

Where was G-d in the Holocaust?

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I. The Theodical Approach:

1. Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum¹ (1987-1979), The Rebbe of Satmar, V'Yoel Moshe, 133, 110:

No one can deny that due to these movements that captured the hearts of the people and violated the oath of hastening the end, by taking kingship and freedom before its time (*referring to the Zionist movement actively working towards returning to the Land of Israel - IR*), six million Jews were murdered... I only wrote to point out that it is clear that the impure idea of establishing a state before its time caused us all the suffering and hardships that have befallen us, not to mention the millions of Jews who perished in their wars against the divine will.

2. Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman² (1875-1941), *Akevta D'Meshica*, 21:

In these times, Jews have chosen two forms of idolatry before which to offer their sacrifices. They are Socialism and nationalism. The ideology of the new nationalism may be defined succinctly: "Let us be like all the nations." Nothing is asked of a Jew but national feeling. One who carries shekels and sings *Hatikva* is exempt from all the commandments of the Torah. Clearly, this approach is considered idolatrous in the eyes of Torah. These two forms of idolatry have poisoned the minds and the hearts of Jewish youth. Each has its leadership of false prophets, in the form of authors and speakers, who perform their work faultlessly. A miraculous feat has been accomplished: in the heavens, these two forms of idolatry have been fused into one – National Socialism (i.e. Nazism); they have been forged into a terrible staff of wrath that beats Jews all over the land. The impurities which we worshipped come to beat us.

II. The Radical Approach:

3. Yeshayahu Leibowitz³ (1903-1994):

Whoever claims that in the aftermath of Auschwitz, they have lost faith in G-d, to them I respond with certainty and clarity: It means that they have never truly believed in G-d, but rather only relied on G-d's help.

III. The Divine Concealment Approach:

4. Deuteronomy 31, 17:

Then My anger will flare up against them, and I will abandon them and hide My countenance from them. They shall be ready prey; and many evils and troubles shall befall them. And they

¹ Yoel Teitelbaum was the founder and first Grand Rebbe of the Satmar dynasty. A major figure in the post-war renaissance of Hasidism, he espoused a strictly conservative and isolationist line, rejecting modernity and Zionism.

² Elchonon Bunim Wasserman was a prominent rabbi and rosh yeshiva in prewar Europe. He was murdered during the Holocaust.

³ Yeshayahu Leibowitz was an Israeli Orthodox Jewish public intellectual and polymath. He was a professor of biochemistry, organic chemistry, and neurophysiology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as a prolific writer on Jewish thought and western philosophy.

shall say on that day, “Surely it is because our G-d is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us.”

5. Talmud Chagigah 5a:

Then My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured” (Deuteronomy 31:17). Rav Bardela said that Rav said: Anyone who is not subject to His hiding of the face, i.e., whose prayers are always answered, is not from the Jewish people.

6. Rabbi Professor Eliezer Berkovits⁴ (1908-1992), Faith after the Holocaust, Page 101:

We may glean a hint of the theological significance of such apparent divine indifference from a passage in Isaiah. The prophet says of G-d: “You are indeed a G-d that hides himself, O G-d of Israel, a Saviour.” (Isaiah 45, 15) In this passage G-d's self-hiding is not a reaction to human behaviour, when the Hiding of the Face represents G-d's turning away from man as a punishment. For Isaiah, G-d's self-hiding is an attribute of divine nature. Such is G-d. He is a G-d, who hides himself. Man may seek him and he will not be found; man may call to him and he may not answer. G-d's hiding his face in this case is not a response to man, but a quality of being assumed by G-d on his own initiative. But neither is it due to divine indifference toward the destiny of man. G-d's hiding himself is an attribute of the G-d of Israel, who is the Saviour. In some mysterious way, the G-d who hides himself is the G-d who saves. Thus, Isaiah could also say: “So I will wait for the L-d, who is hiding His face from the House of Jacob, and I will trust in Him. (Isaiah 8, 17)”

7. Rebbe Nachman of Breslow⁵ (1772-1810), Likkutei Muharan, 64:

when G-d wanted to create the world, there was no place in which to create it, since there was nothing but *Ein Sof* (the Infinite One). He therefore contracted the Light to the sides, and through this contraction the Vacated Space was made. Then, within this Vacated Space, all time and space came into existence

8. Genesis 2, 15:

The L-d G-d took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it.

9. Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7, 13:

When the Holy One blessed be He created Adam the first man, He took him and showed him all the trees in the Garden of Eden, and He said to him: ‘See My creations, how beautiful and exemplary they are. Everything I created, I created for you. Make certain that you do not ruin and destroy My world, as if you destroy it, there will be no one to fix it after you.

⁴ Eliezer Berkovits, was a rabbi, theologian, and educator in the tradition of Orthodox Judaism. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Berlin. He served in the rabbinate in Germany, England, Australia & US. He served as chairman of the department of Jewish philosophy of the Hebrew Theological College in Skokie.

⁵ Nachman of Breslov was the founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement. He was particularly known for his creative parables which drew on Eastern European folktales to create mystical and mythic fantasies and which influenced 20th century literature, probably including the works of Franz Kafka.