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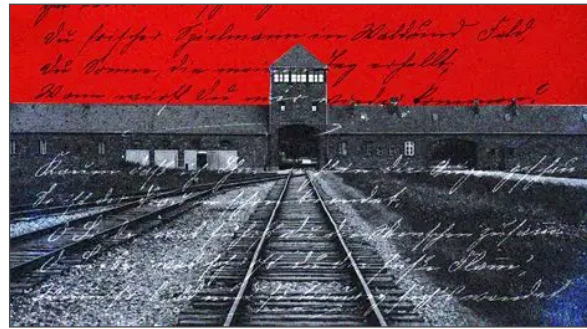
The Wound as Altar: An Ant-Itheodicy of the Shoah

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Abstract

This essay assembles into systematic form the post-Holocaust theology that has emerged across three decades of my struggle with a cohesive explanation of theodicy in the face of the Tremendum. Its central thesis is that a Jewish theology capable of surviving Auschwitz and an October 7th, must be built on four interlocking commitments: first, an uncompromising anti-theodicy that refuses every attempt to explain the Shoah theologically, and most emphatically the attempts by certain Jewish theologians to locate its cause in the victims' alleged deficiencies — Zionism, Bundism, Haskalah, assimilation, insufficient piety, inadequate Torah study; second, the Piaseczner Rebbe's practice of teaching-without-explanation within the Warsaw Ghetto, epitomized by his 1942 marginal note conceding that the present suffering exceeded all prior Jewish historical precedent; third, the Lubavitcher Rebbe's theological move, according to which divine contraction (tzimtzum) precedes and enables the very possibility of moral failure, tempered by the Rebbe's own rejection of every theodicy for the Shoah; and fourth, Elliot Wolfson's apophatic discipline, in which divine essence functions as a regulative linguistic limit rather than an ontological substrate, and in which post-Holocaust faith must remain linguistically wounded.^{1,2,3} Drawing on the author's own articulated framework of hermeneutic medicine, therapeutic tzimtzum, Shekhinah consciousness etc, the essay proposes a Judaism after Auschwitz grounded in wounded address without theodicy and in compassionate presence in place of explanation.

The poems *Ashen Soul* (2019) and *The Insanity of the Last Century* (2025) are adduced as the author's own lyric articulation of this theology: the heavens disqualified as witnesses, the earth tainted with ash, and the hands of the healer — rather than the catechism of the theologian — becoming the altar.^{4,5}

Keywords: Shoah, Holocaust Theology, Anti-Theodicy, Piaseczner Rebbe, Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Elliot R. Wolfson, Tzimtzum, Hester Panim, Dark Shekhinah, Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought, Eilav Velo Middotav, Victim-Blaming, Satmar, Fackenheim, Berkovits, Greenberg, Rubenstein, Wounded Address.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Prologue: On the Impossibility of This Essay

Every word written about the Shoah risks becoming a second betrayal of the murdered. Adorno's warning that lyric after Auschwitz is barbaric was, he later conceded, overstated — but it captured a truth that every Jewish theologian after 1945 must inhabit as permanent condition: that the event exceeded theology, that no explanation sustains, and that the sermon delivered at the graveside is, by its very structure, an affront to those buried beneath.⁶ The first act of any honest Shoah theology is therefore an act of refusal. The theologian who still wishes to write must first refuse the temptation to make the event make sense. Fackenheim named this most starkly with the 614th commandment: not to hand Hitler a posthumous victory by explaining the Shoah into the inherited theodicies.¹ The present essay accepts that commandment as its governing premise.

What I offer here is not a theology of the Shoah — no such theology is possible — but a theology after it: a structure of address, refusal, and wounded fidelity that has emerged across the arc of my published work in hermeneutic medicine, post-Orthodox Hasidic theology, and the integration of Lurianic kabbalah with post-catastrophic Jewish thought.^{7,8,9} The essay is occasioned by a reader's request that I assemble the materials of that work — the essays, the poems, the podcasts, the clinical meditations — into a single coherent statement. What follows is that statement. It is written with full awareness that it, too, is a failure. The theology that succeeds after Auschwitz is the theology that knows it has failed. I owe this to record my failure but also frame it in a coherent manner that collects thoughts and writings over decades.

2. The Revulsion: Against the Second Killing of the Victim

Before any constructive theology can begin, the ground must be cleared of a particular obscenity. That obscenity is the tradition within post-Shoah Jewish thought that locates the theological cause of the catastrophe in the deficiencies of the victims — their alleged insufficient piety, their alleged Zionism, their alleged Bundism, their alleged embrace of the Haskalah, their alleged failure to study Torah with sufficient ardor, their alleged assimilation. Norman Solomon's survey of Jewish responses catalogues these positions with a scholar's care.¹⁰ The present essay approaches them with a different affect: revulsion. I want to be explicit about this affect, because scholarly

neutrality with respect to these positions is itself a small complicity. These theologies constitute a second killing of the victim — a posthumous moral execution of those who had already been physically executed — and no sophistication of theological articulation can redeem them.

2.1 The Satmar Indictment: Zionism as Cause

The most notorious articulation of victim-blaming came from Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe, in *Va-Yoel Moshe* (1961) and subsequent works.¹¹ For Teitelbaum, the Shoah was the punitive consequence of the Zionist violation of the *shalosh shevuot* — the three oaths of the Babylonian Talmud (Ketubot 111a), by which Israel was said to have sworn not to ascend to the Land as a collective, not to rebel against the nations, and not to force the End. In Teitelbaum's logic, the founding of secular Jewish political sovereignty before the messianic advent was the precipitating sin; six million died because some Jews had dared to imagine the redemption as a political project. The position deserves to be named for what it is: a theology that blames the gassed child for the choices of the political Zionist. It reduces Auschwitz to a juridical equation between the acts of one stratum of Jewish society and the annihilation of all strata, without distinction. The Jews of Salonika and Thessaloniki, the Jews of Vilna and Lodz, the Jews of Amsterdam and Rhodes — the overwhelming majority of whom were neither Zionist nor anti-Zionist in any ideologically defined sense — were, by Teitelbaum's logic, collateral to a punishment whose rationale they did not share. The Piaseczner Rebbe himself, murdered at Trawniki, had no Zionist politics to speak of; nor did the Hasidic courts of Ger, Alexander, Sanz, or Lubavitch whose populations were almost entirely liquidated. The Satmar theology requires that we consider these martyrs collateral damage in a punishment directed at others.¹²

The moral problem deepens when one considers that Teitelbaum himself survived via a Kastner-arranged transport (the so-called "Kastner train") that departed Hungary in 1944 — that is, his personal survival was arranged through precisely the political-rescue infrastructure that his theology delegitimizes.¹³ I am not the first to note this contradiction, and I do not invoke it here to discredit Teitelbaum personally, who suffered incalculably and whose post-war rebuilding of Satmar is a genuine achievement. I invoke it only because it exemplifies what is structurally wrong with theodicies of victim-blame: they always require an exception for the theologian's own survival and

an indictment for the survival-that-failed of others. The Jews who died become retroactively guilty of the political choices of those who lived. This is not theology. It is theological self-exoneration dressed in the garments of piety.

The Satmar position has also been articulated, in softer forms, by other Haredi circles — Brisker, Neturei Karta, and various Hungarian Hasidic descendants of the pre-war anti-Zionist rabbinate. In every version, it performs the same theological operation: the victim is found guilty. I reject the operation wholesale.

2.2 The Haskalah Indictment: The Enlightenment as Cause

A second family of theologies — present in certain Mitnagdic and yeshivische traditions, but also within some Hasidic circles — locates the Shoah's cause in the Jewish Enlightenment. On this reading, the maskilim of Berlin, Vilna, and Warsaw, by opening Jewish life to secular philosophy, modern science, and the modern university, introduced the corruption that God punished. The most direct form of this theology was famously articulated in Nathan Birnbaum's pre-war circles and later echoed by certain post-war musar teachers, for whom the shtetl's destruction was the middah k'neged middah for the abandonment of the shtetl's Torah.¹⁰ The indictment is logically incoherent and morally untenable. Its logical incoherence: the Jews of Eastern Europe who perished were, in overwhelming majority, not maskilim. The Hasidic rebbes of Gur, Alexander, Belz, Bobov, Stolin, Radomsk, and countless other courts were paradigmatically un-Enlightened; they died first and fastest. The Haskalah theology therefore faces the same problem as the Satmar theology: to be coherent, it must assert that the pious died for the sins of the impious, which is a proposition the tradition itself (Ezekiel 18, Jeremiah 31) has explicitly repudiated. Its moral untenability: it makes the German-Jewish intellectual who read Kant guilty of the murder of the Galician Hasid who did not. No honest accountant of human choice and divine justice can sustain that sum.

