It reeked under my blanket, but I could not bear to show my face outside. I was too ugly for outside, choking at the stench of the internal, trapped at the crack between the worlds, popping my head in and out like a shell-shocked tortoise. There was only one option. I had to leave the thought-loop behind where it belonged, with the fart and the blanket. Sick ideas arise from a healthy mind, and nasty farts from a healthy bowel, but one need not fixate on foul gas. It was a brain-fart, and would pass if I concentrated on something else, and that else was the other side of the blanket. It meant standing up and getting in formation, however bizarre the dance.

This cafartic experience was my initiation. I surrendered my concepts of the entities on the altar, and gave up trying to work out whether or not I could conform to what I believed they represented. Who was I to judge them, to judge anything with that mess in my head? Whatever I thought I knew about Mary, I didn't have a clue until we met. Mary is older than time, a well of compassion infinitely larger than our tiny minds. She doesn't mind if you puke on your shirt or contemplate murder. She has seen it all before. I bought a hymnbook and a tie, took my own silver star, and began playing music in the sessions. I have followed the brew on a bumpy cruise around the globe for eight years, periodically vomiting overboard. Being a psychedelic Christian has not stopped me being Jewish, Taoist, pagan, or even

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atheist, as I still don't believe God exists, (at least no more than  $\pi$  exists). Neither has Daime stopped me being foolish, but it has stopped me getting hung up on the dualism that insists that you must be one thing and not the other.

Daime began in 1920 when Raimundo Irineu Serra, a seven-foot black man of slave descent, came to the Amazon in search of riches. His mission changed when he was introduced to ayahuasca. He began working as a healer, and despite having neither talent nor experience in music, he started singing original hymns with a distinct and novel musical style. His hymnbook contains 128 songs and then some, and the rhythm and ritual he developed have been the basic format ever since. Our hymns are absolutely central to the tradition, containing teachings, stories, poetry, and a whole lot besides. We believe, or at least most of us believe, that they are messages from spirits.

Mestre Irineu moved to a district of Rio Branco named in his honour today. His hymnbook expanded, his sessions grew, and various lines emerged after his death. One was led by a rubber tapper by the name of Sebastião Mota de Melo, a man on a mission with a long beard and 182 stonking tunes. It was this line that first took Daime out of the Amazon, to urban centres across Brazil, and to the rest of the world.

Unlike most psychedelics, ayahuasca is a mix of plants, and the ceremony is a mix of Amazonian shamanism, Catholicism, the European Spiritualist tradition, and the African animism of Mestre's roots. Ayahuasca is extremely versatile, responding to the environment and working with the brain it finds itself in. In Japan they dance barefoot, as Zen monks sit in lotus around the edge of the session in their neat outfits, desperately trying to keep it together. The English group started to celebrate the solstices, and added reggae bass-lines, jazzy trumpets, and soaring Japanese flutes into the cauldron, and there are now hymns in English, Japanese, Spanish, French, German, Hebrew, and even Welsh. Everything is drawn into the universal solvent, and the spirits use whatever they find to pass their messages across.

Judaism works in exactly the opposite direction. It has been conducted in the same language for thousands of years, and the instructions have remained essentially the same. The word of God is fixed, and applied to every new situation. Fridge lights in religious Jewish households, for example, do not function on the Sabbath, to keep the prohibition against lighting a fire, and kosher laws which limited animal suffering in the desert are rigidly applied in modern abattoirs, leading to more suffering than Moses could have imagined. Music was forbidden in worship after the destruction of the temple, and

the rabbis argue over whether banging on the table constitutes playing an instrument.<sup>2</sup>

This inflexibility has done the world a great service. Whilst Christians repeatedly put *The Bible* through the carwash, the Hebrew Bible survived in its original form (or at least, in an early form), precisely because in Judaism, the word of God is fixed and finished. There are no more prophets; there is only ever deeper analysis. By contrast, there are new Daimon hymns every week. I have seen an Englishman interrupt a session to announce that he had just received a song that very minute. It was in Portuguese, so he translated it, and then sang all five verses, rhyming and in perfect metre.

