

THE MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM OF THE HOLOCAUST AND JEWISH FAITH

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*Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized. Whether culmination or aberration of history, the Holocaust transcends history. Everything about it inspires fear and leads to despair. The dead are in possession of a secret that we, the living, are neither worthy of nor capable of recovering.*¹

The poem by the great Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti entitled “Like a Bull” was written in the year Hitler came to power in 1933.² He foretold the coming danger of the “wolfpack” and the future of European Jewry in that “the pack will scatter his bones all over the meadow.” The biologist Lecomte du Noüy stated in *La dignité humaine* (1944) that “Germany’s crime is the greatest crime the world has ever known, because it is not on the scale of History: it is on the scale of evolution” of driving a human genetic line, a bloodline, to extinction like man has driven certain species of animals to extinction.³

Fifteen-year old Anna Eilenberg-Eibeshitz witnessed in Łódź the day on September 5, 1939 when the Nazi soldiers arrived singing *Wenn Judenblut von messer spritzte/Dann geht’s nochmal so gut!* (When the Jewish blood spurts from the knife/Then all goes doubly well!).⁴ Later, she wrote these words:

*They came like a cloud of green locusts, a horde of brutes in human form; masses of flesh and steel, a stream of thunderous terror in dawn, heavy with foreboding. Even the smallest child among us could feel the abysmal evil and disaster that descended upon us. We were enveloped, as doomed to destruction as the sinful generation of the flood.*⁵

Elie Wiesel has called the Holocaust the *mysterium tremendum* (sacred mystery) that can be approached, but never fully understood.⁶ Wiesel claims that “the ultimate mystery of the Holocaust is that whatever happened took place in the soul” and Professor David Patterson wrote to approach the Holocaust we need to find our way into our own souls.⁷ Primo Levi wrote that

*. . . there is no rationality in the Nazi hatred: it is a hate that is not in us: it is outside man, it is a poison fruit sprung from the deadly trunk of Fascism, but it is outside and beyond Fascism itself. We cannot understand it, but we can and must understand from where it springs, and we must be in our guard . . . because what happened could happen again. Conscience can be seduced and obscured again – even our consciences.*⁸

Wiesel asked one of the three judges in the Adolf Eichmann trial on whether he understood the Holocaust after reading all of the trial documents and the secret reports and interrogating all of the witness. The judge humbly confessed that:

No, not at all. I know the facts and the events that served as their framework; I know how the tragedy unfolded minute by minute, but this knowledge, as if coming from outside, has nothing to do with understanding. There is in all this a portion which will

*always remain a mystery; a kind of forbidden zone, inaccessible to reason. Fortunately, as it happens. Without that . . . Who knows, perhaps that's the gift which God, in a moment of grace, gave to man: it prevents him from understanding everything, thus saving him from madness, or from suicide.*⁹

Arthur Cohen refers to the Holocaust as a human *tremendum*, in which the concentration camps were a *tremendum*, based upon the celebration of death and not of life.¹⁰ Wiesel has said “[w]hat we suffered has no place within language: it is somewhere beyond life and history.”¹¹ Arthur Cohen wrote that:

*The death camps are a reality which, by their very nature, obliterate thought and the human programme of thinking. We are dealing . . . with something unmanageable and obdurate . . . The death camps are unthinkable, but not unfelt. They constitute a traumatic event and, like all decisive trauma, they are suppressed but omnipresent, unrecognized but tyrannic, silted over by forgetfulness but never obliterated.*¹²

Wiesel described his moment of liberation on April 11, 1945 at Buchenwald during a speech delivered at the International Liberators Conference in 1981 beginning as a

*. . . terrifying silence terminated by abrupt yelling. The first American soldiers. Their faces ashen. Their eyes – I shall never forget their eyes, your eyes. You looked and looked, you could not move your gaze away from us; it was as though you sought to alter reality with your eyes. They reflected astonishment, bewilderment, endless pain, and anger – yes, anger above all. Rarely have I seen such anger, such rage – contained, mute, yet ready to burst with frustration, humiliation, and utter helplessness. Then you broke down. You wept. You wept and wept uncontrollably, unashamedly; you were our children then, for we, the twelve-year-old, the sixteen-year-old boys and girls in Buchenwald and Theresienstadt and Mauthausen knew so much more than you about life and death. You wept; we could not. We had no more tears left; we had nothing left. In a way we were dead and we knew it. What did we feel? Only sadness.*¹³

Wiesel said “[a] normal person cannot absorb so much darkness, nor can he understand, or ever hope to understand.”¹⁴

*The ghetto and the sealed cars, the children hurled alive into the flames, the dumb old men with slit throats, the mothers with crazed eyes, the sons powerless to relieve their fathers' agony: a 'normal' person cannot take in so much horror.*¹⁵

Christian theologian Franklin H. Littell has stated that “[t]here is a demonic quality to hatred of the Jews which makes it more than human cruelty: it is blasphemy.”¹⁶ In early 1942 and 1943, government officials in Washington, London, Basel and Stockholm had actual information in photographs and reports marked confidential and publication prohibited “about every transport carrying its human cargo to the realm of ashes, to the kingdom of mist.”¹⁷ And the world was silent. As Eichmann once declared no country was interested in saving Jews and Germany was killing the Jews for the good of the world.¹⁸ How do you explain the silence from Roosevelt, Churchill,

Eisenhower and the Pope? The Hungarians, the Rumanians, the Slovaks, the Poles and the Ukrainians were more savage than the Germans in murdering Jews.¹⁹

Professor Wistrich has called the Holocaust a *pan-European* event supported by millions of Europeans wishing to eliminate the Jewish presence and remarked that:

*Thinking about the Holocaust is like staring into an abyss and hoping it will not stare back . . . a black hole of history that not only challenges our facile assumptions about modernity and progress but questions our very sense of what it means to be human.*²⁰

Emil Fackenheim wrote that what stares back from the abyss is the terrifying, stark and skeletal image of the *Muselmann*, the Nazis' "most characteristic, most original product," a "new way of being in human history."²¹ Primo Levi in *Survival in Auschwitz* described the *Muselmänner* as

. . . the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer. One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand.

. . . if I could enclose all the evil of our time in one image, I would choose this image . . .
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The evil of the Holocaust cannot be understood, punished, nor forgiven, but can only be remembered.²³ By remembering, we rob the Holocaust of the final victory of silencing the dead in the abstractness of the number 6 million.²⁴ The number 6 in the Ten Commandments is "you shall not kill." *Exodus 20: 13. Whoever sheds the blood of man, among man, his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man. Genesis 9:6.* The mass murder that is the Holocaust was a series of millions of individual murders,²⁵ in which one third of the world Jewish population was killed by the Nazis and their collaborators.

