

**“A million candles burning for the help that never came/You want it darker”  
Leonard Cohen [Canada; 1934-2016] “You Want it Darker” 2016.**

The Problem of Divine Silence

1) I cry out to you, but you do not answer me; I stood and you [just] ponder/contemplate me. Job, 30:20

2) Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love. Psalms 44:23-26

3) You said You were the God of the universe. Were you the God of the people within it? Were you not the one who frees us from abandonment?

I was abandoned, frightened, helpless, alone,  
Where were you, God? I needed you, You were not to be found.

In my loneliness, my heart sank. Why did you hide your face from me?  
What offense had I done to you?...

Prayer of a sexual abuse survivor, quoted in James Leehan, Defiant Hope: Spirituality of Survivors of Family Abuse. 1993.

4) *Wenn es einen Gott gibt muß er mich um Verzeihung bitten.* If there is a God, He will have to beg my forgiveness. [Carved on the walls of Mauthausen concentration camp]

5) The only thing that gives meaning to human protest is the idea of a personal God who has created and is therefore responsible for everything.... Only a personal God can be asked by the rebel for a personal accounting. Albert Camus [France; 1913-1960], *L'Homme révolté* [The Rebel] 1951.

6) Is he ([God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil? David Hume [Scotland, 1711-1776] Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, published posthumously in 1779.

7) How can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz? Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate omnipotent actor in the historical drama. It has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the S.S. as instruments of God's will. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic anti-human explosion in all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept...

When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos unaided by any purposeful power beyond our resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God? Prof. Richard Rubenstein, After Auschwitz. 1966

### The Presence of Evil

8) Judaism, with its realistic approach to human beings and their place within reality, understands that evil cannot be obscured and hidden. Evil is an undeniable fact. There is evil, there is suffering, there are hellish torments in this world. Whoever wishes to delude himself by diverting his attention from the deep fissure in reality, by romanticizing human existence, is nought but a fool and a fantasist. R. Joseph Soloveitchik [Belarus; U.S.A.; 1903-1993] *Kol Dodi Dofek*, 1957.

9) The evil that created the ghettos and the death camps and ruled them with an iron fist was no mere absence of good. It was real, potent, absolute. R. Eliezer Berkovits [Romania/U.S.A.; 1908-1992] *Faith After the Holocaust*, 1973.

### Responses to Suffering (I) – The Strategy of Self-Criticism

10) Why was the first Sanctuary destroyed? Because of three things which prevailed there: idolatry, immorality, bloodshed. But why was the second Sanctuary destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, mitzvot, and the practice of charity? Because there prevailed hatred without cause. Talmud, *Yoma*, 9B.

11) On account of *our sins we were exiled from our land*. *Musaf Amida* for Chagim.

12) It is better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God, than a saint in a world ruled by the Devil. A sinner in a world ruled by God may be bad; but there is always a certain sense of security to be derived from the fact that the world around is good. W.R.D. Fairbairn [Scotland; 1889-1964] "Endopsychic structures considered in terms of object relationships." *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*. 1944

13) The Bible and rabbinic literature attest that Jews *failed* to find direct, stable, and predictable connections between their behaviour, whether as individuals or as a community, and subsequent events. When meticulous attempts to live up to covenantal responsibilities were followed by unexpected disasters, was it because of some undetectable flaw in apparently exemplary behaviour, or was it because of the sins of earlier years or even of previous generations?... One cannot ascribe a sense of dignity to people who are burdened by such questions and are unable to handle their understanding of how God responds to their lives. The rabbis were deeply concerned with this problem. R. David Hartman [U.S.A./Israel; 1931-2013] *A Living Covenant*, 1985

### Responses to Suffering (II) – The Strategy of 'Self-Improvement' (What Do I Do Now?)

14) "What obligation does suffering impose upon man? We do not inquire about the hidden ways of the Almighty, but rather about the path wherein man shall walk when suffering strikes. We ask neither about the cause of evil nor about its purpose but rather about how it might be mended and elevated. How shall a person act in a time of trouble? What ought a man to do so that he not perish in his afflictions? The Halakhic answer to this question is very simple. Afflictions come to elevate a person, to purify and sanctify his spirit, to cleanse and purge it of the dross of superficiality and vulgarity, to refine his soul and to broaden his horizons.

The function of suffering is to mend that which is flawed in an individual's personality. The Halakha teaches us that the sufferer commits a grave sin if he allows his troubles to go to waste and remain without meaning or purpose." R. Soloveitchik, "*Kol Dodi Dofek*".

