

Matan - Judaism and the ISMs

Judaism Encounters Nazism and Holocaust Theology

Part I - Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook

...אין לבוא בקושיות ותלונות על רבונו של עולם. ביום הכיפורים אנו אומרים וידוי 'על חטא' המסודר לפי סדר א"ב, הכולל חטאים שבין אדם למקום ובין אדם לחבירו. הדבר האחרון שאנו מזכירים הוא 'על חטא שחטאנו לפניך בתמהון לבב'. המהרי"ל דיסקין שאל: איזה חטא יש **בתימהון לבב**? האם יש איזה לאו, או איזה איסור להתפלא ולתמוה? והוא השיב, שחטא זה של תמהון לבב הוא החטא היותר חמור, שיא החטאים, להתפלא על הקב"ה! יש לפעמים מצבים בחיי האדם בהם אין מבינים את ההנהגה הא-להית, ואז באים בקושיות ותלונות על רבונו של עולם. ביקורת הקב"ה היא החטא היותר גדול, הנובע מחוסר אמונה בהשגחה הא-להית. גם הקושיות על השואה הן בגדר תלונה על הקב"ה.

הכל בא בסוד ה'. כל סדר ההנהגה הא-להית אינו גלוי לנו. לעשות חקירות בענין השואה - הוא מעשה ילדות, רק בזהירות גדולה ומתוך בגרות רוחנית אפשר לגשת לעניין הנורא הזה. ראשית כל יש לזכור שקיים הבדל בין חשבון א-להי לחשבון אנושי. השקפה אמיתית ואמונה אמיתית כוללות גם הבנת שנות דור ודור: 'זכור ימות עולם, בינו שנות דור ודור' (דברים ל"ב, ז), הבנת התגלות ד' בעולם בכל השטחים, התגלות ד' בטבע, ולא פחות מזה התגלות ד' בהיסטוריה, בשנות דור ודור, ואמונה בהנהגה ובחשבון הא-להי. אבל יחד עם זאת יש לזכור 'כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי, נאום ד'... כן גבהו דרכי מדרככם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם' (ישעיהו נ"ה, ח-ט). חולשה באמונה ובהשקפת עולם מביאה למדידת ההנהגה הא-להית על פי קנה-מידה של הבנתנו, שהיא מצומצמת, ואינה יכולה לתפוס את הנהגת 'מלכות כל העולמים'. החשבון שלנו הוא חשבון אנושי, חשבון הווי, לעומת החשבון הא-להי שהוא חשבון של דורות. יש עניינים גדולים ונוראים שחובקים זרועות עולם, ואין אנו מוכשרים להבין אותם ולהקשות עליהם קושיות. קורה ואדם שוכח שענייננו אינו תלוי במידת יכולתנו להתרומם ולהיפגש בחשבונות א-להיים כלליים. אין זה קל כל כך להתרומם למידה

זו. על כן, היו אנשים שהגיעו לאובדן אמונה בעקבות השואה, היות ולא הצליחו להתרומם לדעת א-לוקים אמיתית. כמובן, יש להבין אותם, כפי שאמרו חז"ל על איוב 'אין אדם נתפס על צערו' (בבא בתרא טז ע"ב). יש מקום להבין אדם על מעשיו הרעים שהוא עשה בשעת צערו, אם כי אין להצדיקו על כך.

The Master of the universe arranged history in such a way that for a certain time we would be in exile, and then He brought matters about in such a way that in a process lasting several generations, the nation of Israel began to awaken. "Shake yourself from the dust and arise" (Yishayahu 52:2); Israel gradually approaches a full awakening.

This is not such a simple process. There are instances where it is difficult to become severed from the exile. But the time has come for the revival of the nation and the redemption of the land; the manifest end [i.e., the beginning of the messianic era] has come, with [the fulfillment of the prophecy,] "You, O mountains of Israel – you shall give forth branches and yield fruit for My people, Israel, for they are starting to return" (Yechezkel 36:8). The soul of the nation and the soul of the land belong to one another, and when the nation is reunited with its land, [the land] is resurrected. "For they are starting to return" – Jews are starting to move to the land of Israel, and this causes the revival of the land.