Herman Kruk's hidden diaries, narratives and poems recorded the annihilation of the Vilna Ghetto and the death camps in Estonia before his death on September 19, 1944.²⁶ Before he was shot and burned, he wrote and buried on March 24, 1944 in Klooga near Tallinn the following poem:

FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

*Neighbors in Camp Klooga often ask me
Why do you write in such hard times? –
Why and for whom? . . .
. . . For we won't live to see it anyway.*

*I know I am condemned and awaiting my turn,
Although deep inside me burrows a hope for a miracle.
Drunk on the pen trembling in my hand,*

*I record everything for future generations:
A day will come when someone will find
The leaves of horror I write and record.
People will tear their hair in anguish,
Eyes will plunge into the sky
Unwilling to believe the horror of our times.
And then these lines will be a consolation
For future generations, which I, a prisoner,
Kept in my sight, things
I recorded, fixed faithfully . . .
For me it is superfluous,
For future generations I leave it as a trace.
And let it remain though I must die here
And let it show what I could not live to tell.
And I answer my neighbors:
Maybe a miracle will liberate me.
But if I must die, it must not die with me –*

*The time of horrors I leave for future worlds.
I write because I must write – a consolation in my time of horror.
For future generations I leave it as a trace.²⁷*

Wiesel in *The Oath* comes to the realization that if, by telling the story of countless deaths, one life can be saved, the story must be told, no matter how painful and even if promises of silence were made in the past.²⁸ Victor Klemperer said in his diary on May 27, 1942 “I shall go on writing. That is my heroism. I will bear witness, precise witness!”²⁹ We must tell so the dead are not forgotten and, since it is so easy for the nature of man to play the role of the SS guard, seek ways ensuring it will not happen again.³⁰

Tell your children about it, and your children to their children, and their children to another generation. Joel 1:3.

Wiesel has said many times that to forget the victims means to kill them a second time and, although we could not prevent the first murders, we have a responsibility for the second one.³¹ The legend engraved over the entrance to *Yad Vashem* reads, “Forgetfulness is the way to exile. Remembrance is the way to redemption.”³² The memory of the Holocaust is part of the collective consciousness of every Jew living in Israel.³³

From the Kingdom of Memory, Wiesel wrote “to be Jewish is to remember – to claim our right to memory as well as our duty to keep it alive” and

Remember . . . Remember that you were a slave in Egypt: Remember to sanctify the Sabbath . . . Remember Amalek, who wanted to annihilate you . . . No other Biblical Commandment is as persistent. Jews live and grow under the sign of memory.³⁴

Dr. Yosef Burg during the eulogy for Aliza Begin in 1982, the wife of the former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, gave these words about memory:

*In Judaism, memory is everything. No less than one hundred and sixty-nine times does the Torah command us to remember the past. The significance of memory is that, by it, the past is made part of the present. If you erase the power of memory you shatter the sense of time. Time is past, present and future. And the existence of a future in Judaism is netzach – eternity.*³⁵

Hélène Berr wrote in her *Journal* on November 30, 1943 that “[t]he only immortality of which we can have certain knowledge is the immortality that consists in the continuing memory of the dead among the living.”³⁶ The Hebrew word for “memory,” *zikaron*, means also “a source of speech,” the “wellspring of the word offered to another, for the sake of another.”³⁷ Hélène Berr, an honor graduate of the Sorbonne in English language and literature in 1942, kept a diary in Nazi-occupied Paris until her deportation to Drancy.³⁸

Drancy was an internment camp located in a northern working-class suburb of Paris close to railway lines leading east and became the hub of operations to exterminate the entire Jewish population of France.³⁹ From the records of *Shoah* victims’ names at *Yad Vashem*, there once lived in France a Wolf Brauman, who was sent to Drancy and died in Auschwitz in 1942 and somehow a distant relative in the author’s chain of generations.

Hélène was involved in a clandestine network to save Jewish children from deportation.⁴⁰ On her twenty-third birthday in 1944, Hélène and her parents were taken from Drancy by train to Auschwitz, where her parents died within six months and later she was forced marched to Bergen-Belsen, where in April of 1945 she was brutally beaten to death because being sick with typhus she could not make the morning assembly that day.⁴¹ In Berr’s *Journal* on October 11, 1943, she earned the right to make these observations:

Is the pope worthy of God’s mandate on earth if he is an impotent bystander to the most flagrant violations of Christ’s teachings? Do Catholics deserve the name of Christians when, if they applied Christ’s teachings, religious difference, or even racial difference would not exist?

And when they say: The difference between you and us is that we believe the Messiah has come already, and you are still waiting. But what have they done with their Messiah? They’re as evil as men were before he came. They crucify Christ every day. And if Christ were to return to earth, would he not answer them with the same words as before? Who knows if his fate would not be exactly the same? . . . No, Christ would no longer be wanted, because he would give men back their freedom of conscience, and that is too hard for them to bear.. .

. . . I also read the Gospel according to St. Matthew. . . What I found in the words of Christ was no different from the rules of conscience that I have instinctively tried to obey myself. It seemed to me that Christ belongs much more to me than he does to some good Catholics I could mention. I sometimes used to think I was nearer to Christ than many Christians were, but now I can prove it.

. . . there were those who rejected Christ, despite his having come for everyone's sake, and those people weren't "the Jews," since at that time everyone was Jewish; they were just stupid, nasty people (nowadays you could just as well call them "Catholic") . . .

. . .

*As I read the Gospel I was struck by the word convert. We have given it a precise meaning that it did not have. The Gospels say that "ye shall be converted" – that is to say, changed and made good by listening to the word of Christ. But nowadays, conversion means going to a different church, following a different sect. Were there different sects at the time of Christ? Was there anything other than the cult of God? How men have become petty while believing they have become clever!*⁴²

Since the Holocaust represented the attempted annihilation of the entire Jewish people and culture from the face of the earth and the erasing of any memory of their existence, Wiesel has ruled out all comparisons to other genocides.⁴³ Benjamin Harshav wrote that there were two Holocausts: the extermination of six million Germans, French, Poles, Hungarians, Italians and Russians of Jewish origin and the extermination of a trans-national Jewish cultural nation without power over a territory that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries with political parties, clubs, newspapers, literature, language, libraries, unions, schools and had existed in Europe for over a thousand years.⁴⁴

Lucy Dawidowicz has described the Holocaust as not just another anti-Semitic event, but "[i]t was part of a salvational ideology that envisaged the attainment of Heaven by bringing Hell on earth" by the Nazis.⁴⁵ Zelig Kalmanovitch wrote from the Vilna Ghetto that

*A war is being waged against the Jew. But this war is not merely directed against one link in the triad [of Israel, God, and Torah] but against the entire triad: against the Torah and God, against the moral law and Creator of the universe.*⁴⁶

Professor Wistrich wrote that the "Holocaust was indeed a logical culmination of Hitler's messianic megalomania and the perverted religiosity that had animated his politics . . . [and its] . . . 'finality' . . . resonated with sinister echoes of the last judgment, the final destruction of the Jews heralding the dawn of a new millennium, the redemption of the end of days . . . [and yet] destroyed the moral foundations of the European civilization that it so falsely claimed to defend."⁴⁷

