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# A Defective Covenant: Abandonment of Faith among Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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## A Defective Covenant: Abandonment of Faith among Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust

*Wenn es einen Gott gibt muß er mich um Verzeihung bitten.*

– Unknown

The phrase above was carved into the prison cell walls of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Although the authorship is unknown, this prisoner's words hold considerable weight. In English, the phrase translates to "If there is a God, He will have to beg my forgiveness."<sup>1</sup> Religious victims of the Holocaust were confronted with the ultimate test of faith. The majority of these victims were the European Jews. Having already been a tormented demographic for thousands of years, they were faced with complete obliteration at the beginning of the Second World War, a time when antisemitism took on its most horrifying form.<sup>2</sup>

One of the essential teachings of Judaism is the belief that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. If God were truly omniscient, or "all-knowing," He surely must have been aware of the imminent death of eleven million human beings, six million of which were his chosen people. If He were really omnipotent, or "all-powerful," He would have been able to stop the atrocities. And, if God were indeed omnibenevolent, or "all-good," how could He have simply stood by while these atrocities occurred? These inconsistencies have given rise to an ongoing philosophical and theological debate among Jewish thinkers. Holocaust theology, a new realm of Jewish philosophy, seeks to explain the behavior and role of God in light of the Shoah. These discussions are composed of religious responses to the problems of suffering and unwarranted evil. Worthwhile engagement in these types of theological arguments requires the consideration of many perspectives, especially of those who were eyewitnesses to

the depravity. The survivors of the Holocaust who have graciously supplied their testimonies have concurrently provided various outlets of interpretation concerning the nature, or even existence of God. In his 1980 publication, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, Reeve Brenner, an American Reform rabbi, commented on the importance of survivor testimonial material in field of Jewish studies.

In the absence of studies on general Jewish attitudes, the thoughtful and often deeply moving testimonies of survivors provide us with important insights into the nature of Judaism in the post-Holocaust world. And until careful surveys are conducted, survivors will not be speaking for themselves alone: They represent a sensitive barometer of contemporary Jewish beliefs and behavior, not only concerning the Holocaust but on a wide variety of issues. Here is telling proof that the terrible experiences of Auschwitz made victims of the Holocaust acutely aware of the existential condition of man in general and the Jew in particular.<sup>3</sup>

With so few survivors left, eyewitness accounts are crucial to keep research in this area alive. In recent decades, the accessibility of survivor testimonies has significantly increased. Shortly after the release of *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg established the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education at the University of Southern California. The Foundation's Visual History Archive contains 107,000 hours of video documentation of roughly 52,000 eyewitness interviews conducted during the mid to late 1990s.<sup>4</sup> The testimonies used in this paper have been carefully sifted out of this invaluable collection of interviews. Although the personal accounts of survivors are abundant and often quite detailed, anecdotal source material must always be utilized with caution. Indeed, human memory is of better service to anthropological, sociological, and philosophical analysis, rather than historicity. Accordingly, the survivor testimonies in this work will be examined alongside a researched historical narrative.

Each man, woman, and child's experience with unrelenting wickedness varies. While some Jewish survivors have discovered a newfound strength in their faith, others have abandoned their beliefs entirely. Some Jews entered the camps as atheists and reemerged with an

even deeper recognition of their disbelief. This work's specific investigation will focus on the process of spiritual transformation among the previously religious Jewish survivors who have abandoned their faith as a result of having lived through the inhumanity of the Holocaust. The exploration of these individual experiences will highlight the dramatic modifications and additions to Jewish spiritual thought, especially in regards to the notion of theodicy, or "justification of God."<sup>5</sup>

Civilian life at the turn of the century and during the prewar years did not suggest an imminent genocide. Jewish family life and traditions differed throughout Europe, usually depending on the location. Demographically, most varieties of Judaic systems emerged especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The Jews in the east made up a significant part of the population. They held a unified self-awareness of their circumstances; being Jewish was a collective endeavor, not an individual inclination.<sup>6</sup> Eva Bronstein fondly reminisces about being surrounded by loved ones during her family's weekly Shabbat tradition in Vilna, Poland prior to the war. "My mother made everything...Everybody used to come to our house because we observed all the holidays."<sup>7</sup> Eva's religious traditions would later deteriorate after losing her entire family during the Holocaust.

