

## Jewish Ecological Thought: Sacred Activism as Biophilia

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Paintings by Micaela Amateau Amato from  
*Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle,*  
*A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era*

Ladino and Hebrew glossary provided upon request

I wasn't sure what he meant, but I asked him if he knew why the gypsies sang of ancient Sepharad. He told us that when he had been living in the caves of Spain he had learned from the *sevad*, the Roma chieftain, that the Roma gypsies are unafraid of *gafje* (strangers) since they themselves are nomads and are seen as strangers by others. The Roma felt deep empathy for the plight of the outcast wandering Jews, and expressed their melancholy in the *diwand*, the deep emotion of their music and song.

"*Tashkiliti Ken ze homo va la zboriva, apolis al yogurt!*" (If you get burned on the hot soup, blow on the cold yogurt.) Rabbi Hahibi called out as the voices of the Romanis faded into the distance. Cocozino and I continued to climb the steep rock.

When we got to the top of Gibraltar, the mountain dropped abruptly, straight down to the sea. Peering over the edge, we could see just a sliver of the city below us along the shore. Momnia had taught me that if I breathe slowly and pay deep attention, unexpected magical things can happen; time and space—distance and scale can transform in unexplainable ways.<sup>16</sup> If we concentrated, far into the distance we could see Andalusian wine-makers stomping juicy grapes in a large vat—making sweet theory in the town of Jerez, one hundred-thirteen kilometers north from where we stood.

Twenty-four kilometers to the south across the Mediterranean Sea, if we concentrated, we could see Moroccan farmers on tall ladders combing through olive tree branches. When I was a little boy while beekeeping,<sup>17</sup> Momnia told me many stories about the olive-combers she had seen in Tunisia. Olive-combers wore a single sheep's horn on each finger and stroked the limbs of the trees, gently releasing the olives onto tight-mesh nets spread across the ground below. I realized the further I could see into the distance of the landscape, the further I could see into my own memories and imagination.<sup>18</sup>



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We prayed to our revered *tzaddik* for an end to profit-driven biocide; we prayed for an end to the monoculture of the mind; we prayed for ecological intelligence to help us figure out how to encourage people to realize the deep connections between environmental justice and human rights, and act together to stop the suffering of people whose lands and water are poisoned and stolen; we prayed for a transition from a global extraction economy to a global regenerative economy. ...

I realized that a search for home was at the root of all these prayers. Home, I now understood, was a lived and shared opening to global interconnectedness. We can stop these crimes against nature if we can understand the relationship between *bal taschit*<sup>1</sup> and *tikkun olam*—between caring for people and caring for our environment, for what Ima calls our sacred social ecology.

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi David Seidberg's essay, "Bal Taschit: What's Wrong With the Jewish Law Against Destruction and Waste — and How to Fix It," <https://www.tikkun.org/bal-taschit-jewish-law-against-destruction>

So goes my cross-cultural tale of Jewish polymaths and conviviality, biophilia and multiplicity. In the tradition of the *maggid*, I offer this tapestry as a strategy to ignite social justice dialogue, ecological consciousness, and collective action. Throughout this presentation you will hear Ladino,<sup>2</sup> the language



of my family—a hybrid of ancient Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Italian, French, and Greek—depending on where the Mizrahim and Sephardim had fled when they were exiled from Iberia and Europe during the various expulsions beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Ladino proverb: *Ken mete kara, toma marido!* (Those who take risks accomplish the most!)

Both the multiplicity of ethnic identities across the Jewish diaspora as well as principles found in Jewish languages,<sup>3</sup> symbols, festivals, liturgy, life-cycle markers, and discussions of Torah can be

<sup>2</sup> The Inquisition followed the Sephardic Jews to the so-called “New World.” According to UNESCO’s Red Book, Ladino is a seriously endangered language. Reviving the diversity of Jewish spoken languages is critical to recognizing our global interconnectedness. This reclamation is pivotal to embodying hybrid cultural identities and reflects the potency of biodiversity throughout our ecosystems. At the heart of this practice is an investigation of Ladino. Throughout our story, the characters hear and speak Ladino. Exiles of the Diaspora of 1492 wove Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, Italian, French, Portuguese, and Arabic into their 15th century Spanish. Ladino is the ultimate polyvocal, hybrid language—a reflection of the Diaspora; embracing difference. Rich with humor, songs, and poetic metaphors, Ladino has no set linguistic laws; grammar laws of Spanish do not apply. It is deeply connected to oral traditions; only phonetic pronunciations are used. Ladino is the language of the polymath Maimonides, the poet Yehuda Halevi, and the entire tradition of *Kabbalah* (and the *Zohar*, its foundation). These sacred texts were written in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic—identified as one of the many layers of Ladino. Because of our vast diaspora, Ladino language gradually developed two overarching dialects.