Ayahuasca reflects the rainforest from which it comes, which is as yin as can be, moist, dark, and fertile. The yin is expressed in the session, which is emotional and mind-bending, unpredictable and absorbing, and we close with a prayer to all the beings of the celestial court. The session is about union, and a participant does exactly the same as everybody else, which is to sing one melody, without harmonies, and to dance in formation with everyone else. There is a whole dimension behind this, but at one level, the practice is to be present in every moment, and to focus on the words of the hymns even as they are swimming around the page and your neighbour is sprouting wings. There is no chatting, and words are completely inadequate for describing what is happening to you anyway. The best you can do is plug in to the current, and let your unconscious absorb what it will.

A Jew in Synagogue reads and reflects, sometimes has a word with his neighbours, and can rejoin the flow later. Religious life is a cerebral affair, and wisdom has been cultivated through analysis in an unbroken dialectic until today. The yang of Judaism became extreme in Babylon, and law, dualism, debate, and the textual corpus derive from this time, as do the prophets of the end of the world. In ancient times as today, the Israelites lived in a yang environment, where dry-lipped camels ambled past the odd spiky plant in the desert, where the rays of the sun beat down on the sand and filtered through into the philosophy, the culture, and the religion. *YHVH* bellows over Israel in a booming baritone: I am the Lord your GOD, thou shalt have no other God than me, and DON'T PISS ME OFF! It is yang theology at its most extreme, with 613 commandments and reams of commentary. It is exclusive rather than absorbent, because only Jews need follow the rules, whilst the rest of humanity is more or less unimportant. *The Old Testament* is a warrior king's dirty book, the story of a tribe overcoming its neighbours and fighting its way into the land of milk and pussy.

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Hebrew culture was always yang. The ire and fire of *YHVH* provided the momentum for the nomads to organise themselves and conquer Jerusalem, but that was as far as they would get. The tribes began fighting amongst themselves shortly after their arrival, and after the catastrophic Babylonian exile was over, the scrap reopened again. The flexibility of the language was a dot of yin in the yang of Judaism, and it was precisely this that made such an extreme yang culture possible. By the turn of the first millennium, Jewish culture was scorching. In 62AD, the yang bomb exploded. The Jews overwhelmed the Roman garrison, and Jerusalem consumed itself in a fire of zealotry as various factions turned on each other in the power vacuum. The Romans had only to wait for the situation to cool down a little, and then pick up the pieces.

Extreme yang inevitably switches to yin. The end of the Jewish state came shortly after the Jewish book was first translated into the Greek *Septuagint*. Later, when the story of a rebel rabbi questioning laws and saving souls emerged from the ashes of Jerusalem, it was told in Greek. With the language precise, diverse interpretations were not possible, and the story shattered into various conflicting 'truths'. And here begins the swing to yin. For the early Jewish-Christian cults, the internal, invisible, indivisible yin concept of faith became more important than the yang of deed in accordance with law. Christianity absorbed and swelled, and old laws broke down as new churches were built. Kosher rules were relaxed, circumcision was ditched, and new converts were welcomed.<sup>3</sup> God remained all-powerful, and there was still one book for everyone, but the book was growing, and in a direction quite unlike *The Old Testament*. The tradition of analysis was left behind with the Hebrew and the rabbis who understood it. Bible stories were told whole to the flock in the vernacular, rather than picked to bits by scholars, and new stories were added as the Gospel spread through the infrastructure of the Roman Empire and beyond. Pluralistic pagan concepts such as the trinity and the Virgo birth were adopted. The faith became less analytical and more emotional, with images of the suffering martyr and the selfless Virgin as objects of devotion.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Ioannes ousted Mithras, Mars, Lucifer and Oannes. Thomas cast doubts on Tammaz, Appollo appalled Paul, James jilted Janus, Peter, chief of the priests, dominated Jupiter, chief of the Gods. Is there something more in the names than poetry? Nothing I can prove, admittedly, but there is no denying that pagan gods later became saints, such as the horned Cernunnos, who became St. Cornely, saint of horned animals,<sup>4</sup> and Bridged, the Celtic goddess of fertility who was worked back into the story as Mary's midwife St. Bridget.<sup>5</sup> Lady Day is celebrated during the festival of Cybele,<sup>6</sup>

