

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Jewish Literature 7153X: Responses to Catastrophe in Jewish Tradition

Syllabus - Fall, 1977

Sept. 9	Continuity in the Responses to Catastrophe	Roskies
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[Jan. 20	Lurianic Kabbala as a Response to the Spanish Exile	Siegel
Jan. 27	Jewish Psychological Responses to Catastrophe	Ostow
Feb. 3	Student presentations and discussion	
Feb. 10	The Catastrophe of 1648/9: History and Memory	Bacon
Feb. 17	Responses to Catastrophe in Christian Tradition: Some Examples	Roger Shinn (UTS)
→ Feb. 24	Student presentations and discussion	
Mar. 3	Traditional and Modern Liturgical Responses to Catastrophe	Harlow
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Mar. 17	Student Presentations and discussion	
Mar. 31	Jewish Behavior During the Holocaust	Isaiah Trunk (YIVO)
Apr. 7	History and Myth in Holocaust Fiction	Roskies
Apr. 14	Bringing it All Together	
May 4	Yom Hashoah: Student -run workshops	

Commentary

165 East 56 Street
New York, New York 10022
PLaza 1-4000



Dad,
I came across this in cleaning my office. I
think you had asked for it. Sorry it's probably too
late!

July 25, 1974

Mrs. Anne Lapidus Lerner
The Jewish Theological Seminary of America
3080 Broadway
New York, New York 10027

David

Dear Anne:

The course I'm giving in the Fall term is titled "Responses to Catastrophe in Jewish Writing." For the first four or five sessions I'll be using texts that I presume most students would already own or could easily get hold of: Psalms, Lamentations, and Job from the Bible; the Midrash on Lamentations; selections from Josephus; and selections from the High Holiday liturgy. Thereafter things may become more problematic:

Joseph HaCohen, Vale of Tears (there are various Hebrew editions; the English translation was published in 1971 by Martinus Nijhoff, the Hague).

Samuel Usque, Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel (English translation published by JPS, 1965).

Maimonides, "Epistle to Yemen" (English available in various places, including in Isadore Twersky's A Maimonides Reader, Behrman House, 1972).

Nathan Hannover, Abyss of Despair (new Hebrew edition, Tel Aviv, 1966; English translation published by Bloch in 1950).

Navarro, "Story of Joseph della Reyna" (in Mimkor Yisrael, ed. Bin Gorion-Berdichevsky, Mosad Bialik, 1943, Vol. 4, pages 68-75; this could be easily xeroxed, I should think).

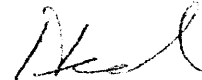
David Reuveni, Diary (there's a fairly recent Hebrew edition of this, but I don't have the reference on hand).

I. M. Weissenberg, "A Shtetl" (in Ruth R. Wisse's
A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas, Behrman, 1973).

Y. Baer, Galut (Schocken, 1947).

Do let me know if you need any further information.

Yours,



Neal Kozodoy
Executive Editor

NK:y1

1. THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRA

(Genesis 18-19)

The men departed from there and looked out upon the plain of Sodom,

and Avraham went with them to escort them.

Now HE had said to himself:

Shall I cover up from Avraham what I am about to do?

Avraham, he shall become, become a tribe great and substantial, and with him shall all the tribes of the earth bless themselves.

Indeed, I have known him,

in order that he may command his sons and his house after him:

they shall keep MY way,

to do truth and justice,

so that HE shall bring upon Avraham what he has spoken concerning him.

HE said:

The outcry against Sodom and Gomorra, indeed, it increases, and their sin, indeed, it weighs very heavily.

I will go down and see—

if they have done according to their cry that has come to me:

—Destruction!

and if not:

—I will know it.

The men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Avraham still stood before HIM.

Now Avraham stepped forward and said:

Will you really sweep away the true(-ones) with the wicked?

Perhaps there are fifty true present in the city, will you really sweep them away?

Will you not bear the place because of the fifty true in its midst?

Far be it from you to do according to this word, to deal death to the true with the wicked,

that it should come about: so the true, so the wicked, far be it from you!

The judge of all the earth, will he not do justice?

HE said:

If I find in Sodom fifty true within the city,

I will bear the place for their sake.

Avraham answered, he said:

Now here, I have ventured forth to speak to my Lord, and I am dust and ashes:

Perhaps there will lack of the fifty true five—

will you bring ruin upon all the city for these five?

He said:

I will not bring ruin, if I find there forty-five.

But he continued to speak to him still, he said:

Perhaps will be found there (only) forty!

He said:

So I will not do it, for the sake of the forty.

(ט) וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁקְפוּ עַל פְּנֵי סֹדֹם. וַאֲבְרָהָם הִלֵּךְ עִמָּם לְשִׁלְחָם.

(י) וַיְהִי וְהוּא אָמַר:

הַמִּכְסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאֲבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה?

(י�) וַאֲבְרָהָם הָיָה יֹהֵה לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעָצוּם, וַנִּבְרְכוּ בוֹ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ;

(יב) כִּי יִדְעָתִיו

לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו

—וַתִּשְׁמְרוּ דְרָךְ יְהוָה: לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט (לְמַעַן הִבִּיא יְהוָה עַל אֲבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו).

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה:

וַעֲקַת סֹדֹם וְעַמּוֹרָה כִּי רַבָּה,

וַחֲטֵאתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד—

(יד) אֲרָדָה נָא וְאֲרָאָה:

הַכְּצַעֲקוּתָהּ, הַבָּאָה אֵלַי, עֲשׂוּ?

—כִּלְהִי

וְאִם לֹא?

—אֲדַעָה.