Oriental Ladino spoken in Turkey, Rhodes, North Africa, Egypt (echoing Castilian Spanish), while Western Ladino (closer to northern Spanish and Portuguese) was spoken in Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia, the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Both dialects were also spoken in France, Israel, the United States and Latin America. The United Nations agency, UNESCO, publishes a Red Book of Endangered Languages. Yiddish is listed as ‘endangered’ while Ladino is listed as ‘seriously endangered.’ Our characters’ search for home through language is also an attempt to build solidarity alliances with other ethnic minorities whose languages have been systematically obliterated—thus stripping and eventually erasing their cultures. In spite of its history of adaptation, Ladino will most likely be extinct in 30 years or less. Few Jews are even aware of Ladino’s existence, let alone its demise. Although Yeshiva University is attempting to revitalize Ladino, most major American rabbinical schools have chosen to ignore Ladino. Additionally, Yeshiva University permitted a Hebrew Literature professor to call Sephardim “poor and uneducated” (David Shasha, “The Idiot Sephardim” [groups.google.com/forum/#!searchin/davidshasha/idiot\\$20sephardim/davidshasha/HWE675C8-No/VxmT4bkxZlclJ](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!searchin/davidshasha/idiot$20sephardim/davidshasha/HWE675C8-No/VxmT4bkxZlclJ)). Prior to World War II, approximately 80% of Diaspora Jews were Ladino-speaking.

However, an estimated 90% of all the world’s Ladino-speakers were wiped out during the Holocaust (Lorne Rozovsky, “Will Ladino Rise Again?” [www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/1085545/jewish/Will-Ladino-Rise-Again.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1085545/jewish/Will-Ladino-Rise-Again.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era* explores not only Ladino, Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, but other Jewish dialects from around the world, including: Judeo-Malay. Judeo-Malayalam

antidotes to our industrial-waste consumer culture. I ask: How can we invoke dynamic intersubjectivities in order to hold ourselves and corporations accountable to toxic production / consumption / disposal habits that poison life on earth? How can we transform habitual behaviors of entitlement and obsessive accumulation, so that we embody the ways we are all interconnected as a model and resource for compassionate living? How can we manifest symbiotic solutions as we transition from our Anthropogenic, petroleum-pharmaceutical-addicted cyber-culture to a biocentric Commons—one that inspires, educates, and mobilizes peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds?



Ladino proverb: *Una mano lava lo otra, I las dos lavas la cara.* (One hand washes the other and together they wash the face.)

I contend that the alternative to convenience culture is not inconvenience. “Consumer-reduction” has become an unpopular approach to environmental crises because it falsely implies sacrifice. I suggest we redefine “convenience” and taken-for-granted normative infrastructures. The ethnic mosaic of Jewish identities is integral to understanding how we can engage on a day-to-day basis with the sacred world around us. While encouraging individuals and communities to *collectively* resist industrialized capitalism and its inherent self-destructive consequences, this presentation offers behavioral and infrastructural design shifts that embody Jewish sacred activism.

Ladino proverb: *Kyen a la mar se kaye, de la espanda se detyène.* (A drowning man will hang onto anything.)

Navigating our own extinction along with the collapse of the known world, we witness not only our fears and failures, but also the exhilarating potential to radically transform our Anthropogenic status quo that defines our species’ hubris. Transitioning from the Anthropocene Era (human-induced ecological destruction due to advanced capitalism, rampant consumerism, international development,

(of the Cochin Jews from Kerala), Judeo-Berber, and the Judeo-Iranian languages (Judi—Judeo-Persian and Judeo-Shirazi of the Shirazi Jews), Bukhari (Judeo-Tajik), Judeo-Tat (Juhuri), Judeo-Ishfahani, Judeo-Median, Judeo-Gurgani, Judeo-Hamandani, Judeo-Yazdi, and Judeo-Kashani).

environmental racism) to biophilia, love of life, necessitates collaborative personal-political practices echoing Judaic exegetical dialogue rooted in mindfulness and deep inquiry.



