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Bach's "Goldberg Variations," to almost anything of Mozart, and to much of Beethoven, it is clear to me that I inhabit heaven. How else can I explain the joy of these abundant gifts? More generally, how is

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Polarities to the Rescue

by Everett Gendler

Even those who believe that God is One know that we are not God and that, as individuals, we are far from being one. We are not internally unified or individually coherent. Here on this precious planet disparity is our lot, multiplicity our fate. We're not going to "get it all together," much as we might wish or hard as we might try.

One of the profound gifts of Kabbalah is the example of reducing multiplicity to polarities, thereby making them manageable. This acceptance of duality has helped me remain engaged and energized over the decades. Two examples will illustrate.

Heaven and earth is a duality that for me has had immense symbolic value. Listening to

there something rather than nothing? The questions confront us with a mystery, a wonder: that there is a created world, that we are inheritors of and participants in it, and that we are aware of this miracle.

You are less moved by music? No problem. What is your passion? Find it -- or let it find you -- and, from that ecstasy, act to make the world better, more just, more joyous. It is only from such ecstasy, from such an energy-producing position outside of (ex) the fixed place (stasis) of things, that tikkun comes about. This feels directly related to William Blake's "Poetic or Prophetic character" that helps us move beyond "the same dull round over again."

At exalted moments we may inhabit heaven, but mostly we live on "the earth God hath given to humans" (Psalm 115:16). Care for the earth, the ground of our subsistence, is our daily round, our regular beat, our primary responsibility. Ecclesiastes had it right -- "Even a king is subject to the soil" (5:9, Gordis translation) -- as does midrash on Ecclesiastes, which instructs to guard the earth, preserve it, and "do not corrupt and desolate my world, for if you corrupt it, there is no one to set it right after you."

Tune in to heaven, but keep feet on earth. And never forget: wonderful as is the internet -- and it is wondrous -- not by connectivity alone shall humankind subsist. To sustain soul, sustain soil!

Another invaluable polarity for tikkunistas is the kabbalistic *chesed* and *gevurah*: kindness and severity, compassion and judgment. Yes, the Slonimer Rebbe is surely right in construing Psalm 89:3 as meaning, "the entire world was constructed by the attribute of chesed." He quickly adds severity/judgment as the necessary counterbalance. Politically speaking, acceptance along with assessment, entitlements together with responsibilities, and rights related to duties are crucial in restoring and sustaining the credibility of a politics of compassion in our world today.

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His articles in Tikkun include "[Elements of a Philosophy for Diaspora Judaism](#)," November/December 2010; "[2008- A Year to Remember Gedaliah](#)," September/October 2008; and "[Ancient Visions, Future Hopes: Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamaret's Objection to Zionism as We Know It](#)," July/August 2003.

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