7

Theological Responses to the Hurban from within the Hurban

Nehemia Polen

INTRODUCTION

It is a striking fact that in the staggeringly vast sweep of the Holocaust, thus far only two extended documents of Orthodox Jewish theological reflection have come to the attention of the scholarly community. The specification of the set we have in mind—which will be the focus of this essay—requires some clarification. Its defining characteristics include the following:

(1) The document must be essentially theological in its orientation. This is meant to exclude, for example, halakhic responsa, but it includes *derashot* and other theological/philosophical reflections grounded in rab-

binic literature broadly defined: *aggadah* and Midrash especially, as well as medieval Jewish philosophy, biblical exegesis, kabbala, Hasidism, *mussar*, and related bodies of literature.

(2) The document must have been written during the Holocaust. This stipulation is not without ambiguity. Did the Holocaust begin in January 1942 with the Wansee Conference, in the summer of 1941 with the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the Einsatzgruppen mass killings, or perhaps with the German invasion of Poland and the start of the war in September 1939? In any event, for the purposes of this paper, documents written before September 1939 will not be included in our analysis. We will consider the date for the end of the Holocaust to be May 1945, with Germany's unconditional surrender and the end of the war in Europe.

This specification excludes many significant documents from the purview of the present paper: documents from before the war that might be seen to have prophetically foreseen the catastrophe (such as certain writings of Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, among others), as well as responses to the rise of Nazism in Germany that were written before the war (such as essays of Rabbi Elhonon Wasserman, among others).[1]

Also excluded are postwar theological responses to the Holocaust by those who were threatened by the Nazi onslaught but who managed to escape, such as the writings of the Satmar Rebbe, among many others.

This provision also excludes postwar testimonies and reminiscences, which, however valuable and significant, cannot be considered contemporaneous documents.

(3) We also exclude documents written during the Holocaust but outside the European theater, and thus outside the perimeter of oppression and degradation and the immediate threat of the Nazi extermination machine. This excludes wartime writings from *Eretz Israel* and America, for example. We include, however, writings from Hungary: while the German occupation came only in March 1944 and the existence of a wartime regime allied with the Nazis actually shielded the Jewish population (temporarily) from the systematic workings of the Final Solution, yet Nazi-style juridical exclusion, degradation, dehumanization, expulsion, and massacres were already endemic throughout most of the war period.

[1]See the material cited in Gershon Greenberg, "Myth and Catastrophe in Simha Elberg's Religious Thought," *Tradition* 26:1 (1991), 60, n. 2; cf. also Hillel Goldberg, "Holocaust Theology: The Survivors' Statement," *Tradition* 20:4 (1982), 341–357.

With our universe of analysis thus delineated with a reasonable degree of specificity and precision, we return to the claim in this essay's opening statement: thus far, only two documents of Orthodox theological reflection from the Holocaust have come to the attention of the scholarly community. These two are Rabbi Kalonymus Shapira's *Esh Kodesh* and Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichthal's *Em ha-Banim Semehah*. In a moment we shall discuss these documents and append one more item to this very short list, but first let us examine the significance of our specification set.

While the paucity of exemplars within our set is indeed striking, it is hardly incomprehensible. For those who were directly caught in its net, the period of the Holocaust was

hardly a time for creative religious thought. While many diaries, chronicles, poems, and other works of historical and literary interest have survived, the time was clearly not conducive to sustained theological reflection. This only increases the significance of those very few documents that did survive.

By focusing our analysis on documents written during the Holocaust, we do not in any way intend to diminish the value of works written before or after the war; to this date, a comprehensive treatment of all such documents has not been attempted and is a desideratum. Our intention, rather, is to restrict the domain of analysis to a field appropriate to one paper. In addition, we are suggesting that documents written during the Holocaust indeed have a special value, as they are direct responses to the unparalleled catastrophe, unmediated and unrefined by the opportunity for reflection that distance (either geographical or chronological) affords.