This practice of interdependency cultivates Maimonides' holism (the intersection of biodiversity and biophilia). Rabbi Seidenberg reminds us: “Maimonides, *who integrated medieval philosophy and Judaism*, warned against seeing everything in anthropocentric terms, suggesting instead that we think of the whole creation and each creature in terms of itself instead of in terms of its usefulness to us.”<sup>4</sup> Seidenberg describes the imperative of co-evolution: “We need to grow up in our relation to the Earth, to enter into mutual relationships, to cherish kinship with all life, rather than reward exploitation.



*Shiluach haken* [the Hebrew term for kindness or compassion toward non-human animals] is one commandment that offers us a window into our own souls and a yardstick to measure how far we have come along that path.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://multi.jewishpublicaffairs.org/coejl/resources/cosmology-and-biodiversity-the-divine-purpose-in-creating-many-species/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://jewschool.com/2016/09/77477/nesting-mothers-food-compassion-sustainability/> See also, Rabbi Seidenberg's, *Kabbalah and Ecology: God's Image in the More-Than-Human World*.

Counter to agribusiness and advanced capitalism, Jewish sacred activism incorporates a commitment to our non-human kin. These include Shabbat, the Jewish laws of *Sh'mitah*, and the Sabbatical years



including *Yovel*, the Jubilee years. Judaic relationships to generosity and agriculture, gleaning, eco-kashrut, restoring balance to the land, forgiving debt, and multiple interpretations of fertility offer visions of possibility for contemporary social and environmental justice. In contrast to tyrannies of linear progress, these biocentric relationships reflect the necessity for “cross-species connections and communications.”<sup>6</sup>



We must shift the hegemonic concept that there is only one way to approach development and progress, that high-tech is going to solve all of our social and ecological problems. Like indigenous cultures across the world, for thousands of years, Jewish communities have evolved using ancient design systems and local/traditional wisdoms' slow and low technologies that work symbiotically with their natural environments. These technologies embrace the concept of *deep time*. Architect Julia Watson reminds us: “This knowledge is based upon thousands of years of thinking and understanding

<sup>6</sup> For example, “[p]lant time honors the difference between human time and vegetal temporalities—the cycles of germination, growth, maintenance, seeding, and dormancy or death. ...Anthropologist Natasha Myers calls this process of paying attention to the material entailments of other elements of the world 'attunement.'” (cited in Charis Boke's “Plant Time,” Matthew Schneide-Mayerson, Brent Ryan Bellamy, and Kim Stanley Robinson, eds., *An Ecotopian Lexicon* Introduction. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019: 205).

and adapting. [I]t's also circular time because it works with seasons...it repeats, and ...strengthens as it builds on itself...[it] changes based upon new impacts. [While the benefits] might be slow, they have an incredible multiplier effect.”<sup>7</sup> This ecological intelligence embodies resiliency that is rooted in adaptability and “creativity in crisis.”



By understanding the connections between homogenized cultures, impoverished soils, and resulting malnutrition, we can collaboratively create more efficient and just alternatives to the Anthropocene in our everyday lives. We can generate a decolonized territory within the intersections between ethnic identities, indigenous wisdoms, and our natural environment as a basis for global justice. Jewish philosophies resonate with this enfoldment of our material, spiritual, and social bodies.

Ladino Proverb: *Ande komen dos, komen i tres.* (Where two people eat, three people also can.)

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/964214673>

Spiritual intelligence embraces teachings from the *Zohar* (the foundation of *Kabbalistic* thought):<sup>8</sup> how to lead a practical, holy life. Like the *Zohar*, the Islamic-Arabic concept of *adab*, and the *yamas* and *niyamas* of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras in the Hindu tradition also offer both individual and social behavioral ideals for which to strive to live an ethical life. The word yoga translates as 'to yoke,' to unite.<sup>9</sup> Examining *Kabbalah* from Rabbi Tirtzah Firestone's feminist perspective, we witness how "all things exist in a state of inherent *yichud*, a uniting of disparate parts."<sup>10</sup> Judaism is rooted in this equilibrium in flux. Similarly, *Kabbalah* scholar, Daniel Matt explains that the *Zohar* crosses binaries, interweaves our differences.<sup>11</sup> *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Assiyah*, the aggregation of the three faculties of thought, speech, and action, form *mazalot*<sup>12</sup> (constellations). He tells us: "To those without spiritual attainment, The *Zohar* reads like a collection of allegories and legends that can be interpreted and perceived differently by each individual. But to those with spiritual attainment, i.e. *Kabbalists*, The *Zohar* is a practical guide to inner actions that one performs in order to discover deeper, higher states of perception and sensation."<sup>13</sup>