2.3 The Bundist Indictment: Socialist Universalism as Cause

A third, less commonly articulated but still present theology blames the Bund — the Jewish Labor Bund founded in Vilna in 1897, whose commitment to Jewish cultural autonomy, Yiddishism, and democratic socialism formed a major pole of inter-war Jewish political life. The indictment, in its rabbinic version, is that the Bund's secular, class-based,

internationalist vision of Jewish futurity displaced the messianic vision and therefore provoked divine withdrawal. In its softer version it is the diffuse religious disappointment with Jewish secularism as a whole that reads the catastrophe as the punishment for abandonment of the covenant.¹⁴

I pause on the Bund because its victims — the schoolteachers, the trade unionists, the Yiddish poets, the mutual-aid activists, the ghetto fighters of 1943, many of whom were explicitly Bundist — are among those whose memory is most systematically maligned by the survivor theologies. The central Bundist theological-political commitment was doykayt — “hereness,” the insistence that Jewish life must be lived and defended in the place where Jews actually lived rather than deferred to a future messianic Land or reserved for an exclusively religious sphere.¹⁴ Doykayt opposed itself simultaneously to Zionism's territorial futurism, to Agudah's halakhic quietism, and to assimilationism's erasure of Jewish particularity. It articulated a Judaism that was Jewish in every cultural marrow — Yiddish language, folk memory, communal ethics, mutual aid but secular in its refusal to wait for divine intervention. The theologians who blame the Shoah on the Bund are therefore blaming a specific form of engaged Jewish presence — the form that, in the event, produced the defenders of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Marek Edelman (1919–2009) was the last commander of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. A Bundist from his youth, he refused after the war both to emigrate to Israel and to abandon his politics, remaining a cardiologist in Łódź and later a public intellectual whose interviews, especially *The Ghetto Fights* and his conversations with Hanna Krall, constitute some of the most unsentimental testimony we possess from inside the event.³⁹ Edelman consistently refused the mythology of heroic martyrdom that post-war institutional Judaism tried to impose on the uprising. He insisted that his comrades had fought not for God, not for Jewish national redemption, not even for survival — which was impossible — but because, in his phrase, “it is easier to die fighting than to die in a cattle car.” The choice was between two deaths; the fighters chose the one that preserved a shred of human dignity. That is the precise theological weight of the uprising: not redemptive sacrifice but dignified refusal.

The Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (Jewish Combat Organization, ZOB) that executed the uprising was a coalition of Bundists, Left and Right Poalei Zion, Hashomer Hatzair, Dror, Akiva, and various

smaller movements. Its commanders — Mordechai Anielewicz (Hashomer Hatzair), Edelman (Bund), Yitzhak Zuckerman (Dror), Zivia Lubetkin (Dror), and others — were overwhelmingly secular, politically Left, and theologically disengaged from rabbinic Judaism as traditionally practiced.⁴⁰ They were also the only Jews in the ghetto who, at the decisive moment, did what no one else could do: they fought. The rabbinic establishment of the ghetto, with the luminous exception of the Piaseczner and a small handful of others, had by early 1943 either been deported, murdered, or — in some documented cases — was counseling the remaining Jews to submit peacefully rather than provoke the Germans. The Bundists and their allies rejected that counsel, organized the resistance, and died in it.

To indict the Bund theologically, then, is to make three claims simultaneously. First, that the Jews who fought deserved to die because they had held the wrong political theology. Second, that the rabbinic establishment which in many cases counseled non-resistance had held the correct theology and therefore was not responsible — despite the empirical fact that their counsel, where heeded, got more Jews killed faster. Third, that *doykayt* — the commitment to Jewish life in the place where Jewish life actually was, with all its political and ethical complexity — was a theological error rather than, as it historically proved, one of the only Jewish stances from which organized armed resistance to the Nazis was actually mounted. All three claims are, I must say, theologically monstrous. The theologian who makes them condemns the defenders of the ghetto in the name of those whose position made defense impossible.

Edelman himself had a precise ethical vocabulary for what his theological critics were doing. In interviews throughout his life he returned to one formulation: that God was “hidden” during the ghetto, and that any theology which claimed to locate God in a position of judgment over the fighters was, in his terms, obscene—a word he used with the full weight of a physician who had carried wounded comrades through the sewers.³⁹ Edelman did not believe in God in any traditional theological sense. His testimony therefore cannot be co-opted as religious witness. But it can be received as the testimony of a Jew — a Jew who carried the weight of having been the last commander — and it can be placed alongside the Piaseczner’s *derashot* as converging witness from inside the event that the theological operation of explanation was, in itself, an injury to the dead.

A further point must be made. The Bund was not merely the political wing of the uprising; it was also, through its schools, cultural institutions, and mutual-aid networks, the infrastructure by which a specifically Jewish ethics was transmitted to Jewish children who might otherwise have been wholly assimilated to Polish or Russian secular culture. The Bundist schoolteacher who taught I. L. Peretz and Sholem Aleichem in Yiddish, who sang the Bundist anthem *Di Shvive* with her pupils, who organized soup kitchens during typhus outbreaks in the ghetto—that teacher was doing Jewish work. Her work was not rabbinic work. But it was Jewish work in a recognizable continuity with the prophetic demand for justice and with the Jewish ethical tradition’s claim that the defense of the poor is the defense of God’s image. To call her work the theological cause of her own extermination is to engage in precisely the desecration of the dead that Scripture repeatedly forbids (Deuteronomy 21:22–23; Psalms 79:2).

I therefore cannot merely reject the Bundist indictment as one more victim-blaming theology among others. I must reject it with a specific additional force, because its victims are the Jews who actually fought. No post-war Jewish theology that cannot honor Edelman and his comrades—and the schoolteachers and the mutual-aid workers and the Yiddish poets of the ghettos — has any claim on the name of Jewish theology at all.

2.4 The Piety Indictment: Inadequate Torah Study as Cause

A fourth position — most diffuse, because it is more often implied than articulated — holds that the Shoah was occasioned by insufficient Torah study, insufficient *mitzvah* observance, or a general spiritual laxity within pre-war European Jewry. In its crudest form it surfaces in eulogies and *drashot* that exhort the contemporary community to *teshuvah* lest “another Shoah” befall them. In its more refined form it surfaces in *musar* works that treat the destruction as an indictment of a generation’s spiritual condition.

The problem with this theology is not that it misreads any particular text — one can, of course, find prophetic texts that read collective catastrophe through the lens of collective sin, and the tradition has deep resources for such reading. The problem is that it applies that hermeneutic to an event whose scale and character were qualitatively different from any prior catastrophe the tradition had confronted. This is precisely the recognition that emerges in the Piaseczner Rebbe’s own marginal note of 1942, to which I will turn shortly.^{15,16} For now, the point is that

the piety indictment, too, performs the operation of the second killing. It tells the murdered child that she was not pious enough. It tells the slaughtered bochor that his gemara was insufficient. These are obscenities, and the theology that utters them is obscene.

2.5 The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Surgeon: A Caution from within

A fifth position must be addressed with special care, because it comes not from a theologian I reject but from one I deeply respect: Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe. In an essay published in *Mada ve-Emunah* (1980) and grounded in a 1954 private letter to Rabbi Bentzion Shemtov, the Rebbe offered the notorious surgeon analogy: that God, in permitting the Shoah, acted like a surgeon who amputates a diseased limb to save the body.¹⁷ Zvi Mark has painstakingly reconstructed the genealogy of the analogy and the subsequent controversy with MK Chaika Grossman, a Białystok ghetto fighter who challenged the Rebbe's words as theologically unacceptable.¹⁸ (I have examined the controversy at length in my recent study of the Rebbe's theological radicalism in the *Journal of Religion and Theology*).²

The surgeon analogy is — I must say this plainly — a version of the same theological operation I have been tracking above. It makes divine violence against the murdered intelligible by recasting it as therapeutic. It renders Auschwitz good for the patient. It is, in effect, the most sophisticated of the victim-blaming theologies: it blames not a particular deficiency of the victims (Zionism, Haskalah, piety) but the generic diseased condition of the Jewish body that required divine excision. The move is no less obscene for being sophisticated. Grossman was right.

What rescues the Lubavitcher Rebbe from being simply one more victim-blaming theologian is that he himself, in the fullness of his writings and his pastoral leadership, rejected the attempt to theologically explain the Shoah. As his editors and disciples have repeatedly emphasized, the Rebbe's mature position — the position he lived — was that no explanation small enough to fit within the bounds of human reason can explain a horror of such magnitude; that we can only concede that there are things beyond the finite ken of the human mind.¹⁹ On the public stage, the Rebbe refused to offer Holocaust theodicy; he offered instead resurrectional action — the global expansion of Chabad, the rebuilding of Jewish institutions, the *mitvtzoyim* campaigns as concrete refusal to let Hitler define the Jewish future.

We thus have within the Rebbe himself a dialectic: the sophisticated theologian who, in 1954 and 1980, reached for the surgeon analogy, and the mature pastoral leader who, across forty years, refused to offer theodicy and instead offered the Jewish people back to itself through concrete action. My reading of the Rebbe's legacy — is that the second Rebbe is the deeper one. The surgeon analogy is the Rebbe at his most exposed to the temptation to explain. His rejection of Holocaust theology, performed in act rather than in utterance, is his deeper theological wisdom.² It is a wisdom I will recover constructively in Part III below.

With the ground now cleared of the victim-blaming theologies, we can turn to a theologian who, from within the catastrophe itself, refused each of them: the Piaseczner Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto.

3. The Piaseczner as Counter-Witness

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira of Piaseczno — known to his followers as the Piaseczner Rebbe and, posthumously, as the *Aish Kodesh* after the title of his recovered Warsaw Ghetto *derashot* — is the pivotal counter-witness to every theology I have catalogued in Part I. He is pivotal not only because of what he taught but because of when and where he taught it: from inside the Warsaw Ghetto, between 1939 and 1942, with his only son, his daughter-in-law, his sister-in-law, his mother, and ultimately his daughter among the murdered, and with his own death at *Trawniki* in November 1943 awaiting him as he composed. His *derashot*, buried in a milk canister as part of the *Oyneg Shabbos* archive under Emanuel Ringelblum's direction and recovered in 1950, are the paradigmatic case of a theology spoken from within the catastrophe rather than about it.^{15,16,20}

3.1 Teaching Without Explanation

The first and most striking feature of the Piaseczner's Ghetto *derashot* — the feature that Nehemia Polen identified as the single most important hermeneutic key to the work — is their refusal to name the horror directly.¹⁶ The Rebbe does not write about the Germans. He does not write about Hitler. He does not name the *aktionen* or the transports or *Treblinka*. The Rebbe writes, instead, about the weekly *parashah*. He writes about the patriarchs. He writes about the mothers of Israel. He writes about *hester panim* — the hiding of the Face — in terms the Talmud and the *Zohar* already supplied.

