

University of Dayton

From the Selected Works of Maureen E. Schlangen

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Perceptions: Reconciliation

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Reconciliation

I was stood up for an interview one day in October.

But I was put out for only a moment. The unexpected gap in my schedule was a welcome one. Consumed lately at the “macro” level with the powerless observation of worldwide financial collapse, I have been gradually preoccupied, too, with its impending effects on a “micro” level — on my family, my community, my work ... my future.

As I crossed the library lawn and passed by the monument to the Blessed Virgin Mother with casual disregard, my brisk stride slowed at a sudden awareness of the divine: I was alone.

The normally bustling central campus was quiet, the students away on a four-day midterm break. In that peaceful moment, I was taken by the serene beauty of creation. A warm breeze quietly rustled the leaves, mostly still green under the sun’s autumn brilliance. As I glanced toward the flawless blue sky, extremes came to mind. Despite our best efforts to pollute the world and abuse its abundant resources, God’s creation has not lost its stunning majesty, holy and perfect. It stood in direct contrast to the man-made cesspool of a world economy that had polluted my outlook for the past few weeks.

When I got back to my office, the phone rang. It was my interviewee, sincerely apologetic.

No apology was necessary, I said. No harm was done. In fact, the net effect was the opposite, I told her, for the circumstance had brought about a revelation I desperately needed.

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To this world-class scholar, the question wasn’t rhetorical. She shared that she’d had a similar epiphany just the day before. As the Dow was recording its largest seven-day percentage decline in 21 years, she’d been filled with fear — for the world, for our country, for her children, for her future.

But she’d spent part of the day at temple in prayer. It was a High Holy Day — Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of atonement. On Yom Kippur, she said, one seeks to make reparation with God and with the community. But to receive true peace, one also must make things right with those who have been harmed.

The desired effect: *tikkun olam* — translated from Hebrew, “perfecting the world” or “world repair.”

In our common glimpse of God’s perfection and our shared experience of it, hopefulness prevailed above the fear and uncertainty.

Tikkun olam.

— Maureen Schlangen

— Illustration by Renee Nault