Christmas was put at the solstice, and the ancient rites of Easter were absorbed, as the next sermon relates. The Celtic walk to the end of the earth became a Christian pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, and cathedrals covered stone circles all over Europe. The process continued later in the New World, where churches were built directly on the stones of Inca temples, and Andean priests weaved the virgin into the legends of *Patchamama*. When Cusco citizens gather in front of the Cathedral to whip away each others' sins, or when a Bolivian priest blesses a car before it is sprayed with beer in front of Lake Titicaca, it seems like the missionaries added little more than Christian vocabulary to local legends.

Various Gnostic groups developed in the first few centuries, incorporating Platonic ideas and a wide range of mystical traditions, but this pagan god dressed as the Lamb troubled early Christian authorities. The politics of Imperial Rome prompted a swing back to the yang, and an attempt to homogenise the faith. Gnostics were wiped out or forced underground, and the more mystical texts were purged from *The New Testament*. As the double-headed snake of Christianity curled out of the Middle East, Christians absorbed and cultivated, but they also destroyed and exploited, stole, killed and enslaved. Christian soldiers charged forth into the Muslim and pagan worlds, destroying idols, drowning witches, and decimating tribes from Northern wastes to equatorial jungles.

For Jews in Christian lands, life was saga of persecution. The Jews who kept their exclusive law in the cosmopolitan Hellenistic world spent 2,000 years as the dot in the yin-yang, outcasts who refused to assimilate as other bloodlines mixed, and they suffered for it. As the world became increasingly rational after the Enlightenment, however, and religious toleration removed many obstacles in their way, the Jews became increasingly successful and prominent in finance, science, academics, and law. This is not some international Zionist conspiracy, and Nemu is no anti-Semite. This is the history of mind, in which the Jews played a pivotal role. They may have been chosen, but the job they were chosen for was a tough one.

The Christian current continues to absorb until today, picking up, for example, Santa Claus from somewhere far colder than Jerusalem, and dumping him and his furry outfit on the streets of Rio de Janeiro in the scorching December sun. He seems to be an amalgam of old European gods and devils, of Thor's cheer and chariot, his red robes and long white beard,<sup>7</sup> as well as Odin's solstice fly-bys. Odin rewarded good children, but he also punished bad ones.<sup>8</sup> In other countries, the punishment came from a fat demon in furs who travelled along with the

gift-giver. He has been left behind, but his habit of entering the house through the chimney survived,<sup>9</sup> and so did his furs and his laughter, as recorded in Old English plays - 'Ho, ho, ho! the devil, the devil!'<sup>10</sup> St. Nicholas and Old Nick parted company, but though Santa is offered pies as he creeps past druidic mistletoe and a tinselled up Nordic Yule log, he was not always so well received. His effigy was hanged from the railings of Dijon Cathedral in 1951, before being torched in the town square.<sup>11</sup>

There was always tension between the yin and yang of absorption and reaction as Christianity spread, but the conquest continued, and continues. Legend recalls that the King of the Incas was handed *The Bible* by men who were, for all he could tell, gods fulfilling a long awaited prophesy. He held it to his ear and found it silent. He smelled it and found it bland. He threw it on the ground, appalled by its lack of magick, and the massacre began. The book did carry a new magick word, powerful enough to decimate his empire, but the brain architecture to manipulate it came later. Christian soldiers were followed by governors and merchants, physicians, Coca-cola, and all the fruits of civilisation. 'And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.'<sup>12</sup> Today, Western culture, the echo of the original Good News, has reached all but about 100 isolated tribes, and Scientistics,

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<sup>i</sup> It was by no means only Christians telling tales about the New Kingdom, and a similar desert environment shaped the culture of the people of the other book in a similar way. Islam is part of this story, and although the Church of Nem is concerned with *The Bible*, the Imam Madhi sounds like a good guy. He will teach you simple living and high thinking. 'He will make you understand that virtue is a state of character which is always a mean between the two extremes, and which is based upon equity and justice. He will revive the teaching of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet after the world has ignored them as dead letters.... He will protect and defend himself with resources of science and supreme knowledge. His control over these resources will be complete. He will know how supreme they are and how carefully they will have to be used. His mind will be free from desires of bringing harm and injury to humanity.' (Nahjul Balagha, Khutba 141, 187)