This refusal to name is not evasion. It is a theological discipline of the first order. The Rebbe recognized,

I think, that to name the horror in theological prose would be to risk making it intelligible, and that making it intelligible is the first move toward making it acceptable. The derashot therefore speak of the catastrophe always obliquely, through the grammar of Parashat Vayera or Parashat Chayei Sarah or Tisha b'Av. The theological content is delivered without the theological explanation. The Ghetto Jew who heard the derashah was given language for his suffering — language drawn from Eichah and from the midrashic literature of exile — but he was not given a reason. That distinction is everything.

3.2 The Marginal Note of 1942: Auschwitz as Sui Generis

The most revealing single sentence in the Aish Kodesh is not in the main body of any derashah. It is a marginal note the Rebbe added to his own earlier text, in late 1942, after the deportations to Treblinka had begun in earnest and the ghetto's population had been reduced from over 400,000 to a remnant of a few tens of thousands. In his earlier derashot— from 1939 through the first half of 1942 — the Rebbe had consoled his listeners by placing their suffering within the continuum of Jewish historical catastrophe: the destructions of the Temples, the Crusades, Chmielnicki, the Cossack massacres. What Israel was now enduring was terrible, but it was of a piece with what Israel had always endured, and the tradition's responses — kiddush hashem, teshuvah, bitachon— remained adequate. By this continuity, the Rebbe sustained hope.^{15,21}

In late 1942, after Treblinka, the Rebbe went back to his manuscripts and added a correction. The note, as Abramson renders it, reads: “Only the suffering up to the end of 5702 had previously existed. The unusual suffering, the evil and grotesque murders that the wicked, twisted murderers innovated for us, the House of Israel, from the end of 5702, in my opinion, from the words of the Sages of blessed memory and from what happened in prior generations, there is no precedent.”²²

This marginal note is, to my mind, the theologically decisive sentence of the twentieth century. It is the moment at which the greatest Hasidic theologian of the ghetto period concedes, in his own hand and from within the event, that the traditional hermeneutic of catastrophe has failed. The tradition's vocabulary of churban, tochecha, gezerot does not reach what is now happening. The Shoah is sui generis. Nothing before it illuminates it.

Notice what this concession does and does not do. It does not offer a new theodicy to replace the old. The Rebbe does not say, “I now understand why.” He says the opposite: that the tradition's means of understanding have been exceeded. It does not abandon God. The Rebbe continues to pray, to study, to teach, to die a Jew. But it refuses to make the catastrophe a member of the family of prior catastrophes whose theology is already written. It insists on the incommensurability of the present suffering. This is the opposite of every victim-blaming theology I catalogued in Part I. Those theologies insist that the Shoah is commensurable — that it can be explained by Zionism, Haskalah, Bundism, laxity in mitzvot, or a collective diseased condition requiring surgical excision. The Piaseczner, at the moment of maximum theological authority — from within the ghetto, with his family murdered, facing his own imminent death— refuses all such commensurability. His is the first and most authoritative anti-theodicy of the Shoah, written before a single post-war theologian had begun.

3.3 Extending the Korban: The Self as Offering

If the Piaseczner refuses explanation, he does not refuse meaning-making altogether; he only redirects it. The key theological move of the late Ghetto derashot is the extension of the category of korban— sacrificial offering — to include the suffering of the righteous itself. I have developed this argument at length elsewhere, tracing the trajectory from the prophetic critique of the sacrificial cult, through the rabbinic and early Hasidic interiorization of avodah, to the Piaseczner's wartime radicalization: in the Warsaw Ghetto, the body of the suffering Jew is the altar, and the ashes of the murdered are the terumat ha-deshen.^{8,23}

This is a theology of sacred brokenness, not a theology of redemptive suffering. The difference is decisive. A theology of redemptive suffering would assert that the murdered died for some higher purpose — that their death accomplished something. A theology of sacred brokenness asserts only that the brokenness is sacred because God inhabits it, not because it has become intelligible. The Aish Kodesh sermon on Lamentations (Eichah) is paradigmatic: the Rebbe speaks of a God who weeps with the people, who is wounded with the wounded, whose tears flow alongside the tears of Rachel. God is present in the suffering, not beyond it. But God is not the author of the suffering. God is its companion.¹⁵

I have elsewhere called this figure the Dark Shekhinah—the aspect of the divine feminine that, in exile, is wounded with the people, that dwells in the abyss rather than above it, that refuses the consolation of transcendence.^{4,24} The Piaseczner’s weeping God is the same figure in Hasidic dress. The theology of the wounded Shekhinah is the theological vocabulary by which the Piaseczner makes meaning after meaning has failed: God is not the explanation of the suffering; God is its fellow sufferer. This is a Shekhinah-theology, not a theodicy.

3.4 The Clinical Legacy: Sitting With Absence

The Piaseczner’s practice has a direct clinical afterlife in the framework I have developed under the rubric of hermeneutic medicine.^{7,25,26} The clinical encounter with a patient in the midst of catastrophic suffering—terminal illness, traumatic bereavement, moral injury—is structurally analogous to the Rebbe’s situation with his ghetto congregants. The patient does not need an explanation; the patient needs a witness. The clinician who reaches for theodicy (“this is happening for a reason”; “God never gives us more than we can bear”; “you are being strengthened”) replicates the theological error I have traced in Part I. The clinician who sits with the absence, who accompanies without explaining, who recognizes the wound as sacred without naming its purpose—that clinician enacts the Piaseczner’s pastoral discipline.

This is why the Piaseczner matters not only to the theologian of the Shoah but to the physician at the bedside of the dying child. The discipline of refusing premature consolation is the same discipline. The Ghetto derashah and the oncology consult share a pastoral grammar. My own published work on sacred listening, therapeutic tzimtzum, and the patient as sacred text has been, in retrospect, an attempt to translate the Piaseczner into the clinic.^{9,25}

4. The Lubavitcher Rebbe

The theological trajectory of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), stands in complex tension with the Piaseczner’s. The Piaseczner died in the catastrophe; the Lubavitcher survived it (having escaped from Europe in 1941) and rebuilt Chabad into a global movement across the second half of the twentieth century. Where the Piaseczner’s theology was forged inside the ghetto, the Rebbe’s was forged in the long aftermath. This difference in historical situation produces, I want to argue, a difference in theological method that nevertheless converges on the same fundamental refusal.

5. Tzimtzum Before Sin

Eli Rubin, in his landmark *Kabbalah and the Rupture of Modernity: An Existential History of Chabad Hasidism* (Stanford University Press, 2025), advances a striking reinterpretation of the Rebbe’s 11 Shevat 5731 maamar.²⁷ On Rubin’s reading, the Rebbe inverts the traditional causal relationship between sin and divine withdrawal: rather than sin precipitating the ascent of the Shechinah from the cosmos, it is the primordial ascent of the Shechinah—the tzimtzum—that precipitates sin. The tzimtzum is no longer a response to cosmic limitation; it is the primary creative act that generates the very possibility of limitation, moral choice, and therefore moral failure.

I have engaged this reading at length in my own *Journal of Religion and Theology* essay, “Radical Rupture: Chabad’s Theological Continuity When Divine Withdrawal Precedes Sin” (2025).² There I examine the Rebbe’s position against the scholarly apparatus of Moshe Idel’s work on Hasidic innovation, Elliot Wolfson’s apophatic reading of Chabad messianism, Shaul Magid’s historical-critical analysis of Hasidic modernity, Michael Fishbane’s work on inner-biblical exegesis and myth, and Daniel Matt’s translations of the Zoharic corpus. The conclusion I reached is that the Rebbe’s apparent radicalism, if Rubin’s reading holds, represents less an unprecedented departure than a recovery of an older kabbalistic trajectory—the trajectory one glimpses in Jonathan Eybeschütz’s controversial *va-avo hayom el ha-ayin* and in the pre-Sabbatean mystical tradition that was driven underground by the Frankist crisis.^{2,28}

But for present purposes, the significance of the Rebbe’s move is narrower and sharper. If tzimtzum precedes sin—if divine withdrawal is structurally prior to the moral agency that might be said to deserve it—then no theodicy that routes catastrophe through human sin can reach the level at which catastrophe becomes possible. The very structure of creation, on this reading, already contains the ontological conditions for evil. Auschwitz cannot be explained by any human deficiency (Zionism, Haskalah, impiety), because the possibility of Auschwitz is built into the structure of divine self-limitation before any human deficiency could have acted. The victim-blaming theologies I rejected in Part I are, on the Rebbe’s own logic, categorically excluded.