(טו) וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סֹדְמָה.

וַאֲבְרָהָם עוֹדְנָו עֹמֵד לְפָנָי יְהוָה.

(טז) וַיִּגַּשׁ אֲבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר:

הֲאֵף תִּסְפֶּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע?

(יז) אוּלַי יֵשׁ תְּמַשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר—

הֲאֵף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא תִשָּׂא לְמַקּוֹם

לְמַעַן תְּמַשִּׁים הַצְדִּיקִים, אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ?

(יח) חֲלִלָה לָךְ מַעֲשֵׂת כְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה:

לְהַמִּית צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע;

וְהָיָה: כְּצְדִיק—כְּרָשָׁע?

חֲלִלָה לָךְ:

הַשְּׁפֹט כָּל הָאָרֶץ— לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט?

(יט) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה:

אִם אֶמְצָא בְּסֹדֹם תְּמַשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר—

וְנִשְׂאֵתִי לְכָל הַמַּקּוֹם בְּעֵבֹרָם.

(כ) וַיַּעַן אֲבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר:

הִנֵּה נָא הוֹאֵלְתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל אֲדֹנָי,

וְאֲנִכִּי עֹפֵר וְאֹפֵר:

(כ�) אוּלַי יִחְסְרוּן תְּמַשִּׁים הַצְדִּיקִים תְּמַשָּׁה—

הַתְּשַׁחִית בְּתַמַּשָּׁה אֶת כָּל הָעִיר?

וַיֹּאמֶר:

לֹא אֲשַׁחִית אִם אֶמְצָא שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים וְחַמָּשָׁה.

(כב) וַיִּסָּף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר:

אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים?

וַיֹּאמֶר:

לֹא אַעֲשֶׂה, בְּעֵבֹר הָאֲרָבָעִים.

But he said:

Now let it not inflame my Lord if I speak further:
perhaps will be found there (only) thirty!

He said:

So I will not do it, if I find there thirty.

But he said:

Now here, I have ventured forth to speak to my Lord:
perhaps will be found there (only) twenty!

He said:

I will not bring ruin, for the sake of the twenty.

But he said:

Now let it not inflame my Lord that I speak yet this one time:
perhaps will be found there (only) ten!

He said:

I will not bring ruin, for the sake of the ten.

HE went, when he had finished speaking to Avraham, and Avraham
returned to his place.

(ל) וַיֹּאמֶר:

אֵל נָא יִחַר לֵאדֹנָי וְאִדְבָּרָה:
אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים?

וַיֹּאמֶר:

לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה, אִם אִמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלֹשִׁים.

(לא) וַיֹּאמֶר:

הִנֵּה נָא הוֹאֲלָמִי לְדַבֵּר אֵל אֲדֹנָי:
אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים?

וַיֹּאמֶר:

לֹא אֶשְׁחִית, בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרִים.

(לב) וַיֹּאמֶר:

אֵל נָא יִחַר לֵאדֹנָי וְאִדְבָּרָה אִךְ הַפַּעַם:
אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרֵה?

וַיֹּאמֶר:

לֹא אֶשְׁחִית, בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרָה.

(לג) וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה, כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר אֵל אַבְרָהָם.
וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ.

But HE made rain upon Sodom and Gomorra brimstone and fire,
from HIM, from the heavens,

he overturned these cities and all the district, all the settled-folk of
the cities and the sprouting of the ground.

His wife looked back behind him and became a pillar of salt.

Early in the morning Avraham arose to the place where he had stood
before HIM,

he looked out upon all the plain of Sodom and Gomorra and upon
all the land-plain of the district

and saw:

here, the thick smoke of the land rose like the thick smoke of the
furnace.

(כד) וַיְהוּהוּ הַמָּטִיר עַל סֹדֶם וְעַל עֲמֹרָה גִפְרִית וְאֵשׁ -
מֵאֵת יְהוָה, מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם.

(כה) וַיִּהְיֶה אֵת הָעָרִים הָאֵל וְאֵת כָּל הַכִּפּוּר
וְאֵת כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי הָעָרִים וְצִמְח הָאֲדָמָה.

(כו) וַתִּבֶט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו - וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח.

(כז) וַיִּשְׁכֶם אַבְרָהָם בְּבִקְרָא אֵל הַמְּקוֹם.

אֲשֶׁר עֲמַד שָׁם אֵת פְּנֵי יְהוָה;

(כח) וַיִּשְׁקֹף עַל פְּנֵי סֹדֶם וְעַמֹּרָה וְעַל כָּל פְּנֵי אֶרֶץ הַכִּפּוּר

וַיֵּרָא וַהֲגִה: עָלָה קִיטֹר הָאֶרֶץ כְּקִיטֹר הַכִּבְשָׁן.

1. Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty and maketh it waste,
And turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.
2. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest;
As with the servant, so with his master;
As with the maid, so with her mistress;
As with the buyer, so with the seller;
As with the lender, so with the borrower;
As with the creditor, so with the debtor.
3. The earth shall be utterly emptied, and clean despoiled;
For the LORD hath spoken this word.
4. The earth fainteth and fadeth away,
The world faileth and fadeth away,
The lofty people of the earth do fail.
5. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof;
Because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statute,
Broken the everlasting covenant.
6. Therefore hath a curse devoured the earth,
And they that dwell therein are found guilty;
Therefore the inhabitants of the earth waste away,
And men are left few.
7. The new wine faileth, the vine fadeth,
All the merry-hearted do sigh.
8. The mirth of tabrets ceaseth,
The noise of them that rejoice endeth,
The joy of the harp ceaseth.
9. They drink not wine with a song;
Strong drink is bitter to them that drink it.
10. Broken down is the city of wasteness;
Every house is shut up, that none may come in.
11. There is a crying in the streets amidst the wine;
All joy is darkened,
The mirth of the land is gone.
12. In the city is left desolation,
And the gate is smitten unto ruin.