The vowels of the *Koran* and the meaning of the text were fixed in the second century after Mohammed, and even today scholars can be thrown from windows for interrogating it, [*Scholars Are Quietly Offering New Theories of the Koran* - Alexander Stille, in *The New York Times*, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002 ] but Arabic is as flexible as Hebrew. For example, the 72 'almond-eyed virgins' could be translated 'white raisins', to go with the fine foods, jewelled couches, and rivers of honey which believers can look forward to. This celestial sweetie shop has always struck me as a bit mundane. Are rivers of wine which don't give you a headache the the most exalted poetic teetotal image the Archangel Gabriel could come up with? Is this to proselytize literally minded baklava addicts? Anyway, this is no concern of this Reverend. If Allah wants his people, who are 'not of the polytheists' [Sura 6:79 Shakir], to cross the world to bow down en masse to a rock, it is fine by me. No pagans here, oh no sir, don't mind me, just an infidel going about his unclean business.

evangelists, and buccaneers are busy probing the final frontiers of the forests.

Christianity absorbed the traditions it rolled over, their deities and holy days. It eventually and inevitably infiltrated and absorbed nearly everything, including powerful psychedelics, and not only ayahuasca. The Native American Church use the fantastic peyote as their sacrament, in Gabon the mind-blowing iboga is eaten to contact the Bwiti on Christian festivals, and *salvia divinorum* is consecrated as the spirit of Santa Maria amongst South American shamans. Within the Christian ayahuasca current, there is a wide range of groups, each doing something different with this incredible tea. In Rio Branco alone there are over 40 different groups, from the international União de Vegetal, with their comfy chairs and their prog-rock, to little shacks full of chipped icons where mediums in sailor outfits incorporate the spirits of Christian saints and African slaves. And then there is Daime.

Finally, Christianity has returned to a place where the battle is internal, where a seeker takes her medicine and faces her demons, her greediness, and her hang-ups, within a ceremony, within herself. She goes off balance to find a new balance, and looses her mind to discover what lies outside it. This potion progressively dissolves layers of illusion. It reveals more than the half-truths of politics and the pretty words of poets, it goes beyond the hand-me-down beliefs of priests and the maps of Scyense, which are just the latest shadows creeping across the wall of the cave. Ayahuasca drags you out of the cave into the light, clearing the air of musty thoughts, purifying the waters of the astral, and transforming the earth beneath your feet.

A Gnostic wave is quietly spreading across the world. Vines are being planted in preparation for a bright future. Maracas are being shaken quietly in a psychedelic cell near you, and there are agents in government offices and the highest tiers of academia, industry, and the media. Various ayahuasca traditions are appearing, and groups are incorporating holotropic breath-work, drug rehab, and therapy into the session. There are even rabbis in Israel studying Torah with this incredible brew. Ayahuasca is flexible, combining well with mantra and mandala, with writing, music, art, and juggling, with whirling or tai chi, but it also extremely strong. Experiment, but do it after the session, not instead of the session if you are a beginner (like I am, even after eight years drinking). A ritual with people who know what they are doing directs the force of ayahuasca, so it can be integrates without your mind falling to bits.

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Ayahuasca left the forest with Mestre's fasts and visions in the 20s, but the current stretches way back, as we remember in the last line of the last song of our beloved Madrinha Rita:

*O começo da história vem do Rio de Jordão*

(the beginning of the story is the Jordan River)

In the summer of 2006, the vine wound its way back to the Jordan. In my head, Israel was still the horrible place it had been before, but 'come on man, £260 to go to Zion!' was an offer I couldn't refuse, so I packed my drum and headed off to a series of sessions, ending at Jordan itself. As the last coach-loads of pilgrim baptizees departed from the centre a few hundred yards downstream, we prepared the site with a fire and a photo of Padrinho Sebastião. A drop of Daimé in the Jordan at a pagan Christian ceremony conducted by Jews. Super-yin in the mega-yang of Israel, the medicine that makes you sick, the drug to cure addictions, the spirit to save monotheism from monocultural oblivion; and the circuit is complete