It cannot be overlooked that in all likelihood other such documents were written but did not survive. It is said, for example, that during the war Rabbi Menahem Zemba of Warsaw wrote on the laws and theology of mourning. But this work, if it did exist, and no doubt others like it, is lost to history, and we cannot analyze what we do not have. This again only serves to underscore the preciousness of those few works that we have in our possession. It is to them that we now turn.

I. *SIFTEI SHLOMO*

Before we discuss the two works mentioned above that already have received scholarly attention, we shall introduce one that comes within the domain of the above specifications but that, so far as I can tell, until now has escaped notice in the scholarly literature on the Holocaust. I am

referring to Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Unsdorfer's collection of *derashot, Siftei Shlomo.*[2] Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Unsdorfer (1887–1944) was a *maggid* in Pressburg (Bratislava), in Slovakia. In his youth he was a student of Rabbi Yosef Zvi Dushinsky and Rabbi Akiva Sofer. During the war he remained at his post in Pressburg, giving support and encouragement to the beleaguered community, until he was taken to Auschwitz in the fall of 1944. *Siftei Shlomo* was published in 1972 by the author's son, Rabbi Shmuel Alexander Unsdorfer, who had been sent by his father to yeshiva in England in 1939, before the war's onset. According to the publisher's account in the introduction, the author originally wrote the *derashot* in Yiddish and the younger Unsdorfer translated them into Hebrew. The book contains an approbation by the rabbi of Pressburg, Akiva Sofer, dated September 25, 1947. Published privately and evidently never reprinted, the work appears to have had a very small circulation.

Rabbi Unsdorfer's homiletic approach is rooted in Nahmanides' typological approach to Scripture.[3] His ability to find parallels to the contemporary situation in biblical passages provided his flock with a measure of consolation and hope. An example is the *derashah* for *Parashat Lekh-Lekha*, 5702 (November 11, 1941); a short explana-

[2]Edited and published by Shmuel Alexander Unsdorfer (Montreal, 1972). My thanks to Rabbi Avi Weinstein, who introduced me to this work and graciously shared his insights with me. Rabbi Weinstein plans to publish extended selections from *Siftei Shlomo* in translation. [It just has come to my attention (8 Menahem-Av, 5756) that *Siftei Shlomo* is cited in Abraham Fuchs, *The Holocaust in Rabbinic Sources (Responsa and Sermons)*, Jerusalem 1995 (Hebrew).]

[3]See Amos Funkenstein, "Medieval Exegesis and Historical Consciousness," in idem, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 88–130.

tory remark prefaces the *derashah*, noting that it was delivered "at a time of great trouble, may God spare us, when they decreed and began to expel Jews from our city." Rabbi Unsdorfer writes that during normal times, his community would read the words of *Lekh-Lekha* enjoining Abraham to leave his homeland as historical recounting, but this year the words were aimed directly at his community, an accurate description of its own tragic circumstance. The rabbi counsels his flock to be strong in faith, to accept everything in love, sure in the knowledge that it was all for the good, now or "for the coming generations":

> . . . We who believe in God are compared to the stars: it is precisely in the night's deepest darkness that the stars shine most brightly. So it is with us in times of trouble. God spare us: at that time our trust in God shines, and the great power of Israel's sanctity is revealed in their faith and righteousness. (30–32)

Later in the same year, on December 21, 1941, shortly after the outbreak of war between America and Japan (to which he refers directly), he wrote the following for *Parashat Vayeshev*:

> This Torah section, from start to finish, is all about dreams. When a person lives in peace and tranquillity he has no need for dreams. Who wants to interrupt a quiet, contented life with dreams? Who loves dreams? Who needs dreams? Someone who is suffering, God spare us, someone who is persecuted, just as Joseph was persecuted by his brothers, just as the royal cupbearer in prison. So it is with us today: we are as in a dream, because we are saturated in suffering. They have forbidden us to speak, no one dares utter a sound out of fear of the enemy. But they could not prohibit us from dreaming, and with our dreams we see the future: our sheaf has risen and stands firm. This is our consolation: just like the dreams of Joseph, they will certainly come to pass. (64–66)