הנה יהיה בוקק הארץ ובוֹלָקָה
וענה פניה ותפיץ יִשְׁבִּייהָ :
והיה כעם כפתון
כעבד באדונו
כשפחה כגברתה
כקונה כמוכר
כמלוה כלוה
כנשה כאשר נשא בו :
הבוק | תבוק הארץ ותבוז | תבוז
כי יהיה דבר את-הדבר הנה :
אבלה נבלה הארץ
אמללה נבלה תבל
אמללו מרום עם-הארץ :
והארץ חנפה תחת יִשְׁבִּייהָ
כי-עברו חורח חלפו חק
הפרו ברית עולם :
על-כן אלה אבלה ארץ
ניאשמו יִשְׁבִּי בה
על-כן חרו יִשְׁבִּי ארץ
ונשאר אנוש מזער :
אבל תירוש אמללה-גפן
נאנחו כל-שמחי-לב :
שבת מְשׁוֹש תפִּים
חרל שאון עליזים
שבת מְשׁוֹש כנור :
בשיר לא ישתו-גין
ימר שִׁכָר לשתיו :
נשברה קרית-תהו
סגר כל-בית מבוא :
צוחה על-הגין בחוצות
ערכה כל-שמחה
נלה מְשׁוֹש הארץ :
ונשאר בעיר שמה
ושאיה יפת-שער :

13. For thus shall it be in the midst of the earth, among the peoples,
 As at the beating of an olive-tree,
 As at the gleanings when the vintage is done.

14. Those yonder lift up their voice, they sing for joy;
 For the majesty of the LORD they shout from the sea:

15. Therefore glorify ye the LORD in the regions of light,
 Even the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, in the isles of the sea.

16. From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs: 'Glory to the righteous.'
 But I say: I waste away, I waste away, woe is me!
 The treacherous deal treacherously;
 Yea, the treacherous deal very treacherously.

17. Terror, and the pit, and the trap, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth.

18. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the terror shall fall into the pit; And he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the trap;
 For the windows on high are opened,
 And the foundations of the earth do shake;

19. The earth is broken, broken down,
 The earth is crumbled in pieces,
 The earth trembleth and tottereth;

20. The earth reelth to and fro like a drunken man,
 And swayeth to and fro as a lodge;

And the transgression thereof is heavy upon it,
 And it shall fall, and not rise again.

21. And it shall come to pass in that day,
 That the LORD will punish the host of the high heaven on high,
 And the kings of the earth upon the earth.

22. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the dungeon,
 And shall be shut up in the prison,
 And after many days shall they be punished.

23. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed;
 For the LORD of hosts will reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem,
 And before His elders shall be Glory.

כִּי-כֹה יִהְיֶה
 בְּקִרְבֵי הָאָרֶץ בְּתוֹךְ הָעַמִּים
 כַּנִּקְחַת זֵית
 כְּעִלְלַת אִם-כֶּלֶה בְצִיר:
 הִמָּה יִשְׁאוּ קוֹלָם יִרְנֹו
 כִּנְאוֹן יִהְיֶה צְהִלּוֹ מֵיָם:
 עַל-בֵּן בְּאֲרָיִם כִּבְרוּ יִהְיֶה
 כִּאֲנִי הַיָּם שֵׁם יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

16 מִכְּנֶפֶת הָאָרֶץ
 זְמַרְתָּ שְׁמַעְנוּ צְבִי לְצַדִּיק
 וְאָמַר רְוֵי-לִי רְוֵי-לִי אֱוִי לִי
 בְּגִדִים בְּגִדוֹ
 וּבְגֵד בְּגִדִים בְּגֵדוֹ:
 17 פָּחַד וּפְחַת וּפָחַת
 עָלֶיךָ יוֹשֵׁב הָאָרֶץ:
 18 וְהָיָה הַיָּם מִקּוֹל הַפָּחַד
 יִפֹּל אֶל-הַפְּחַת
 וְהָעוֹלָה מִתּוֹךְ הַפְּחַת יִלְכַד בַּפֶּחַח
 כִּי-אֲרָבוֹת מִמְרוֹם יִפְתְּחוּ
 וַיִּרְעָשׂוּ מוֹסְדֵי אֶרֶץ:
 19 רָעָה הִתְרַעְשָׁה הָאָרֶץ
 פֹּר הִתְפֹּרְרָה אֶרֶץ
 מוֹט הִתְמוֹטְטָה אֶרֶץ:
 20 נֹוַע תִּנוּעַ אֶרֶץ בְּשִׁבוֹר
 וְהִתְגֹּדְדָה כַּמְלִינָה
 וְכָבַד עָלֶיהָ בְּשַׁעָה
 וּנְפְלָה וּלְא־חִסְיָה קוֹם:
 וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַהוּא
 יִפְקֹד יְהוָה
 עַל-צָבָא הַמָּרוֹם בַּמָּרוֹם
 וְעַל-מַלְכֵי הָאֲדָמָה עַל-הָאֲדָמָה:
 וְאִסְפוּ אִסְפָּה אֲסִיר עַל-בֹּר
 וְסָגְרוּ עַל-מִסְגֵּר
 וּמָרְבֵי יָמִים יִפְקְדוּ:

