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The Holocaust is in many ways a tragedy beyond the realm of human comprehension, and, paradoxically, it is thus best understood when transformed to a human scale. Read in its magnitude as an event, even an event in the scheme of history, it is an infinitude, an abstract; expressed in finite terms, however, it becomes a concrete reality. There seem to be three preeminent means of dealing with the Holocaust on that human scale: one, equating man and God in something of a joint messianic vision; two, interpreting the reality through symbols such as language and art; and three, actively replacing the sanctity of God with the concept of human sanctity.

*you didn't
develop this
2nd theme*

If one believes (as I do) that God exists not as a being but as a force, one might accept that God is as dependent upon human beings for his survival as human beings believe themselves to be on God for their survival. In other words, God ceases to exist (albeit on an individual scale) when he ceases to have any meaning for man. (That human beings do not cease to exist might mean that God will never abandon them; it might also mean that God simply doesn't exist.) God's power results at least in part from the fact that he is all that which man is not, and in this light that power is a precarious thing; God's force is capable of being both extinguished and eclipsed. The former threat is that man's horror will exceed God's force; the latter is that man's creativity will transcend it.

*God more
vulnerable than
man!
Yes, you're right*

Man's horror is the Holocaust: how can God live in the midst of ultimate evil. Or, more specifically, how can God allow ultimate evil to flourish. There are, of course, answers to that: God created man, gave him freedom of will and choice, and thus allowed him to destroy the world on his own. There are other answers as well: God failed man, and therefore God ceased to be. Without debating the theological implications of this reading of the God/man relationship, we might for the moment assume the second supposition and look to its logical extension. Man's creativity is his response to the horror, for when God fails to take action, that responsibility falls to man.

It is my argument that a man who both chooses to reject God (it must be emphasized that this is not a necessity but an active choice, often

based on the belief that God rejected him) and turns then within himself to still the chaos of the world is a man who in effect becomes God.

You have no God in you! Open the doors, you heavens,
fling them open wide,
and let the children of my murdered people enter in
a stream.
Open the doors up for the great procession of the
crucified,
the children of my people, all of them, each one a God-
make room! (Katzenelson, To The Heavens, p.916)

Katzenelson, writing in 1943, could not be more direct in his cry of anger against God and the entire God-based system than he is at this moment; every image in the above stanza alone is a precise inversion of traditional thought. Proclaiming the absence of God, he almost literally storms the heavens. Not only does he challenge the existence of God, he also challenges God's authority in the very place of his rule. Power is no longer in the hands of God; man has assumed control.

The real significance of this writing, though, is the attitude the poet takes toward the people. They are murdered, crucified—words that imply passive victimization. The poet, however, who ^{arrogates to} (takes for) himself the authority God no longer bears, extends the notion of his own transcendence to the whole of his people. Through the creative act of writing, Katzenelson alters the structure of the world. Through the author's vision, each man becomes a God. It is a complete and irrevocable rejection of all traditional thought, and it is man's direct response to a tragedy God has chosen to ignore.

For others in the Holocaust, the very act of writing, of creative thinking, was tantamount to assuming a mantle of authority that, if it did not destroy God's role, certainly shadowed it. This is especially true of the sequence of poems directed from parent to child. While many traditional themes still abound, they exist side by side with a new recognition of the world's reality—a reality that acknowledges a silent if not yet dead God, and places an increased emphasis on man's obligation for an increased awareness. For Shayeveitsh, although "he who teaches his daughter Torah/It is as if he taught her/To commit an unworthy sin--Yet the evil day has come,/The evil hour has come,/When I must teach you, a little girl." (Lekh-Kekho, p. 901) In a world without God, as he once was or at all, old orders are broken; the future now lies in the hands of man.