During my visit, I was invited to a Lag B'Omer party on a Kibbutz. I asked someone the story of the festival. 'There are many reasons,' he replied. 'Rabbi Akiva was fighting the Romans... the fire was because... well, I don't know.' Another guest told me to ask someone else, so I tried a fifteen year-old boy, thinking he might have learnt at school. He knew it was something to do with a hero, but had no idea who, nor what he had done, so I asked all 18 people in turn. One said it had something to do with Simeon, another explained that someone, whose name escaped him, thought that someone else, whose name escaped him, was the Messiah. The rest had no idea. One said sagely that people like to gather around fires on warm nights. I was watching a bee buzzing around a lamp, and could see his logic, but I was hoping for more information. Someone got cross with me. Someone else got on the phone, and found out that it is Rabbi Simeon's memorial day, among other things, and the fire recalls the light of *The Zohar*, a kabbalistic text which none of the guests had read.

I am not so obtuse to demand that others be as mythoholic as I am, but these were staunchly Jewish, card-carrying, gun-carrying Zionists, Chosen, of course, but with very little idea of what they were chosen for. They had gathered around the fire with their backs to the world, and had no idea what the fire was about. Zionism is a sticky subject. It is sometimes synonymous with fascism in the minds of Western liberals, who rarely appreciate the conditions from which it emerged (nor the conditions from which fascism emerged). Zionism rose from the ashes of European Jewry, swept from the ovens of the Nazis, during the latest episode in a long story of persecution. The Holocaust is seared into the

Jewish psyche, and though it does not justify oppression, it does explain somewhat the psychology of the Jewish people.

Many Zionists are completely bonkers, including my cousin, who lives in land won from Syria in the '67 war. Between sessions trying to subvert his religion, I visited his home, which was festooned with Israeli flags, both inside and out. Many Jews do this on Independence Day, but not normally all year round. His son is named after the territory. He and I spent an afternoon reading zombie comics, and then went out after we got in trouble for play-fighting. As we walked towards a playground along a road lined with razor-wire and landmine warnings, he gleefully described, as little boys do, how his youth group had stolen a rival group's flag, burned it, and destroyed their camp. He asked if I wanted to make a bomb with him. This is quite endearing coming from a youngster, but after adolescence, flags and bombs take on a sinister aspect. We played a game to see who could guess how many Israeli flags were flying in the garden when we returned. After a few recounts, it turned out to be 69.

Such territorial fanaticism was new to me, but then this is a land unlike most, where nearly all the men and women spend years in the army being shouted at by superiors, shouting at subordinates, and exchanging missiles with their neighbours. There are roadblocks everywhere, searches on every bus, in every shopping centre and station. Soldiers in and out of uniform walk around armed, there are tooled-up teenagers in anarchy T-shirts, and girls strolling along the beach with machine guns. In Tel Aviv I bought a loofah from a guy with a pistol on his belt.

Israelis have fought ~~four~~ five major wars since independence, and have been attacked nearly every week for the last 60 years, even in peacetime.<sup>i</sup> Iran offers a bounty per kill, graded according to whether the victim was a civilian, a soldier, or a politician. There was no official war in the first five years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but 1010 Israelis perished in attacks, 215 of which were combatants. In the same period, violence claimed 3179 Palestinians, half of which were combatants.<sup>13</sup>

I'm not quoting figures to establish who is worse off, nor to make any moral point, but to describe the world in which Israeli and Palestinian brains are incubated. Palestinian kids play with toy guns amidst the rubble of flattened buildings, and they are used as pawns in real street battles. Israelis are accustomed to suicide bombers the way the English

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<sup>i</sup> It was four when I wrote the first draft, but Lebanon had been trashed by the time I edited.

are used to cancelled trains and dark winters. Both learn to hate and fear as they learn to speak. By adolescence, their brains are as riddled with fences as the Gaza strip, and by the time Israelis finish the army and go to India to relax, many of them are completely unbearable.