Wistrich said that "Hitler, masquerading as a Germanic warrior 'Christ' (the Chosen redeemer of a secular Salvationist religion) brought this millenarian tradition to a gruesome end in the death camps – the 'sacred altars' of the new political religion called National Socialism."⁴⁸ Also, Richard Rubinstein characterized the Holocaust as a "modern version of a Christian holy war carried out by a neo-pagan National Socialist State hostile to Christianity."⁴⁹

In Wiesel's *Dialogue* between "A Mother and Her Daughter," the little girl wonders where they are going for she is "really tired."⁵⁰ She wonders whether God is

tired too, but is assured by her mother that “you will ask Him yourself.”⁵¹ A child’s question is anything but childish when asked on the way to Auschwitz, on the way to the end of the world.⁵² However in Eastern Europe except Poland, most Jews were not deported to concentration camps but died at killing sites near their homes with neighbors, schoolmates and colleagues watching or participating in the destruction of the town’s Jewish population.⁵³

In 1941 I witnessed when all the Jews were gathered. Nearly 1,000 appeared with their suitcases. They were given the promise that they would go to Israel. They were deprived of all of their things and forced to strip naked. My friend and classmate was there. His family name was Cantor. He was twelve years old, and they shot him in the eye. My chemistry teacher, his wife, and their two kids were also shot – the entire family. That’s how the Jews were treated. – Iuril Alekseevich Kilan, Zhytomyr, 1996.⁵⁴

What did the father calmly say to his young son, while holding his hand and pointing up to the beautiful sky before the *Einsatzgruppen* troops⁵⁵ and their local collaborators released the fury of their machine guns over the death pits outside of their Lithuanian village? What secret things did he say to his son while pointing upward? Perhaps, “Look, we will soon see the face of God.” The Hungarian poet András Mezei described this epidemic of casual murder.

JASON

*She carefully unlaced her grandmother’s boots,
then kicked off her own. Before the pair: the river.
Behind them: Jason, the neighbour’s son from the square
lit by the frozen snow – and his machinegun.
Jason, discharging his first-ever magazine.
Jason, standing stunned as the tumbling bodies
are whisked away and gone with the turbulent current.
. . . Had he done that? Was there so little to life?⁵⁶*

From the Kovno Ghetto came the song *Lietuva, Kraujuota žemė* (Lithuania, Bloody Land) as a parody on the Lithuania anthem, *Lietuva, tėvyne mūsų* (Lithuania, Our Homeland), which was sung in the ghettos despite risk of death and was inscribed in blood on walls of once Jewish houses.

*Lithuania, bloody land,
May you be cursed through the centuries,
Let your blood flow
Like the blood of Jewish children.*

*Let your sons suffer
As you made Jewish sons suffer;
When your dark days end,
May no one find your grave.*

*You hope the Germans will grant you favors,
But you will end up in the Ninth Fort.*

*What you wish for us should happen to you:
You should be buried alive.*

*Let your cities burn,
And your villages and farms; You should die as you made us die,
Through all eternity!⁵⁷*

My grandfather's older brother, Josel Brauman, was a tradesman who was married and lived in Panevezys (Ponevezh), Lithuania when he died on January 13, 1940. Fortunately, he was buried in the Panevezys Jewish Cemetery before the Germans came, but his wife and sons Chaim Ber (age 33), Itsik and Eliokim (both age 20) died an unknown death when the Germans arrived. Sholem Brauman once lived as a merchant, who was born in 1877 and lived in Zarasai (NovoAleksandrovsk District), Lithuania, also my grandfather's place of birth, and was married to Zelda Kaufman. From the Central Database of *Shoah* Victims' Names at *Yad Vashem*, all that is known is of their deaths in their home town. There once lived Khaim Brauman, who was from and died in Rakishok, Lithuania, in 1941. There once lived Ferentz Brauman (prisoner number 92818) from Lithuania (language German) who died from disease in the camp at Muehldorf Mettenheim in January of 1945 at age 51.

For how many of the murdered victims cried out *SHEMA ISRAEL ADONAY ELOHEYNU ADONAY EHOD* (*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is the One*) before the SS Death Heads and the local populace pulled the triggers or released the gas in the trucks with glee.⁵⁸ The term for martyr in Hebrew means "to sanctify the Name" that is to die with the words of the *SHEMA* on one's lips.⁵⁹ With the *SHEMA*, a person acknowledges his acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.

THE SHEMA - Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is the One. You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions. And these words that I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them to your sons and you shall speak of them while you sit in your home and while you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be ornaments between your eyes. And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

This primary article of Jewish faith, *Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is the One. You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your possessions*, is the prayer for the morning, evening and bedtime. It is the prayer inscribed within the *mezuzah* on every Jewish doorpost, it is the final prayer uttered before death and it is the prayer on the lips of Jewish martyrs whether they were murdered by Catholics of the Inquisition, Muslim jihadists, or Hitler's SS. When the Pharisees asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment in the Law, from *Deuteronomy 6:5* Jesus replied, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind* (*Matthew 22:35-40*).

Evidence indicates that *Kiddush haShem* (sanctification of the name of God) at the moment of death may have provided spiritual refuge and connection and aided individuals to overcome the panic accompanying imminent horror.⁶⁰ This action

constituted spiritual resistance and essentially the only kind of resistance possible for a devout Jew.⁶¹ Rabbis separated from their congregations nevertheless performed religious ceremonies, led prayers and protected *Torah* scrolls to the very moment of their death.⁶²

An Auschwitz survivor describes how he kept his soul from the Germans by praying and God became a living presence within him, a presence in time and memory.⁶³ God surrounded and whispered to those heading for the gas chambers that death could be understood not as nothingness but as a moment of the supreme testing of faith and redemption beyond the suffering of this world for the resurrection of the dead is one of the cornerstones of the *Torah*.⁶⁴

Some Jews amazingly smuggled a page or two of a sacred text into the Nazi death camps, for these words were the connection to a world that honored people, where sanctity existed, where life had meaning and to a world that is to come.⁶⁵ However more importantly, the words of *Torah*, just as when the phrase *Shema Yisrael* is spoken, is the spiritual link and guide for every Jew and to a shared destiny that a non-Jew cannot understand.⁶⁶

*. . . the Torah is not just a sacred scroll of parchment. You have a special feeling for it when you have helped to smuggle it into a ghetto under the nose of the Nazis so that you can celebrate the High Holy Days. When it is a matter of life and death, and something you are willing to risk your life for . . .*⁶⁷

Elie Wiesel related how people in the camps without books would recite passages from the Talmud and how a man smuggled in a pair of *tefillin*, phylacteries.⁶⁸

*He smuggled them in and there were at least two hundred Jews who got up every day one hour before everybody to stand in line and to perform the Mitzvah. Absurd! Yes, it was absurd to put on the phylacteries. Do you know there were Jews there who fasted on Yom Kippur! There were Jews who said prayers! There were Jews who sanctified the name of Israel, of their people, simply by remaining human!*⁶⁹