Until the very end, Rabbi Unsdorfer preached his message of hope, consolation, and the sacredness of Israel. His *derashot*, so far as I can see, display no change over time, whether in terms of homiletic style or theological posture. Their creativity lies in their ability to marshal biblical and rabbinic sources as parallels adumbrating the troubles of his day. *Siftei Shlomo* demonstrates that even during the Holocaust, preachers could maintain the traditional approach to suffering, applying ancient sacred texts to a radically new situation while vigorously affirming the standard theodicy.

Rabbi Unsdorfer was taken to Auschwitz and killed on October 18, 1944.

II. *EM HA-BANIM SEMEHAH*

The second work that satisfies our criteria is Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichthal's *Em ha-Banim Semehah*. As noted above, this work has received the attention of Holocaust writers, in particular Pesach Schindler.[4] Originally published in Budapest in 1943, it was republished in Israel in 1983, in an expanded edition that included footnotes, indices, and other explanatory material.[5] Like many of his rabbinic colleagues, Rabbi Teichthal, a follower of the Munkaczer Rebbe, originally was unsympathetic to the Zionist movement. But the rise of Nazism and the persecution of his people caused him to change his mind. *Em ha-Banim Semehah* is a monograph that draws upon a wide range of

[4]See especially "*Tikkun* as Response to Tragedy: *Em Habanim Smeha* of R. Yissakhar Shlomo Taykhtahl—Budapest, 1943," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4:4 (1989), 413–433. Cf. also idem, *Hasidic Responses to the Holocaust in the Light of Hasidic Thought* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1990), 7–8, passim; idem, "Rabbi Issachar Teichthal on Hurban and Redemption," *Tradition* 21 (1984), 63–79.

[5]Jerusalem: Pri Ha-Aretz, 1983.

traditional sources to make a single point: that Jews must work actively to redeem the Land of Israel and restore it to Jewish sovereignty and that the persecutions of his day were a consequence of having rejected earlier opportunities for emigration to the Holy Land. While not a tract of political Zionism, it is broadly sympathetic to the Zionist movement's aims and sees a messianic dimension in rebuilding of the Land. Rabbi Teichthal sharply criticizes the rabbinic leadership that opposed earlier opportunities for aliyah:

> Had the rebuilding of the Land proceeded earlier with the consent and the participation of all of Israel, the Land would have been ready to receive a large portion of diaspora Jewry. A significant portion of our recently murdered Jewish brethren would have been spared by virtue of their being in the Land of Israel. But now, who takes responsibility for all the innocent blood which has been shed in our time? It appears to me that those leaders who prevented Jews from going and joining the builders, will not be able to wipe the blood-guilt from their hands. (18)

Aside from the author's acknowledgment that he originally was dismissive of the movement to build Israel (21) and that only exile from his home provoked him to re-examine the question anew, the reader does not discern any movement or undercurrent of complexity within the text, which is all of one piece. Like Rabbi Unsdorfer, he cites Nahmanides' Torah commentary, but rather than simply drawing parallels between the biblical narratives and the sufferings of his day, he writes that "[Nahmanides] teaches us that we can detect from the nature of the suffering that Heaven is pointing out the desired path: to make Aliyah to the Holy Land." (147) The meaning of the catastrophic destruction and suffering is stated simply: it is all a divine sign prodding the Jewish people to return to its motherland.

In his introduction, Rabbi Teichthal informs us that the writing of *Em ha-Banim Semehah* was the fulfillment of a vow taken in a time of distress, with the hope that the merit of the Land of Israel would protect him from mishap (25–27 and 33). This might explain in part the single-minded concentration and passionate intensity with which he gathers sources and texts to make his argument for aliyah and building Israel.