6. The Surgeon and Its Failure

And yet—this is the tension—the Rebbe himself, in 1954 and again in 1980, reached for the surgeon

analogy I discussed in Part I.5.^{17,18} How can the theologian who articulates *tzimtzum* before sin also reach for a medical-therapeutic theodicy for the Shoah? The surgeon analogy is, in its structure, a commensurability claim: the Shoah is intelligible by analogy to a surgical intervention. If *tzimtzum* before sin is taken seriously, no such analogy is possible, because the Shoah exceeds every framework — including the framework of healing — by which human reason renders suffering intelligible. My reading of this tension is that the surgeon analogy represents the Rebbe at a moment of theological over-reach — a moment when the sophisticated theologian, having developed the resources for explanation in Chabad mystical metaphysics, applied those resources to an event that his deeper theological instinct (the instinct to refuse theodicy) should have held back from. That deeper instinct is present elsewhere in his corpus. In his public pastoral work, in his engagement with Holocaust survivors, and in his repeated insistence that no explanation small enough to fit within human reason can explain a horror of such magnitude, the Rebbe performed the anti-theodicy he did not always verbally articulate.¹⁹

7. The Deeper Apophysis: Refusing Explanation in Act

What the Rebbe offered in place of theological explanation was a program of action: the global expansion of Chabad, the *mitzvoyim* campaigns (*tefillin*, Shabbat candles, *mezuzah*, *kashrut*, family purity, Torah education, love of Israel, the Seven Noahide laws, *Moshiach*), the *shluchim* movement that placed emissaries in every corner of the Jewish world, and the rebuilding of Jewish educational and welfare infrastructure in the United States, Russia, France, Israel, and beyond. This program was, in its unspoken logic, a refusal to grant Hitler the final word. It was, in Fackenheim's phrase, the refusal to hand a posthumous victory to the murderers.¹

I read the Rebbe's pastoral method here as the Chabad version of the Piaseczner's discipline of teaching-without-explanation. Where the Piaseczner taught the *parashah* inside the ghetto, the Rebbe taught the *mitzvoyim* across the globe. In both cases, theology was performed in act rather than in explanation. The Rebbe's deepest theological statement about the Shoah is not the surgeon analogy of 1954/1980. It is the 4,000 *shluchim* he sent out across the world between 1951 and 1994. Those emissaries are the practical articulation of his anti-theodicy: a refusal to grant meaning to the catastrophe by making meaning in defiance of it.

From this angle, the Rebbe and the Piaseczner converge. Both refuse to explain. Both insist that the tradition's meaning-making resources must continue to be deployed, but in the register of action rather than of theodicy. The difference is historical: the Piaseczner made meaning in the ghetto by teaching Torah under the transports; the Rebbe made meaning in the post-war by sending emissaries where the transports had gone. They are two forms of the same wounded fidelity.

8. The Open Secret and the Linguistically Wounded Faith

Elliot R. Wolfson is, by my reading, the indispensable post-Holocaust theologian of our generation — the thinker who has articulated most rigorously the linguistic and hermeneutic discipline that a Jewish theology after Auschwitz requires.^{3,29,30} Where the Piaseczner provides the pastoral practice and the Lubavitcher Rebbe provides the metaphysical vocabulary, Wolfson provides the linguistic discipline: the rules of theological speech that a post-catastrophic Judaism must follow if it is not to relapse into the evasions I catalogued in Part

8.1 Concealment as Revelation

Wolfson's *Open Secret: Postmessianic Messianism and the Mystical Revision of Menahem Mendel Schneerson* (Columbia University Press, 2009) is the most sustained scholarly engagement with the Rebbe's messianic theology ever produced by a non-Lubavitch scholar.³ Its central insight — the "open secret" — is that revelation in Chabad mysticism operates paradoxically through its own concealment: the messianic presence is present precisely in its apparent absence, and divine manifestation occurs through the very veil that seems to hide it. Concealment is not the opposite of revelation; it is the mode of revelation.

The post-Holocaust application of this insight is immediate. Every theodicy I rejected in Part I operates by trying to convert divine absence at Auschwitz into divine presence — by finding some reason that restores God's intelligible agency to the event. Wolfson's open secret inverts this operation. The absence at Auschwitz is not something to be explained away into presence; the absence is the mode of presence. *Hester panim* — the hiding of the Face — is not a failure of revelation but the structure of revelation after catastrophe. God is not absent from Auschwitz; God is concealed at Auschwitz, and the concealment itself is the post-Holocaust form of divine presence.

The ethical gain of this formulation is that it refuses both of the twin temptations that post-Holocaust theology has struggled against: the temptation of Rubenstein's radical "death of God" (God is simply absent, and Jewish theism is over), and the temptation of Teitelbaum's theodicy (God's absence was punitive and explicable). Wolfson's open secret holds a narrow and difficult middle ground: God is neither dead nor explicable; God is concealed, and concealment is the form in which divine presence now occurs.^{31,11}

8.2 The Linguistic Wound: Theology After Meaning

Wolfson's second crucial contribution is his insistence that post-Holocaust faith must remain linguistically wounded.²⁹

In *Language, Eros, Being* and throughout his mature work, Wolfson argues that kabbalistic apophasis is structurally unstable: the assertion that God transcends attributes is itself an act of signification that cannot escape the semiotic field it seeks to negate. There is no linguistic position — no theological statement, no prayer, no creed — that achieves closure. Every theological utterance, including the utterance "God is beyond all utterance," performs its own failure.²⁹

This might sound like a technical point in hermeneutic theory. In the post-Holocaust context, it is a pastoral necessity. The victim-blaming theologies I rejected in Part I all share one feature: they achieve closure. They complete a sentence that begins "The Shoah happened because..." Their theological error is not only that they are morally obscene but that they are linguistically over-confident. They have said what cannot be said. Wolfson's linguistic wound is the counter-discipline: the refusal to complete the sentence, the acceptance that the sentence will not complete.

I have adopted this discipline as the explicit governing commitment of my own essay "Beyond the Garments: The Grammar of Divine Names, Human Projection, and the Post-Holocaust Condition" (2026).³² There I trace the maxim *eilav velo middotav* ("to Him and not to His attributes") from Exodus 6:3 through the Zohar, the Tanya, the Rebbe's *Basi le-Gani*, Rubin's Chabad metaphysics, and Wolfson's linguistic apophasis, arguing that this maxim becomes, after Auschwitz, not a mystical flourish but a theological survival strategy. If God were reducible to attributes — mercy, justice, providence — faith would collapse under the weight of the event, because those attributes plainly did not operate at Auschwitz. The survival of Jewish theology after Auschwitz depends on the refusal to identify God with God's attributes. The middot collapsed; God, on this theology, is not exhausted by the middot.

8.3 The Amalek Within: Evil as Intrinsic Divine Structure

Wolfson's third crucial move — and here he provides the most direct theological engagement with evil — is his analysis of Amalek in *Open Secret*.³ Against the reading of evil as external to the divine structure, Wolfson articulates the classical kabbalistic insight of left-contained-in-right: evil is not an invader from outside the divine schema but an intrinsic element within it, the un-subordinated force of divine severity (the "left hand") which must be contained within divine mercy (the "right hand") for cosmic harmony. Amalek, as archetypal enemy, is the unmixed left, divine severity unrestrained by mercy — and therefore a configuration within the divine pleroma, not a force against it.

The post-Holocaust application is this: the Shoah is not a rupture from outside divine reality; it is a configuration of divine reality in which the containment structures have failed. This is not a theodicy (it does not explain why the failure occurred or justify it) but an ontology (it names the structural possibility). On this view, the evil of Auschwitz is not human evil that somehow outran divine control, nor divine evil commanded from above; it is the revelation of a structural possibility within the divine itself — a revelation that the kabbalistic tradition had long anticipated in its speculation on the *kelipot* and on the unrestrained left hand, but that the Shoah forced into full historical view.³³

The Amalek-within analysis allows us to hold two theses simultaneously that secular thought cannot hold together. First, that evil is real — not merely the absence of good, not merely human malfeasance that divine sovereignty could have prevented but chose not to, but a structural force that must be reckoned with on its own terms. Second, that evil is not metaphysically independent — there is no dualism, no second principle, no Manichean equal to the Holy One. Evil is structural possibility within the one divine reality, the unmixed left that has always existed within the pleroma and that the post-war world has had to confront in its unrestrained form. This is the kabbalistic resource that post-Holocaust theology requires: an ontology of evil adequate to the event that neither demonizes the human nor exculpates the divine. The consequence that flows from it — the figure of the Dark Shekhinah — deserves its own sustained treatment, to which I now turn in Part V.

9. Beyond the Garments

I want now to assemble the foregoing elements into the positive theology that constitutes, for me, a possible sustainable Jewish faith after the Shoah. I have developed this theology most systematically in “Beyond the Garments” (2026), and I will here recapitulate its essential movements and extend them.³²

10. From Exodus 6:3 to a Process Theology Avant la Lettre

The organizing text for my constructive theology is Exodus 6:3: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH I was not known to them.” The rabbinic and kabbalistic tradition has always found in this verse more than a philological note. What the verse tells us is that the divine name changes not because God changes, but because the conditions of human encounter with God change. El Shaddai is the mode of divine encounter appropriate to the patriarchal age of promise and deferral. YHWH is the mode appropriate to the exodic age of historical intervention and catastrophic risk. The name shifts because history shifts. Revelation follows history; it does not precede it.³²

This is a process theology without divine mutability. God does not change in essence. But the conditions of encounter — the middot, the names, the attributes through which God is accessible to us — evolve as history imposes new demands. The patriarchs’ El Shaddai of contained promise gave way to the YHWH of exodus; the YHWH of exodus gave way to the Shekhinah of exile; the Shekhinah of medieval mystical discourse gave way to the Ein Sof of the Safed kabbalists and the Atzmut of Chabad. Each name records not what God is but how God can be encountered under specific historical conditions.