וּבֹשֶׁת הַחַמָּה
 כִּי-מִלֶּךְ יִהְיֶה צְבָאוֹת
 בְּהַר צִיּוֹן וּבִירוּשָׁלַם
 וַיִּבֶן זְכוּרֵי בְרוֹד:

3. THE GENERATION OF THE WILDERNESS

(Rabbinic Sources)

Moses well knew that mercy was God's chief virtue. He remembered that he had asked God, when he interceded for Israel after their sin of the Golden Calf, "Pray tell me by what attribute of Thine Thou rulest the world." God answered: "I rule the world with loving-kindness, mercy, and long-suffering." "Can it be," said Moses, "that Thy long-suffering lets sinners off with impunity?" To this question Moses had received no answer, hence he felt he might now say to God: "Act now as Thou didst then assent." Justice, that demands the destruction of Israel, is on one side of the scales, but it is exactly balanced by my prayer on the other side. Let us now see how the scales will balance." God replied: "As truly as thou livest, Moses, thy prayer shall dip the scales to the side of mercy. For thy sake must I cancel My decision to annihilate the children of Israel, so that the Egyptians will exclaim, 'Happy the servant to whose wish his master defers.' I shall, however, collect My debt, for although I shall not annihilate Israel all at once, they shall make partial annual payments during the following forty years. Say to them, 'Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against Me. And your children shall be wanderers in the wilderness forty years, and shall bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be consumed in the wilderness.'" "

This punishment was not, however, as severe as it might appear, for none among them died below the age of sixty, whereas those who had at the time of the exodus from Egypt been either below twenty or above sixty were entirely exempt from this punishment. Besides only such were smitten as had followed the counsel of the spies, whereas the others, and the Levites and the women were exempt." Death, moreover, visited the transgressors in such fashion that they were aware it was meant as punishment for their sins. Throughout all the year not one among them died. On the eighth day of the month Ab, Moses would have a herald proclaim throughout the camp, "Let each prepare his grave." They dug their graves, and spent there the following night, the same night on which, following the counsel of the spies, they had revolted against God and Moses. In the morning a herald would once more appear and cry: "Let the living separate themselves from the

dead." Those that were still alive arose, but about fifteen thousand of them remained dead in their graves. After forty years, however, when the herald repeated his customary call on the ninth day of Ab, all arose, and there was not a single dead man among them. At first they thought they had made a miscalculation in their observation of the moon, that it was not the ninth day of Ab at all, and that this was the reason why their lives had been spared. Hence they repeated their preparations for death until the fifteenth day of Ab. Then the sight of the full moon convinced them that the ninth day of Ab had gone by, and that their punishment had been done away with. In commemoration of the relief from this punishment, they appointed the fifteenth day of Ab to be a holy day."

Another interpretation of 'And in that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping and to lamentation': at the time when the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to destroy the Temple, He said, 'So long as I am in its midst, the nations of the world will not touch it; but I will close My eyes so as not to see it, and swear that I will not attach Myself to it until the time of the end¹ arrives.' Then came the enemy and destroyed it. Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, swore by His right hand and placed it behind Him. So it is written, *He hath drawn back His right hand from before the enemy (ib. II, 3)*. At that time the enemy entered the Temple and burnt it. When it was burnt, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I no longer have a dwelling-place in this land; I will withdraw My *Shechinah* from it and ascend to My former habitation; so it is written, *I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their guilt, and seek My face*' (Hos. v, 15). At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, wept and said, 'Woe is Me! What have I done? I caused My *Shechinah* to dwell below on earth for the sake of Israel; but now that they have sinned, I have returned to My former habitation. Heaven forbend that I become a laughter to the nations and a byword to human beings!' At that time Metatron² came, fell upon his face, and spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe, let me weep, but do Thou not weep.' He replied to him, 'If thou lettest Me not weep now, I will repair to a place which thou hast not permission to enter, and will weep there,' as it is said, *But if ye will not hear it, My soul shall weep in secret for pride* (Jer. XIII, 17).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Ministering Angels, 'Come, let us go together and see what the enemy has done in My house.' Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Ministering Angels went, Jeremiah leading the way. When the Holy One, blessed be He, saw the Temple, He said, 'Certainly this is My house and this is My resting-place into which enemies have come, and they have done with it whatever they wished.' At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, wept and said, 'Woe is Me for My house! My children, where are you? My priests, where are you? My lovers, where are you? What shall I do with you, seeing that I warned you but you did not repent?' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Jeremiah, 'I am now like a man who had an only son, for whom he prepared a marriage-canopy, but he died under it. Feelest thou no anguish for Me and My children? Go, summon Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Moses from their sepulchres, for they know how to weep.' He spake before Him: 'Sovereign of the Universe, I know not where Moses is buried.' The Holy One, blessed be He, replied to him: 'Go, stand by the bank of the Jordan, and raise thy voice and call out, "Son of Amram, son of Amram, arise and behold thy flock which enemies have devoured."'

There and then Jeremiah went to the cave of Machpelah and said to the patriarchs of the world¹: 'Arise, for the time has come when your presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He.' They said to him, 'For what purpose?' He answered, 'I know not,' because he was afraid lest they say, 'In thy lifetime has such a thing happened to our children!' Jeremiah left them, and stood by the bank of the Jordan and called out, 'Son of Amram, son of Amram, arise, the time has come when thy presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He.' He said to him, 'How is this day different from other days that my presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He?' Jeremiah replied, 'I know not.' Moses left him and proceeded to the Ministering Angels whom he recognised from the time of the giving of the Torah.² He said to them, 'O celestial ministers, know ye why my presence is required before the Holy One, blessed be He?' They replied, 'Son of Amram, knowest thou not that the Temple is destroyed and Israel gone into exile?' He cried aloud and wept until he reached the patriarchs. They immediately also rent their garments, placed their hands upon their heads, and cried out and wept until they arrived at the gates of the Temple. When the Holy One, blessed be He, saw them, immediately 'In that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping, and to lamentation, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth' (Isa. XXII, 12). Were it not explicitly stated in Scripture, it would be impossible to say such a thing, but they went weeping from one gate to another like a man whose dead is lying before him, and the Holy One, blessed be He, lamented saying, 'Woe to the King Who succeeded in His youth but failed in His old age!'