III. *ESH KODESH*

The third and final exemplar is Rabbi Kalonymus Shapira's *Esh Kodesh,* written in Occupied Warsaw and the Warsaw Ghetto, 1939–1942, and published in Israel in 1960. I have written about *Esh Kodesh* elsewhere[6] and will summarize and extend my findings here as they relate to the theme of suffering.

Rabbi Shapira's responses to suffering can be grouped in two major categories. The first is a set of psycho-spiritual responses, heuristic strategies for facing and overcoming suffering. The second is a more purely theocentric response. We shall examine each type individually.

Strategies for Transformation of Suffering

In the pages of *Esh Kodesh,* we find a variety of strategies for confronting suffering and persecution. Near the beginning of the work, Rabbi Shapira draws upon the ancient tradition that martyrs do not feel the pain of their martyrdom. He casts this tradition in a characteristically hasidic

[6]See Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994).

framework: martyrs elevate their senses to the metaphysical World of Thought, thereby stripping themselves of corporeality and pain.[7]

Other strategies involve transforming raw fear into sacred awe;[8] emphasizing Israel's greatness;[9] and noting that even in conditions of acute suffering, mutuality of caring and human relationship are always achievable.[10] We call these psycho-spiritual strategies because, while they are anchored completely in the rabbinic-kabbalistic-Hasidic worldview, their focus is on the individual's suffering and how to transcend it.

One particularly significant motif in this category is that of suffering as sacrificial offering; the individual is urged to envision his losses as being placed upon the altar as a sacrifice lovingly offered to God. The precedent for this is a famous talmudic passage in which the loss of fat and blood that a Jew suffers on a fast day is to be considered a sacrificial offering.[11] A related motif is Rabbi Shapira's statement that those who have been killed because they are Jews are to be considered "God's servants"—saintly martyrs—even though they did not freely choose their deaths.[12] This is an early version of what would become a standard motif of post-Holocaust theology: that all of the six million, whatever religious convictions they had in life and whatever the precise circumstances of their deaths, are to be considered *kedoshim* (holy martyrs).

[7] *Esh Kodesh*, 8–9; *Holy Fire* [=HF], 67–68.
[8] *HF*, 37–38.
[9] *HF*, 44–49.
[10] *HF*, 49–53.
[11] *Cf. Berakhot* 17a; *HF*, 62–63.
[12] *HF*, 63.

Divine Weeping

The second major approach to suffering in *Esh Kodesh* is more purely theocentric. In it, the emphasis is not so much on how to grapple with the suffering, but with the question of its origin and meaning. Here we find a dramatic shift over the course of the three years during which *Esh Kodesh* was written. At first Rabbi Shapira tends to the traditional theological motif of the divine Father reprimanding his son for his waywardness.[13] This theme eventually is overshadowed by an acknowledgment that there are sufferings that might be incomprehensible and counterproductive, incapable of assimilation into any framework of human benefit or understanding—like the commandments known as *hukkim*, which have no rational explanation and which indeed might be designed to challenge our concept of rationality itself.[14]

The *hukkah* is an expression of God's will, which might be both incomprehensible and paradoxical. If there are *hukkim*-type commandments, there are also *hukkah*-type sufferings. Responding to such sufferings requires a total surrender of the critical cognitive faculties, a complete submersion in the purifying waters of faith.

Rather than attempting a theodicy for this category of suffering—which he came to see as the appropriate one for what was besetting the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto—Rabbi Shapira shifts the emphasis from human suffering to divine suffering.