Practicing the *yamas* and *niyamas* parallel Jews' commitment to read the Bible (The *Talmud*, *Midrash*) exegetically—through a contemporary-context magnifying glass—learning about how to live in the Now. In "The Story of the Jews," Simon Schama defines Judaism as living in "the here and now." He explores the *Mishnah* as a text which presents "how to be and stay Jewish in a non-Jewish world" through repetition, oral interpretation, and laws of daily life.<sup>14</sup> Like the *yamas* and *the niyamas*, the synagogue's mosaic floor in the ancient Israeli village of Sepphoris (a major cultural crossroads) depicts life itself as a place of worship. Abraham Joshua Heschel declared, "Our goal should be to live

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<sup>8</sup> Bar-Yohai was affectionately known as Rashbi in the year 2nd century. While hiding from the Romans for thirteen years, Rashbi and his son buried themselves in sand to protect themselves from the sun. Composed in Aramic supposedly by Kabbalist Rav Shimon bar Yochai, the *Zohar* (the foundational text of the *Kabbalah*), which translates as , splendor, or radiance, offers possibilities of healing, miracles, prosperity, and protection. "The *Zohar* [known as The Book of Enlightenment] is the internal soul of the Bible. ...It reveals the secrets of the Bible" (Daniel Matt, Bildner Center, Lecture, 2013). Rashbi's Hilloula may be the most popular among Sephardim in North Africa. Some contemporary rabbis question whether or not Rashbi did in fact write the *Zohar*. *Kabbalah* scholar Daniel Matt claims that the Sephardic Rabbi Moshe (Moses) de Leon of 13th century Spain actually wrote the *Zohar* and hid his identity behind the famous Rashbi in order to gain credence so that his words would be read and spread. By claiming the *Zohar* was "written under the influence of a holy spirit," under the guise of an authority alive 1,000 years before the *Kabbalah*, Moses de Leon was able to profit financially. We include this debate as an example of the fluidity of interpreting history and Judaic commentary always in flux. I focus on the '*Zoar*' (Ladino translation for *Book of Jewish Mysticism*) as integral to the climax of *Zazu Dreams* because it reinterprets the *lekha* (to yourself): "Travel in order to transform yourself, create yourself anew" (Zorenberg 139), paying deep attention to what already exists. The *Zohar* embodies the "delectable delight diverging" (Matt, Bildner Center, Lecture, 2013) from the essence. In other words, the *Zohar*, which emerged from within the context of 13th century Spain, still offers an invitation to receive the ongoing choice of being fully alive, fully present, fully connected to one's communities. The *Zohar* reminds us: "Love comes from affinity" (author's italics, Aviva Zorenberg, *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious*. New York, NY.: Schocken Books, 2009: 251), no matter how unpredictable it may be.

For references to the layers of racism and sexism embedded in *Kabbalah*, see Rabbi David Seidenberg's presentation with Nurete Brenner's bimonthly discussion group: Sacred Ecological Judaism (SEJ), March 14, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Another critical definition of "yoga" is to pay attention. The confluence of environmental, economic, interpersonal, and bodily challenges demand "that we learn to *pay attention* in new terms" (Charis Boke's "Plant Time," Matthew Schneide-Mayerson, Brent Ryan Bellamy, and Kim Stanley Robinson, eds., *An Ecotopian Lexicon* Introduction. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019: 206).

<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Tirtzah Firestone, *The Receiving: Reclaiming Jewish Women's Wisdom*. San Francisco, CA.: Harper Collins, 2003: 106, 110.

<sup>11</sup> "Zohar and Kabbalah," The Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, Lecture, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> *Mazalot* are heavenly constellations that live among us. The *Zohar* and *Midrash* tell us, "There is no blade of grass that does not have a 'constellation'—*Mazal*—over it, telling it to grow" ([www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/361901/jewish/Angels-and-Mazalot.html](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/361901/jewish/Angels-and-Mazalot.html)).

