

I marvel at the marble stairwell in this 17 story hotel
as I descend in the hope of losing a few calories-
each counts these days-
where one wakes to the magic number on the glucometer
to review the sins of the previous dinner.

What it must have taken to hew and quarry all this marble
and the granite being placed all around the main downtown post office
as I walk to the lake this cloudy morning before Chicago awakens:
Was this TARP money being put to use?

I walk by a quarry near my hospital at times
and marvel at the depth to which man has gorged out of the earth
for his building projects, chosen for the granite and stone hardness
it is prime building material and mechanically crushed to the size demanded by the
contractor who sends in lorry after lorry, winding their way down the spiral dirt path to
the depths of the excoriated gray landscape
as if Mother Earth
gives of Her own body, now willingly
so that we can build huge skyscrapers to our egos.

Then I think of the hole in the earth across from my shul
where the Rabbi is building his new edifice
a gaping disgorgement of Chicago clay, soft and brown
a violation once more but just a few feet deep, enough for the foundation
where we will all stand above
one day
in the artist's rendition sent out to fundraise
manicured pews of cherry wood
ladies gallery and all
just like a Lutheran chapel.

Which brings be to the collapsing building of my soul
as chunks of debris slowly come crashing down to earth
the attempt was made to build
but failed
the material was grade B
the engineer was incompetent
and the workers drunk.

Yet there is something right about this
a sort of hubris
that is appropriate
something that feels justified in a weird way
when something is dreamed of, executed and yet collapses.
when the earth will eventually claim all for itself

either naturally or through it cataclysmic paroxysms
in quakes and other “disasters”. When she is unwilling to stand for all this human
arrogance anymore.

I too was built on a foundation not of my own choosing
but then began the laborious work
of building structure upon structure
in my effort to reach out to the divine
heavenwards,
to this angry punishing skyGod
who rages at us with a wagging index finger
in sacred scriptures.

Then having discovered Midrash
and its poetic beauty
its irony and hidden protest
its textuality and deconstruction of
the heavy revealed word
its playfulness with the Logos
then next story was built
towards Him.

Finally after crisis in life
when one dis-covers the darker side
of one’s soul
Hassidut and Kabbalah provided a narrative
that framed these impulses and feelings
about me and the divine
in a holographic image that provided comfort and validation
of the very struggle. It turns out that He too has His issues
and this world was born out of His desire to expel His dark side.
Mother earth represents that dark desire in the cataclysmic chaos
that followed His birthing.

But now all is crumbling
the edifice is losing height
falling, falling
back down to the cthonic depths
in a free fall
and on the way down all is being stripped away
except the idea behind the words.
except the feeling and the once fresh desire.
The structure is broken
like the way my grandson impulsively tears down
his lego construction
suddenly without warning, on impulse.

Back on the ground
Mother Earth caresses all this with a knowing nod
Her daily rituals and cycles
light and dark,
sleep and wakefulness,
hunger and satiety,
the warm shower and the deep cool mikvah waters
the air breezing on my face in the green cornfields
the awakening of desire in the loins,
now and then
and the persistent seeking of beauty despite age.

These always-present
but newly dis-covered silent presences
give me comfort
and the realization
of the vitality of Her apparent passiveness.
She is the silent witness to all this
She bears the blood of our hubris
She accepts us after all is done and we lie without further breath.

Where the shul becomes erect in its move to become
a place of worship
I become bent over, like an old shaman
with the weight of my past, and others,
of my failure,
and yet my new found sense
of earthiness.
Contrary to what I was taught about "gashmius"-physicality
and the evil of desire,
I now wait for it and welcome the very feelings
of hunger and thirst, the aching limbs that need their daily
limbering up,
the morning misty moist air,
a beautiful girl passing by,
as if this is the very blessing of life and Mother Earth

"They" call it Malchut and Schechina in other texts
but for me
having crumbled
it's just what I have right now
and that is fine.
For 2000 years we in the synagogue and church have imaged the divine
in His masculinity.
Recently Meister Eckhardt, Baal Shem Tov and their disciples
think otherwise

but we get stuck in the wire diagrams
of this or that theosophical system
ignoring the explosive implication of this.

So I need to continue to just hold this paradox
hold the divine images
negotiate His/Her modus vivendi
inside me.

Allow Her to be present to the kiritik inside
to be present at Her desire
in the temporal seasons that characterizes Her cycles
be present to Her feminine rage
as different from His
and wait.