Pre-war Jewish customs differed in Western Europe, where Jews considered their religion to be an individual, private attitude.<sup>8</sup> In France, for example, Jews were only mildly observant. They did not typically uphold traditional religious condemnation, such as using mechanical transportation on the Sabbath.<sup>9</sup> Marcel Braitstein, who grew up in Belgium prior to the war, describes his grandparents' religious differences. His grandfather was very orthodox, whereas his grandmother did not even keep kosher. Marcel's family still celebrated Jewish holidays together, but their individual belief systems remained personal.<sup>10</sup> Whichever traditions families upheld in

either Eastern or Western Europe, they would become significantly altered following the events of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust did not happen out of thin air. The layman may perceive this famous instance of genocide to be an abrupt and evil implementation of the Nazis, satisfying Hitler's life-long dream of eliminating the Jewish population. Although aspects of this simple perception may hold some truth, mass extermination was certainly not a sudden occurrence. Antisemitism had been alive and well in many parts of the world, especially in Eastern Europe. Following the First World War, Jews became widely perceived as a social and political enemy of European gentiles. But, for the European Jews, their identity revolved around their destiny of enduring hardship. Many of them believed that the ability to tolerate prejudice was in their ancestral bloodline. In a sense, antisemitism was nothing new to them.

Survivor Frieda Aaron describes being taunted for her Jewishness by the children in her Polish town. She shares a memory of walking home with her sister, having to dodge rocks being thrown at them.

I was not surprised...ultimately you integrate it into your consciousness, you live with it because you have no choice. And you make the best of it. You retain your sense of humanity; you retain your sense of selfhood...You never allow yourself to be dehumanized. And that's how you fight back, because you cannot fight back with rocks at children.<sup>11</sup>

Antisemitism was a standard part of life. For some survivors, this pre-Holocaust desensitization is often linked to their eventual abandonment of religious identity.

Upon the *Machtergreifung* of the Third Reich, the escalation of antisemitism increased the difficulty of daily life for eastern European Jews.<sup>12</sup> The Nazis sought to eliminate Jewish influence from positions within the civil service of Germany, especially careers in universities and economic institutions. The assumption was that this process would aid in the ultimate goal of

forcing the Jews to leave Germany, and eventually Eastern Europe. The original intention did not involve mass extermination.<sup>13</sup> Alex Hershaft, who survived the Pruszków concentration camp, describes his family's affiliation with Judaism hampering his father's professional career in Warsaw. "In Poland, you could only go so far as a Jew...you had to become a Christian, and my father refused to do that...There was very little religious freedom in Poland."<sup>14</sup> Jewish families like Alex's did not give in to the antisemitic atmosphere; they remained in their hometown and made do with the few opportunities available. Nonetheless, the distressing cloud of National Socialism loomed over them more than ever before. Soon, ghettoization would be implemented to create a physical barrier of Jewish presence in society.

The process of religious transformation and abandonment of beliefs for many Jews began in the ghettos. Although ghettos throughout Europe were not completely uniform in their operations and overall layouts, they shared the common goal of containing the Jews in a confined area with fewer opportunities to thrive and little room to prosper.<sup>15</sup> The luxuries that had once been afforded to them were, at this point, only available to their gentile counterparts on the other side of the ghetto walls and fences. Jewish communal identity declined from celebrating heritage to austere survival. Alex Hershaft spent the majority of his childhood in the Warsaw ghetto. He describes watching the people around him succumb to the progression of starvation, disease, and death.