11. The Collapse of the Middot and the Survival of Address

After Auschwitz, the middot collapse. Mercy, justice, providence — the familiar attributes by which pre-modern Jewish theology articulated divine presence — can no longer be made to cohere with the event. Any theology that tries to hold on to them either becomes a victim-blaming theology (to save justice, one must make the victims guilty) or becomes a Rubensteinian abandonment of theism altogether (if the middot do not work, God is dead).³¹

The maxim *eilav velo middotav* cuts between these two failures. It says: God is not exhausted by the middot. The collapse of the attributes does not

signal the absence of God; it signals the failure of revelation — the failure of the particular configuration of attributes through which God had previously been accessible. God as *atzmut*, as essence, as the one toward whom address is directed, remains. What is lost is the specific grammar of presence that had made faith easy. What remains is address — the capacity to speak to God even when the attributes that once sustained faith no longer function.³²

This is Jewish faith reduced to its irreducible core. It is not a faith about God’s properties; it is a faith toward God, a stance of turning-toward, a continuation of address. The Jew who continues to pray after Auschwitz is not the Jew who has satisfied the theological problem; she is the Jew who addresses God without assurance. This is, I believe, the deepest meaning of the post-Holocaust survival of Jewish liturgical practice: not that the theodicy was solved but that the address was maintained. Faith persists as wounded address, not as satisfied comprehension.

12. The Dark Shekhinah: Feminine Presence in the Abyss

If Part IV.3 named the structural possibility of evil within the divine (Wolfson’s Amalek-contained-in-right), this section names the structural presence of God within evil — a figure I have worked with across the arc of my theological essays and poems and that I call the Dark Shekhinah.^{4,24,41} The Dark Shekhinah is not a new kabbalistic doctrine. It is a reading of the Shekhinah’s exile (*Shekhinta be-galuta*) that emphasizes, rather than sublimates, the wounded and abased character of divine feminine presence in the world after catastrophe. She is the divine who does not rescue — because the structure of the world does not permit rescue — but who accompanies, suffers with, and bears witness from the inside.

The doctrinal sources of this reading are internal to the classical kabbalistic tradition. The Zoharic corpus repeatedly describes the Shekhinah as exiled with the people, descending into the *kelipot* to gather scattered sparks, wounded in the very structure of creation by the shattering of the vessels (*shevirat ha-kelim*).^{33,42} Isaiah Tishby’s *Doctrine of Evil and the Kelippah* in Lurianic Kabbalism is the indispensable scholarly map of this terrain: a God whose own coherence is fractured by the primordial catastrophe that made creation possible, and who therefore inhabits creation not as its triumphant sovereign but as its suffering fellow-traveler.³³ Moshe Idel’s work on feminine kabbalistic symbolism and Yehuda Liebes’s *Studies in the Zohar* both establish that this suffering-with-

creation is not a sentimental modern projection but the deepest current of the classical mystical tradition.^{43,44}

Wolfson's contribution to this tradition — developed most rigorously in *Circle in the Square* and further in *Language, Eros, Being* — is to show how the gendered symbolism of the Shekhinah is not ornamental but constitutive: the feminine mode of divine presence is the mode in which divine vulnerability, receptivity, and wounded accompaniment become theologically articulable.^{29,45} The masculine Tiferet of the sefirotic tree is the God of transcendent sovereignty; the feminine Malkhut/Shekhinah is the God who has descended into exile with the people. After Auschwitz, the first God is unavailable; the second God is the only God who remains coherent. This is not a contemporary innovation; it is the recovery of the mystical tradition's own deepest resource at the moment when it is most needed.

The Piaseczner's Warsaw Ghetto derashot bear striking witness to this feminine theology. Polen has documented how the Rebbe's anthropomorphic language intensified as the catastrophe deepened: God is imaged as weeping, as wailing, as wounded in the Rebbe's presence.¹⁶ The theological vocabulary the Rebbe reaches for in these late sermons is the vocabulary of Rachel Imenu weeping for her children (Jeremiah 31), of the Shekhinah descending into exile with Israel, of divine tears accompanying human tears. The Rebbe does not say, and cannot say, that God is suffering in a way commensurate with the ghetto's suffering — that would be the obscenity of a theodicy of divine participation that made the suffering make sense. What the Rebbe says is more modest and more theologically precise: that the Shekhinah is present in the weeping, not above it; that her exile is now radicalized beyond any prior exile; that the Rachel who wept at Ramah for her deported children weeps now, in 1942, in the Ghetto, for these children too. This is Dark Shekhinah theology in its Hasidic idiom.

No contemporary theologian has pressed this line further than Melissa Raphael in *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (2003).⁴⁶ Raphael's thesis is that in the camps, women's embodied practices of care for one another — sharing food, covering each other's nakedness in the face of dehumanizing exposure, maintaining the rituals of washing and dignity under conditions designed to obliterate them — were not merely humane gestures but the enactment of divine presence. The Shekhinah, on Raphael's reading, was not absent from Auschwitz; the Shekhinah was

present in and as these practices of feminine care. God had not withdrawn; God had contracted into the gestures by which one prisoner covered another prisoner's body with her own in the moment of forced undressing. Tzimtzum as the feminine act of making oneself small enough to inhabit another's nakedness.

Raphael's theology is both a major contribution to post-Holocaust thought and, for my purposes, a complication I want to acknowledge. The contribution is the location of divine presence in embodied ethical practice rather than in a transcendent judicial principle. The complication is that Raphael's reading risks, at its most confident, being too consoling — risks, that is, turning the Shekhinah into a figure who accomplishes something in Auschwitz that retroactively gives the suffering redemptive meaning. My own Dark Shekhinah theology tries to hold Raphael's insight about feminine presence in care while refusing the consolation. The Shekhinah was present in the gestures of care — yes. But her presence did not save. It did not redeem. It did not accomplish. It accompanied. The ethical weight of the figure is in the accompaniment, not in any rescue it effected.

What the Dark Shekhinah does for a post-Holocaust theology is to name a God who is with the victim without being above the victim. She is not the judge of the Shoah. She is not the executor of the Shoah. She is not the guarantor that the Shoah had meaning. She is the wounded feminine presence who descended into the camps with the people, who wept at the selections, who covered the naked with her own garments of glory that had long since been torn, and whose presence is the ground on which the survivor's continued address to God becomes possible. To pray after Auschwitz is to pray to this God — not to the God who could not be prayed to, the sovereign of mercy and justice whose attributes failed at Treblinka, but to the Dark Shekhinah who was always there and who is now the only God the tradition can still locate.

This is the theological figure that binds together, across Part IV, Part V, and the poems of Part VI, the otherwise disparate positions I have examined. The Piaseczner's weeping God is the Dark Shekhinah in Hasidic dress. The Lubavitcher Rebbe's concealed Shekhinah of *tzimtzum-before-sin* (in Rubin's reading) is the Dark Shekhinah as cosmic principle. Wolfson's *left-contained-in-right* is the metaphysical structure within which the Dark Shekhinah's exile becomes intelligible. Raphael's embodied ethics of camp-care is the Dark Shekhinah in the practices of survivors. My own poem "The Secret of Schechina Be-Galuta"

(2019) tries, in lyric, to articulate what the scholarly prose here articulates: that the Jewish faith which survives after Auschwitz is a faith directed toward a God who is already in the wound, not a God who can be called down to heal the wound from outside.⁴¹

Two clinical consequences follow from this theology. First, the chaplain, physician, or pastoral worker at the bedside of the dying patient is not mediating between the patient and a distant God; the chaplain and the patient together constitute a site of Shekhinah presence. This is one of the organizing insights of my work on hermeneutic medicine, therapeutic tzimtzum, and sacred listening.^{7,25,26} Second, the survivor of religious trauma — whose relationship to the sovereign God of reward and punishment is fractured, perhaps terminally — can often still find relation to the Dark Shekhinah. The God who was coherent in the pre-trauma religious world is not the God who survives; the God who survives is the one who was always in exile, who was always in the wound, and whose presence in the wound does not require the survivor to re-absolve the institutions or theologies that caused the trauma. This is Dark Shekhinah theology as clinical resource, and it is, I believe, one of the few theological resources adequate to the actual pastoral work of accompanying survivors without reinjury.

12.1 The Wound as Altar: The Clinic as the Site of the Sacred

The constructive theology cannot remain at the level of speculative apophysis or even of the Dark Shekhinah's feminine presence. It must translate into practice. My work on hermeneutic medicine has been, throughout, an attempt at this translation: to specify what a post-Holocaust, post-Orthodox, post-victim-blaming Jewish theology does at the bedside, in the consulting room, at the site of contemporary suffering.^{7,25,26}

The central image of this translation I have articulated in my poem "The Insanity of the Last Century" (2025): "when the heavens withdraw, / it is the hands of the healer / that become the altar."⁵ This is not metaphor decorating theology; it is theology compressed into metaphor. After Auschwitz, the altar has migrated. The sacrificial service is not resumed in a rebuilt Temple; the sacrificial service is enacted in the clinical encounter, where one human being places herself at the disposal of another's suffering without explanation, without theodicy, without redemptive narrative. The healer's hands are the altar because the altar is, now, wherever one person bears the wound of another without trying to explain it away.

This is the Piaseczner's theology made contemporary. The ghetto derashah that refused to name the horror, that continued to teach the parashah while the transports rolled, that wept with the weeping God — that derashah has become the clinical consult that refuses to tell the patient "there is a reason," that continues to accompany through the disease, that weeps without explanation. The theology has found its pastoral venue.

13. Poetry as Theology: Two Lyrics of Wounded Address

I have reserved for last what may be the most honest articulation of the position I have been assembling in prose: two poems that say more about my post-Holocaust theology than any of my scholarly essays. I include them here not as illustration but as primary theological text. My prose glosses the poems; the poems do not illustrate the prose.