Livia Bitton Jackson related how in the cattle cars on the way to Auschwitz the men stood up and responded in prayer with the timeless affirmation of faith of *Here, Oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!*⁷⁰ Jackson later describes how in the women's barracks at Auschwitz the girls were able to obtain a small prayer book from somewhere and chanted evening prayers daily in Hebrew.⁷¹ Jackson talks of their fasting for *Yom Kippur*.⁷² In the Death Camps in spite of complete destitution, suffering and humiliation, some had the strength to fast for *Yom Kippur* and to express the hope of living in *Eretz Yisrael*, if by miracle they survive the camp.⁷³

However, behold – days are coming – the word of the Lord – when it will no longer be said, As the Lord lives, Who took out the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt, but rather, As the Lord lives, Who took out the Children of Israel from the North and from all the lands where He had scattered them; and I shall return them to their land, which I gave to their forefathers. Jeremiah 16:14-15.

From the voices of the ghettos comes a song, it could be the song from the *Book of Job*, sung during the Nazi persecution by Miriam Eisenstadt, known as the “Nightingale of the Warsaw Ghetto,” of “*My God, My God.*”

*My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
In fire and flames they burned us.
Everywhere they shamed and mocked us.
But none could turn us away
From You, My God, and from Your Holy Torah
And Your Commandments.*

*My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
Day and night, My God, I think only of You,
And with awe I keep Your Torah and Your
Commandments.
Oh save me from danger,
As once You saved the patriarchs,
Hear my prayer and my lament,
You are my only help.
Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.⁷⁴*

In Lawrence Langer’s book entitled *Return to Vilna, In the Art of Samuel Bak*, he describes the works of Bak, who was born in Vilna, Lithuania and survived the Vilna ghetto as a young boy. Bak’s paintings often feature a broken Ten Commandments with the number 6 (not to murder) tossed aside and broken Stars of David. Bak symbolized in his paintings the meaning of the Holocaust with the image of the broken Tablets, when he wrote that: “[t]hroughout their long history of violation and abuse, the Tablets have maintained their eternal power to reemerge as a guide for those who choose to accept their covenant. Their power cannot be totally annihilated: Out of their fragments new Tablets are being created.”⁷⁵

Some of Bak’s paintings depict a tattered Teddy Bear, allegorizing the more than one and half million Jewish children killed. Elie Wiesel speaks of the Jewish children from his experiences at Auschwitz: “I saw them, I saw them being thrown into the flames, alive.”⁷⁶ From his hiding place on a farm near Kovno, Aba Gefen wrote in his diary on October 30, 1941 about

the Lithuanian chief of police, covered his nice uniform with a white smock and methodically smashed the heads of Jewish babies against the stone wall of the Christian cemetery, adjacent to the killing site. Then calmly he returned home to his wife and four little children. On Sunday he attended chapel in the friendly company of the parish priest.⁷⁷

How could Christians celebrate their religious holidays, such as Christmas with the joyous birth of the Savior of the world, and yet destroy their Savior’s earthly family?

Christmas in Auschwitz

I

*Holding that child will cost your life,
Young woman . . . a slave of the camp warned Mary
on the ramp, before the selection. Today
that advice resounds a thousandfold.*

II

*When Mengele sent off Mary
and the Child towards the left,
the Saviour was even born
in the Carpenter's empty arms.⁷⁸*

In the spring of 1942, the children from the Shpalerna Street orphanage in Minsk were buried alive in deep sand pits, while SS officer Wilhelm Kube threw them candy as they cried in terror.⁷⁹ The words of Israel's poet laureate, Haim Nahman Bialik, have been used to express that "[e]ven the Devil himself has yet to conceive vengeance for the blood of a child" to describe the 1.5 million Jewish children murdered by the Nazis.⁸⁰

Bak's paintings take the raw material of the greatest tragedy of human experience and provide a window looking into what is deeply hidden, evil and morally hideous. The dominant theme throughout Bak's paintings, as symbolized in *Elegy III*, was the crucifixion of the Jews by Christian Europe. The painting portrays the raised and nail-scarred hands of a ghost of a young Jewish boy being executed in the streets of the Warsaw Ghetto, while an angle looks off and detached like the Christian church. Bak's painting, depicting this Warsaw boy, is drawn from the infamous photograph of a Jewish child that has become an icon of the *Shoah*.⁸¹

In the photograph, the Jewish boy, probably eight or nine years old, is dressed in a fine coat and hat, indicating his family's apparent urban middle-class life, but he is alone and unprotected without his parents to comfort him.⁸² He represented the European-Jewish financial and social middle-class success that was destroyed forever.⁸³

For Samuel Bak, the boy's outstretched

[a]rms that reach for the sky are also a gesture of surrender, of giving up. When you superimpose the image of a crucified Son on that of the little Warsaw boy with his uplifted arms, you are made to wonder, Where is God the Father?⁸⁴

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.

His hands are reaching out crying, where is anyone who would play the part of God or savior among the religions created by men?⁸⁵ God did not create religion. The Nazi

photo of the Jewish boy discloses the fact that no difference was made between children and adults in the Holocaust.⁸⁶ The paintings of Bak cry out after the Holocaust, what are we to make of the Christian church with its promises of redemption and salvation?⁸⁷

The photograph of the Warsaw boy was one of forty-nine photographs assembled into an album, entitled "The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw Is No More," by Jürgen Stroop, the commandant charged with clearing out the Warsaw Ghetto following the Jewish uprising from April to May of 1943, and which album was a birthday present to Heinrich Himmler.⁸⁸ SS General Jürgen Stroop, a Roman Catholic, married with two children, wrote in his April 22, 1943 report: "Whole families of Jews enveloped in flames leaped out of windows or slid to the ground on bed sheets tied together. Measures were taken to liquidate those Jews at once."⁸⁹

Alexander Donat described the scene of that Easter Sunday in 1943 after the Jewish Uprising as the Nazis were clearing out the Jews by burning down the Warsaw Ghetto:

Church bells rang out that bright April morning as the God-fearing Poles of Warsaw, dressed in their finest, crowded into their lovely churches to hear once again the glad tidings – so often repeated, yet always joyfully anticipated – that He who had died on the Cross for the love of man was risen from the dead . . .

Mass over, the holiday crowds poured out into the sun-drenched streets. Hearts filled with Christian love, people went to look at the new unprecedented attraction that lay halfway across the city to the north, on the other side of the Ghetto wall, where Christ's Jewish brethren suffered a new and terrible Calvary not by crucifixion but by fire. What a unique spectacle! Bemused, the crowds stared at the hanging curtains of flame, listened to the roar of the conflagration, and whispered to one another, 'But the Jews – they're being roasted alive!'