¹ Cf. Gen. XVII, 4, *Thou (sc. Abraham) shalt be the father of a multitude of nations.* ² According to the legend, when Moses ascended Mount Sinai he had to contend with the angels who wished God to withhold the Torah (Shab. 88b).

¹ The Messianic era.

² Name of an angel who defended the interests of Israel.

Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, turned upon the Ministering Angels, saying to them, 'Why do you string dirges together over this incident, standing rows upon rows?' They answered before Him: 'Sovereign of the Universe, because of Abraham Thy friend who came to Thy house, and lamented and wept; why didst Thou disregard him?' He said to them, 'From the day My friend departed from before Me to his eternal home, he came not to My house; but now, *What hath My beloved to do in My house?* (Jer. xi, 15).' Abraham spake before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe, why hast Thou exiled My children and delivered them over to heathen nations who have put them to all kinds of unnatural death, and destroyed the Temple, the place where I offered my son Isaac as a burnt-offering before Thee?' The Holy One, blessed be He, replied to Abraham, 'Thy children sinned and transgressed the whole of the Torah and the twenty-two letters² in which it is composed'; and so it is stated, *Yea, all Israel have transgressed Thy law* (Dan. ix, 11). Abraham spake before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe, who testifies against Israel that they transgressed Thy law?' He replied to him, 'Let the Torah come and testify against Israel.' Forthwith the Torah came to testify against them. Abraham said to the Torah, 'My daughter, art thou come to testify against Israel that they transgressed thy commandments and hast no shame before me! Remember the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, handed thee about to every nation but they refused to accept thee until my children came to Mount Sinai, accepted thee and honoured thee¹; and now thou comest to testify against them in the day of their trouble!' When the Torah heard this, she stood aside and gave no testimony against them.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, 'Let the twenty-two letters come and testify against Israel.' Forthwith the twenty-two letters appeared. The *aleph* came to testify that Israel had transgressed the Torah. Abraham said to it, 'Thou, *aleph*, art the first of all the letters, and thou comest to testify against Israel in the day of their trouble! Remember the day when the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself upon Mount Sinai and opened with thee, *I² am the Lord thy God* (Ex. xx, 2), and no nation accepted thee but my children, and thou comest to testify against my children!' The *aleph* immediately stood aside and gave no testimony against them. The *beth* came to testify against Israel, and Abraham said to it, 'My daughter, thou comest to testify against my children who were zealous about the Pentateuch³ of which thou art the first letter, as it is written, *In the beginning⁴ God created* (Gen. i, i).' The *beth* immediately stood aside and gave no testimony against them. The *gimel* came to testify against Israel, and Abraham said to it, '*Gimel*, thou art come to testify against my children that they transgressed the Torah! Is there a nation which observes the commandment of fringes,⁵ of which thou art the first letter, except my children; as it is written, *Thou shalt make thee twisted cords⁶* (Deut. xxii, 12)!' The *gimel* immediately stood aside and gave no testimony against them.

When the remainder of the letters saw that Abraham silenced these, they felt ashamed and stood apart and did not testify against Israel.

(Midrash Rabba Lamentations)

5. THE MARTYRDOM OF RABBI AKIBA

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked Government¹⁾ issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practise the Torah. Pappus b. Judah came and found R. Akiba publicly bringing gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to him: Akiba, are you not afraid of the Government? He replied: I will explain to you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside of a river, and he saw fishes going in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: From what are you fleeing? They replied: From the nets cast for us by men. He said to them: Would you like to come up on to the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors? They replied: Art thou the one that they call the cleverest of animals? Thou art not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die! So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written, *For that is thy life and the length of thy days,*²⁾ if we go and neglect it how much worse off we shall be! It is related that soon afterwards R. Akiba was arrested and thrown into prison, and Pappus b. Judah was also arrested and imprisoned next to him. He said to him: Pappus, who brought you here? He replied: Happy are you, R. Akiba, that you have been seized for busying yourself with the Torah! Alas for Pappus who has been seized for busying himself with idle things! When R. Akiba was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the *Shema*,³⁾ and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven.⁴⁾ His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, *'with all thy soul'*, [which I interpret,] *'even if He takes thy soul'*. I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfil it? He prolonged the word *ehad*⁵⁾ until he expired while saying it. A *bath kol*⁶⁾ went forth and proclaimed: Happy art thou, Akiba, that thy soul has departed with the word *ehad*! The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Such Torah, and such a reward? [He should have been] *from them that die by Thy hand, O Lord.*⁷⁾ He replied to them: *Their portion is in life.*⁷⁾ A *bath kol* went forth and proclaimed, Happy art thou, R. Akiba, that thou art destined for the life of the world to come.

Thus we are told that when Moshe asked about the death of Rabbi Akiva (Menahot 29), he was told "Silence! Thus it is up in thought That is to say, you have to be silent, and not seek and answer to such a question. For this is "up there" in thought, which is higher than the world of words. Therefore you can only respond to such a question with silence. So it is with questions from the void: they are silence; one can only have faith and be silent there. That's why only a zaddik like Moshe can look into such questions; Moshe was the silent one, one who was slow with words (Ex.4); he was of the silence that is higher than speech.