Many people were dying of typhus. Almost everybody had contracted typhus, including members of my own family. But, if they were reasonably well fed, they were able to survive it. Those who were not well fed did not survive. Every morning when you went out on the street there were corpses on the street of people who had been dumped, who had died the night before.<sup>16</sup>

Since he had witnessed these atrocities as a young boy, Alex describes how it permanently affected his maturing process throughout his life. "When you grow up as a child,

you sort of assume that your times is what life is about, so my life actually is a steady string of improvements. I started at the bottom, and now I'm on top.”<sup>17</sup> After surviving the Pruszków concentration camp and living under a false identity for many years, Alex has since abandoned his belief in God and now identifies with Atheism. Life in the ghettos, in and of itself, served as a dramatic test of faith. Although there were instances of Jews who were comforted by their religious communities, many were driven away from their faith as a result of the social inequality and the weakened sense of morality that the ghettos presented.<sup>18</sup>

Up to this point in the progression of brutality, many Jews had already begun to question God's presence, thus signifying an important moment in the transformation of faith. The circumstances intensified considerably when the Jews were faced with surviving the conditions of the deportation process and subsequent life in the concentration camps. Andre Marosy, originally from Hungary, remembers the beatings, shootings, and hangings that occurred at Auschwitz III-Monowitz. In a death march that lasted for several days with around 4,000 other prisoners, Andre witnessed constant executions by the SS while simultaneously trying to preserve his own life.<sup>19</sup> Andre has since suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, continuously haunted by his experience in the camps. “I see the face of a little girl who was deported with me together...who was taken out from the wagon. And I see, many times, her look...she never come back.”<sup>20</sup> Andre attributes his loss of faith in God to his loss of faith in humanity. “I don't believe in God. After this experience, I see that the human animal wouldn't change. Selfishness, you know, in the earth more and more, could accumulate.”<sup>21</sup>

If the Holocaust has brought mankind anything, it is awareness of the human potential for evil.<sup>22</sup> Leon Wells, a survivor of the Janowska transit camp near Lwów, Poland, has left behind valuable memoirs of his horrifying experiences and subsequent life-long spiritual struggle. In

*Shattered Faith*, he describes losing his entire immediate and extended family to the Nazis, after which he was faced with the torment of survivor guilt.<sup>23</sup> As a teenager, Wells was forced to unearth thousands of Jewish corpses from mass graves and burn the remains, so as to hide the evidence from the Allies. One of these particularly grueling days fell on Yom Kippur, the holiest of Jewish holidays.

There were about two-thousand bodies that lit up the sky, which was now red and smoky from the fire... Today I did not look up and no one from my family was left to look up, either... It was exactly as the sages had told us: that the two thousand corpses will change into extreme spirituality and, as during the time of the Temple on Yom Kippur, no longer occupy any space. Who cared today if the skies opened to receive our prayers? Our nostrils were not filled with spices but with the smoke of burning bodies... Today on Yom Kippur... nobody spoke of God or about penance. We made a statement to ourselves, even if no one cared. It was a very hard day, as if God, too, wanted to break us.<sup>24</sup>

For the rest of Leon's life, vivid recollections of the handling and disposing of thousands of corpses replaced his fond memories of family traditions during Yom Kippur.

A religious transformation had manifested within Leon, as well as many other Jews, especially after having been subjected to the horrors of the Holocaust. Most of them would be changed for the remainder of their lives, sometimes involving complete disbelief in God. What does it mean to be an atheist Jew? The spectrum of Jewish identity is indeed one of the most complex; it encompasses aspects of an ancient religious foundation, a cultural heritage, and variations of philosophical thought. This gamut has endured a colorful addition of even more complexities since the events of the Holocaust, particularly in regards to being Jewish without believing in God. Spirituality aside, many Jewish survivors attribute their newfound strengthened *cultural* identity to their experience in the Holocaust, as if it had provided an outlet to reconnect with their tragic roots.<sup>25</sup> In essence, the Holocaust was a major turning point in Jewish history for a variety of reasons, particularly regarding the ancient covenantal history with God.

“...The Lord said to Himself: ‘Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done. So long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.’”<sup>26</sup> Most Jews consider God’s promise to Noah after the flood as a symbol of their reciprocal, covenantal relationship. This sacred concept precipitated many questions among survivors of the Holocaust. What is the nature of the covenant? Is it defective, in that it only applies to certain situations and certain individuals? Does the malfunction result from the operation of the promise, or from outright miscommunication? Is there a malfunction at all?