Drawing heavily upon passages in rabbinic literature that speak of God's suffering,[15] Rabbi Shapira turns the idea of

[13] *HF*, 106–110.
[14] *EK*, 84–85; *HF*, 70–94.
[15] A summary of this theme can be found in Jacob J. Petuchowski, *Theology and Poetry: Studies in the Medieval Piyyut* (London, 1978),

divine transcendence on its head. Precisely because God is infinite, his suffering is infinite and beyond human conception. It is the infinite magnitude of Divine suffering that paradoxically explains the absence of a visible Divine response to Israel's catastrophe. God has not abandoned his people. Quite the contrary: God's distress is so great that He is forced to escape to the innermost domain of Heaven, to weep in secret. If one tear from the flow of divine weeping were to enter the world, the world would explode. So God must hide the awesome secret of His weeping and suffering; this is what we perceive as *hester panim*.[16]

One should not confuse Rabbi Shapira's writing on divine suffering and hiddenness, on the one hand, and modern ideas of process theology, on the other. In certain versions of this theology, one reads of a finite divinity who has relinquished omnipotence completely and unconditionally in order to grant radical freedom to his creation.[17] It is important to recall that Rabbi Shapira's concept of divine pain and hiddenness is generated by emphasizing God's infini-

ch. 8: "The Suffering God." See also Henry Slonimsky, *Essays* (Cincinnati, 1978), 41–48; also Michael Fishbane, "The Holy One Sits and Roars," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1991), 1–21.

[16]This is based on a reading of *Hagiga* 5b. See *HF*, ch. 6 and 8.

[17]See, for example, Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," in A. Rosenberg and G. E. Myers, eds., *Echoes from the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1988), 292–305. (This is the most recent version of an essay that has appeared elsewhere in several different forms; see ibid., 292, for full publication history.)

It is interesting that Jon Levenson takes pains to forestall and disentangle a similar misunderstanding in his *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). See especially the new preface to the 1994 edition, xv–xxviii.

tude, not finitude. In line with kabbalistic thought, Rabbi Shapira understands that the eruption of God into the physical realm in no way limits or affects His infinitude; rather, it is the capstone of unlimited divine power to be able to enter the finite realm as well. In a famous formulation of Rabbi Azriel of Gerona, "If one were to assume that His power reigns in the unbounded but does not extend to the domain of the bounded, one would thereby diminish His perfection."[18] The multitiered interleavings and recursive self-mirrorings of the sefirotic system allow for the appearance of the upper levels within the lower, the infinite within the finite. For this reason, Rabbi Shapira never entirely gives up hope in divine salvation in a historical sense; he continues to hope and pray for deliverance until the very end.[19]

In the later pages of *Esh Kodesh*, Rabbi Shapira does not offer a theodicy; in fact, there are passages where he refutes its possibility of theodicy, denying the enterprise any legitimacy.[20] Instead of attempting to justify God, he assumes the posture of total submission, of absolute surrender, of complete immersion in the waters of the divine will. At the same time, he does not shrink from calling God to task, imploring Him in the name of His suffering people

[18]*Perush Eser Sefirot* (cited in Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbai, *Avodat ha-Kodesh* 1:8). Cf. J. Dan and R. C. Kiener, *The Early Kabbalah* (New York, 1986), 90.

[19]In *Esh Kodesh*, 161–163, Rabbi Shapira explains that God is linked to the realm of the finite through the Torah, which is at once the will of the infinite God and the template of creation for the bounded world of space and time. As God's revelation, the Torah is thus the vehicle for the penetration or eruption of the infinite into the finite. The hope for salvation lies precisely in communion with God by means of the Torah.