But when the time comes for our emergence from the darkness of exile, there arise some situations like that of the slave, who says, "I love my master [and wish to remain in servitude]" (Shemot 21:5). Jews become enamored with the exile and refuse to ascend to the land of Israel. But the exile cannot continue forever; exile is the greatest desecration of God's Name, as is made explicit in [the book of] Yechezkel: "When they came among the nations to where they had

come, they defiled My holy Name, when people said of them, 'These are God's people, and they have departed from His land'" (Yechezkel 36:20). When the time comes for redemption, it may happen that there are complications, and a large portion of the nation of Israel is tarnished with the "pitch of exile." This is a fact: many Jews have become accustomed to the defilement of the exile, and refuse to leave it. Even greatly righteous people are sometimes attached to the exile and its defilement. Then there begins a deep and hidden internal Divine treatment of purification from this defilement, a surgery and a healing. All the millions of Jews together form a single body, a single organism, and when it is delayed in its healing because of cleaving to the land of the other nations, there is a need for a **cruel Divine operation**. The time has come for Israel to return to their land, but since some of them refuse to do so, there is no other way but "He took me by the hair of my head" (Yechezkel 8:3), in order to bring them up to Eretz Yisrael, against their will. When the end comes, and not all Jews recognize this, there is a cruel Divine surgery of amputation from the exile. This is not an accounting with some or other individual, since that is God's secret, the secret of souls. Rather, it is an operation in the general sense, because of the reality of "they have despised the pleasant land" (Tehillim 106:24). It is a surgical operation that causes the nation to be severed from exile and to return to Eretz Yisrael, the place of our life.

Rav Tamir Granot

In the writings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak ha-Kohen Kook (Rav Zvi Yehuda's father), attention is paid to these implications of the redemption of Israel. In his article, "*Le-Mahalakh Ha-Idei'ot Be-Yisrael*" (*Orot*, pp. 102-118), Rav Kook describes how the Divine concept – the idea of God's presence within all of reality, in history, in

the State, in society, and the Divine nature of life in general – which is the fundamental idea of *Am Yisrael* and of the Torah, crumbles and shrinks in exile into a religious idea, concerned only with the redemption of the individual soul and its World to Come, while negating the positive value of historical and material existence.

The manner in which Rabbi Zvi Yehuda perceives the liberation from exile therefore represents a continuation of the teachings of his illustrious father. However, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook anticipated a gradual process of development, with the optimistic hope that the liberation from an exilic consciousness, on the one hand, and the growth of a new religious consciousness born in and of *Eretz Yisrael*, on the other, would take place simultaneously, with willingness and grace and without any rupture. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda teaches us that in order for this process to happen, there was need for drastic treatment – an operation that literally amputated parts of the body and of the personality. So long as the diseased elements of exile adhere to the national body, it would not be capable of being liberated and .rejuvenated

“We Have Fled from You to You”: Rav Amital and the Shoah, by Rav Reuven Ziegler and Dr. Yehudah Mirsky

One of the strongest points of disagreement between Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook and Rav Amital concerned the understanding of history. While both of them discerned redemption in the making in the founding of the State of Israel and in the 1967 war, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda also saw the Holocaust as part of God’s plan, at last excising Israel from exile and bringing about the creation of the state.[15] Rav Amital refused to view those horrors the same way.

The Holocaust certainly deepened Rav Amital's sense of awe at the times through which he was living. While the *Shoah* did not shake his faith in God, it eventually came to place an unanswerable question mark on any attempt to read His mind. **Rav Amital steadfastly refused to interpret the *Shoah* as part of any divine plan, let alone as justification for anything, even for the Jewish state.** But he also did not attribute the Holocaust to *hester panim*, the "hiding of [God's] face."

I clearly experienced the hand of God during the Holocaust – only I did not understand its meaning. It was so clear – so abnormal, so unnatural, so illogical. I was not in Auschwitz, but I saw Jews being taken there. I saw regiments of Germans who were not going to the Russian front, but rather guarding the trainloads of Jews headed to the death camps. It went against all military logic and interests. Can one possibly begin to understand such madness? I saw the hand of God in everything. It was not natural; it was not human. I saw the hand of God, but I did not understand its significance.[16]

Part II- Rabbi Dr Eliezer Berkovitz

דברים פרק לא, טז-יח

(טז) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹזֵק אֶל מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּךְ שֹׁכֵב עִם אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְקָם הָעָם הַזֶּה וְזָנְהוּ אַחֲרַי אֱלֹהֵי יִכָּר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא בָּא שָׁמָּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְעִזְבֵנִי וְהִפֵּר אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרַתִּי אִתּוֹ:
(יז) וְחָרָה אַפִּי בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְעִזְבֹתָיִם וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי מֵהֶם וְהָיָה לְאָכַל וּמְצָאָהוּ רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֹא עָלַי כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקִרְבִּי מִצְאוּנֵי הָרָעוֹת הָאֵלֶּה: (יח) וְאַנְכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עַל כֹּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָּנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרָיִם:

Talmud Bavli, Chagiga 5

"And My anger will burn against them on that day, and I shall leave them and hide My face from them" – Rav Bardela bar Taviomi said in the name of Rav: Anyone who does not [suffer from] *hester panim* is not of them [Rashi: of the seed of Israel; as it is written, "I shall hide My face from them" – that he cries out because of the troubles that befall him, but is not answered such that they do not come].

