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Dr. Molly E. Dunn leads the Weintraub Israel Center at Jewish Philanthropies of Southern Arizona, where she works at the intersection of Jewish identity, Israel education, antisemitism analysis, and community resilience. She develops educational initiatives that help Jewish students, families, and institutions understand Jewish peoplehood, Israel, and antisemitism with historical clarity and moral seriousness.

Dr. Dunn holds a Ph.D. in Justice Studies from Arizona State University's School of Social Transformation. Her academic work examined antisemitism, Jewish identity, race, social movements, and the ways Jewish people are often misread or erased within contemporary social justice frameworks.

Prior to working in the Jewish community, Dr. Dunn taught courses in criminology, justice studies, contemporary antisemitism studies, feminist theory, immigration, and human difference. Her teaching and public work draw on more than a decade of experience in higher education, social justice scholarship, and Jewish communal education.

Her work translates complex institutional patterns into clear analysis, especially around campus antisemitism, Jewish belonging, Israel, and the failures of diversity frameworks to account for Jewish peoplehood. She writes and teaches with a focus on moral clarity, historical memory, and the relationship between Jewish identity and land.

Finding God in the Jewish People

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I returned to Judaism by following evidence past the limits of categories I had inherited from higher education. As a scholar trained in social justice and Indigenous methodologies, I learned to ask whose knowledge counts, who gets to tell the story, whose relationship to land is taken seriously, and whose is dismissed as politics.

Frameworks like indigeneity,¹ settler colonialism,² decolonization,³ and *Land Back*⁴ taught me to notice peoplehood, memory, displacement, historical revisionism, and erasure. They taught me that domination does not only remove people from land. It tries to remove land from a people's memory, then calls that forgetting *truth*.

For a long time, I asked those questions about everyone except the Jewish people. Then I realized that was the problem. The Jewish people were everywhere in these conversations, but rarely as ourselves. We appeared as symbols in moral stories: too European, too religious, too particular, too inconvenient. We were treated as a problem to explain, not as a people with land, language, law, memory, longing, and continuity.

Eventually, I could not unsee it. The Jewish people were missing from our own story. That realization brought me back to Judaism. Not because I abandoned scholarship, but because I applied these questions to Jews, too. If land mattered, the land also mattered for the Jewish people. If dispossession mattered, Jewish dispossession mattered. If return mattered, Jewish return mattered.

If *terra nullius*⁵ names the fantasy that land can be treated as empty when its people are made invisible, then I had to ask why the Jewish homeland was treated as empty of the Jewish people. Not literally empty, but emptied of Jewish origin, memory, language, longing, law, and return.⁶ The place Jews come from was being narrated as the place Jews merely arrived, as if Jewish peoplehood had no geography and Jewish continuity had no land beneath it.

Jewish continuity could not be reduced to trauma, politics, or private belief. Our language, calendar, rituals, arguments, laws, texts, and collective memory were not ornamental. They were evidence of inherited relationships across exile and time. God became thinkable to me there. Not as an escape from history. Not as something I found by leaving intellectual life behind. God became thinkable through Judaism itself: not religion alone, but the Jewish people; through the way we carried covenant, grief, joy, argument, law, longing, and obligation across rupture and return.

I do not claim to see from nowhere. I remain shaped by Donna Haraway's critique of the "*god trick*,"⁷ the fantasy of seeing everything from nowhere. What I claim is situated knowledge: I came to understand God from inside a people whose existence has outlasted every theory and empire that tried to explain us away.

For me, finding God meant finding the Jewish people: a people bound by memory, obligation, and return—to our land, to one another, and to ourselves.

Footnotes:

- 1) Drawing on Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “indigeneity” refers to a people’s enduring relationship to land, collective memory, culture, language, knowledge, and self-determination under conditions of colonial disruption. In a Jewish context, this framework helps illuminate peoplehood as rooted in ancestral connection, exile, return, and attachment to the Land of Israel.
- 2) In Patrick Wolfe’s account, “settler colonialism” is an ongoing structure through which settlers seek to secure land and replace Indigenous populations, not a single historical event, organized around securing land by eliminating or replacing Indigenous peoples.
- 3) In Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s work, decolonization names the active process of dismantling colonial systems of power and knowledge while restoring Indigenous self-determination, sovereignty, collective memory, and ways of knowing. For example, decolonization can involve transferring power to formerly subjugated peoples, restoring Indigenous sovereignty, and unlearning Western or Eurocentric paradigms.
- 4) Land Back is an Indigenous-led political, cultural, and organizing framework aimed at collective liberation, Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization, and the return or restoration of stolen lands to Indigenous Peoples.
- 5) In the settler-contract framework developed by Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, terra nullius refers to the colonial fiction that land could be treated as empty or available for conquest by denying Indigenous peoples’ land relationships, political societies, and prior claims.
- 6) In the context of this passage, the word “return” refers to the Jewish people’s spiritual, historical, and legal reconnection to their ancestral homeland—the concept of returning from exile.
- 7) Donna Haraway’s critique of the “god trick” critiques the illusion of objectivity as a detached, universal, and unmarked standpoint—as if one could know the world by “seeing everything from nowhere.” Here, not claiming to “see from nowhere” means that this essay does not pretend to speak from outside history, peoplehood, or land; it locates God from within a people’s inherited story: Jewish collective history and shared memories of exile, return, and belonging.