. . . The explosions of grenades and dynamite could be heard as well, as Jews scrambled from their hiding places. Pain-crazed figures leaped from balconies and windows to smash on the streets below. From time to time a living torch would crouch on a window sill for one unbearably long moment before flashing like a comet through the air. When such figures caught on some obstruction and hung there suspended in agony, the spectators were quick to attract the attention of German riflemen. 'Hey, look over there! No, over there!' Love of neatness and efficiency were appeased by a well-placed shot; the flaming comet was made to complete its trajectory; and the crowds cheered.⁹⁰

"Campo dei Fiori" is the title of a poem by Polish Nobel laureate Czeslaw Milosz written at Easter 1943 when he lived in Warsaw, in which he associated the carefree attitude of Romans going about their daily lives while public executions were being carried out in Campo dei Fiori with that of Polish citizens of Warsaw merrily attending an amusement park on a spring evening as the Warsaw Ghetto burned nearby.

*Those dying here, the lonely
forgotten by the world,
their tongue becomes for us
the language of an ancient planet.
Until, when all is legend,
and many years have passed on a new Campo dei Fiori
rage will kindle a poet's word.*

Czeslaw Milosz, Warsaw 1943⁹¹

In Miklós Radnóti's poem, "Neither Memory nor Magic," the poet begins with in my youth "I knew an angel watched me, a great sword in his hand, to care, protect and follow me in danger's shadow-land."⁹² However, the poem ends with the lamentation of "[w]here once an angel with a sword stood guard, now perhaps, no one stands."⁹³

Primo Levi has said that there is the *shame* that afflicts us when we read about the Holocaust.⁹⁴ When Levi was liberated from Auschwitz, he expressed this feeling of shame during the meeting of the first Russian troops to reach the camp:

*They did not greet us, nor did they smile; they seemed oppressed not only by compassion but by a confused restraint . . . It was that shame we knew so well, the shame that drowned us after the selections, and every time we had to watch, or to submit to, some outrage; the shame the Germans did not know, that the just man experiences at another man's crime; the feeling of guilt that such a crime should exist, that it should have been introduced irrevocably into the world of things that exist.*⁹⁵

It is a shame afflicting our image of human nature, which can never be purged.⁹⁶ It is a shame that falls on the Christian church as reflected by the fact that in Auschwitz all the Jews were victims and all the killers were Christian as highlighted by Wiesel's questions.⁹⁷

*How is one to explain that neither Hitler nor Himmler was ever excommunicated by the church? That Pius XII never thought it necessary, not to say indispensable, to condemn Auschwitz and Treblinka? That among the S.S. a large proportion were believers who remained faithful to their Christian ties to the end? That there were killers who went to confession between massacres? And that they all came from Christian families and had received a Christian education?*⁹⁸

In Wiesel's book, *Night*, he tells of his experiences as a prisoner with his father at Auschwitz and the witnessing of the public hanging of a young boy. The victim was so light in weight that he took more than half an hour on the rope to die as his tongue hung swollen, blue-tinged and his eyes glazed.⁹⁹ While the prisoners were forced to watch the execution, Wiesel remembers someone behind him asking:

*Where is God now?
And I heard a voice within me answer him:
Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows . . .*¹⁰⁰

Wiesel concluded that it is God Himself that the Nazis were determined to crucify.¹⁰¹

Rutka Laskier, a 14 year-old Jewish girl in the months before perishing in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, wrote in her diary:

*Well, Rutka, you've probably gone completely crazy. You are calling upon God as if He exists. The little faith I used to have has been completely shattered. If God existed, He would have certainly not permitted that human beings be thrown alive into furnaces, and the heads of little toddlers be smashed with butts of guns or be shoved into sacks and gassed to death . . . It sounds like a fairy tale. Those who haven't seen this would never believe it. But it's not a legend; it's the truth.*¹⁰²

A Yiddish poem entitled *Lekh Lekho* by Simcha Bunin Shayevitsh from the Łódź Ghetto, dated February 23, 1942, spoke of going forth as Abraham from their once happy village and “in our blood flows the power of our forefathers who in all generations performed all kinds of sacrifices,” as he prepared his own daughter for the “unknown journey” of deportation.¹⁰³

*So let us not weep, let us not
Moan, and to spite all enemies,
Let us smile, only smile, that they
May be amazed at what Jews are capable of*

*And not know that today, the same angels
Accompany us as in the past.
On the right Michael, on the left Gabriel,
In front Uriel, and in the rear Raphael.*

*And though beneath our steps lies death,
Over our heads is the divine presence of God.
So, child, go forth with a new sacrifice of self
And with the old “Ekhod,” the oneness of God.
Shema Yisrael. The Lord is One.*¹⁰⁴

Between 1933 and 1939, Jewish livelihoods in Germany were destroyed and social assimilation was dissolved by incremental stages of Nazi persecution.¹⁰⁵ Few imagined that conditions for the Jews would deteriorate to Auschwitz, even after the November Pogrom of 1938.¹⁰⁶ After 1938, the escalation of persecution by the German government and society left Jews scrambling to escape Europe, but the world did not want them.¹⁰⁷

“We were so German, we were so assimilated, we were so middle class” were the words of German Jews to explain their life before 1933.¹⁰⁸ Earlier in the 19th century, Meshech Chochmah prophetically had written that the assimilated Jew had “substituted Berlin for Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁹ Just as during the long sojourn in Egypt when the Nile was substituted for the Jordan, will eventually God demonstrate that Germany is not their homeland?¹¹⁰

Jews had lived in Germany since the 4th century.¹¹¹ Although representing less than 1 percent of the population, they were among the elite of German society as prominent doctors, lawyers, professors and industrialists.¹¹² Of the 550,000 Jews in Germany by 1914, 100,000 fought in the Great War, 12,000 German Jews died fighting and about 35,000 were decorated for their military service.¹¹³ As the birthplace of the Reform movement of Judaism, Germany represented one of the cradles of Jewish religious intellectualism.¹¹⁴

German Jewish intellectuals in the 1930s by being “good Germans” who rejected Jewish laws and traditions believed that they would be safe. History is repeating itself today, for liberal Jews in the United States and Europe have rejected traditional Judaism, but use their “Jewishness” in aiding the Arab cause by making Israel appear to be illegitimate for having a presence in the Biblical areas of Judea and Samaria and even parts of Jerusalem and even in denying any religious significance to the State of Israel.

Conditioned by centuries of racism towards the Jews, the German bureaucratic, academic and military elites were unencumbered by any sense of personal guilt, even after the war.¹¹⁵ Perhaps, that is why Yehuda Bauer, one of the world’s premier historians of the Holocaust, stated that “[t]he horror of the Holocaust is not that it deviated from human norms; the horror is that it didn’t.”¹¹⁶ Still, one would have to ask how one of the most advanced nations of Western civilization could sacrifice millions of innocent civilians for Nazi paganism.¹¹⁷

Primo Levi commented that:

*[n]othing obligated German industrialists to hire famished slaves . . . No one forced the Topf Company (flourishing today in Wiesbaden) to build the enormous multiple crematoria in the Lagers; that perhaps the SS did receive orders to kill the Jews, but enrollment in the SS was voluntary; that I myself found in Katowitz, after the liberation, innumerable packages of forms by which the heads of German families were authorized to draw clothes and shoes for adults and for children from the Auschwitz warehouse; did no one ask himself where so many children’s shoes were coming from?*¹¹⁸

Did these events simply represent humanity without God?

