

Emunah at Times of Darkness



This shiur is kindly sponsored by:

Anne & Chaim Bernstein for the yahrtzeit of Anne's father, Mr. Bernard Muschel - Dov Beirish ben Meir ע"ה

Becki & Yaakov Dworetsky Li'el Nishmat Mrs. Kitty Silverman, Gittel Bas Ezriel Baruch, ע"ה of San Diego, CA (originally from Ireland).

Susan Kohn for the yahrzeit of her mother Mrs Esther Want, Esther Hinda bas Meir Ozer ע"ה which takes place on Monday, February 17th

Karen and Michael Rosenbloom for the 1st yahrtzeit of Karen's mother Mrs. Roslyn (Bunny) Sand-Raizel bat Mendel Hakohen ע"ה

The Belief of our Fathers

1. Shmos 20:1-2

וידבר אלהים את כל־הדברים האלה לאמר:

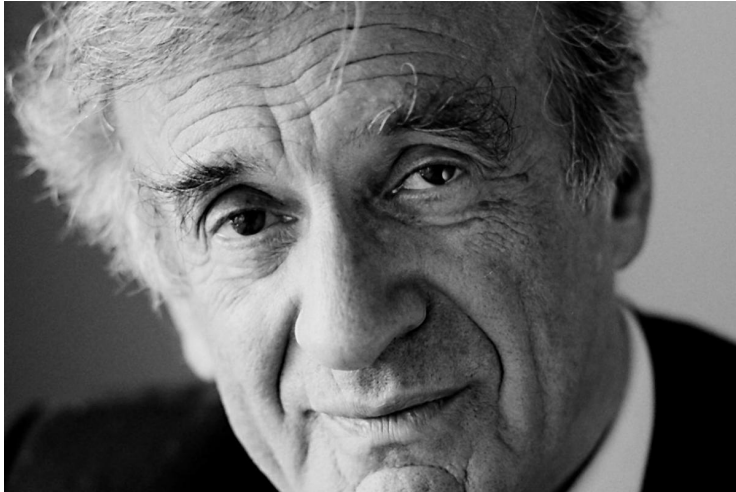
God spoke all these words, saying:

2. Meshech Chochma, Yitro 29

וזה שאמר וידבר אלקים וכו' לאמר, היינו שכל ישראל השומעים יאמרו לבניהם ובניהם לבניהם עד עת קץ הימין מצב הר סיני ועשרת הדברים

Approach 1: Trying to see Hashem in the Holocaust

Idea A: God in the Fire



3. Wiesel, Elie. *Night* (Night Trilogy) (pp. 64-65). Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Kindle Edition.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking: "For God's sake, where is God?"
And from within me, I heard a voice answer: "Where He is? This is where—hanging here from this gallows ..." That night, the soup tasted of corpses.

Aish Kodesh: H' in the suffering

4. Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, *Sacred Fire: Torah from the Years of Fury 1939-1942*, translated by J.H. Worch [Jason Aronson]



This is the very reason why God appeared to Moses for the first time from within the burning thorn bush. Rashi (Shemot 3:2) explains the choice of the thorn bush by quoting the verse (Tehillim 91:15) "I am with him in his pain."

So long as God has only "strength and rejoicing in His abode" (I Divrei Ha-yamim 16:27) then prophets, too, can prophesy only when they also are be-simcha (joyous). But when God is, as it were, together with the Jews in their pain and trouble, then prophecy may also come to the prophet who is likewise in pain

over the plight of the Jews.

In the Talmud (Chagiga 5b) we learn: "It is written (Yirmiyahu 13:17), 'My soul weeps in mistarim (concealment).' Is there then any weeping on the face of the Holy Blessed One, as it is written, 'Beauty and splendor before Him; strength and rejoicing in His abode' (I Divrei Ha-yamim 16:27)? There is no contradiction. One verse refers to the inner chambers, while the other chambers." Thus, we learn that while in the outer chambers of heaven there is always "strength and rejoicing" before God, within the inner chambers, God weeps in His distress, as it were, over the pain of the Jews.

So it is possible that at a time of hesther panim (concealment of the Divine Face), which is to say, when God hides Himself within the inner chambers, a Jew may also enter and be alone with God there, each Jew at his own level. There, within the inner chambers, Torah and worship are revealed to each person who enters. We have already spoken about how the Oral Torah was revealed primarily in exile, in Babylon, and how the holy Zohar was only revealed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar when they were living in a cave, fleeing the Romans government, afraid for their lives. (ibid., p.315)



Idea 2: Exile and Redemption

5. Crisis and Covenant p. 54, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"The Holocaust raised in its most acute form the question of the interpretation of suffering. But the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 raised the no less intractable question of the interpretation of redemption."