<sup>13</sup> [www.kabbalah.info/engkab/mystzohar.htm#\\_V0sVL9c7Efo](http://www.kabbalah.info/engkab/mystzohar.htm#_V0sVL9c7Efo)

<sup>14</sup> PBS 2014.

life in radical amazement. ...Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.” Rabbi Firestone explores this deep mindfulness as a shared purpose in which “we are brought together to grow beyond ourselves. ...In order to be fed, we must feed the world around us, or our system collapses.”<sup>15</sup> We can cultivate this spiritual intelligence as a form of devotion to ecological living.



In response to the question, *how* can we live Jewish ecological thought as an ever-evolving practice that reinvigorates our most vital relationships, I wrote *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era*. This quintessential Judaic *aggadah*<sup>16</sup> explores ecological extinction in the context of cultural extinction—including histories of forced conversion rooted in binary-driven fundamentalism that undergirds our oppressions of silence and assimilation.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Firestone 187.

<sup>16</sup> *Aggadah*, a narrative component of Judaism's Oral law in the *Talmud* or other rabbinical literature. A quintessential intersectional device, *aggadah* incorporates parables, maxims, folklore, ethical convictions, historical anecdotes, and practical illustrations. This narrative is deployed in multiple social realms ranging from medical advice to business opportunities.

<sup>17</sup> Congruent with the Spanish Inquisition's *conversos*, a term for descendants of Jews forcibly converted to Christianity, *anusim* (the forced ones), *marranos* (swine), and *chuetas* (pig eaters), the *other-within* simultaneously reifies xenophobia and disrupts cause-and-effect binary codes—the “totalitarian tendency underlying universalism” (Irwin Hall cited in Benay Blend's "Because I Am in All Cultures at the Same Time" 1: Intersections of Gloria Anzaldúa's Concept of *Mestizaje* in the Writings of Latin-American Jewish Women, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/%E2%80%9CBecause-I-Am-in-All-Cultures-at-the-Same-Time-%E2%80%9D-1-Blend/aa8697ce82d466d8aebf905ec650b50f6b8b79d6?p2df>). For example, the island of Majorca's history of “*quinze siglos de racismo*” demonstrates how the legacy of the Inquisition continues to infect the lives of the ancestors of those Jews who converted to Christianity five hundred years ago.

The term *aljama* was the Catholic Spanish appellation for identifying both Jew and Muslim. While they encourage an acute awareness of the interconnected web of the ancient past with the present, such realizations are intended to undermine marginalization of the Inquisitional cultural pariah. Believed to be crypto, or secret Jews practicing crypto-Judaism, these *aljama* families continue to be pariahs in their own homeland. “Home” becomes a dangerous and ambiguous zone within the cultural imagination—a space nourished by fictionalized and demonized mythology and superstition.



*Zazu Dreams* is a call for hospitality and a renewed *Convivencia* (conviviality—referring to the Golden Age of Spain during which Muslim and Jewish literature, science, and arts flourished). *Convivencia* can be framed as the apotheosis of non-binary relationships; historian Americo Castro has said that Spain must acknowledge that Hispanics are historically “½ Muslim, ½ Jewish, and ½ Catholic.”

Understanding historical relationships between the Spanish Inquisition and contemporary manifestations of erasing cultural difference and ecosystem diversity, *Zazu*, the protagonist shares: “I understood more and more that there was so much work to be done; that the only way to heal ethnic and racial divisions and the ecology of our global body is to see how we are all intermeshed. We all have to take care of each other.”<sup>18</sup> The characters become increasingly aware of environmental relationships to humanitarian crises; while in each country they visit, they witness how, for hundreds of generations throughout the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia, symbiosis between humans and nature has been the norm throughout Jewish communities. Along the way, they learn from historic figures such as: Spinoza, Rachel Carson,



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<sup>18</sup> Cara Judea Alhadeff, *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle, A Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era*. Berlin: Eifrig Publishing, 2017: 26.



She was the same woman from the catacomb caves in Iran—the hooded figure who had whispered to me about remembering the *Ummah*. Cocomiso recognized her voice.

As before, she spoke in a language I had never heard, but somehow I still understood her.