Many historians have asked why the Jews walked like meek sheep to the slaughter house. Holocaust survivor, Gerda Weissmann Klein, responded to this question in her book, *All But My Life*, by saying “because we had faith in humanity” and “we did not really think that human beings were capable of committing such crimes.”¹¹⁹ Anti-Partisan Chief and Police Leader Russia Center von dem Bach, who observed the killing of Jews from 1941 until the end, commented that

Contrary to the opinion of the National Socialists that the Jews were a highly organized group, the appalling fact was that they had no organization whatsoever. The mass of the Jewish people were taken completely by surprise . . . That is the greatest lie of anti-Semitism because it gives the lie to the slogan that the Jews are conspiring to dominate

*the world and that they are so highly organized. In reality they had no organization of their own at all, not even an information service. . . It was not so, as the anti-Semites say, that they were friendly to the Soviets. That is the most appalling misconception of all. The Jews in the old Poland, who were never communistic in their sympathies, were, throughout the area of the Bug eastward, more afraid of Bolshevism than of the Nazis. This was insanity. . . After the first anti-Jewish actions of the Germans, they thought now the wave was over and so they walked back to their undoing.*¹²⁰

The Jews were accustomed to the historical pogroms as Elie Wiesel commented that during his youth:

*Somehow I accepted persecution as a law of nature. I was convinced that this was how God created the world, that once a year we had to avoid being in the street because on that winter evening [Christmas], or on that day in the spring [Easter], Christians attacked Jews. It was clear, it was normal. I didn't even protest.*¹²¹

The Nazis introduced a revolutionary doctrine and a Nazi innovation of using technology for the mass murder of defenseless people, which was so inconceivable to Western civilization and the Jews that they had great difficulty in accepting the Nazis' intention of mass murder.¹²² The American judge at the Nuremberg trials, Robert H. Jackson spoke of the Nazis' crimes:

*These crimes are unprecedented ones because of the shocking numbers of victims. They are even more shocking and unprecedented because of the large number of persons who united to perpetrate them. All scruple or conscience of a very large segment of the German people was committed to Nazi keeping, and its devotees felt no personal sense of guilt as they went from one extreme measure to the other. On the other hand they developed a contest in cruelty and a competition in crime.*¹²³

Until the Holocaust, it was impossible for human consciousness, Jewish or otherwise, to accept as a non-negotiable inevitability the elimination of an entire people.¹²⁴ Holocaust survivors in witness accounts repeat the same two observations: "I saw it," and "I could not believe what my eyes have seen."¹²⁵ Wiesel has commented that it is possible that these victims, abandoned by the world except for Death, were tired of hiding, running and hoping and tired of living in a world where humans murdered innocent Jewish children without remorse.¹²⁶

Alexander Donat in *The Holocaust Kingdom, a Memoir* wrote that it was a pure myth of the Jews not resisting the Nazis, for they fought back to a degree no other community anywhere in the world could have been able to do in any similar situation of total systematic annihilation.¹²⁷ Donat described the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto fighting against starvation, disease, the Nazi economic blockade and murderers and traitors within their own community, while "forsaken by God and by man, surrounded by hatred or indifference."¹²⁸

In the end, it was ruse, deception, cunning beyond anything the world had ever before seen, which accomplished what hunger and disease, terror and treachery could not achieve. What defeated us, was Jewry's unconquerable optimism, our eternal faith in

*the goodness of man, our faith that even a German, even a Nazi, could never have so far renounced his own humanity as to murder women and children coldly and systematically. And when, finally, we saw how we had been deceived, and resorted to the weapon which we were least well prepared to use – historically, ideologically, and psychologically – that is, when we finally took up arms, we inscribed in the book of history the unforgettable epic of the Ghetto Uprising.*¹²⁹

As Allan Levine proposed that “the question should not be, why did more Jews not resist . . . But rather, how, under the circumstances, was any resistance possible at all?”¹³⁰ During 1942 and 1943 in Poland, more than 100,000 Jewish fugitives were on the run while the Nazis were liquidating ghettos, but most were killed by Nazi police or by Soviet or Polish partisans, who cared nothing about Jewish extermination.¹³¹ Yet, small groups of Jewish partisans survived fighting and hiding in the forests of eastern Europe led by leaders such as Abba Kovner, Tuvia Bielski, Shalom Zorin, Dr. Yeheskel Atlas, Misha Gildenman and many more.¹³²

Jewish resistance existed at Sobibor where they organized an escape, at Treblinka where they revolted, and at Auschwitz where they blew up the crematoria.¹³³ After the explosion and the attempted escape from Auschwitz failed, the Germans arrested the four Jewish girls from Warsaw who supplied to the prisoners the chemicals for the explosives.¹³⁴ Roza Robota, Ala Gertner, Estusia Wajcblum and Regina Safirsztajn were tortured, but refused to give the names of the underground members before their execution. They were hanged in public, but they died without fear with the oldest being 16 and the youngest being 12.¹³⁵

Professor Wistrich commented that the common cliché that the Jews went “like sheep to the slaughter” was neither accurate or a fair description when considering the extreme efforts in which the Nazis concealed their genocidal policy towards the Jews.¹³⁶ The Nazis continued to encourage false hopes and the illusion of salvation through compliance and work, while the notion of total extermination was unprecedented.¹³⁷ The ghettoized Jews were exhausted, demoralized and isolated from the outside world.¹³⁸ Even with escape into generally hostile and anti-Semitic surroundings, Jewish men were marked by circumcision and probably by beards, facial features, and distinctive clothes.¹³⁹

Wistrich has pointed out that the Jews did rebel in over twenty ghettos, such as in Warsaw, Kovno, Vilna and Bialystok, in the death camps of Treblinka, Sobibór and Auschwitz and with arm resistance as partisans, such as the United Partisan Organization.¹⁴⁰ There were more than a half million Jewish soldiers in the Soviet Army, seven hundred thousand Jews in the British and American armies, thirty-five thousand Palestinian Jews fighting under the Jewish Brigade in the British Army, two thousand Jews with Marshal Tito’s guerrilla forces and significant involvement in the leadership and rank and file roles with all of the resistance movements throughout Europe.¹⁴¹

During the hopeless voyage in 1939 of the S.S. *St. Louis*, in which Jewish refugees were trying to flee Nazi Germany and to seek sanctuary in America by way of