6. Elie Wiesel, Introduction to Night

And yet, Zion has risen up again out of the crematoria and the slaughterhouses. The Jewish nation has been resurrected from among its thousands of dead. It is they who have given it new life. We do not know the worth of one single drop of blood, one single tear. All is grace. If the Almighty is the Almighty, the last word for each of us belongs to Him. That is what I should have said to the Jewish child. But all I could do was embrace him and weep.

Approach 2: Humans not God in the Holocaust

7. Faith in Humanity - Rav Yehuda Amital



I once had a conversation with Abba Kovner, may he rest in peace. He was a leader of the revolt in the Vilna Ghetto and an important Hebrew poet. I said to him, "I don't know whose test was greater, mine or yours. Your banner was faith in man. After the Shoah, can you still believe in man? I believe in God, Whom I cannot understand. But man should be fathomable - so what do you believe in now?"

8. Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 38a

(שע"ה בסו"ף ארמ"י סימן) אמר רב יהודה א"ר בשעה שבקש הקב"ה לבראות את האדם ברא כת אחת של מלאכי השרת אמר להם רצונכם נעשה אדם בצלמנו אמרו לפניו רבש"ע מה מעשיו אמר להן כך וכך מעשיו

The Gemara presents **a mnemonic** for the statements that follow: **At the time, to the end, Aramaic. Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: At the time that the Holy One, Blessed be He, sought to create a person, He created one group of ministering angels. He said to them: If you agree, let us fashion a person in our image.** The angels **said before him: Master of the Universe, what are the actions of this person** You suggest to create? God **said to them: His actions are such and such**, according to human nature.

אמרו לפניו רבש"ע) [תהלים ח, ה](#) (מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו הושיט אצבעו קטנה ביניהן ושרפם וכן כת שניה כת שלישית אמרו לפניו רבש"ע ראשונים שאמרו לפניו מה הועילו כל העולם כולו שלך הוא כל מה שאתה רוצה לעשות בעולמך עשה

The angels **said before him: Master of the Universe: "What is man that You are mindful of him? And the son of man that You think of him?"** ([Psalms 8:5](#)), i.e., a creature such as this is not worth creating. God **outstretched His small finger among them and burned them** with fire. **And the same** occurred with **a second group** of angels. The **third group** of angels that He asked **said before Him: Master of the Universe, the first two groups who spoke** their mind **before You, what did**

they accomplish? The entire world is Yours; whatever You wish to do in Your world, do. God then created the first person.

כיון שהגיע לאנשי דור המבול ואנשי דור הפלגה שמעשיהן מקולקלין אמרו לפניו רבש"ע לא יפה אמרו ראשונים לפניך אמר להן) [ישעיהו מ"ד](#) (ועד זקנה אני הוא ועד שיבה אני אסבול וגו')

When history arrived at the time of the people of the generation of the flood and the people of the generation of the dispersion, i.e., the Tower of Babel, whose actions were ruinous, the angels said before God: Master of the Universe, didn't the first set of angels speak appropriately before You, that human beings are not worthy of having been created? God said to them concerning humanity: "Even to your old age I am the same; and even to hoar hairs will I suffer you; I have made and I will bear; and I will carry, and I will deliver you" ([Isaiah 46:4](#)), i.e., having created people, I will even suffer their flaws.

9. The Faith of God (Bereishit 5778), Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

When I first stood at Auschwitz-Birkenau the question that haunted me was not, "Where was God?" God was in the command, "You shall not murder." God was in the words, "You shall not oppress the stranger." God was saying to humanity, "Your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground." God did not stop the first humans eating forbidden fruit. He did not stop Cain committing murder. He did not stop the Egyptians enslaving the Israelites. God does not save us from ourselves. That, according to the Talmud, is why creating man was such a risk that the angels advised against it. The question that haunts me after the Holocaust, as it does today in this new age of chaos, is "Where is man?"



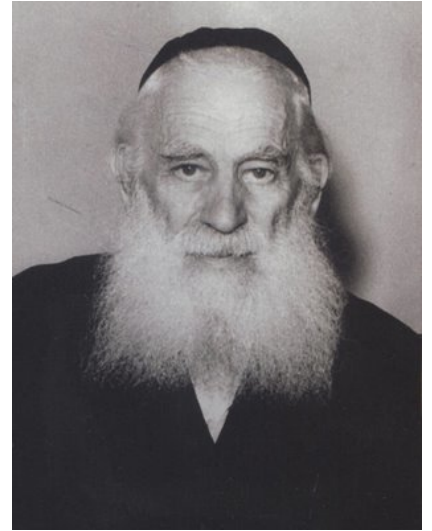
Expressions of Humanity

Lesson 1: Resilience

Ponevezher Rav, Harav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman

He called out to her, "Mameh, you carried us in the ice and snow to learn Torah. Mameh, you will see, I will bring many boys to learn Torah, for you Mameh. For you."

Concluded the Ponevezher Rav, "After all I have lost and suffered; if I still have the strength to start again, it is due to my mother."