Harriet Tubman, Doña Grasi Nasi,<sup>19</sup> Sol Hachuel,<sup>20</sup> Inayat Noor Khan,<sup>21</sup> and ibn Sina, as well as 21st century villains like Nestlé, Merck, Exxon, and Monsanto—Big Pharma, Big Oil, and Agribusiness



Black Gold (oil) to White Gold (lithium);  
Embodied Energy and The Politics of Batteries/Energy Storage.  
Solar/Photovoltaic Parks, Wind Farms, Electric Vehicles,  
Biofuel Crops, Nuclear Regression

<sup>19</sup> In *The Woman Who Defied Kings*, Andre Aelion Brookes chronicles the amazing journey of *converso* banker, Doña Gracia Nasi (Gracia Mendes Nasi 1510-1569). Doña Gracia fled the Inquisition in Portugal and wandered throughout Europe. In Antwerp where she found sanctuary, she eventually became a financially powerful banker. Doña Gracia lived the end of her life in Turkey where she was seen as the uncrowned Queen of Jewry in the Ottoman Empire. Doña Gracia Nasi developed a secret escape network that saved thousands of her fellow *conversos* from the brutalities of the Inquisition.

<sup>20</sup> Sol Hachuel, a Jewish female saint who was revered by Muslims and Jews, defied forced conversions in Morocco in the 19th century. She was publicly beheaded at the age of seventeen.

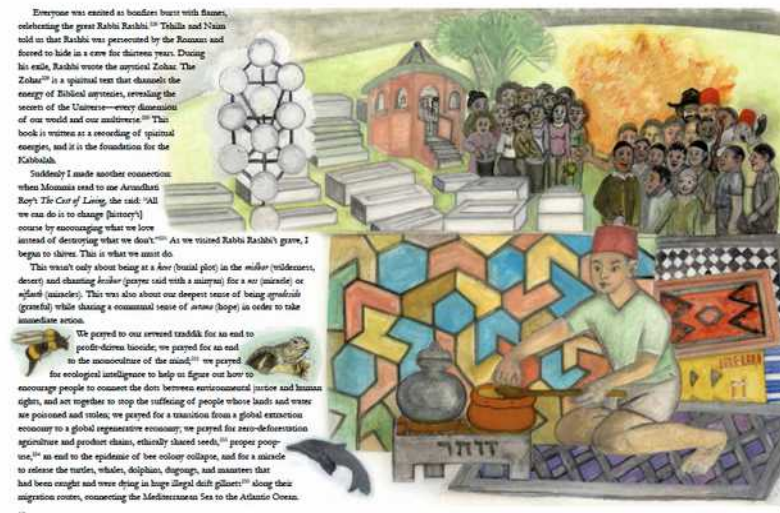
<sup>21</sup> An interlude from *Zazu Dreams*: “Remember the Ummah...” She was the same woman from the catacombs in Susa. As she spoke, her face slowly transformed into women I had seen in Ima’s books. Ima had told me about women who started underground escape networks for persecuted people or who sacrificed their lives for their undying commitment to empathy and the common context of struggle—women like Noor Inayat Khan, who survived WWII as long as she did because of her belief in the imagination and her extraordinary commitment to human rights. Khan was an East Indian-American Muslim who became a spy for Britain’s covert unit, the Special Operations Executive who supported an underground resistance network in Nazi-occupied Paris. “Khan took her assignment knowing the average survival time for an underground wireless operator in occupied France was six weeks. She lasted 16 weeks. ...Betrayed by a double agent, she was kept prisoner for almost a year until she was executed at Dachau concentration camp.”

giants that stalk planet Earth. *Zazu Dreams* crosses the border between diasporic identities and environmental action.

Ladino proverb: *Todo ke tyene ambre, venga y komen.* (Let anyone who is hungry, come and eat with us.)



Rabbi David Aaron reminds us, “*Kabbalah* is there to help us overcome the misconception of the disconnect.”<sup>22</sup> Echoing this consciousness of interconnectedness, of “expansive, united beings,”<sup>23</sup> *Zazu Dreams* confronts false binaries that feed on the illusion that we are separate from one another, separate from our natural world. Such binary codes reinforce entanglements of implicit and explicit forms of corporate coercion and corporeal collusion. Dictating us versus them ideologies, these predetermined, prescribed categories of identification generate and sustain environmental and humanitarian injustices. Binary-laden conformity, “the trap of mere opposition,”<sup>24</sup> nullifies creativity and invention, inhibiting deviation from the norm.



