



## ROUNDUP SPIRITUAL

BY BARBARA MAHANY

### Sabbaths 2013

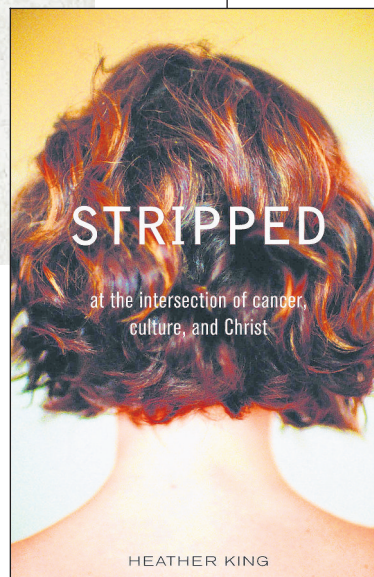
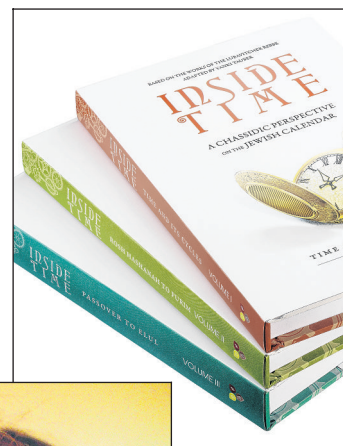
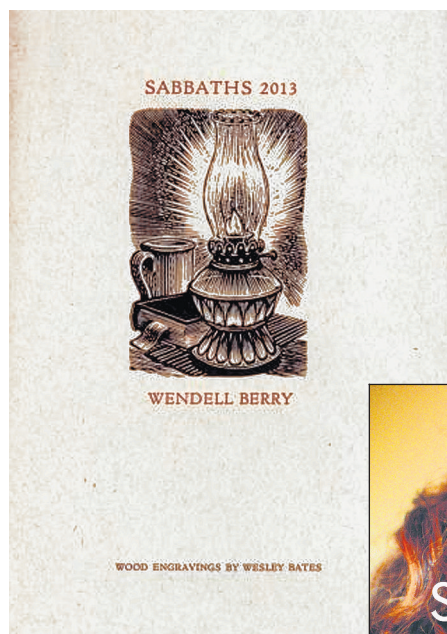
By Wendell Berry, Larkspur, 36 pages, \$28

There are rare few times in the unfolding of our quotidian lives when we hold something in our hands and know, right away, that it's sacred. To hold "Sabbaths 2013," a hand-bound volume of Kentucky poet Wendell Berry's poems in handset type with wood engravings by Wesley Bates, is to behold the sacred.

It's as all the finest books on our shelves should be — a work of art, of exquisite attention, at every step of the bookmaking process. Larkspur Press in Monterey, Ky., is that rarest of small-press publishing houses. Gray Zeitz, the founder, is described as "bewhiskered, aproned, and ink-smudged." He sets type by hand on clamshell printing presses, and his place of creation is said to be equal parts library, museum and workshop. Larkspur's tagline: "Creating fine books one letter at a time."

Certainly, these poems of Berry deserve to be unspooled with such care. Each of the 20 poems is a meditation, the closest we might come to modern-day Scripture. To encounter these lines is to brush up against the beautiful, the breathtaking, rooted in the everyday — the birthing barn, the generations-worn kitchen table, the old dog with her gray muzzle.

Consider, for instance, just this one line: "The years / have brought him love and grief. / They have taught him that grief / is love clarified, appraised / beyond confusion, affirmed, lifted / out of time."



### Stripped

By Heather King, Loyola, 224 pages, \$14.95

Cancer is hardly the landscape where one might expect soliloquies on prayer. But prayer, the down-on-your-knees, heart-wide-open petitions that spring from the raw fear of dying and death, is what makes "Stripped: At the Intersection of Cancer, Culture and Christ" (the author originally titled it, "Stripped: Culture, Cancer, and the Cloud of Unknowing") very much a book for the soul — and not only for those who've been excoriated by the words, "You have cancer."

More than anything, it's the quality of King's writing that catapults this book off the shelf. Her words are sharp-edged as any surgeon's knife, and, as with all the most powerful writing, hers has the capacity to slip in wisdoms and enlightenments without notice. You're busy laughing or wiping away a tear, and suddenly you realize you've pulled out a pen to underline words to keep for the ages.

This is not a cancer saga you've read before, and where King's faith takes her is a place few might choose. (She submits to surgery, but decides against radiation or chemotherapy — decisions she made 15 years ago now, and she's still alive to write about it.) It's the journey, the straight-shooting, no-punches-pulled, intimate cry of her heart, that makes this a most soulful expedition. One you'll not soon forget.

### Inside Time

Based on the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, adapted by Yanki Tauber, Meaningful Life Center, 3 volumes, 944 pages, \$54.99

It would be shortchanging this three-volume set to call it simply a meditation on time. More apt would be to call it meditations within meditations, a Russian doll of deep thinking on the sacred nature of time and the particulars of the Jewish calendar. What's found here is a collection of deeply thoughtful essays, exploring the soul of time as defined by the Torah and seen through the lens of Hasidic teaching. You needn't subscribe to a Lubavitch world view to be enlightened by the epiphanies found in these pages.

At heart, in Volume One, "Time and Its Cycles," is the notion that Creation wasn't a divine one-time act, but rather that God creates the world anew in every moment. (Volume Two considers the Jewish calendar from Rosh Hashana to Purim; Volume Three, Passover to Elul.) This notion of perpetual creation, Rabbi Tauber argues, is a powerful antidote to the hopelessness that plagues so much of the modern-day landscape. Most powerful of all, he writes, is the corollary that time is wholly concentrated in the here and the now, inviting a fine-tuned focus on mindfulness.

Consider this instruction, drawn from one of the many charming stories Tauber tells to illustrate his teachings: "We cannot make our days longer, nor can we add additional hours to our nights. But we can maximize our usage of time by regarding each segment of time as a world of its own."

For the student eager to burrow deep into the great vault of Jewish sacred text, this is a book to hold our attention for a very long time.

Barbara Mahany is the author of "Slowing Time: Seeing the Sacred Outside Your Kitchen Door." Twitter: @BarbaraMahany