

Part VI

Jews and Judaism since the Holocaust and the Birth of Israel

The Existential Crisis of the Holocaust

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Introduction

It is hard to come up with exact figures and even words for describing the devastation caused by the Holocaust. The rise, expansion, and collapse of the Third Reich and its allies caused havoc and destruction of governments, civil organizations, and populations across virtually all of Europe and deep into the Soviet Union. It is clear that the ideological impetus behind the war and the Holocaust was not just the territorial expansion of Germany and the elimination of the Jewish population and culture, but had much broader ambitions to remake the entire political, economic, and demographic map of at least Europe, if not much of the world. Although Nazi officialdom maintained surprisingly detailed records of what they were doing, the sheer scale of activity renders it impossible to grasp in any comprehensive way what truly happened. It is the sheer massiveness, brutality, and venality of what occurred that has raised profound questions about modernity in the West in general, and among Jewish communities in particular.

Before proceeding, it may be helpful nonetheless to offer some cumulative figures on what the Nazi regime wrought. In general, the total deaths of World War II are estimated to be approximately fifty million (Winter, 2001), including both military and civilians (out of an estimated total population of about 577 million in 1939: Kirk, 1969: 24). In addition, there were somewhere between 11 and 20 million refugees and displaced persons of various sorts throughout Europe at the end of the war (Displaced Persons Camp, 2010). The infrastructure of Europe had also been severely damaged by the war. Virtually every major city, town, and village had

been fought over and in many cases bombed, often repeatedly. These raw figures of course do not begin to capture the physical and psychological trauma that survivors of all kinds endured. It is fair to say that, 65 years after the war, Europe and Europeans are still struggling at various levels to deal with that horrid past.

The Jewish statistics tell their own story. It is difficult to estimate the total number of Jews killed during the Nazi years, with numbers ranging from the most conservative 5.1 million (Hilberg, 1979: 670) to Lucy Dawidowicz's figure of 5.9 million (Dawidowicz 1979: 544). Probably the most reliable are those charted in *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (Gutman 1990, vol. 4: 1799), which gives a range of 5.6–5.85 million. This was out of a total world Jewish population of something like 16 million, and a European Jewish population estimated at about 9.8 million. Among these deaths were approximately 1.5 million children, producing a significant demographic gap for the succeeding generation upon which recovery would be built. In addition there was the destruction of virtually every Jewish building in Europe and the entire dismantlement of all Jewish civic and religious organizations: schools, yeshivas, welfare funds, hospitals, old age homes, businesses, community centers, theaters, political organizations, and synagogues. Those Jews who did survive in camps or in hiding or in other ways had literally no community to which to return. Most, of course, did not want to return. In some cases they preferred emigration elsewhere rather than return to the Soviet Union, the Ukraine, or Poland, for example. Even those who did return to their former countries of residence found that the material and economics of immediate postwar Europe made rebuilding nearly impossible. So those remnants of European Jewry that did survive largely scattered to British Palestine (or, after 1948, to the State of Israel) to the United States, or elsewhere. Although many individual Jews survived the onslaught, the wonderfully vibrant and creative life of European Jewry, religious, artistic, cultural, political, was entirely over. European Jewry as a living community had not been revived in any meaningful way sixty years later.

Although World War II, and the Holocaust, ended formally on May 8, 1945 with the surrender of German forces to the Allied supreme commanders, the effects of the Nazi program of genocide continued to lead to death and destruction for some time. The momentum could simply not be stopped in its tracks. In the concentration camp of Bergen Belsen, for example, liberated prisoners at the camp continued to die in significant numbers. Although the camp was taken by the British on April 15, 1945, nearly another nine thousand deaths are recorded by the end of the month, and another four and a half thousand in May and a few hundred more in June. These deaths were the result of the lingering effects of malnutrition, maltreatment, and disease, despite the best efforts of the British occupying forces to care for the survivors (Bergen-Belsen, 2010). Significant health issues, both physical and psychological, as well as premature deaths, continued in the survivor community for months and even years (see, for example, Krell and Sherman, 1997).