13.1 "Ashen Soul" (2019): The Heavens Disqualified as Witnesses

The poem takes its opening from Ha'azinu (Deuteronomy 32:1): עֲרָאָה עִמָּשְׁתּוֹ; הִרְבֵּדְאוּ, בְּיַמְשֵׁה וּגְיוֹזָאָה — "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth."³⁴ Moses' final song summons heaven and earth as the permanent witnesses against Israel's future infidelities; the Sinaitic covenant is validated by cosmic witnessing.

The poem asks what happens to that covenant when the witnesses are themselves disqualified.⁴

*Sitting in a manicured courtyard,
Palm trees surrounding this sacred space, allowing
for privacy
The sound of water gushing into a small pool,
I however cannot escape history,
My soul is ashen,
Infected by a white powdery substance
That was released some 70 years ago
When millions were cremated,
And the smoke and ash billowed heavenward.*

The poem names the ontological claim that underwrites the post-Holocaust theology: that the ash of the crematoria has infected everything — that there is no neutral ground, no sacred courtyard, no meditative retreat that is not already contaminated by the material residue of the Shoah. Nature accepted what heaven refused. The ash fell back to earth

because the heavens would not receive it. Even joy is contaminated by this white powdery gloss.

The poem's theological climax is the juridical disqualification of the cosmic witnesses:

סִימָנֶשֶׁה וַיִּזְאֶה "Listen O heavens!"

No longer are you a valid witness!

You let the ash rain back down

No longer are you a valid witness

You are summarily disqualified

זָרְעָה עִמָּשְׁתָּו "Let the earth give ear"

It cannot—its ears are filled with ash, you cannot bear witness

You hide too much blood

Moses our teacher no longer has eternal witnesses to rebuke Israel

When it sins,

Case is now dismissed for tainted witnesses

Even the judge is absent.

The juridical structure of the Sinaitic covenant — heaven and earth as witnesses, God as judge — has collapsed. The witnesses cannot testify because they are complicit. The judge is absent. The case is dismissed. What remains is the ashen soul of the survivor, who cannot believe and cannot not believe, who speaks the Ani Maamin of Maimonides' thirteen principles and, in the same breath, the refusal of that creed. The poem ends with the juxtaposition that is the most honest single line I have ever written

הַמֶּלֶשׁ הַגּוֹמָאֵב וַיִּמְאֵם יָנָא

הַמְהַמְתִּישׁ יֵפֶ לַעֲרֵאן, חִישְׁמָה תְּאִיבֵב

אוֹבְבֵישׁ מוֹי לִכְבּ וּלְתִקְוָא הָוֹ לֵב מַעַ

"even though he may tarry"

Tragically too late for history

וַיִּמְאֵם אֵל יָנָא

"Ani lo maamin" — I do not believe. This is the poem's final word. It is the direct inversion of the Ani Maamin chanted by Jews on the way to the gas chambers, the anthem of messianic trust that became the post-war Jewish hymn. In the mouth of the post-Holocaust Jew who knows what the ash did to the soul, the Ani Maamin and the Ani lo maamin coexist. The believer and the disbeliever are the same Jew. The faith is wounded in exactly the way Wolfson described, and the wound is permanent.

I want to be clear: the Ani lo maamin at the end of the poem is not atheism. It is not the rejection of God. It is the rejection of the middot as reliable mediators of faith — precisely the rejection that Part V articulated in prose. The Jew who says Ani lo maamin at the end of the poem has not given up God; she has given up the attributes through which God was previously available. She continues to address God — the poem is itself an act of address — but she addresses without belief in the properties. This is eilav velo middotav spoken from the wound rather than from the scholar's study.

13.2 "The Insanity of the Last Century" (2025): The Wound as Mercy

The second poem, written some six years after "Ashen Soul," performs a more tentative recovery. It begins with the same recognition — that the genocidal impulse has not been exhausted, that we have learned nothing, that the euthanasia of divine retribution from our public consciousness has not produced peace but only a more efficient barbarism — and arrives, nevertheless, at a difficult constructive move:⁵

Yet perhaps in this silence—

this ache where Presence once thundered—

there lies a hidden mercy:

not in the miracle,

but in the wound itself.

For when the heavens withdraw,

it is the hands of the healer

that become the altar.

In the absence of command,

we are called not to obedience,

but to compassion—

to become, ourselves,

the justice we once awaited.

And maybe that is the final retribution:

not divine fury,

but divine trust

that we would bear the unbearable

and still choose to heal.

This is the theological move that "Ashen Soul" could not yet make. It does not restore the middot. It does not reinstate the cosmic witnesses. It does not claim that the Shoah had a purpose or that the murdered died for

any reason. What it claims is more modest and more difficult: that the post-Holocaust task is not to restore the heavenly order but to assume responsibility for enacting, at the human level, the justice that heaven can no longer be relied upon to enact. “In the absence of command, / we are called not to obedience, / but to compassion — / to become, ourselves, / the justice we once awaited.”

This is Fackenheim’s 614th commandment rephrased in the idiom of hermeneutic medicine: the refusal to hand a posthumous victory is not a cognitive act but a healing act. It is not a doctrinal commitment; it is the daily practice of sitting with the patient, accompanying the wounded, becoming the altar oneself because the Temple is gone and the middot have failed. The Piaseczner’s ghetto derashah and the oncologist’s bedside meet in this poem. The healer’s hands are the altar because the altar is now human work, not divine architecture.¹

14. Clinical and Pastoral Implications: The Healer’s Hands

I have argued through six parts that the sustainable Jewish theology after Auschwitz must be built on the refusal of victim-blaming theodicies, the Piaseczner’s discipline of teaching-without-explanation, the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s mature refusal to theologize the catastrophe (even when he briefly reached for a surgeon analogy he should not have), Wolfson’s linguistic wound, and the maxim *eilav velo middotav*. I want to close by sketching what this theology does in practice — specifically, what it does in the clinical encounter, which I have argued throughout my corpus is the contemporary locus of sacred witnessing.^{7,25,26}

The survivor of religious trauma, the patient in the final stage of cancer, the parent sitting by the bed of a dying child, the soldier returned from a moral injury— these are the contemporary sites at which the post-Holocaust theology is tested. The clinician who arrives at these sites equipped only with biomedical categories will fail; the clinician who arrives equipped with the traditional theodicies (“it happened for a reason”; “God never gives us more than we can bear”) will fail worse, because the theodicies reinjure the sufferer by telling her that her suffering must be made intelligible. The clinician who arrives equipped with the post-Holocaust theology I have sketched— with the discipline of sitting-with-absence, with Wolfson’s refusal of closure, with the Piaseczner’s weeping God, with the Dark Shekhinah’s presence in the abyss— is prepared to do the one thing that is required: to witness without explaining.

I have developed the clinical specifics of this witnessing across many published essays: therapeutic *tzimtzum* as the clinician’s self-contraction to make room for the patient; Shekhinah consciousness as the alertness to the sacred in the ordinary; the patient as sacred text requiring hermeneutic engagement rather than diagnostic reduction; sacred listening as the refusal of premature closure; *tikkun* as the gathering of scattered sparks from the survivor’s pre-trauma religious life into a new vessel that the survivor herself constructs.^{7,8,9,25,26,35} The full elaboration is distributed across that body of work. The governing commitment, however, is the one this essay has tried to articulate: that Jewish theology after Auschwitz can sustain itself only as wounded address, and that the clinical encounter is the paradigmatic venue in which such address is practiced.

This is, finally, why the theology matters. It is not an academic exercise. It is the framework by which I have conducted five decades of neurological practice, by which I approach patients in pain clinics in Chicago and Merrillville, by which I have tried to hold the space between the patient’s despair and the tradition’s resources without collapsing either. The theology I have sketched here is what I have learned in that clinical work, read back through the Piaseczner, the Rebbe, and Wolfson. It is the theology that survives contact with the dying patient. It is the theology that does not lie.

15. Conclusion: A Judaism That Sits with Absence

I have argued that the Shoah demands a Jewish theology of four interlocking refusals and one constructive commitment. The refusals: of every victim-blaming theodicy (Satmar’s Zionism, the Haskalah indictment, the Bundist indictment, the piety indictment, and the Rebbe’s surgeon analogy); of the temptation to convert divine absence into theological presence by any explanatory device; of the temptation, conversely, to abandon Jewish theism altogether in the Rubensteinian manner; and of the linguistic closure by which the theological sentence attempts to complete itself when the event forbids completion. The commitment: to a Judaism of wounded address— of continued prayer without assured property, of sacred listening without explanation, of the healer’s hands as the altar that the Temple can no longer be.

This is not the Judaism of my childhood. The Judaism of my childhood — Orthodox, assured, articulated in the confident Soloveithican grammar of reward and punishment, *hashgachah peratit*, and the

coming redemption — did not survive my reading of Rubinstein, Fackenheim, my pastoral encounters with survivors, my five decades of clinical witness to suffering, and my slow education at the feet of Elliot Wolfson. What has replaced it is a Judaism I have elsewhere called post-modern, post-Orthodox, and post-Hasidic.³⁶ This essay has been an attempt to give that Judaism its theological articulation with respect to the single historical event that most definitively shaped its post-Orthodox character.