Leon Wells refers to the covenant in his memoir: “Many evils and misfortunes daily fell on our heads. No one sought to discover why God acted like this to His preferred people whom He chose for His inheritance. It was because of this that we passed from downfall to downfall, and every day was more accursed than that which came before it.”<sup>27</sup> It is here that Leon admits his struggle of accepting God’s covenant as legitimate, or even originally sincere. Another survivor, Jim Burakiewicz, does not seem to understand the concept of “chosen people” at all. Like Leon, he endeavors to question the covenant’s significance. “Very often I think that the Lord could choose somebody else for the next 2,000 years so that we can have a little bit of peace. I don’t feel privileged just because I’m Jewish. I don’t feel exceptional. I suffered a hell of a lot just because I’m Jewish.”<sup>28</sup> Jim assesses everyone as a human being, regardless of spiritual background. He no longer identifies with Judaism and does not believe in God, primarily because he does not agree with classifying individuals based on religious affiliation. Jim believes the term “Jew” is arbitrary, an excuse for perpetuating discrimination. After battling depression

throughout the second half of his life, Jim's only wish is to be judged for his decency as a human being without the consideration of his societal label as a Jew.

The survivors who challenge the validity of God's covenant do not go unnoticed. In the seven decades since the Holocaust, various discussions have emerged regarding the concept of theodicy, a theological term that refers to the vindication of divine goodness in view of the existence of evil. This concept has existed in philosophical discussions throughout history as early as the ancient Greeks, but it became especially prevalent in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Professor Sarah K. Pinnock discusses how modern theodicy in light of recent atrocities such as the Holocaust differs from the previous conversations about the problem of evil. "What is distinctive in the modern era, from the seventeenth century to the present, is that theodicy discussions of God and evil are increasingly formulated in response to the critical attack of skeptics and atheists."<sup>30</sup>

Holocaust theologians have approached this conversation in an exceptional way, through an innovative amalgamation of philosophical theory and religious interpretations pertaining to their ancient tradition.<sup>31</sup> Many of these theologians oppose the idea of theodicy and prefer to classify it as "anti-theodicy," a term coined by Professor Zachary Braiterman in his 1998 work *(God) After Auschwitz*. Braiterman argues that although the classical Jewish response to the problem evil is "overwhelmingly theodic," the accompanying religious texts contain sources with underlying anti-theodicy, meaning "any religious response to the problem of evil whose proponents refuse to justify, explain, or accept as somehow meaningful the relationship between God and suffering."<sup>32</sup> In other words, God's relationship with and use of evil is not meaningful; therefore God cannot be absolved of human suffering. Pinnock states further,

The Holocaust is not rationalized as instrumental for God's purposes, but is approached practically from the position of survivors who seek to find productive responses to

suffering. They tackle the topic of God and evil by focusing on concrete evil: evil experienced as suffering affecting persons...In response to the Holocaust, practical alternatives to theodicy focus principally on suffering rather than evil. As a result, they tend to assume the perspective of victims rather than perpetrators...<sup>33</sup>

Not all Holocaust theologians believe in fully blaming God for the Holocaust, however.

Orthodox Jewish thinkers have provided several other explanations, notably Rabbi Eliezer Berkovitz, who lived during the Holocaust.<sup>34</sup> Berkovitz is known for his exegesis of God's apparent absence during the Nazi atrocities through the reference of *hester panim*.<sup>35</sup> This classical concept of the Torah taken from the book of Deuteronomy refers to the divine face of God being hidden at certain times in order to respect humanity's use of free will. Should humanity abuse this privilege – and they certainly did – it would remain inappropriate for God to intervene. From the sacred passage, God states, "I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them. They will be devoured, and plagued by many evils that will distress them, and will say, 'Do we not suffer because God has left us?'"<sup>36</sup> The concept of *hester panim* remains among Berkovitz's tools in his attempts to explain the divine reasons for inaction during the Holocaust.<sup>37</sup> Needless to say, it may not be an easy concept to digest for those who had seen the horrors with their own eyes.