[20]For details, see *HF*, 70–94.

to bring deliverance. At one point he even suggests that God perform the mitzvah of *teshuva* (repentance.)[21]

He also freely admits where he has been wrong. Perhaps the most powerful instance is a passage written in late 1942, revising an earlier passage from the winter of 1941. In the earlier passage, Rabbi Shapira had argued that, for all the sufferings of the contemporary period, nothing in them overshadowed what Jews had endured in earlier periods of catastrophe, such as the time of the Temple's destruction. The marginal note from late 1942 (after the great deportation of the summer of 1942, when most Jews were sent to their deaths in Treblinka) acknowledges that the most recent events were indeed different, surpassing in horrific cruelty anything previously recorded in Jewish history.[22]

Toward the end of *Esh Kodesh*, there is also a heightened emphasis on human initiative, what the kabbalists call *itaruta de-le-tata* (arousal from below). At a time when there appeared to be only silence from Heaven, Rabbi Shapira works to break through that silence by means of a self-generated call to spirit. Because *itaruta de-le-eila* (the gift of grace from above) seemed to be temporarily unavailable, the Hasid, through his own initiative and labor, would have to wrest the spirit of song from the abyss itself. At a time when the enemy was doing all he could to push God out of the world, Rabbi Shapira knew that it was the Hasid's task to awaken the numinous in one's soul, inviting the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to recover Her place in the world.

This posture places the emphasis on human initiative, human creativity, and divine anchoring in the human (Jewish) condition. Man's suffering is transcended by a shift of focus to the suffering of God, and God's suffering provokes

[21] *HF*, 94–105.

[22] *EK*, 139; *HF*, 84.

a move to new birth, to new creation, to the eruption of new initiatives out of the abyss.

Esh Kodesh provides us with a typology of suffering. The relevance of the traditional approach continues to be affirmed: there is indeed suffering that is divine chastisement and for which the appropriate response is *teshuva*. This kind of suffering might act as a prod, a sign, a reminder, a tocsin. Just as times of prosperity are particularly conducive for serving God with enthusiasm and joy, times of suffering are opportunities to serve Him with a broken heart and the outpouring of the soul.

Furthermore, much suffering can be attenuated, softened, meliorated by cognitive reframing. A path to achieving dignity in suffering is consciously accepting the suffering as sacrifice and decisively offering it up to God on the altar of one's soul. Even when the suffering is caused by a human enemy's hatred and persecution, one never must forget the dignity of Israel, the fact that each Jew is a prince and a child of the Master of the Universe. The evil that the enemy embodies will be transformed one day. Because the Hasid recalls the Baal Shem Tov's essential teaching that the bad is the throne for the good, that evil is only provisional and phenomenal, that in the end Satan will be transformed into a sacred angel whose name encodes the divine, the Hasid is secure in the inner knowledge that Israel will triumph over her persecutors.[23]

All this having been said, there was still a deep mystery in the unparalleled cruelty the Jews were experiencing as Rabbi Shapira taught and wrote. As he acknowledged, there are some sufferings that completely resist interpretation and that are incomprehensible. Here the only answer is surrender, as well as communion with other human beings in

[23] *HF*, 122–135.

suffering and with the divine holy One whose suffering is infinite and infinitely hidden.

We might summarize Rabbi Shapira's views on suffering in the following manner: In contrition and surrender, man fully accepts the reality of his personal suffering and participates by compassion in the suffering of others. But with the eyes of faith, he sees through the evil that is the proximate cause of the suffering and believes that the vector of evil one day will be transformed and transmuted into a powerful vector of good. In faith, man engages in self-examination and self-improvement. He prays for deliverance. Equally in faith, he protests, imploring God to desist, to turn back, to relent.

But what if deliverance in the hoped-for, concrete sense refuses to come?

In the end, what remains is a relationship. A relationship with the other, compassion for the other, suffering with the other, is itself a kind of redemption. For what is redemption if not the finding of our most fully human self in the act of *imitatio dei*? It is not just that God suffers with us, for us, because we suffer, but that God is most God when He suffers; He comes most into Himself when He identifies with Israel, with her humanity, her vulnerability, her personal and collective destiny. Similarly, we become most like God when we transcend our own suffering and participate in that of others and of God. Because God is God, He suffers most intensely and infinitely; His suffering must remain hidden. But because God remains God, He remains the hope for redemption in a concrete sense. Because man is man, he does not decide when or how to end his suffering and he does not claim to know its meaning. But because man is man, he can rouse himself, take hold of inner, hidden, mysterious resources—in other words, grasp his faith—and thereby hope to rouse God to manifest, physical redemption.

