

Arthur Green

ארתור גרין - דוד
August 25, 1989

Dear David,

I hope this finds you concluding what has been both a restful and productive summer. We've been up in New England, as usual, and I can report modest success in doing some writing, for which I now have hardly any time at all during the year.

Thanks for sending me the new version of your first chapter, which I very much enjoyed reading. I think the piece has improved tremendously, and sets the stage for what should be a most interesting volume.

I do continue to find myself troubled by a couple of things. Since you were kind enough to ask, let me spell them out for you.

I know that ikh bin aleyn shuldik for telling the Dan Berrigan story, which has now already appeared in print once or twice. I shudder a bit at your presentation of it, largely because I think that by using it so prominently you make too great a link between the war and the founding of the havurah. If you are going to take the havurah seriously - which is precisely what you want to do - the presentation of it as a bunch of draft-dodgers does not seem to be helpful.

Personally, there are three aspects of your characterization of me that continue to bother me:

1. I was not quite a pure "Camp Ramah Jew" by the time of Havurat Shalom, and find myself annoyed at being depicted that way. Of course I was far from coming from the Hasidic world, and you are generally right in your characterization of our collective (including my) search for authenticity. But I was a Jew formed by my grandparents' shul (including a tendency in my childhood to prefer the company of Yiddish-speaking zekeynim to kids my own age!), by the influence of Glatzer, Altmann, and the Rosenzweig tradition, and by a love affair with studying Hasidic texts which had already been going on for six or seven years by 1968. I had been through both an Orthodox period and a fling with Jewish secularism. I just don't see myself as a kid from Ramah who "spent time in a Trappist monastery...and took LSD". LSD was in fact important in my own development, but only in the year or so before Havurat Shalom, and long after I was already studying Jewish mysticism.

2. My role as "charismatic leader" is considerably more complicated than you indicate. The fact was that I certainly had aspects of "charisma" in that role, and was not at all at peace with them. I fought being placed in the role of leader at least as much as I enjoyed it. Even in those days I felt a sharp contrast between my role and that of Zalman Schachter, who thoroughly enjoyed "playing rebbe". I did not see myself as doing that, and often went to great lengths to avoid it. I did not lead the tisch on any regular basis, did not usually lead davenen, etc. So I would like you to make some reference to the hesitancy of whatever charismatic role you think I had.

3. I honestly don't think I had anything like an "all-but-total identification" with Nahman of Bratslav. Of course this may be the way you saw things, but I'm afraid I have to say that was the creation of your imagination, not mine. I was studying Nahman among others, and was teaching his writings only among others. There were things I found attractive about Bratslav, to be sure, but I was also frightened and put off by his excessive guilt and preoccupation with sexuality. I found works like Kedushat Levi or Sefat Emet, both of which I frequently taught at the havurah, to be significantly more sane and balanced. In my last couple of years at Havurat Shalom I began working on the dissertation on Nahman, and he was much on my mind. But I do not accept that this was identification, and surely not that such an identification was the source from which I "derived my authority" in Havurat Shalom. I just think that is a real distortion of the historical record. (Of course it may be your own "creative betrayal" of what happened there, but that's another matter...) The best I can suggest on this matter is that you check it with some others who were there and remember - perhaps Barry Holtz or Richie Siegel, both of whom are accessible to you. I think that this is a case where your considerable powers of imagination have framed your memories in ways that are quite inaccurate.

I appreciate having the chance to respond "in advance" in this way. Thank you again for the courtesy.

This in fact is a weekend for the old hevrah. I'm writing on Friday afternoon, shortly before leaving for the Bar Mitzvah of Larry and Debbie Fine's son Jacob. We expect to see the Reimers there as well. Sunday is the naming of Barry and Bethamie's daughter, and I shouldn't be surprised to run into you there too.

Meanwhile, kol tuv, and if I weren't too ambivalent I would employ my full charismatic powers to invoke heaven's blessings on you and yours. In any case, you know my heart's in the right place!

Yours
Arthur