Survivor Alice Glitzer, for example, lost her faith early in life. "At some time when I was 12 years old, I lost my faith. When I saw a Jew being beaten up on the street, my mind said 'What happened to God, did He fall asleep?'"<sup>38</sup> Alice's experiences with pre-Holocaust antisemitism ultimately caused her to sever her relationship with God. Max Feig, who survived several concentration camps in Germany and Yugoslavia, ascribes his loss of faith to the atrocities he witnessed which were committed against Jewish children. "I saw what they did with small children. Big children, big people are sinners. Okay? They're punished. What is a small child of four, five, six years, what sin can they have that they must be killed?"<sup>39</sup> Like Alice, Max

often wonders where God was during the Holocaust. They, along with many other Atheist survivors, would likely not find Berkovitz's concept of *hester panim* to be a sufficient explanation.

How then, can one make spiritual sense of the Holocaust? Richard Rubenstein, an American Jewish professor of religion and former liberal rabbi, contends that it is impossible. In 1966, Rubenstein published his controversial work *After Auschwitz*, in which he argues that it is no longer intellectually reasonable to retain a belief in God. His position rests primarily on the events at the death camps of Auschwitz.

How can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz? Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate, omnipotent actor in historical drama. It has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, anti-human explosion of all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept.<sup>40</sup>

Rubenstein refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the death of God. While he admits that humans are incapable of ever knowing that God is dead, he asserts that the death of God is a "cultural fact," in that humanity is "living in the time of the death of God."<sup>41</sup>

Although Rubenstein has been heavily criticized for his position in *After Auschwitz*, some scholars, such as Braiterman, believe many of these criticisms to be overly hostile.<sup>42</sup> Later in his career, Rubenstein responded to the criticisms of his controversial claims by expanding upon his rationale. In his 1987 work, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, he proposes a conception of God with its roots in Western and Oriental mysticism: the Holy Nothingness.

I believe there is a conception of God...which remains meaningful after the death of the God-who-acts-in-history. When God is thus designated [as the Holy Nothingness], he is conceived of as the ground and source of all existence. To speak of God as the Holy Nothingness is not to suggest that he is a void...God as the Nothing is not absence of being but superfluity of being...<sup>43</sup>

One could argue that Rubenstein's belief in the infinite God as "Nothingness" approaches the realm of atheism. Acknowledgement of a Holy Nothingness, however, suggests that Rubenstein still believes in a God, if only a philosophical conception. Although *After Auschwitz* and *Approaches to Auschwitz* serve as intriguing contributions to Holocaust theology, many Jews have rejected Rubenstein's theories altogether, primarily based on the argument that Judaism cannot exist without a deity.<sup>44</sup>

Considering Rubenstein's arguments, why would survivors of the Holocaust be inclined to believe in God? Some survivors hold onto their faith so as not to give belated credit to the Nazis. Because so much had been taken away from them, maintaining religious tradition presents itself as a duty. Emil L. Fackenheim, a Reform rabbi and Jewish philosopher, had experienced being arrested during the *Kristallnacht*, spending a year at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and successfully escaping to Great Britain. After losing loved ones to the Nazis, Fackenheim spent many years contemplating the nature of God and the obligation of the Jewish people. He refers to victims of the Holocaust as *kedoshim*, or "holy ones," who were martyrs for the Sanctification of the Name.<sup>45</sup> According to Fackenheim, it would be a posthumous victory for Hitler if the Jews were to let go of their faith and abandon their religious identity.<sup>46</sup> "The moment the living God became questionable, Jewish existence became questionable."<sup>47</sup> Fackenheim asserts that the Holocaust was an assault on the Creator of the world, manifested through the Nazi assault on the Jews. He proposes the concept of *tikkun olam*, meaning "the mending of the world," as the solution to fix what humanity had broken. *Tikkun olam* requires more than just acts of social justice – also prayer, scripture, the restoration of the commandments, and preservation of the sanctity of life.<sup>48</sup>

Estelle Abas, however, would probably disagree with Fackenheim's concept of *tikkun olam*. "I feel if I need God, I talk to him in English...but I'm not a member of any organization...because that is left over from the Holocaust." Although she technically still believes in God, Estelle explains that she is afraid to affiliate with the Jewish community. She remembers when the Germans would go to the temples in her town to obtain the membership lists. Those who were on the lists were the first to be rounded up and deported. Estelle sincerely believes that it is possible for another Holocaust to happen again, placing her among the survivors who have abandoned their Jewish identity out of fear or exhaustion. "I will just not belong...I have a feeling that they can trap you again...nobody's sure that we couldn't get another Holocaust. Here and there, it's like a fire [that spreads]."<sup>49</sup>