Nahman ben Simha of Braslav

Likutey Moharan

(1) Deut. XXX, 20. (2) I.e., recited the *Shema*. V. *supra* 13a. (3) Lit., 'when will it come to my hands'. (4) 'One' in Hear, O Israel etc. (5) V. Glos. (6) Ps. XVII, 14. E.V. 'From men by thy hand, O Lord'. (7) Ibid.

Semantic difficulty

holocaust has no resonance in French

extermination is the closest equivalent!

but Steiner teaches a multitude of mini holocausts

Hidden curriculum

Austria: preserve society for democracy, independence

France: expiate the sin of collaboration
leftist anti-Israel bias

Germany: tendency to ① personalize: blame Hitler exclusively
② psychologization of Hitler's life
<scapegoating>
③ politicization - relevance to social science
④ no notion of Jewish life: perhaps all Jews = Pharisees

Israel: working thru the trauma

① demonization of German atrocity - arational

② national trauma / pride

③ fear of death repressed

④ Eichmann trial - 2 wars = liberated psyche →
אכילס און

Phila: integrate 2 heterogeneous city

fight racism; citizenship training

legitimate checks & balances ↔ absolute power

global responsibility

Broadline - sensitizing students / teachers to ea other

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FIRST SESSION: RECONSTRUCTING THE EXPERIENCE

Each participant will be given a copy of the same photograph. The discussion leader may begin by asking the students what they think the photo is all about.

- a. Where was it taken?
- b. When?
- c. What is the woman doing?
- d. Who is she?
- e. Who took the picture?

ANSWERS:

- a. Ghetto of Lodz.
- b. 1942.
- c. Writing a letter before boarding the trains that will take her to the Chelmno death camp.
- d. Probably a Jewish woman from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria or Luxemburg who were brought to the Lodz Ghetto and then deported.
- e. Mendel Grossman, a professional photographer, who recorded the life and death of the Lodz Ghetto, often at the risk of his own life. He died at age 32 in a forced march several days before the war ended.

BACKGROUND:

THE FATE OF THIS WOMAN HAD ALREADY BEEN DECIDED UPON IN BERLIN IN 1941 AND THE PROCESS OF HER GRADUAL DEHUMANIZATION METHODICALLY PLANNED.

"In one of the stages of the destruction of the Jewish people, the Germans deported the remnants of the Jewish communities of Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Luxemburg, and brought them to the Lodz ghetto. The deportees were not told where they were going. The Germans fed them stories about a "Jewish autonomous region." Mendel (Grossman) received the arrivals with cameras in hand. Here were characters of a new kind, with a different appearance, different manners. They were well dressed, they carried heavy suitcases, were well provided with food. They were horror stricken at the sight of the ghetto, refused to become members of it. They spoke of culture, of hygiene, made attempts at living in a manner they had been accustomed to. They refused contact with the old inhabitants of the ghetto whose appearance repelled them. They tried to swim against the current, and -- quickly gave up. Their capitulation was cruel. They fell prey to diseases of the

ghetto, to the dirt, the lice, they collapsed spiritually and physically. Mendel and his camera followed this process, and thus we have a record of this tragic development which ended when the Germans collected the pitiful remnants and again loaded them on trains. This time the trains were bound for Chelmo."

from: Mendel Grossman, With A Camera in the Ghetto, Kibbutz Lochamei Hagettat, 1970.

DISCUSSION:

- a. Filling in the gaps in her biography: where was she born, how did her family react to the Nazi invasion, how did she explain it all to herself, the trauma of the first train ride; who was she writing the letter to and why; what awaited her after the second train ride.
- b. Photography as an act of resistance. Art form out of chaos.

MEMA'AMAKIM

The following is selected from the table of contents of the book of responsa From the Depths (translated from Hebrew) consisting of questions asked rabbis and their answers during the years 1941-44 in the ghetto of Kovno, Poland under Nazi rule.

Book 1: questions:

- 1 concerning when the Nazis forced Jews to desecrate a Sefer Torah with their own hands, and to defile it.
- 3 concerning the use of the clothes of martyrs.
- 5 concerning cooking on Shabbat within the ghetto.
- 6 concerning one who willfully commits suicide in order to receive a Jewish burial.
- 7 concerning the saying of "Birkat HaGomel" by the remnants of a German "action."
- 8 concerning a brit milah being made by violating the law.
- 9 concerning allowing a pidyon haben in absentia when the father of an illegitimate child will not or cannot identify himself.
- 10 concerning unsalted, improperly killed meat from a kosher animal in the ghetto.
- 12 concerning the making of tzitzit using wool stolen from the Nazis.
- 13 concerning whether the ghetto dwellers need a mezuzah.

- 14 concerning whether one is allowed to learn Torah with the Nazis when forced to.
- 15 concerning whether one is allowed to save himself by using a forged identity paper.
- 18 concerning whether one is allowed to use birth control within the ghetto when the Nazis have threatened to kill every pregnant Jewish woman.
- 20 concerning whether one may have an abortion when the Nazis threatened to kill every pregnant Jewish woman.
- 26 concerning whether one is allowed to put tefillin over a bandage covering up a Nazi tatoo.
- 30 concerning printed holy books which the goyim are using for profane purposes.
- 31 concerning whether one is allowed to enter a church on the chance of saving Jewish children left there for protection during the war.