However, equally potent is our resistance to such hegemonies in the form of collaborative action that ignites personal, collective, cultural, and ecological healing. As it says in *Pirkei Avot*, (the Ethics of the

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Steve Bram documentary film, “Kabbalah Me: Spiritual Journey Into the World of Jewish Mysticism,” 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. New York: North Point Press, 1998: 274.

Ancestors) the ancient collections of rabbinic writings: “Do not separate yourself from the community”<sup>25</sup> When we embrace multiplicity and the sacred possibilities of mutual accountability, we develop the capacity for intra-agency: “agency always emerges in relationship.”<sup>26</sup> Through the vast diversity of the Jewish diaspora we can explore the familiar within the unfamiliar —illuminating a recognition of difference—a spiritual, socio-political connection with *the other*, increasingly urgent in our reductive media-saturated, techno-euphoric age.<sup>27</sup>



Through creative, collaborative daily choices, we can disentangle the intertwined roots of our climate crisis. Once we collectively embody how, as Rabbi Arthur Waskow asserts, “social justice and planetary healing are inextricably intertwined,” we can spark biocultural transformation—a resistance to colonialist legacies of systemic economic oppression and extractive industries.

Although I am haunted by the horrors of our insidious and explicit techno-utopic race into a robotic-5G

<sup>25</sup> Hillel, *Pirkei Avot* 2:4.

<sup>26</sup> See Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press: Durham, N.C., 2007. Barad along with Noam Chomsky, Rabbi Lerner, Bill McKibben, James Hansen, David Orr, Arun Gandhi, Paul Hawken, SHK-G HumptyHump, Thom Hartmann, Henry Giroux, Stephanie Seneff, Eve Ensler, James Wines, Antonia Juhasz, and Daliya Kandiyoti endorsed *Zazu Dreams*.

<sup>27</sup> The following Judaic principles reflect this imperative for a pluralistic social ecojustice. They represent *la'am* (simultaneously yes and no in versions of Hebrew and Arabic), the balance of contradictions.

***Machloket L'Shem Shamayim*** (Disagreement for the Sake of Heaven): Differing, and even contradictory, perspectives can become a fertile ground for dialogue and eventually collective action.

***Elu V'Elu Divrei Elohim Chayim*** (These and These are the Words of the Living God): Unity in diversity represents the intersection of biodiversity and cultural diversity. It is rooted in a process of storytelling in which ambiguity is not a lack of clarity, but offers multiple clarities in order to confront contemporary ecological and humanitarian crises.

***Shivim Panim La'Torah*** (Multiple Perspectives Can Co-Exist): We can embody lessons from Judaism's crossculturalism. When asked his religion, Einstein replied: “Mosaic.” Brit Hazon reminds us: “Just as there are 70 faces to the Torah, so too are there a myriad of ways to understand our climate issues and approaches to solving them.”

***Ribui HaShalom*** (The Multiplicity of Truths): Rabbi Seidenberg shares a criteria of biophilia: by “binding ourselves to other creatures (...), we are enriching the meaning of our own humanity” (171). It is essential to understand ourselves in relation to a greater whole. Judaism, in its multiplicity, teaches us that we are not victims; we are not at the whim of corporate tyrannies; those most vulnerable can be empowered if we acknowledge and collectively act on how we are all interconnected. Living these interrelationships is the foundation for conviviality: compassionate coalition-building and sustainable ecological stewardship. See [Brit Hazon](#) (all about personal behavior change).

future, I cling tenaciously to the possibility that we can shift our self-destructive complicity that sustains ravaging anthropogenic environmental racism. A joyful, cross-cultural, interspecies approach to climate-crisis mitigation weaves simultaneous individual, community, and corporate accountability. When we overcome binary divisiveness, we can co-create an action-oriented practice of gratitude and integrity—roots of the *Kabbalah*. This collective spiritual intelligence, this deep mindfulness, is a devotion to reciprocal, biophilic infrastructures. A devotion to constructing co-beneficial, regenerative support systems can undermine industrial convenience-culture. And, I would love to be in conversation with others who also find themselves ignited by such devotion.

Ladino proverb: *Kuándo una puerta sérra syen avren.* (When one door closes, one hundred open.)