[Likewise,] anyone who is not "for consumption" [Rashi: that the gentiles plunder his property] is not of them.

ישעיהו פרק מה, טו

(טו) אֶכֶן אֶתָּה אֵל מְסִתֵּי־פָנֶיךָ יְיָ יִשְׂרָאֵל מוֹשִׁיעַ:

Faith after the Holocaust, p. 101

We have discussed earlier the two different forms of *hester panim*, of the "Hiding of the Face:" one as judgment, the other as apparent divine indifference toward the plight of man. We may glean a hint of the theological significance of such apparent divine indifference from a passage in Isaiah. The prophet say of God: "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

In this passage God's self-hiding is not a reaction to human behavior, when the Hiding of the Face represents God's turning away from man as a punishment. For Isaiah, God's self-hiding is an attribute of divine nature. Such is God. He is a God, who hides himself. Man may seek him and he will not be found; man may call to him and he may not answer. God's hiding his face in this case is not a response to man, but a quality of being assumed by God on his own initiative. But neither is it due to divine indifference toward the destiny of man. God's hiding himself is an attribute of the God of

Israel, who is the Savior. In some mysterious way, the God who hides himself is the God who saves. Thus, Isaiah could also say: "And I will wait for the Lord that hideth His face from the house of Jacob and I will hope for Him."

Faith After the Holocaust, 64, 105

The hiding God is present; though man is unaware of him, He is present in his hiddenness. Therefore, God can only hide in this world. But if this world were altogether and radically profane, there would be no place in it for Him to hide. He can only hide in history. Since history is man's responsibility, one would, in fact, expect him to hide, to be silent, while man goes about his God-given task. Responsibility requires freedom, but God's convincing presence would undermine the freedom of human decision. God hides in human responsibility and human freedom.

But the awarding of freedom to man comes at a heavy price, and we pay it – along with God:

But if man alone is the creator of values, one who strives for the realization of ideals, then he must have freedom of choice and freedom of decision. And his freedom must be respected by God himself. God cannot, as a rule, intervene whenever man's use of freedom displeases him... If he did so would the possibility for good also disappear. Man can be frightened; but he cannot be bludgeoned into goodness. If God did not respect man's freedom to choose his course in personal responsibility, not only would the moral good and evil be abolished from the earth, but man himself would go with them. For freedom and responsibility are of the very essence of man. Without them, man is not human. If there is to be man, he must be allowed to make his choices in freedom. If he has such freedom, he will use it. Using it, he will often use it wrongly; he will decide for the wrong alternative. As he does so, there will be suffering for the innocent.

Hence, the original question that we posed concerning the phenomenon of suffering is actually a question about man's very existence in the world. The question therefore is not: Why is there undeserved suffering? But: Why is there man? He who asks the question about injustice in history really asks: Why a world? Why creation? To understand this is, of course, far from being an answer to our problem.

Faith After the Holocaust, page 107

One could call it the divine dilemma that God's *erekh apayim*, his patiently waiting countenance to some, is, of necessity, identical with his *hester panim*, his hiding of the countenance to others. However, the dilemma does find a resolution in history. If man is to be, God himself must respect his freedom of decision. If, man is to act on his own responsibility, without being continually overawed by divine supremacy, God must absent himself from history. But man left to his freedom, his performance in history gives little reassurance that he can survive in freedom. God took a risk with man and he cannot divest himself of responsibility for man. If man is not to perish at the hand of man, if the ultimate destiny of man is not to be left to the chance that man will never make the fatal decision, God must remain present.

The God of history must be absent and present concurrently. He hides his presence. He is present without being indubitably manifest; he is absent without being hopelessly inaccessible. Thus, many find him even in his "absence;" many miss him even in his presence. Because of the necessity of his absence, there is the "Hiding of the Face" and suffering of the innocent; because of the necessity of his presence, **evil will not ultimately triumph; because of it, there is hope for man.**

דבר אחר: מי כמוך באלים ה' – מי כמוך באלמים. 6 מי כמוך בנסים וגבורות שעשית לנו על הים, שנאמר: "נוראות על ים סוף וגו' ויגער בים סוף ויחרב" (תהלים קו ב-כט). 7.