Cuba, the passenger Aaron Pozner described Dachau to the ship's steward, Leo Jockl.¹⁴² Aaron was released in 1939 from Dachau with the condition to leave Germany immediately.¹⁴³ During the conversations, Leo asked "[b]ut have you never lost your faith?" "No, I have not lost my faith, but only a Jew would understand why."¹⁴⁴ "He later realized it would have been easy to have said he was a Jew through an accident of birth but he knew it would have been less than the truth; that for him being a Jew was far more than merely observing the ritual of his faith, that it reached deep into every aspect of his life."¹⁴⁵

When the *St. Louis* returned to Europe after the refugees were denied entry into Cuba by the Cuban president, who had not received his bribes timely, and ignored by President Roosevelt, Aaron Pozner was sent to Auschwitz and died; this was the fate of most the Jews on that ship returning to Continental Europe in 1939.¹⁴⁶

Chaim Kaplan wrote in his diary on October 2, 1940 from the sealed Warsaw Ghetto on the eve of the High Holy Days that "[a]gain: everything is forbidden to us; and yet we do everything! We make our 'living' in ways that are forbidden . . . It is the same with community prayers: secret *minyanim* in their hundreds all over Warsaw hold prayers together and do not leave out even the most difficult hymns. Neither preachers nor sermons are missing; everything is in accordance with the ancient traditions of Israel."¹⁴⁷

On the eve of the Ninth day of Av (the anniversary of the destruction of the first and second Temples and of the exile of the Jewish people from Israel and later from Spain in 1492), a scroll is chanted in the synagogues from the two verses at the end of *Lamentations*: "*Return us unto Thee, oh Lord, and we shall return; renew our days as of old. Unless You have abandoned us entirely, have been angry with us to the extreme.*" Tradition mandates that the reading not end in utter abandonment but that the verse of return is repeated, so that the lament ends with hope.¹⁴⁸

On the eve of the Ninth of Av, July 22, 1942, began the deportation of the hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto to the gas chambers at Treblinka.¹⁴⁹ During the eight-week period with the Resettlement Operation ending on Rosh Hashanah in 1942, more than 300,000 Jews were deported by cattle cars to Treblinka, leaving 30,000 "legal" inhabitants of the Ghetto with probably an equal number of hidden "illegals."¹⁵⁰ As commented by Alexander Donat about the final deportations to Treblinka from the Warsaw Ghetto:

*In vain we looked at that cloudless September sky for some sign of God's wrath. The heavens were silent. In vain we waited to hear from the lips of the great ones of the world – the champions of light and justice, the Roosevelts, the Churchills, the Stalins – the words of thunder, the threat of massive retaliation that might have halted the executioner's axe. In vain we implored help from our Polish brothers with whom we had shared good and bad fortune alike for seven centuries, but they were utterly unmoved in our hour of anguish. They did not show even normal human compassion at our ordeal, let alone demonstrate Christian charity.*¹⁵¹

From the information in the Central Database of *Shoah* Victims' Names at *Yad Vashem*, there once lived a family, Yisrael and Cyna Brauman, their son and daughter-in-law, Moshe and Ita Brauman, and their granddaughter, Sheindl Brauman, age 7. Except for Moshe, they all were deported from Warsaw and murdered at Treblinka in 1942. Moshe was killed in Kursk, Russia in 1942, probably in a slave work gang. Somehow they are a part of the author's chain of generations; I will never know their family.

In Joshua Perle's eyewitness account in *The Destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto*, he described pediatrician Henryk Goldszmit (pen name: Janusz Korczak), who abandoned his literary and medical careers to start an orphanage in Warsaw and who could have escaped the Warsaw Ghetto at any time, but who chose to lead his children to the trains bound for Treblinka for he knew his presence would calm them, ignoring his own future death with them in the gas chambers.¹⁵²

*A miracle occurred, two hundred pure souls, condemned to death, did not weep. Not one of them ran away. None tried to hide. Like stricken swallows they clung to their teacher and mentor, to their father and brother, Janusz Korczak.*¹⁵³

Diane Ackerman in describing the actions in the Warsaw Ghetto of Janusz Korczak wrote that according to Jewish legend, there are a few pure souls "through their good hearts and good deeds, keep the too-wicked world from being destroyed . . . [and] . . . [f]or their sake alone, all of humanity is spared . . . they are ordinary people, not flawless or magical, and that most of them remain unrecognized throughout their lives, while they choose to perpetuate goodness, even in the midst of inferno."¹⁵⁴

Although Janusz Korczak was a popular pediatric doctor with both the assimilated, urban Jews and the Polish population, he chose to be with his orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto and to journey with his two hundred children to the death camps even though the Germans offered to spare his life.¹⁵⁵ Korczak embodied a spiritual presence not even the Germans could destroy by saying "You will not destroy my dignity, my humanity."¹⁵⁶ Through his death, Korczak became a monument to the over 100,000 murdered Jewish children of Warsaw¹⁵⁷ and located in Janusz Korczak Square at *Yad Vashem* is the sculpture in memory of this great Polish-Jewish educator standing in the center of a group of his children and sheltering them with his body and his outstretched arms.¹⁵⁸

Viktor Frankl, a survivor of Auschwitz, wrote in *Man's Search for Meaning* that the Nazis tried to rob the Jews of every vestige of their humanity, but there was one freedom they could not take away, the freedom to decide how to respond because at the heart of Judaism is faith in freedom, our faith in God's freedom and God's faith in ours:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but

*one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.*¹⁵⁹

After each catastrophe, Jewish faith has confronted the suffering and Jews have remained faithful to the covenant.¹⁶⁰

The Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will lead you. There you will serve gods, the handiwork of man, of wood and stone, which do not see, and do not hear, and do not eat, and do not smell. From there you will seek the Lord, your God, and you will find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you, at the end of days, you will return unto the Lord, your God, and hearken to His voice. For the Lord, your God, is a merciful God, He will not abandon you nor destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant of your forefathers that He swore to them. Deuteronomy 4:27-31.

Jews on their journey to Treblinka and Birkenau sung *Ani Ma’amin*, the Song Lost and Found Again, a song about the coming of the Messiah who will deliver us, and showed that the dead at the moment of dying had maintained their faith.¹⁶¹ Prime Minister Menachem Begin once related how his father, the secretary of the Brisk Jewish community in Belarus, walked to his death leading 500 fellow Jews in singing *Hatikva*, the anthem of Jewish resistance, and *Ani Ma’amin* as the Germans drove them into the River Bug while machine guns turned the river to blood.¹⁶²

Wiesel relates from personal memory on April 11, 1945, the day of his liberation at Buchenwald, of how the Jewish walking dead welcomed their sudden freedom.¹⁶³ Instead of grabbing the food offered by the American soldiers, they gathered in circles and their first act of freedom was to say *Kaddish*, glorifying and sanctifying God’s name.¹⁶⁴

Out of the pit of death, the rebirth of the Jewish people has occurred as symbolized by the testimony of Rivka Yoselewska during the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel when describing the Nazi murder squads.¹⁶⁵