Book 2: questions:

- 1 concerning if one is allowed to put himself in possible mortal danger in an effort to save one who is sure to be killed.
- 4 concerning the proper formulation of the blessing for martyring one's self.
- 5 concerning whether one is allowed to derive pleasure from the clothes which the Nazis took off Jews before they were martyred.
- 7 concerning whether a cohen who has been castrated by the Nazis is allowed to receive the first aliyah to the Torah.

- 10 concerning whether one is allowed to operate on a nine-month pregnant woman just murdered by the Nazis in order to save the fetus.
- 11 concerning if one is allowed to put himself in mortal danger in order to study Torah or to pray with a minyan.
- 12 concerning whether one is allowed to open a grave in an effort to salvage others' valuables buried with him.
- 13 concerning whether one is allowed to have a meal while a corpse is in the same room.
- 18 concerning if one is allowed to derive pleasure from gold teeth found among the bones of martyrs.
- 19 concerning whether one who hid a sefer Torah by throwing it into a lake is in need of teshuvah if he feels guilty.
- 20 concerning whether one is allowed walk on grave markers taken from a Jewish cemetery used as paving for roads.
- 21 concerning whether one is allowed to bury someone in a Jewish cemetery where he is suspect of having converted.
- 24 concerning whether the offspring from a Jewish woman (married to a Jew) and a non-Jew is a "mamzer" ("bastard").
- 25 concerning whether a child born from a Jewish woman and a non-Jew needs to be converted, and if he may be given a brit milah on Shabbat.

(publishing information: Nema'amakim, Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, vol. 1 (1959) and vol. 2 (1963), Modern Linotype Co., NYC)

Mema'amakim

Question: On that day (8 Marcheshvan, 1942) the order came out from the accursed Nazis that all ghetto dwellers without exception should report to the Democratia Platz within the ghetto for a German selection, and all who do not fulfill this order and stay in their houses will be killed. It is impossible to imagine or describe the extent of the fear and confusion which gripped the Jews of the ghetto. They all knew that this day would decide their fate, if for punishment or for kindness.

The ghetto dwellings were emptied of their inhabitants, parents carried their small children, and sons supported their elder fathers, sick and weak were carried by their families, all going tearfully to the yard of fear. Voices of crying broke the air. We did not know what would be our end, but one thing we knew; we were decreed against and lost.

And that day was stormy, the rain and snow mixed together from heaven as if the dwellers above in the heavens, the angels, the aids of God the Supreme, also were confused, asking each other, where is the Lord of Lords - answer! He who lives on high, have pity on the remnant sheep of your flock being taken to slaughter as sheep to slaughter.

And thusly gathered to this yard all of the ghetto dwellers, numbering then some thirty thousand inhabitants who waited for the appearance of one of the Germans, the selector of the Gestapo in whose hand was given the fate of every Jew of the ghetto, as clay in the hands of the creator, at his will creating, and at his will condemning to death.

And then as that time approached me Reb Eliyahu from Warsaw, one of the refugees escaped from Warsaw to Lithuania, but who fell from the frying pan into the fire, for also to Lithuania came the impure hands of the Nazis who intended to kill Israel, and since he well knew the ways of these evil ones, knowing that many on this yards would not survive since tomorrow many would be taken to be killed, he asked me what is the form of the beracha for one who martyred himself for His name, may It be praised, to recite, for he wanted to know for himself what to recite if, heaven forbid, it came to that, and in addition, he wanted to perform a mitzvah, perhaps the last of the days of his life, namely, to pass among those marked to die and to teach properly what to do if their last moment should come to them and to make them worthy that they should recite the beracha according to the law.

Mema'amakim

Answer: In the book Yosef Ometz #483, is brought the form of the beracha incumbent upon martyrs to recite, and the form of confession from the Holy Congregation of Frankfort who martyred themselves, as follows: "Praised by Thou, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who sanctified us to love the honored and awesome Name, which was, is and will be in all our hearts and in all our soul, and to sanctify His Name in public. Praised be Thou, O Lord, sanctifying Your Name in public, and after that he should say Shma Yisrael, and give over his neck for the sanctification of His Name.

And in the ShLh he wrote that is the proper form: "Praised be Thou, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us by His commandments, and commanded us to sanctify His Name in public" (Baruch ata hashem, elokaynu melech haolam, asher kidshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu, lekadesh shemo barabim). He states there why recite "lekadesh" (to sanctify) and not recite "al kidush" (concerning the sanctification of), that every mitzvah which is able to be done by means of a messenger recite "al" (concerning), but a mitzvah which can be done only by himself, and which is impossible to be done by a messenger, recite with a lamed (to).

And from all of this I taught him that according to my view, one should recite the form of the ShLH ...

The martyr Reb Eliyahu learned and practiced this form of the beracha, and also taught other Jews so that this beracha would be fluent in their mouths in order that they should know how to recite when their time will come, heaven forbid, to die the death of martyrs.

After some time, the martyr came again to me and told me that also the Gaon, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman taught his son the Gaon Naftali who also was there, for form of the bracha as the ShLH, and stated it in the name of our teacher, the Chofetz Chayim, may the memory of a tzadik be for a blessing.

And I also heard from the grandson of the Chofetz Chayim, the Gaon Yehoshuah Levinson, that it was the same thing that he heard from the Chofetz Chayim when he was in Russia during World War I, when the murdering camps of Petlura and others killed Jews, that one should recite the bracha according to the form of the ShLH.

Sh'alot U'Teshuvot Mema'amakim (Responsa From the Depths), by Rabbi Efrayim Oshry, Vol. 2 #4, Modern Linotype Co., 1963.