15) I don't know why one person gets sick, and another does not, but I can only assume that some natural laws which we don't understand are at work. I cannot believe that God "sends" illness to a specific person for a specific reason. I don't believe in a God who has a weekly quota of malignant tumors to distribute, and consults His computer to find out who deserves one most or who could handle it best. "What did I do to deserve this?" is an understandable outcry from a sick and suffering person, but it is really the wrong question. Being sick or being healthy is not a matter of what God decides that we deserve. The better question is "If this has happened to me, what do I do now, and who is there to help me do it?" It becomes much easier to take God seriously as the source of moral values if we don't hold Him responsible for all the unfair things that happen in the world. R. Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People. 1981.

16) We are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, secondly, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories. Prof. Emil Fackenheim [Germany/Canada/Israel' 1916-2003] "The 614th Commandment)" in To Mend the World, 1982.

17) The Holocaust did not make Jewish survival a mitzvah. In the holocaust, for example, gypsies too were singled out, but that did not make it a command to be a gypsy. We can imagine a hypothetical Hitler who decreed a final solution against homosexuals, but that would not of itself sanctify homosexuality. Jewish survival has religious significance *after* the holocaust only because it had significance *before* the holocaust. R. Jonathan Sacks, Tradition in an Untraditional Age, 1990.

18) I do not think that Judaism can be given a new hold on life by means of Auschwitz. For me the Holocaust was a totally destructive event, which makes my remaining a Jew infinitely more difficult than it has ever been. There is no salvation to be extracted from the Holocaust, no faltering Judaism can be revived by it, no new reason for the continuation of the Jewish people can be found in it. Prof. Michael Wyschogrod [Germany/U.S.A; 1928-2015], "Faith and the Holocaust". In Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust.

#### Responses to Suffering (III) – Human Freedom and Moral Responsibility

19) God's involvement in the realm of finite reality is imaginable only as an act of "self-limitation," as it were, God, notwithstanding His transcendence, bends down into the world of finitude...He reduces himself so that He may enter into the narrow straits of a relationship with finite existence. R. Eliezer Berkovits, God, Man and History. 1959

20) 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. R. Eliezer Berkovits, Faith After the Holocaust, 1973.

21) It is the tragic paradox of faith that God's direct concern for the wrongdoer should be directly responsible for so much pain and sorrow on earth. If man is to be, God himself must respect his freedom of decision. If man is to act on his responsibility without being continually overawed by divine supremacy, God must absent himself from history. But man left to his freedom is capable of greatness in both—in creative goodness and destructive evil... God himself could eliminate moral evil and the suffering caused by it only by eliminating man, by recalling the world of man into nothingness. R. Eliezer Berkovits, Faith After the Holocaust.

#### Responses to Suffering (IV) – Reenvisioning God and the Covenant

22) Modern man cannot possibly view earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, devastating storms and floods, famines and plagues, noxious plants and animals, as “necessary” to any preconceived plan or purpose. They are simply that phase of the universe which has not yet been completely penetrated by godhood. Of course, this involves a radical change in the traditional conception of God. It conflicts with that conception of God as infinite and perfect in His omniscience and omnipotence. R. Mordechai Kaplan [Lithuania/U.S.A.; 1881-1983], The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion, 1937

23) God wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can't bring that about...God is not perfect... There are some things God does not control... our misfortunes are none of His doing...I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason. Rabbi Harold Kushner, When Bad Things Happen to Good People. 1981.

24) Since there can be no covenant without the covenant people, is not the covenant shattered [by the Shoah]? In Elie Wiesel's words: “The Jewish people entered into a covenant with God. We were to protect His Torah, and he in turn assumes responsibility for Israel's presence in the world...Well, it seems, for the first in history, this very covenant is broken.” Or as Jacob Glatstein put it: “We received the Torah at Sinai/and in Lublin we gave it back/Dead men don't praise God/The Torah was given to the Living.”... Morally speaking, God must repent of the covenant, i.e., do teshuvah for having given his chosen people a task that was unbearably cruel and dangerous without having provided for their protection. Morally speaking, then, God can have no claims on the Jews by dint of the covenant. What then happened to the covenant? I submit that its authority was broken but the Jewish people, released from its obligations, chose voluntarily to take it on again. We are living in the age of the renewal of the covenant. God was no longer in a position to command, but the Jewish people was so in love with the dream of redemption that it volunteered to carry on its mission. R. Irving Greenberg, “Voluntary Covenant,” Perspectives National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, 1987.

Responses to Suffering (V) - Incomprehensibility

25) "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?  
Tell me, if you understand.  
Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!...  
"Have you ever given orders to the morning,  
or shown the dawn its place,  
that it might take the earth by the edges  
and shake the wicked out of it?  
"Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea  
or walked in the recesses of the deep?  
Have the gates of death been shown to you?  
Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness?  
Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth?  
Tell me, if you know all this. Job, Ch. 38.