Max Feig, as mentioned earlier, takes the opposite approach to his religious transformation. He does not believe in God, but still goes to his local synagogue every morning and is well versed in the Talmud. He values his religious community for the purposes of socializing with friends and preserving his heritage.<sup>50</sup> For Max, belief in God is not a requirement of being a Jew. The Holocaust indeed served as a pivotal moment in the evolution of the complexities surrounding Jewish persona; these changes in defining Jewishness are certainly continuing to develop. Faith in God remains a primary component of Holocaust theology and will continue to intrigue thinkers, religious and secular alike, for years to come.

Survivors like Max face inevitable criticism from some Holocaust theologians. For instance: Peter J. Haas, professor of Judaism and ethics at Vanderbilt University, asserts that secular reform of Jewish tradition can do more harm than good for the prospect of recovery. Belief in God is essential to maintaining a moral code; community is simply not sufficient.

...If we continue to allow our future to be governed by the principles of the secular, scientific world, we open ourselves to the same boundless possibilities that opened the

way for the Nazi exploitation of the situation in Germany. While reference to God or religious principles is no guarantee in and of itself of righteousness or moral propriety, it at least gives us a language within which to carry on a moral discourse.<sup>51</sup>

Although Haas did not live through the Holocaust, he is the son of a survivor.

Is it possible to understand an individual's justification of their religious deterioration without having been an eyewitness to their experiences? How does one define Jewishness, and who is allowed to define it? After living through the events of the Holocaust, Karl Bettelheim does not really know what being Jewish means to him. He does, however, find comfort in approaching the world from a humanistic perspective.

I can't [believe]. I tried once. I think about it a great deal. I'm a humanist, if I'm anything...I am proud of my heritage, I am proud of the fact that my ancestors survived literally, scientifically, and so on through a dreadful age. I think many mistakes were made by the Jewish community in sort of the last 2,000 years. I think Jewish people could have contributed far more to mankind if they hadn't cut themselves off, or forced themselves to be cut off. I have ambivalent feelings...I think that the future of mankind is multicultural. And I think that's what I would strive for...In many ways, whatever we are, we have more in common than we have not in common. It's really only our bigotry and irrationalism, and that takes over. And unfortunately religion, regardless of which one, has contributed.<sup>52</sup>

Karl's outlook represents a rebirth of Jewish thought, a perspective that has emerged as a product of the Holocaust. This revival of philosophy often involves disbelief or agnosticism with elements of humanism.

Holocaust survivors provide a harrowing illustration of the intersection of memory and faith. Through analyzing their personal experiences and convictions, one can come to understand their religious metamorphoses. The specific moments when survivors remember realizing their loss of faith varied from early instances of pre-war violence to post-traumatic reflections in the decades following the Holocaust. Augmented religious responses to the problem of evil have complicated the essence of faith,<sup>53</sup> which is one of the many reasons why survivors have developed a method of formulating a personal ideology. This abstraction is a naturally

uncomplicated process for some, but it certainly remains challenging for many, often manifesting itself in the form of a lifelong struggle. Prior to the Holocaust, Jewishness was defined much more precisely than how it is today. Jewish atheism, however contradictory as it may seem, assuredly deserves to stand among any other recognized philosophy. First-hand experiences with utter inhumanity have led many Jews to reject the validity of God's covenant. For them, the horrors of genocide have provided a transformational vessel toward the abandonment of faith. Their tragic journey epitomizes an edifying addition to the spectrum of Jewish identity.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This phrase was featured in an Italian documentary screened for tourists at the site of the Mauthausen concentration camp near Linz, Austria. See Giuseppe Ronzoni, Youtube post, July 21, 2011, accessed March 16, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r50t7148sA&feature=youtube&t=19m20s>; "Archive of the Mauthausen Memorial," Mauthausen-Gusen Concentration Camp, accessed April 24, 2014, [http://en.mauthausen-memorial.at/index\\_open.php](http://en.mauthausen-memorial.at/index_open.php).