Few Israelis favour a withdrawal from the occupied territories to the east, because they act as a buffer zone, ensuring that the weekly rocket attacks fall short of the capital and industrial centres on the west coast. My Israeli friend who demonstrated against the partition wall still suffers chronic tinnitus from the stun grenade the army fired at the protest. Despite the occupation, however, Tel Aviv is by no means secure. Suicide bombers slip through roadblocks, and the rockets fall ever closer as missile technology improves. The president of the US can pledge his unending support for blah blah blah until the end of time, but very few Israelis see a solution, and Palestinian hopes are rarely hopes of coexistence. Meanwhile the nuclear threat increases, making Armageddon (which derives its name from Megiddo in the occupied West Bank) seem closer than ever. Of course, all-out war in the Middle East means catastrophe for the rest of us as well.

Ultimately, I am optimistic about the universe (and no right-thinking mage can afford to be anything else) but the situation on the ground is horrible. As the Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth wrote in *The Dignity of Difference*:

There is no question that this kind of prolonged conflict, together with the absence of hope, generates hatreds and insensitivities that in the long run are corrupting to a culture<sup>14</sup>

He quotes *Exodus*, where a Jew must not 'ill-treat a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt'.<sup>15</sup> His comments drew attacks from all quarters of the Jewish Community, by Jews far less learned than he, who identify with a political rather than a spiritual notion of Israel.<sup>16</sup> The rabbi was compelled to remove the passages from the second edition, but in the original he went on to describe how the situation arises from an outdated dualism of right versus wrong, which is unsuited to a modern, pluralistic world.<sup>17</sup> Western liberals clamouring to criticise Israel buy into the same simplistic dualism, but swap goodie and baddie badges according to the bias of a sensationalistic media.

Some Christians say that the second coming will happen when the Jews finally accept Jesus. Jews tend to laugh at this idea. There are Zen BuJews, HinJews, pagan Jews, Jewish Taoists and medicine men on the Native American tip. Judaism is so hard and dry, Israelis go searching everywhere for another level of meaning. There are Jewish seekers in the lab and the library, theorists in every field and drug-addled Israeli trance fiends on beaches all along the Asian hippy trail,

but there are very few Christian Jews. The cross was so detested that the paving stones in medieval synagogues were laid staggered so as not to form crosses, and it has long been the badge of those who persecuted them, associated with the swastika of the holocaust, and with Christians like the Pope who remained silent as Italian Jews were sent to the extermination camps.

The Jewish prophecy is that the Messiah will come when every Jew performs his religious duties. The prerequisite for this is peace. How can Israel *not* mistreat strangers in the land when most of them want Israel wiped off the map? How can Jews obey all the laws of a book that contradicts itself? Some Messianic Jews want the temple rebuilt, but one of the holiest mosques stands on the building site, from where Mohammed was taken up to heaven. There seems to be no solution, and the problem is not going away. It is getting more serious. For dualists, be they Muslims or Jews, Christians, Scientistics, or heretical environmentalists, there is no escape. But the answer to apocalyptic questions always comes from another dimension.

I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.<sup>18</sup>

Kabbalists describe how the original act of creation was unstable, and fractured the world into shards. *Mitzvoth* (good deeds) are performed to unite the shards and repair the world, to usher in the Messianic Age. Peace is not about eliminating enemies, but uniting opposites. Behind the apparent contradictions lies a fundamental unity. Only by shedding dilemmas does one become a vessel empty enough to receive the light of the Messiah. *Guela partit* (personal redemption) precedes the coming of the Messiah.

Can mind-bending religious instruction (or deconstruction) change minds in Israel and bring peace on the planet? Ayahuasca reveals the life behind the illusion. It teaches, and for those who listen, it is an elixir of life. Its truth is more intimate than the advice of your closest friend, and the harmony it reveals is staggering. Numerous other techniques can dissolve conditioning, but the apocalypse fast approaches and there may not enough time to sit still and say 'om' until it all clicks into place. On your feet, grab your maraca. The end is nigh and the last hymn is for you.