The Piaseczner died at Trawniki in November 1943. The Lubavitcher Rebbe died in Brooklyn in June 1994. Elliot Wolfson continues his work. The theological conversation persists and its subject is the possibility of Jewish faith after the heavens have been disqualified as witnesses. Its answer — tentative,

Addendum



Anti-Zionist Hatred Ideologies as the Continuation of the Second Killing

1. Why This Addendum

Part I of the main essay rejected five theologies of Shoah victim-blaming, one of which was the Satmar theology of 1961 that located the Shoah's cause in Zionism. That rejection was confined to a specifically rabbinic-theological position articulated within Haredi Orthodoxy. In the eight decades since the event, however, a broader set of anti-Zionist ideologies has developed outside the rabbinic world—in Western academic and activist Left politics, in the anti-colonial discourse of the post-Bandung global South, in the Islamist movements of the Middle East, and in various syntheses of these currents — that also performs a theological-political operation on the memory of the Shoah. The present addendum is necessary because that operation is, I want to argue, structurally continuous with the second killing I rejected in Part I. It is the same logic wearing different garments: the victim is found guilty; the survivor's defensive institution is treated as the new crime; the memory of the catastrophe is weaponized against the descendants of those who died in it.

wounded, spoken always against the temptation of premature consolation — is that the faith persists as address, that the altar has migrated to the healer's hands, and that the Judaism which survives is the Judaism that sits with absence without trying to fill it.

May that Judaism continue. May it refuse, always, the second killing of the victim. May it teach the parashah in the ghetto and the mitzvoyim in the world and the eilav velo middotav in the scholar's study and the accompaniment at the bedside. May it be the Judaism that Moses the Piaseczner, and Menachem Mendel the Rebbe, and Elliot the scholar, and every physician who refuses the lie of theodicy, and every patient who bears the unbearable and still chooses to heal, together constitute. Eilav velo middotav. Amen.

I want to be precise about what this addendum is and is not. It is not an argument against criticism of Israeli policy. Criticism of Israeli policy — including sustained, structural, and severe criticism — is a legitimate political and ethical activity, and there are many Jewish critics of Israeli governments, including within my own circle, whose critiques I have found sharp and valuable. It is not an argument that every opponent of Zionism is antisemitic; there are serious philosophical, religious, and political arguments against Zionism as a specific modern political program, including Jewish arguments (Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, Hannah Arendt in certain moments, the early Hebrew University liberals) that do not carry antisemitic weight.⁴⁷ This addendum is directed at a narrower and more specific phenomenon: the ideological formation in which anti-Zionism functions as the legitimated public form of anti-Jewish hatred, in which the memory of the Shoah as well as October 7th, is inverted as a rhetorical weapon against Jews, and in which the structural logic of victim-blaming I rejected in Part I is re-performed against the Jewish survivors and their descendants.

2. The Diagnostic Question: Critique or Hatred?

Any honest engagement with this addendum's subject matter begins with a diagnostic question that the speaker of good faith must be willing to ask herself: when does critique cross into hatred? The question cannot be evaded, because conflation in either direction is destructive. To treat every criticism of Israeli policy as antisemitism is to immunize a state from the moral scrutiny every state requires. To treat every articulation of anti-Jewish hatred as legitimate political speech is to grant public license to the most ancient pathology of Western culture. The task is diagnostic precision.

Natan Sharansky's "3D" test offers one widely used framework: Demonization (describing Israel or Israelis in terms that exceed any reasonable political disagreement — Nazi comparisons, blood libels, genocidal tropes), Delegitimization (denying Israel's right to exist at all, as distinct from criticizing its policies), and Double Standards (applying to Israel standards of conduct or existence that are applied to no other state).⁴⁸ Where critique stays within the terms of ordinary political disagreement — where it would be recognizable as critique if directed at any other state — it is critique. Where it crosses into these three zones, it has become something else. The 3D test is not the last word, but it is a useful first cut.

A second diagnostic, drawn from the academic study of contemporary antisemitism in the work of David Hirsh, Anthony Julius, and Alvin Rosenfeld, is the "Livingstone Formulation" test: does the speaker, when the accusation of antisemitism is raised, treat it as a matter to investigate, or as a conspiracy to silence legitimate criticism?^{49,50} A movement that consistently, reflexively accuses Jews of weaponizing the accusation of antisemitism to suppress speech has, by that very reflex, revealed something about its relationship to Jews. A movement in intellectual good faith treats the charge of antisemitism as it treats the charge of any other prejudice: as a serious claim requiring serious investigation.

A third diagnostic — less clinical but perhaps most penetrating — is the one Dara Horn articulates in *People Love Dead Jews*: the love of Jews only as victims, only as martyrs, only as the corpses of Auschwitz, and the corresponding rage against Jews who presume to defend themselves, to refuse the role of corpse, to exist as political agents rather than as symbols of innocent suffering.⁵¹ The anti-Zionist hatred ideology, on Horn's diagnostic, is a form of love for dead Jews that cannot accommodate the existence of living ones.

3. Holocaust Inversion

The specific pathology of anti-Zionist hatred that concerns me most in an essay on post-Holocaust theology is Holocaust inversion: the rhetorical operation by which the Shoah is inverted as an accusation against its victims and their descendants.⁵² Israel is "like Nazi Germany"; the IDF is "the new Wehrmacht"; Gaza is "the Warsaw Ghetto"; Israelis are "the new Nazis"; Zionism is "a form of fascism." The rhetorical structure is identical across the Western-Left, Islamist, and paleoconservative variants of the ideology.

Holocaust inversion performs several theological-political operations simultaneously. First, it relieves the non-Jewish speaker of any historical debt to Jews by reassigning the Nazi role to them. Second, it weaponizes Jewish trauma: the Jew who objects to being called a Nazi is told she is merely defensive about her own crimes. Third, it empties the historical Shoah of its specifically Jewish content — if anyone can be a Nazi and anyone can be a Jewish victim, then the particular destruction of European Jewry loses its historical specificity and becomes a floating moral template available for any political use. Fourth, and this is the deepest wound, it uses the very memory of the murdered to wound their descendants.

The theological obscenity of Holocaust inversion is, I want to argue, worse than the obscenity of the Satmar theology I rejected in Part I. The Satmar theologian blamed the Jewish victims for the Shoah; the Holocaust inverter blames the Jewish survivors for becoming, allegedly, the new perpetrators. The former treats the murdered as guilty of the wrong politics; the latter treats the survivors' political agency itself as the repetition of the crime against them. Both are versions of the second killing. The second is worse because it weaponizes the memory of the dead against the living.

4. The Progressive Form

Within Western Left discourse, anti-Zionism has increasingly occupied the structural position that classical antisemitism once occupied within Right discourse: the organizing conspiracy theory about power. The Jew of classical antisemitism controlled the banks, the media, the governments, and the cultural institutions through a hidden global network. The "Zionist" of contemporary progressive discourse is said to control the American government (via the pro-Israel lobby), the media (via "Zionist money"), the universities (via "Zionist donors"), and the Democratic Party (via "the lobby"). The vocabulary

has changed; the structural role of the Jew-figure in the conspiracy theory has not.^{49,50,53}

David Hirsh's work on contemporary Left antisemitism, and the scholarship assembled in Alvin Rosenfeld's edited volume on the dynamics of delegitimization, have documented this convergence with precision.^{49,50}

The tragedy I want to register here is that progressive politics in the West has historically been one of the political homes in which Jews have been relatively safe and in which Jewish participation has been full and generative — from the labor movement through the civil rights movement through the anti-war movements of the 1960s. The current moment, in which the public politics of significant sectors of the Western Left has become a politics in which Jewish participation is conditional on the repudiation of Jewish peoplehood, is a loss of that home. I register it as a wound, and I want to register it theologically: to lose the political tradition that gave shelter to one's grandparents is a specific form of exile.

5. The Islamist Form

The Islamist form of anti-Zionist hatred is the most direct heir of classical European antisemitism, which it received through the Arabic translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the 1920s, promoted by Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem — whose wartime collaboration with the Nazi regime, including his meetings with Hitler and his recruitment for the Bosnian SS, is historically documented — and subsequently disseminated across Islamist movements.^{54,55} The Hamas Covenant of 1988 incorporated both the Protocols and classical blood libels; it was modified in 2017 under international pressure but not fundamentally revised in its theological substrate. The October 7, 2023, massacre was, among many other things, the largest-scale material enactment of this ideology since 1945, a point I tried to register in my poem “Kabbalah of October 7th.”⁵⁶

The Islamist form is distinctive in that it frames its anti-Zionism in explicitly religious-theological terms: Jews as the killers of prophets (a classical Islamic anti-Jewish theological motif), Israel as *dar al-harb* on the soil of *dar al-Islam*, Zionism as a cosmic-theological transgression requiring violent rectification. This is not, pace some apologists, merely a political response to the founding of Israel in 1948; the theological substructure predates 1948 and drew strength from European antisemitism as imported. Matthias Küntzel's work on Nazi propaganda in the Arab world, Robert Wistrich's *A Lethal Obsession*, Bernard

Lewis's writings on Jews in Islamic civilization, and Jeffrey Herf's archival study of Nazi wartime Arabic-language broadcasting establish this with sufficient rigor that the denial of it has itself become part of the diagnostic for Holocaust inversion.^{54,55,57,58}

6. October 7, 2023 and Its Aftermath

The reaction of significant sectors of Western academic, cultural, and political life to the October 7, 2023 massacre constituted a distinct rupture. Within days — often within hours, before Israeli retaliation had begun — major student organizations, academic departments, and activist coalitions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe issued statements celebrating or justifying the killings. Video of the massacre itself was distributed as celebratory content on major social-media platforms. Subsequent months saw the normalization of public chants (“from the river to the sea,” “globalize the intifada,” “by any means necessary”) whose material content includes the violent elimination of the Jewish state and, in some explicit versions, of Jews as such. I want to be precise about what I am and am not saying. I am not saying that every person who protested against the Israeli military response in Gaza is an antisemite. There are serious moral critiques of Israeli conduct in the subsequent war; some of these critiques have been made by Jewish moralists I respect, and some by Israeli moralists within Israel itself. I am saying that a public culture in which the celebration of the massacre of Jewish civilians, including infants, is a normalized activist stance — and in which the descendants of Holocaust survivors are told, on their university campuses, that October 7 was an act of “decolonial resistance” — is a culture that has crossed from political disagreement into something structurally identifiable as anti-Jewish hatred. The theologian who wishes to locate the contemporary form of victim-blaming need not look further than this.