<sup>2</sup> In Raphael Lemkin's "Introduction into Part 1: The New Word and the New Idea," he asserts that the evil of mankind has ancient roots. "Genocide is a new word, but the evil it describes is old. It is as old like [*sic*] the history of mankind." For more on Lemkin's construction of the term "genocide," see A. Dirk Moses, "The Holocaust and World History: Raphael Lemkin and Comparative Methodology," in *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 272-89.

<sup>3</sup> Reeve Robert Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 249.

<sup>4</sup> While primarily dedicated to preserving testimonial material from Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive also contains interviews from other victimized demographics such as homosexuals, Roma, eugenics survivors, political prisoners, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The organization expanded in 2013 to include interviews of eyewitnesses of the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

<sup>5</sup> Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Death and Birth of Judaism* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987), 337.

<sup>7</sup> Eva Bodenstern, interviewed by Roslyn Flamenbaum, February 4, 1998, interview code 37729-4, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Cot St. Luc, Quebec, Segment 7.

<sup>8</sup> Neusner, 337.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Marcel Braitstein, interviewed by Kelly Johnson, January 28, 1998, interview code 37669-4, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Vaudreuil, Quebec, Segment 4.

<sup>11</sup> Frieda Aaron, interviewed by Lisa Berlin, February 5, 1995, interview code 00802-3, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Belle Harbor, Queens, New York, Segments 32, 33, & 34.

<sup>12</sup> *Machtergreifung*, meaning "seizure of power," is typically used to refer to the transfer of power from the Weimar Republic to the Nazi Party on January 30, 1933.

<sup>13</sup> George M. Kren, "The Holocaust as History," in *Echoes of the Holocaust: Philosophical Reflections on a Dark Time*, ed. Alan Rosenberg and Gerald E. Myers (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 14.

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<sup>14</sup> Alex Hershaft, interviewed by Genie Glucksman, November 6, 1996, interview code 22273-38, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Bethesda, MD, Segment 27.

<sup>15</sup> Ghettoization in Hungary, for example, differed greatly from other European ghettos. See Graham Smith, "The geography of persecution," *Geographical (Campion Interactive Publishing)* 66, no. 9 (September 1994): 22-25; Tim Cole, "Building and Breaching the Ghetto Boundary: A Brief History of the Ghetto Fence in Körömend, Hungary, 1944," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 54-75.

<sup>16</sup> Alex Hershaft, Segments 10 & 11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Segment 11.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Cole, "Ghettoization," in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 72.

<sup>19</sup> Andre Marosy, interviewed by Deborah Miller, June 8, 1998, interview code 42545-2, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Southfield, MI, Segment 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Segment 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Segment 30.

<sup>22</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "The Challenge of the Holocaust," *International Journal for Public Theology* 7, (2013): 197-209.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Weliczker Wells, *Shattered Faith: A Holocaust Legacy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995). Leon claims he was the only survivor out of the 70 or so members of his family who were captured by the Nazis, including both of his parents and his all six of his siblings. The concept of "survivor guilt" is a common symptom experienced by many others who had suffered great losses during the Holocaust.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 98-100. It is important also to note here that Wells's abandonment of the Jewish faith intensified throughout his life after the Holocaust. For instance, in his earlier book *The Death Brigade (The Janowska Road)* originally published in 1963, Wells describes this particular memory differently, in which he and his fellow Jews did celebrate Yom Kippur holiday that evening. This serves as an example of taking necessary precautions when approaching survivor testimonial material as historical fact. Nonetheless, the development of memory, regardless of the degree historiographical truth, should not be undermined. See Leon Wells, *The Janowska Road* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>25</sup> This can be more thoroughly reflected in University of California Professor Alexander J. Groth's study on Jewish identity. See Alexander J Groth, *Holocaust Voices: An Attitudinal Survey of Survivors* (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 107-129.

<sup>26</sup> Genesis 8:21.