Given the collapse of the overall situation in Germany and the numerous forced death marches into already overcrowded camps all across Germany, the experience of immediate postwar Bergen-Belsen can be taken as representative of what was happening across Europe. Needless to say, the deaths recorded in Bergen-Belsen in the first six weeks after liberation reflect only the immediate post-liberation state of affairs.

Of course surviving the camps and living through the first weeks of liberation was only the first step in a long process of rehabilitation. For many survivors, the first priority was to find any surviving family members. In most cases this was, of course, a fruitless search. This meant that many survivors were very much on their own in a Europe that was economically, politically, and psychologically unable to offer them support. They were also a part of a vast number of several million persons who were displaced in one way or another.

The second step was usually to find a place to settle and begin building a life. Here experiences varied widely. For children, there was often no place to return to since they had “grown up” in the camps. Many were orphans and so needed to be placed with foster or adoptive families. Survivors from the Soviet Union often did not want to return there but preferred to stay in the West. Some returnees to Poland encountered antisemitism, even death, as in the infamous Kielce pogrom of July 1946. Others returned to their hometowns in Holland, France, even Germany, only to find their homes gone or occupied by others, their businesses destroyed, and the general economy such that starting over was impossible. Eventually a system of Displaced Persons Camps was established under United Nations auspices to house, feed, and care for the more permanently displaced persons. Various Jewish organizations began to work with the refugees, offering education, job training, and some rehabilitation. By 1946, however, there still remained about a quarter of a million Jews stranded in Displaced Persons Camps across the continent (Gutman, 1990: 377ff.). Only gradually was this population moved out. Those who hoped to move to the United States found their way blocked until the passage of the Displaced Persons’ Act of 1948. Subsequently some seventy to eighty thousand succeeded in coming to the United States and another 16 thousand found their way to Canada (Roth, 2000: 581). Most of the rest had resolved to migrate to British Palestine, but because of the immigration blockade the British kept in effect, many ended up in British detention camps in Cyprus and elsewhere, and were able to enter legally only after the State of Israel was declared in 1948. Clearly the process of repatriating, or even “patriating” survivors was a long and difficult affair for everyone involved. By 1952, most of the camps had been shut down, but this was fully seven years after the end of the war. The last Displaced Person’s Camp, Foehrenwald in Bavaria, did not close down until 1957.

Although the majority of Jewish survivors had been resettled by the middle of the 1950s, the aftereffects of the Holocaust were far from over. There was, of course, the task of coming to terms with the sheer scale and magnitude of what

occurred. The first scholarly attempt to piece together the entire Holocaust operation was Raul Hilberg's famous 1961 study, *The Destruction of European Jews*. The book made clear for the first time how pervasive the Nazi machinery was for identifying, isolating, transporting, imprisoning, and eventually killing the Jews of Europe. The book also laid out the process by which the victims' property – houses, apartments, furniture, clothing, jewelry, stocks, and all other assets of a modern human life – was seized, accounted for, and distributed. That same year saw the beginning of the widely publicized trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem as well as the release of the film *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Two other highly influential books also made their appearance at roughly this same time: Elie Wiesel's *Night* (first published in English in 1960) and Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). The confluence of these events brought the question of the Holocaust forcefully into the public forum and raised in particular new insights and disturbing questions about the character of the perpetrators, the bystanders, and the victims. The 1967 "Six Day War" in the Middle East brought the new Israeli and American Jewish generation face to face with what seemed like another existential threat, a sort of completion of the "Final Solution." By the late 1960s, the Holocaust and the various questions it raised had become fully part of American, European, and Israeli intellectual and public discourse.