26) As long as man's apprehension is limited and distorted, as long as he perceives only isolated fragments of the cosmic drama, and the mighty epic of history, he remains unable to penetrate into the secret lair of suffering and evil. To what may the matter be compared? To a person gazing at a beautiful rug, a true work of art, one into which an exquisite design has been woven - but looking at it from the reverse side...We, alas, view the world from its reverse side. R. Soloveitchik, Fate and Destiny.

27) [According to the model of epistemological impairment i.e. the inability to know] human cognition is limited and unable to grasp all the relevant facts and all the pertinent moral considerations. Hence, human beings can go on believing in God's goodness even if they do not exactly know how to reconcile it with moral iniquity. This model might indeed provide answers to individuals who wish to sustain their belief in God's goodness, on two conditions. The first is that the number of instances in which God's commands or God's deeds appear to be immoral is relatively limited - the higher their number, the lower the justification for a continued belief in God's goodness. Second, the model's assumption is that what appears immoral is not really so, only the limitations of the human cognition view it as injustice and evil...What seems immoral [needless human suffering] is dismissed in favour of a more important moral consideration. If it eventually emerges that some [divine] acts are patently immoral, the justification for continued belief in God's goodness will be reduced. Prof. Avi Sagi, Jewish Religion after Theology, 2009.

28) Mr. **MENACHEM DAUM**: At the Passover seder, my mother would get annoyed as my father recited the Exodus story. She would ask him, if God did so many miracles during biblical times, then why hadn't she seen any such miracles during the Holocaust?

My father's only response was that we humans, with our limited minds, cannot expect to understand God's ways. We must live with faith despite our unanswered questions. The tenacity of my father's faith has always been a mystery to me. It's a lot easier for me to understand the religious defiance of my father's only surviving relative, his cousin Dora.



Ms. DORA LEFKOWITZ: I cannot see a God who will allow a little baby to be killed for no reason at all. And I really lost my belief then, right there and then. I had one sister and two brothers. I was the oldest and the only survivor of my family. Why? What did they do so terrible that they had to perish? I think if God is so great and so powerful, he could have struck Hitler down before he killed so many Jews. That's my feeling. "Holocaust Survivors: The Search for Faith." April 20, 2001. [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

29) "The tragedy of the Holocaust is an unanswerable question. There is no human rationale whatsoever that can explain such indescribable suffering. Indeed, God's words to his prophet that, 'My thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways' (Isaiah 55:8), is all that can be said." R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson [Ukraine/ U.S.A; 1902-1994]. Speech at Lubavitch headquarters, Brooklyn N.Y. 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, 5751. December 27, 1990.

30) Supporters of the epistemological impairment model [i.e. that humans have extremely limited cognition of the "big picture"] can...argue that we do not understand anything. This claim, however, leads to a series of problems extensively discussed in the history of philosophy. First, if we do not understand anything, how do we know that God's understanding is greater than ours? Second, if we do not understand anything, how can we claim that God is a good, given that this claim requires some sort of knowledge, both concerning the good and concerning God's attributes? Prof. Avi Sagi, Jewish Religion after Theology, 2009.

#### In the Aftermath

31) I must repeat: we the survivors, are not the true witnesses. Primo Levi. The Drowned and the Saved.

32) Elie Wiesel, was asked, "Is there such a thing as a *silence* in Judaism?" Wiesel replied: "Judaism is full of silences ... but *we don't talk about them*."

33) "So here I am right now, about eighty years old – coming to the year of eighty. I have two married children, wonderful children. I have five grandchildren and one great-grandson. Three generations born and raised from the ashes of the Holocaust. Today I am the happiest man in the world. Just last week I was thinking – 'My God, sixty-two years ago I came here, a boy of seventeen, from a different planet, into a different planet,' I feel that I accomplished what I wanted. My life, my children, and grandchildren, I couldn't be happier in any other place. I am always saying to people: [the fact] that I survived as a decent man and a believing Jew, who can laugh and love and look on the world's bright side, is nothing less than magnificent. My whole life has changed, but my life is still a continuing defeat for Hitler and the Nazis who hoped to destroy us, but 'Am Yisrael Chai' [the people of Israel live]." – Eliezer Ayalon "The Road Ahead". Survivors Speak about their Lives after the Holocaust. Yad Vashem.

The Tisha B'Av 5777 Day of Learning is sponsored in loving memory of Ben Blutstein z"l by his family; and in loving memory of Terri R. Mentor z"l by E. Scott and Jackie Menter