Mema'anakin

Question: On the 11th of Marchashavan, on the third day after the Nazi butchers, may their names be blotted out, removed from the Kovno Ghetto thousands of people, men, women and children, and transported them to slaughter in the Ninth Fortress where they were killed with all types of bitter and hard tortures and a 11 sorts of deaths, with great cruelty such as if it difficult to describe, the remnant returned from the valley of killing and slaughter. One boy who escaped told me all the fearful details, how the accursed Germans ordered these unfortunates to remove all of their clothing, and to jump into pits which were prepared for this purpose, and then fired into them with machine guns, and when they ended this act of murder, they covered the pits with dirt and buried them all, the alive and the dead together, for many of these martyrs were still alive.

There was no home in the ghetto in which there was not a death, this cried bitterly over his brothers, and this one lamenting his wife, this crying about his children...

The surviving prisoners of the ghetto wrapped themselves in mourning and sorrow. There came to me Berchick the Glazier, the gabbai of the Ayn Yaakov and Buriel Societies, and asked if there was need to mourn the martyrs, and to recite kaddish for them.

Answer: In the responsa of the MaHaRil, #99, it is asked if it is necessary to recite the kaddish for martyrs, and the asker wanted to innovate that there is no such need, and the MaHaRil there answered: "And thus I heard from my teacher that it was taught in Prague that there were those who wished to state that there is no need to mourn over martyrs, and finally they agreed to mourn, and I agree with it, that even though they are holy martyrs of the highest and first rank, that no creature is able to stand in their way, in any event, one must mourn them."

From all of this I answered that mourning must be held for the martyrs of the Ninth Fortress, and to recite Kaddish over them. And then awful and terrible was the sight at the time when the entire Congregation remaining alive in the ghetto said together the Kaddish over their loved ones, and may it be the will of He who heals the broken heart to heal our sorrow, and send to his people eternal salvation.

THE GOYIM AND THE JEWS

The Christian Easter occurred in that memorable spring of 1943 at the end of April. Unceasing processions to the walls of the Ghetto continued throughout the Holy Week, and did not even stop on Easter itself. Hardly had the words been said: "You may go, the Mass is over, Alleluja," -- and the crowds from the overflowing churches, alive with spring, with fresh flowers in their hands, ran to the walls, to Warsaw's Easter spectacle.

It was an extraordinary spectacle. The inhabitants of the houses overlooking the Ghetto saw how -- beyond those walls -- half-crazed people would dash out of cellars and like lizards slink from one floor to another, higher and higher. The fire crawled after them, and they in their helplessness, sought some fireproof corner, invisible to the gendarme's eye... When the flames approached their feet, the husband would hand the child to his wife, all three would kiss each other for the last time, and then they would jump, first the woman with the baby, and then the man. The firemen watched from the surrounding rooftops in case the flames spread to the Aryan side. Returning to their safe dwellings, they would say: "The little ones are falling there like peas, and the old ones too."

Some people would arrive, others would leave. They looked on, conversed, regretted. They regretted the goods, the fortunes, the gold -- the legendary gold, but above all the flats and houses, the "most beautiful houses." They said: "Could not Hitler solve this problem in some other way."

The General of the Polish Home Army appealed to conscience. But we here on the spot, saw how tiny, how infinitesimal human conscience is. The detonations were shaking the earth, the street, but not the people.

* * * * *

"Let's talk," I said.

"About what?"

"A Saturday in spring. Nineteen forty-four. On one side, the Jews; on the other, you. Only the window -- that window -- between."

"I remember."

"With shame?"

"No."

"With remorse?"

"No."

"With sadness?"

"No. With nothing at all. There's no emotion attached to the memory."

I leaned forward slightly: "What did you feel then?"

...more...

"Nothing."

The muscles in my face tightened: "Outside, children were sick with thirst: what did you feel?"

"Nothing."

"Outside, men were turning away so as not to see their children doubled up in pain: What did you feel?"

"Nothing." A silence; then: "Absolutely nothing. My wife was crying in the kitchen. Not me. She was sad and miserable. I wasn't."

Elie Wiesel, The Town Beyond the Wall, p. 156.

How much a murdered brother? What price a burnt baby? I am not touched by the Berlin Wall. It seems such small recompense. Why, their wall dead are so unsatisfyingly few that all their photographs barely cover two pages of a color supplement. Their wall dead are so modest in number that they can be remembered with flowers. Each one with flowers.

... We have witnessed an alarming metamorphosis. In 1966, a little more than twenty years after the holocaust, one already senses a feeling of boredom and impatience with these Jews (not the six million) and, simultaneously, the astonishing emergence of the Good German.

... While the six million lived, very few people wanted to know about them. There were not sufficient trucks to trade for their lives or enough bombers available to flatten the rail-heads that led to the extermination camps. Now that they are dead suddenly they are wanted, a useful brand name.

Mordechai Richler, "The Germans Are An Abomination To Me,"
Toronto Telegram, October 15, 1966, p. 22.

Men shun the scandal of the particularity of Auschwitz. Germans link it with Dresden; American liberals, with Hiroshima. Christians deplore anti-Semitism in general, while Communists erect monuments of victims-of-Fascism-in-general, depriving the dead of Auschwitz of their Jewish identity even in death. Rather than face Auschwitz, men everywhere seek refuge in generalities, comfortable precisely because they are generalities.

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A Jew at Auschwitz was murdered because he was a Jew; a Christian was murdered only if he was a saint: but there are few saints among either Jews or Christians... The Jew after Auschwitz exists with the knowledge of abandonment; the Christian cannot bear to face his responsibility for this abandonment... Hence the Christian failure to face Auschwitz. Hence Christian recourse to innocuous generalities. Hence, too, Christian silence in May 1967.

Emil L. Fackenheim, "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust,"
Commentary, August 1968, pp. 30, 35.