דבר אחר: מי כמוך באלים ה' – מי כמוך באלמים. מי כמוך שומע עלבון בניך ושותק, שנאמר: "החשתי מעולם אחריש אתאפק כיולדה אפעה אשום ואשאף יחד" (ישעיה מב יד – טו). 8. לשעבר "אחריש אתאפק", מכאן ואילך "והולכתי עורים בדרך לא ידעו בנתיבות לא ידעו אדריכם אשים מחשך לפניהם לאור ומעקשים למישור אלה הדברים עשיתם ולא עזבתם".

Faith After the Holocaust, page 109, 128-147

Yet He is present in history. He reveals his presence in the survival of his people Israel. Therein lies his awesomeness.[1] God renders himself powerless, as it were, through forbearance and long-suffering, yet he guides. **How else could his powerless people have survived! He protects, without manifest power.** Because of that, Israel could endure God's long silences without denying him. Because of the survival of Israel, the prophets could question God's justice and yet believe in him. The theology of a God unconvincingly present in history alone might not have sufficed. The dilemma cannot be resolved on the intellectual level alone. And, indeed, neither Jeremiah, nor Habakkuk, nor even Job, were given an intellectually valid answer. The Talmudic conclusion was correctly reached: God was silent. Yet, the dilemma was resolved, not in theory, but, strangely enough, in history itself.

Now, historical facts that conflict with a philosophy of history *eo ipso* refute that philosophy. But historical facts, however numerous, cannot refute another historical fact however irregular and solitary. It is indeed true, as was seen by Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and others, that a great deal of the historical experience contradicts some essential Judaic propositions of a just and benevolent providence; the way of the wicked often succeeds, God is much too often silent. **But it is even more true that seen in the light of the generally observed facts and processes of history, the very idea of a people of God, of constituting a people on the basis of a commitment to do the will of God and to the belief that life and death are determined by the ethical categories of good and evil, was a fantastic proposition. All history advised against it. From the very beginning, all the powers and processes that determine the course of history were poised to render its materialization impossible.** Indeed, had it all been only an idea, a theology or philosophy, the testimony of the facts of history would have rendered the concept of a people of God and the propositions on which it was to be based ridiculously absurd. However, this fantastic concept became itself a fact of history. The people of God did come into being; it entered history, it became itself a historical reality, exercising great historical influence and demonstrating mysterious survival power. It has all been quite irregular. It is all in conflict with the rest of historical experience, yet itself a fact of history.

God's unconvincing presence in history is testified to through the survival of Israel. All God's miracles occur outside of history. When God acts with manifest power, history is at a standstill. The only exception to the rule is the historic reality of Israel. That faith history has not been erased from the face of the earth by power history, notwithstanding the incalculable material superiority of the forces arrayed against it all through history, is the ultimate miracle. Since, however, it

has been accomplished without manifest divine intervention, it remains within history, the only miracle that is a historic event, the miracle of the viability of faith history. It is for this reason that Isaiah could say of Israel on behalf of God: "Therefore ye are my witnesses, says the Eternal, and I am God" (*Yeshayahu* 43:12). Rightly do the rabbis add the comment: If you are my witnesses, I am God; if you do not witness, I am – as it were – no God. There is no other witness that God is present in history but the history of the Jewish people."

God's own destiny in history is joined to the history of Israel. Great empires do not testify to divine presence in history. Whatever they are and accomplish is fully explicable in terms of their material resources. They have their self-explanatory place in power history. Half a billion Christians all over the world prove nothing about God's presence in history. They are too many, too influential, too pervasive. They are a this-worldly power in the context of power history... This is the ultimate significance of the idea of the chosen people. God needs a small relatively weak people in order to introduce another dimension into history – human life – not by might nor by power but by His spirit. "The Eternal did not love you nor choose you because you were more numerous than any other people"; He could not associate his cause with the mighty and the numerous. It is not through them that a God who renders himself "powerless" in history, for the sake of man, can advance his purpose for man. Only a nation whose presence in and impact on history testify to God's presence may be God's people. God's relation to human history is such that he needs a chosen people. The chosen people satisfy a need for divine concern for all men.

Rav Tamir Granot

Thus, there is a profound connection between the Holocaust and the State of Israel, but it is not a connection of purpose (as in Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook's metaphor of an operation) nor of causality (reward and punishment). Certainly, the establishment of the State of Israel does not justify the Holocaust, for Divine Providence is not based on a perception of justice in the simple sense. The principle of "God Who is concealed and Who saves" is a theology with two extremes – the Holocaust (concealment) and the State of Israel (salvation). The Holocaust is cruel proof of the existence of human freedom and Divine concealment, without which man cannot exist. The State of Israel is the most wondrous proof of God's presence in history; proof without which it would be all but impossible to believe in His existence. Through the establishment of the State, *Am Yisrael* returned to the stage of history, and – no less importantly – the Master of the universe reappeared in it once more.