*He [the German] turned me around again, began to reload his revolver. Turned me around and fired . . . I fell into a pit and felt nothing. I felt that I felt some weight, some heaviness on me. I thought that I was dead, but nonetheless, for all my being dead, I felt something. I felt that I was suffocating, because people had fallen on top of me. I felt that I was drowning. I began to move about. I felt that I could move, that I was alive. I am suffocating, I hear the shots, another person falls, but I fought and struggled not to suffocate. I had no strength. And then suddenly I feel that, for all that, I am rising upwards and over the others. I see people dragging, biting, scratching, pulling me downwards. Yet, with all the strength remaining to me, I started to climb upwards, I climbed and recognized nothing . . .*¹⁶⁶

Yoselewska rose out of the death pit of Europe, losing her entire family, but immigrated to Israel, remarried and gave birth to two sons.¹⁶⁷

It will be that when all these things come upon you – the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you – then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where the Lord, your God, has dispersed you; and you will return unto the Lord, your God, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul. Then the Lord, your God, will bring back your captivity and have mercy upon you, and He will return and gather you in from all the peoples to which the Lord, your God, has scattered you. If your dispersed will be at the ends of heaven, from there the Lord, your God, will gather you in and from there He will take you. The Lord, your God, will bring you to the Land that your forefathers possessed and you shall possess it; He will do good to you and make you more numerous than your forefathers. The Lord, your God, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Deuteronomy 30:1-6.

In *Deuteronomy 30:3*, “God, will bring back your captivity,” means that God will return with your captivity, signifying that God Himself goes into exile and will return from exile together with the Jewish people.¹⁶⁸ When Israel is dispersed, God’s Presence goes with them.¹⁶⁹ “The *Book of Esther* taught the Jewish people that God always hovers near His people, even when He seems to have forsaken them, and it teaches that there are no coincidences in Jewish history.”¹⁷⁰ When people ask where was God during the Holocaust? God went into exile with His people as evident by a post-Christian Europe today. In *Exodus 3:2*, the vision of the burning bush that did not burn was symbolic of the Egyptian exile, in which God was in the humble thorn bush and when Israel is in exile, He joins in their suffering. The bush, representing Israel, could not be consumed because God will not allow His nation to be destroyed.

He will call upon Me and I will answer him, I am with him in distress; I will release him and I will bring him honor. Psalm 91:15.

The Nazis were determined to destroy the soul, the divine spark within man from having been created in the image and likeness of God, before destroying the body. Israel’s enemies doom their own souls as their souls shall be hurled into eternal pain as *one shoots a stone from a slingshot (kaf hakela). I Samuel 25:29*. The Holocaust was not just a genocidal attempt to destroy the Jews, God’s people, but an attempt by the Nazis to destroy God Himself, deicide, and purge Him from the Christian churches of Europe forever.

For the last two thousand years Esau’s offspring, the ancestors of Edom, in their various manifestations have held sway and the Jewish people have been exiled from their land and former glory.¹⁷¹ Also, Edom has signified Christendom with its anti-Semitic dogma, its crusades and persecutions and its underpinnings leading to the Holocaust.¹⁷² However, the prophecy given to Rebecca between Jacob and Esau shall be fulfilled when “the might shall pass from one of them to the other” and judgment shall be rendered upon those who trace their greatness to the mountain of Esau and the kingdom will be God’s.¹⁷³

Extend the sickle, for the harvest has ripened! Come and trample [the grapes], for the winepress is full, the vats have overflowed! – for their evil is great. [Commentary: God is speaking to His agents of destruction, who are now to harvest the crops of Divine vengeance]. Multitudes upon multitudes [will fall] in the Valley of the [Final] Decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the Valley of the [Final] Decision. The sun and moon have become blackened, and the stars have withdrawn their shine. And the Lord will roar from Zion and will emit His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and earth will tremble. But the Lord will be a shelter for His people and a stronghold for the Children of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord your God, Who dwells in Zion, My holy mountain; Jerusalem will be holy, and aliens will no longer pass through her.

And it shall be on that day that the mountains will drip with wine, the hills will flow with milk, and all the watercourses of Judah will flow with water, and a spring will go out from the House of the Lord and water the Valley of Shittim. Egypt will become a desolation and Edom will become a desolate wilderness; because of the robbery of the children of Judah, for they shed innocent blood in their land. Judah will exist forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. Though I cleanse, their bloodshed I will not cleanse, when the Lord dwells in Zion. [Commentary: Though I will cleanse the nations by forgiving many of their sins, I will not forgive them for the bloodshed they perpetrated against Israel. When the Lord dwells in Zion, at the End of Days, they will be punished.] Joel 4:13-21.

¹ Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea Is Never Full: Memoirs, 1969 -*, (1st ed. 1999), p. 121.

² Zsuzsanna Ozváth and Frederick Turner, *Foamy Sky: The Major Poems of Miklós Radnóti*, (1st ed. 1992), p. 16.

Dr. Ozváth translated the poems by the great Hungarian poet Miklós Radnóti in her book *Foamy Sky*. Radnóti was executed, as the Russian army approached, and fell into a mass grave after a forced march into the countryside and after suffering years in the work camps in Hungary. A year and half after his death, they found his body in the mass grave, as identified by his notebook (containing his last 10 poems written in the camps) found in the rain coat that he was wearing when he was shot. Dr. Ozváth has the notebook and has published his works.

³ Diane Ackerman, *The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story*, (1st ed. 2007), p. 92.

⁴ Allan Levine, *Fugitives of the Forest: The Heroic Story of Jewish Resistance and Survival During the Second World War*, (1st Lyons Press ed. 2009), p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God, Biblical Portraits and Legends*, (1st ed. 2005), p. 84.

⁷ David Patterson, *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary*, (1st ed. 1999), p. 9.

⁸ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz and The Reawakening: Two Memoirs*, (Summit Books ed. 1986), p. 394.

⁹ Lawrence L. Langer, *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*, (1st ed. 1995), p. 143.

¹⁰ Oliver Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, (1st ed. 1995), p. 189.

¹¹ Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences*, (1st ed. 1990), p. 33.

¹² Leaman, p. 193.

¹³ Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory*, pp. 155-156.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶ Franklin H. Littell and Hubert G. Locke, editors, *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust*, (1st ed. 1974), p. 30

¹⁷ Langer, *Art from the Ashes*, p. 144.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

²⁰ Robert S. Wistrich, *Hitler and the Holocaust*, (1st ed. 2001), pp. xv and xviii.

²¹ David Patterson, *Emil L. Fackenheim: A Jewish Philosopher's Response to the Holocaust*, (1st ed. 2008), p. xiii.

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- ²² Levi, p. 90.
- ²³ Harry James Cargas, *When God and Man Failed: Non-Jewish Views of the Holocaust*, (1st ed. 1981), p. 145.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.
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- ²⁶ Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles From the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939-1944*, (1st ed. 2002), p. v.
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