Rabbi Shapira observes that in Jewish history, it is often precisely during periods of suffering and persecution that the most profound and powerful sacred texts have emerged.[24] Furthermore, Rabbi Shapira introduces the notion of suffering itself as a kind of sacred text.[25] Like all texts, suffering captures and conveys the soul of its author; it demands interpretation, which resides as much with the reader as with the writer. Like all communication, it may be ignored or dismissed. But to interpret is to wrest meaning from the abyss.

Rabbi Shapira made his own suffering into Torah, a communion-text that bares his soul, yielding a triadic fusion of student, text, and divine author. All who study it make contact with the soul of the human author, with their own soul, and with the soul of the One who, in unfathomable ways, teaches Torah to His people of Israel.

IV. COMPARISON OF THE THREE DOCUMENTS

As noted in the introduction to this essay, it is indeed striking how minuscule is the pool of documents that fit our criteria for analysis. Each of the three works we have examined displays a different mode of response to the suffering of the Holocaust. *Siftei Shlomo* demonstrates that a preacher could and did respond with courage, compassion, and creativity and still remain entirely within the traditional worldview of his youth, with theology and theodicy apparently unaffected. The homilies of *Siftei Shlomo* are effective as *derashot* but are utterly conventional theologically. This is precisely the tale they tell: that one can go through

[24] *EK*, 178; cf. 75–76; 127–130.
[25] *EK*, 100.

the unprecedented, the unparalleled, the overwhelmingly incomprehensible, and still be unshaken in one's pure faith and commitment.

Rabbi Teichthal's *Em ha-Banim Semehah* is different: he grapples with the events of his day and is transformed by them. They provoke him into reading the traditional sources in ways he had not perceived before, and they awaken him to the spiritual beauty in the lives of individuals whose paths and accomplishments he previously had dismissed. But for Rabbi Teichthal, the transformation pertains to one matter: the enterprise of rebuilding the Land of Israel.

In Rabbi Shapira's *Esh Kodesh*, however, the shift is more fundamental, touching upon the deepest layers of faith: a faith beyond reason, beyond the mind's grasp, beyond despair. Faith that God would intervene to save the Jews was transformed into faith in God despite the evidence that He had *not* intervened to save the Jews. The image of God as the righteous judge of Israel's actions receded; the mythic and participatory consciousness of divine weeping replaced the rational accounting of reward and chastisement. *Esh Kodesh* reminds us, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has pointed out, that not all theology of suffering is theodicy,[25] that there are faith-filled responses that seek not to justify God, but to surrender the self as a sacred offering, to protest, to rouse the divine realm to responsive action, to commune in weeping—to do all of these things serially or even simultaneously, but withal to maintain and even deepen one's relationship with the Holy One of Israel, the One who is beyond all conception.

[25]Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought after the Holocaust* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 40.

Each of the three documents that has survived, then, must speak for, stand for, be emblematic of others that might have been written, or that we wished had been written. The response of a powerful conventionalism that eloquently transcends its conventionalism; the response of renewed commitment to ingathering the Diaspora, redeeming Israel, and uniting her children in unconditional love; and the response of human spiritual initiative that penetrates the deepest mystery of divine suffering in partnership with Israel: the elements of this triad of responses complement and frame each other, by comparison and by contrast giving honor and tribute to the awesome power and courage of their authors, and to the suffering and eternal people which gave birth to them.

Jewish Perspectives on the Experience of Suffering

edited by
Shalom Carmy

Robert S. Hirt, Series Editor

The Orthodox Forum Series
A Project of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary
An Affiliate of Yeshiva University

JASON ARONSON INC.
Northvale, New Jersey
Jerusalem