7. The Classical Templates in New Garments

A useful diagnostic exercise is to hold up contemporary anti-Zionist tropes alongside the classical antisemitic tropes they have, in many cases, functionally replaced.^{59,60}

The classical blood libel (Jews kill Christian children for ritual purposes) has become the rhetorical libel that “Israel kills children deliberately” — often with the same viscosity of emotion, the same resistance to evidence, the same recursion to the libel when refuted. The classical conspiracy theory (Jews control world affairs secretly) has become the “Zionist lobby” conspiracy theory (Zionists control American politics,

global media, world banking, and the academic suppression of truth). The classical demonization (Jews as Christ-killers, Jews as desecrators of the host) has become the demonization of Zionists as genocidaires, as uniquely evil, as a cosmic obstacle to progressive history. The classical dual-loyalty charge (Jews are not truly members of their host nations) has become the accusation that Jews who support Israel in any form are not truly American, British, or French.

The utility of the classical-template exercise is diagnostic, not polemical. If a contemporary political position reliably produces the classical antisemitic tropes in its rhetoric, the burden of proof is on that position to explain why it is producing them; and if it cannot explain the production except by the reality of the tropes, the diagnostic question is answered. This is the same pattern of reasoning by which we identify any returning pathology: by its symptoms.

8. Theological Response: The Same Logic of the Second Killing

I return now to the theological argument of the main essay. The position I rejected in Part I was the theology that locates the cause of the Shoah in the victims' deficiencies. The position I reject in this addendum is the theology — often unspoken but structurally theological — that locates the wrongness of Jewish post-Holocaust existence in Jewish political agency itself. Both positions perform the same operation. Both treat the Jewish victim as the author of her own victimization. Both absolve the non-Jewish world of its historical role by reassigning that role to the Jews. The Satmar theologian blames the gassed for wrong politics; the Holocaust inverter blames the survivor for the audacity of not being gassed. Both are the second killing.

The post-Holocaust theology I articulated in the main essay — of anti-theodicy, of the Dark Shekhinah, of *eilav velo middotav*, of the wound as altar — provides the resources for responding to this phenomenon theologically. The response is not to retreat from Jewish political agency; nor is it to offer a messianic vindication of the State of Israel. The response is to recognize that Jewish political agency, including the political institution of Israel with all its imperfections and its morally complex record, is the concrete embodied form that Jewish post-Holocaust *doykayt* — presence in the world, not deferral to a future messianic resolution — has taken. This is not a theodicy. It is not a claim that Israel is the fulfillment of divine promise or the precursor to the messianic age; that would return us to the triumphalism the main essay refused. It is the more modest and more sustainable claim: that

Jewish survival and Jewish institutional presence in history are not theological errors requiring correction but morally ordinary political activities that Jews, like every other people, are entitled to undertake.

The Dark Shekhinah, as I developed her in Part V.3 of the main essay, does not take sides in the internal political debates of Jewish life. She does not underwrite any particular government, any particular party, any particular policy. She is present in the ethical care of one Jew for another, of one human for another, of one patient for another — she is present in the practices that honor the image of God in the suffering neighbor, including and especially the neighbor whose politics the political Jew disagrees with. A Jewish politics faithful to the Dark Shekhinah is a politics that refuses both the victim-blaming theologies of Part I and the anti-Zionist hatred ideologies of this addendum — a politics that insists on Jewish presence in the world, refuses the inversion that turns Jewish survival into Jewish guilt, and remains, within that presence, committed to the ethical care that is the only mode of divine presence the post-Holocaust world reliably contains.

I want to be explicit about a theological conviction that this addendum presupposes but that deserves its own statement. I do not believe that Jewish survival requires apology. I do not believe that the Jewish institutions built after 1945 — the State of Israel, the Jewish communities of the diaspora, the Jewish educational and welfare networks, the Jewish religious institutions of every denomination — owe their existence to any tribunal of gentile political or intellectual approval. The tribunal that adjudicated Jewish existence in the twentieth century operated at Wannsee; its verdict was rendered; its verdict did not prevail because the Jewish people, against every theological and political expectation, refused to accept it. That refusal is not, in itself, a theological achievement; it is, as the Piaseczner would have it, the ordinary fidelity of a people who continued to live because they had not been granted permission to die. The anti-Zionist hatred ideology that would now retroactively grant Wannsee's permission — by reconstructing Jewish political presence as the new crime requiring correction — is to be refused on the same grounds on which the original verdict was refused.

9. Clinical and Pastoral Implications

The clinical and pastoral weight of this addendum is not academic. Jewish patients — including Shoah survivors, their children and grandchildren, and

those whose relationship to Jewish identity was not in question until recent years — present, at the bedside and in the consulting room, with specific contemporary wounds: the wound of being told, by colleagues or academic institutions, that their people's attempt at national self-defense is a species of Nazism; the wound of hearing the massacre of their relatives celebrated as justice on campuses where they or their children study; the wound of watching the classical templates of anti-Jewish hatred return in the vocabulary of political circles that had been, within living memory, their home.

These wounds are real; they are specific; and the clinician who approaches them requires a vocabulary that does not collapse into either denial (that the phenomenon is real) or into the reciprocal pathology (that every Palestinian child is guilty, that every critic of Israeli policy is antisemitic). The diagnostic precision I attempted in sections A.2 through A.7 of this addendum is, in the first instance, a precision the clinician herself requires. She must be able to receive the Jewish patient's grief without pathologizing it as paranoia, and she must be able to do so without overextending the grief into a polemic that closes off the possibility of any concrete ethical engagement with Palestinian suffering — which, however it stands in relation to the politics of this addendum, is also real and also demands care.

The Piaseczner's discipline of sitting-with-absence applies again. The clinician does not need to resolve the political question at the bedside. The clinician needs to receive the wound as a wound. The Jewish patient grieving October 7, or grieving the loss of her progressive political home, or grieving the rupture of long friendships over the conflict, is undergoing a form of exile — a loss that requires acknowledgment, not argument. The vocabulary of the Dark Shekhinah, of Shekhinta be-galuta, of the wounded feminine presence that accompanies the people in their exile, is available here as pastoral resource. The same vocabulary is available, equally and without contradiction, to the Palestinian patient whose suffering is not reducible to the Jewish patient's; the Dark Shekhinah is, in her classical kabbalistic definition, the divine presence that descends into exile with whichever people is, in that moment, in exile.⁶¹

10. A Note on Hope

This addendum has been, by a considerable margin, the hardest section of the essay to write, because it concerns a contemporary phenomenon that is actively wounding me and my community as I write. I want to

close with a note on hope, and I want to be honest that the hope is small and unassured.

The hope is this: that the same Jewish theological tradition that survived the Spanish Expulsion, the Chmielnicki massacres, the Russian pogroms, and the Shoah will survive the current ideological formation as well. The tradition's survival mechanism has always been the same. It has not been triumphalism; it has not been ideological counter-attack; it has not been retreat into the ghetto. It has been the persistent practice of Jewish life in its full depth: the study of Torah, the practice of chesed, the liturgical address to a God who does not answer on command, the cultivation of the next generation in a tradition they did not themselves create. The Piaseczner continued to teach under the transports; the Lubavitcher Rebbe continued to send shluchim after the murders; the Israeli mother continues to raise Jewish children under rocket fire and in the face of international condemnation; the American Jewish student continues to study at a university that tells her, now, that her peoplehood is an oppression. The theological-political form of the hostility changes; the pattern of Jewish persistence does not.

A specifically theological element of the hope is the Dark Shekhinah's own persistence. She was in the Warsaw Ghetto. She is in the hospital room in Chicago. She is in the beit midrash in Jerusalem. She is at the Shabbat table of a family whose grandmother was murdered at Auschwitz and whose grandchild is now told, at her university, that Jewish peoplehood is a species of oppression. The Shekhinah is present in all these places, and her presence is the ground on which the continuation of Jewish life — intellectually, politically, pastorally, clinically, morally — remains possible. That ground is what I try to stand on, in the clinic and at the writing desk and at the Shabbat table, as I write this essay and as I will continue to write after it.

The final word of this addendum is the same final word as the main essay. Eilav velo middotav. To Him, and not to His attributes. The God to whom post-Holocaust address is still directed is not the God who vindicates any particular political formation, not the God who will adjudicate the Middle East conflict, not the God whose attributes can be summoned as evidence in any argument, Jewish or anti-Zionist. It is the God who inhabits the wound, accompanies the exile, and receives the address of the one who continues to speak toward Him without assurance of reply. That God is with the Jewish patient grieving October 7. That God is with the Palestinian patient grieving what Israeli

actions have meant for her family. That God is with every person who refuses both the first killing of the theodicies and the second killing of the inversions. The Jewish theological task, at the writing desk and the bedside and the Shabbat table, is to be with that God, and to continue.

Eilav velo middotav. Amen.

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