<sup>27</sup> Wells, 97.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Burakiewicz, interviewed by Danny Gesundheit, September 3, 1996, interview code 19540-40, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Melbourne, Victoria, Segment 34.

<sup>29</sup> The German polymath and philosopher Gottfried Leibniz coined the term "theodicy" in 1710.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah K. Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, "Most post-Holocaust theologians see the Holocaust as a rupture in history, calling into question the entire Western ethical/religious tradition. According to these thinkers, theodicy after Auschwitz – the attempt to reconcile the evil of the Holocaust with an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent deity – must certainly be rethought." See David Patterson and John K. Roth, *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 189.

<sup>32</sup> Braiterman 1998, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Pinnock, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Berkovitz, originally from Berlin, escaped Nazi capture and deportation by relocating to England in 1940 to serve in the Leeds rabbinate.

<sup>35</sup> *Hester panim* literally translates to "hiding of the face."

<sup>36</sup> Devarim 31:17. Devarim is part of the *parashah*, a weekly Torah portion read during prayer services. It is comprised of Deuteronomy 1:1-3:22.

<sup>37</sup> Braiterman, "Anti/theodic Faith in the Thought of Eliezer Berkovitz," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (December 1997): 86-7.

<sup>38</sup> Alice Glitzer, interviewed by Adina Paritzky, February 12, 1997, interview code 25801-1, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Northridge, CA, Segment 69.

<sup>39</sup> Max Feig, interviewed by Darren Sager, September 10, 1997, interview code 32921-4, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Willowdale, Toronto, Segment 22.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966), 153.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>42</sup> See Braiterman, “‘Hitler’s Accomplice’?: The Tragic Theology of Richard Rubenstein,” *Modern Judaism* 17, no. 1 (February 1997): 75-89. In his later 1998 publication, however, Braiterman comments, “The attempt to reinvent tradition, represents the point at which Rubenstein’s contribution to post-Holocaust Jewish thought ultimately falls short” (Braiterman 1998, 109).

<sup>43</sup> Rubenstein, *Approaches to Auschwitz* (London: SCM, 1987), 315.

<sup>44</sup> For further reading, see Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Holocaust Theology: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Yehuda Bauer, “A Past That Will Not Go Away,” in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 15.

<sup>46</sup> Fackenheim’s “614<sup>th</sup> commandment” prohibits Jews from acting in ways that validate Hitler and his beliefs. Relating to the spectrum of modern Jewish identity, Fackenheim comments, “I think the authentic Jew of today is beginning to hear the 614<sup>th</sup> commandment. And he hears the voice of the [commander] in the [commandment]. Moreover, it may well be the case that the authentic Jewish agnostic and the authentic Jewish believer are closer today than at any previous time.” See Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return Into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 23.

<sup>47</sup> Fackenheim, “Jewish Existence and the Living God: The Religious Duty of Survival,” in *Arguments and Doctrines: A Reader of Jewish Thinking in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 252-69.

<sup>48</sup> David Patterson, *Emil L. Fackenheim: A Jewish Philosopher’s Response to the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 155-159; Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>49</sup> Estelle Abas, interviewed by John Kent, July 15, 1996, interview code 17092-1, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, San Diego, California, Segments 2 & 3.

<sup>50</sup> Max Feig, Segment 22.

<sup>51</sup> Peter J. Hass, “Auschwitz: Re-envisioning the Role of God,” in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Responses to the Shoah*, vol. 5, *Studies in the Shoah*, ed. Steven L. Jacobs (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), 109.

<sup>52</sup> Karl Bettelheim, interviewed by Dina Brustman, June 9, 1997, interview code 32375, video recording, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, Macleod, Victoria, Segment 32.

<sup>53</sup> “...The evil of the Holocaust should not and will not go away. Here, perhaps, we have a key to the horror of that evil, namely, that during the Holocaust, human beings attempted to erase the traces of teachings and traditions that would determine human suffering to be *evil*, and not just a ‘tragedy,’ a result of poor morality or subverted ethics, or a source of academic curiosity. The Holocaust remains an issue for humanity – we remain in a *post-Holocaust* period – precisely because the outcome of that attempt at erasure remains in suspense” (Patterson and Roth, 215-216).