Lesson 2: The Highest and the Lowest of Humanity

10. The Nazi Accomplice in the Circumcision, An account by Rabbi Israel Spira, the Rebbe of Bluzhov



Rabbi Yisrael Spira, the Rebbe of Bluzhov

Cradling the child in her arms, she soothed his cries. Then, she addressed the heavens: "Master of the Universe! Eight days ago you gave me a child. I know that neither I nor he will long survive in this accursed place. But now, when you take him back, you will receive him as a complete Jew."

"Your knife," she said, handing the holy object back to the German. "Thank you."

Lesson 3: The Inner Power of the Irreligious Jew



11. Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust, Yaffa Eliach

"You don't understand, Jewish dog," roared the taller of the two.

"I command you in the name of the Führer and the Third

Reich, fress!"

Schneeweiss, composed, his head high, repeated the same answer. "We Jews obey the law of our tradition. Today is Yom Kippur, a day of fasting."

The German took out his revolver from its holster and pointed it at Schneeweiss's temple. Schneeweiss remained calm. He stood still, at attention, his head high. A shot pierced the room. Schneeweiss fell.

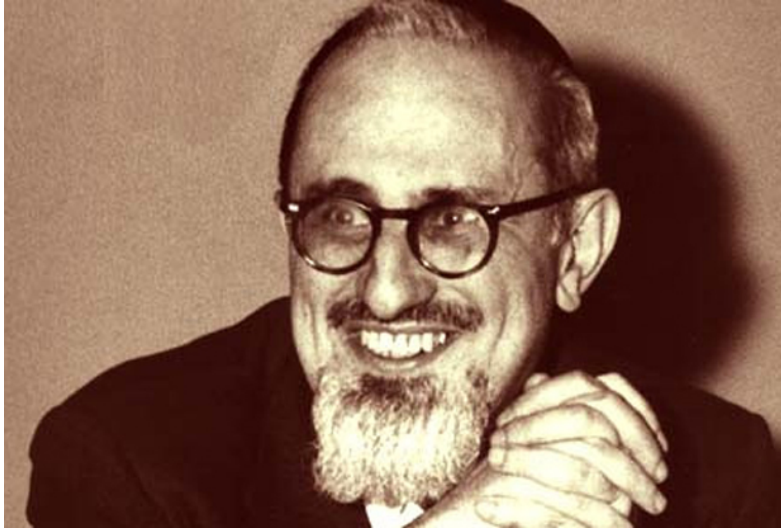
The rabbi and the Hasidim stood as if frozen in their places.

They could not believe what their eyes had just witnessed. Schneeweiss, the man who in the past had publicly transgressed against the Jewish tradition, had sanctified G-d's name publicly and died a martyr's death for the sake of Jewish honor. "Only then, on that Yom Kippur day in Janowska," said the rabbi to his Hasidim, "did I understand the meaning of the statement in the Talmud: 'Even the transgressors in Israel are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds.'

Approach 3: What not Why

Idea

12. Kol Dodi Dofek



After the psychic quaking of the sufferer, which comes as a first reaction to suffering, comes the intellectual curiosity of the sufferer, which seeks to understand existence and to strengthen the sufferer's safety and security. **At this stage man begins to examine suffering and to ask weighty questions. He searches for the rational foundations of suffering and evil, and he endeavors to find the tranquility and harmony that lie between the positive and negative and thus to**

remove the edge from the tension between the thesis, "good," and the antithesis, "evil," of existence. From the question and the inquiry, the solution and the answer, he arrives at a metaphysical formulation of evil through which he comes to terms with evil and attempts to gloss it over. The sufferer employs the powers of rational abstraction (with which the Creator endowed him) to the point of selfdeception: denial of the existence of evil in the world.

However, in the realm of destiny man recognizes reality as it is, and does not desire to use harmonizing formulas in order to hide and disregard evil. The "Child of Destiny" is very realistic and does not flinch in anticipation of a face-to-face confrontation with evil. His approach is halakhic and moral, and thus devoid of any metaphysical/speculative nuance. When the "Child of Destiny" suffers, he says in his heart, "There is evil, I do not deny it, and I will not conceal it with fruitless casuistry. I am, however, interested in it from a halakhic point of view; and as a person who wants to know what action to take. **I ask a single question: What should the sufferer do to live with his suffering?"** In this dimension, the emphasis is removed *from* causal and teleological considerations (which differ only as to direction) and is directed *to* the realm of action. The problem is now formulated in the language of a simple halakhah and revolves around a quotidian (i.e. daily) task. The question of questions is: What does suffering obligate man to do? This problem was important to Judaism, which placed it at the center of its *Weltanschauung*. Halakhah is just as interested in this question, as in issues of *issur* and *heter* and *hiyyuv* and *p'tur*. We do not wonder about the ineffable ways of the Holy One, but instead ponder the paths man must take when evil leaps up at him. We ask not about the reason for evil and its purpose, but rather about its rectification and uplifting. How should a man react in a time of distress? What should a person do so as not to rot in his affliction?