A wave is gathering momentum as it leaves the jungle. It is the final chapter of a book that began as the Israelites stepped out of the Iron Age into the Age of the written word, and it finishes as we step silently beyond our boundaries into a world we can barely imagine. The King of the Jews is walking over seas of vomit to return to the shores of Galilee. The current is seeking its source. Can the cross, splashed with

psychedelic paint and wiggling to the beat of a maraca, save Israel and the rest of us from the untamed rational mind? Will something new begin in Old Jerusalem, where all the children of Abraham have ringside seats? Don't all the best stories return to the beginning?

I left the Lag B'Omer party none the wiser, and returned to the farm where I was staying, with the Israeli who first introduced Daim to Israel. He is a fascinating guy, somewhere between Daimista and Hassid, who ties his *tefillin* (prayer boxes) in the name of Jesus. He is the most religious heretic I have ever met, a walking contradiction, and he was the only person who could tell me about Lag B'Omer that night.

Lag B'Omer commemorates many events, including the day a plague on Rabbi Akiva's students came to an end. A parasite has festered in the pages of our holy books, spreading illness around the planet for millennia, but the purge is finally coming. Tensions are rising along every axis, between East and West, North and South, rich and poor, material and spiritual, forward thinkers and back trackers, noble savages and savage nobles, the hopelessly sentimental and the coldly calculating. Burning hot yang sputters and smokes in dark oceans of yin. These are turbulent times as the currents mix, and these battles cannot be won, but the philosophies which keep soldiers in rank and file can be dissolved in a strong enough solvent.

The dark days of dualism are numbered. We approach a vanishing point, where opposites will annihilate each other in the clash of civilisations, in the power struggles within states, in the schizophrenic battles within divided selves. The question is not whether we are Christian or Jewish, Scientist or pagan, anarchist, socialist, or capitalist, or whatever we imagine ourselves to be, though we will tear ourselves apart trying to work it out as situation decays. The question is whether we love life in all its expressions, and find the strength to cling to it as the cold grip of death creeps in on all sides. Kings will ride out to Armageddon, but the real battle is between the defiantly conscious and armies of sleepwalking zombies. Be vigilant, my brothers and sisters, for the End is Nigh again.

Lag B'Omer also recalls Rabbi Simeon's death, when the day was filled with great light, when the sun did not set until he was done revealing the wisdom of *The Zohar*. Will we see the sun hovering iridescent in the sky again, revealing the shadows in our hearts? Will there be a revolution of the earth? Will the dead arise? Pay attention, psychedelic children of Israel. Keep singing. Keep dancing. Keep praying. And brace yourself for the purge.

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## NEMU'S END

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- 1 Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, quoted in *Forms of Prayer for Jewish Worship III*, (Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, 1994) p. 529
  - 2 *Shulhan Aruch, Orah Chaim*, 338:1-4 and 339:3.
  - 3 *Galatians* 5: 2-6
  - 4 *Celtic Lore: The History of the Druids and their Timeless Traditions* - Rutherford Ward (London, 1993) p. 91
  - 5 Frazer, pp 134-135
  - 6 Hislop, p. 102
  - 7 *Myths of Northern Lands* - Guerber, H. A (New York, 1895) p. 61
  - 8 *Who is Santa Claus? The Truth behind a Living Legend* - Robin Crichton (Bath, 1987) pp. 55-56
  - 9 *When Santa was a Shaman* - Tony van Renterghem (Llewellyn, 1995) p. 102
  - 10 *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, Vol. 4 - Robert Dodsley (The Project Gutenberg eBook)
  - 11 *Father Christmas Executed* - Claude Lévi Strauss in *Unwrapping Christmas* David Miller
  - 12 *Matthew* 24:14
  - 13 *Breakdown of Fatalities: 27 September 2000 through 1 January 2005* (from the University of Colorado at Boulder Library statistics,
  - 14 *Prophet of Hope* - Jonathan Freedland, *Guardian* August 27, 2002
  - 15 *Exodus* 22:21
  - 16 *Prophet of Hope* - Jonathan Freedland, *Guardian* August 27, 2002
  - 17 *Religion - Leading from the front* Ziauddin Sardar, *New Statesman* Special Issue, 10th April 2006
  - 18 *Mark* 14 58