It hardly needs remarking that the historical, political, philosophical, moral, and theological questions of the Holocaust continue to evolve and provoke heated discussion as new information surfaces and scholarly analysis proceeds. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 began a process that made it possible for Western scholars for the first time to have access to the vast archival resources of Eastern Europe, opening up entirely new vistas on the Nazi regime and its operation. Film director Steven Spielberg began a project of videotaping interviews with survivors in 1994, and has made some 52 thousand such interviews available to researchers and scholars, who now have access to eyewitness details of specific camps and events (see, for example, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, 2010). In addition, the archive of the International Tracing Service at Bad Arolsen, containing some 17.5 million files, was finally opened to scholars in 2007. Various trials involving reparations, the fate of former Jewish communal property, alleged war criminals, and stolen artwork continue to be filed and to provide new details. While the reading and digestion of these resources has barely even scratched the surface, it is more than fair to say that our understanding of the Holocaust has broadened, deepened, and widened considerably over the last generation.

With this general background in mind, we can turn to the existential crises which the Holocaust has generated in the Jewish community. In the following discussion I will focus on three areas in particular: (i) the theological issue of the presence, absence, and nature of the deity; (ii) the politics and policies inside the State of Israel and between the State and the Diaspora; and (iii) the Jewish relationship to the Enlightenment and to modern Western values.

The Enlightenment

The term “Enlightenment” refers to the broad intellectual, cultural, and political developments that took place in Europe during the eighteenth century and beyond. The stimulus behind these developments was the conviction that human reason was the route to truth and that the application of human rationality based on that reasoned truth would form the basis for legitimate authority and improvement in the human condition. The impressive technological developments that characterized the “Industrial Revolution,” which was occurring at the same time, seemed to confirm the notion that the traditional social, political, and economic structures were obstacles to human progress and so needed to be overcome. In the course of the Enlightenment, many of the established configurations of European culture were therefore replaced by newly formed “rational” alternatives.

In many ways, France represents the most striking example of the implications of the Enlightenment. The few short years of the French Revolution witnessed the overthrow of the aristocracy, subjects of the king turned into citizens of the state, the erasure of the special status of the Church in favor of a secular society, and the rise to power of entrepreneurs and wealthy bourgeoisie. In the course of these revolutionary events, the status of the Jews very early on rose to the surface. If the old medieval social order was being dismantled in favor of the universality of human values and rights and if the traditional authority of Christian teaching was being subjected to rational and neutral inquiry, then the place of Jews and Judaism in the “new world order” was suddenly an open question. The attitude of the Enlightenment is most famously illustrated by a series of comments made by the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre in the French National Assembly on December 23, 1789. On religion, the Count noted that the “Declaration of Rights” states “that no one shall be persecuted for his religious beliefs.” He went on to point out that the law had no hold over a person’s soul, but only a person’s actions. From this he concluded that “Every religion must prove but one thing – that it is moral.” From this grand statement, Count Clermont-Tonnerre segues to the Jews: “The Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals” (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 1995: 114–115). In short, from his point of view, as far as the law was concerned, a Jew could believe anything he or she wanted, provided that he or she acted in accord with rational morality. At the same time, however, the Jews as a corporate group had no claim to special rights, privileges, or obligations. In short, Jews were to be treated exactly as all other Frenchmen, provided that they acted like all other Frenchmen, and of course provided that they recognized the overarching authority of the State. These stipulations received concrete articulation, and acceptance, in the famous conference of French Jewish leaders in the so-called “Paris Sanhedrin” of 1806–1807.

The “emancipation” of the Jewish community from its medieval restrictions, more or less along the lines laid out in France, slowly but steadily moved across

Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the end of the nineteenth century, Jews in Western, Central, and most of Eastern Europe had been released from their ghettos, were allowed to pursue educational and professional careers, and were enjoying full legal rights as citizens of their respective countries. To be sure there was some social, political, and religious opposition to these developments, especially from the more conservative elements of society – the Church, the remaining aristocracies, etc. This opposition coalesced into racial antisemitism (a word that came into use in the 1860 and 1870s). By and large, however, Jews by the end of the nineteenth century had enthusiastically embraced the new opportunities made available to them and had become “Europeans of the Mosaic persuasion.”

It needs to be pointed out that the acceptance of the “Enlightenment bargain” demanded some profound changes in Jewish life. In particular, Jews were expected to give up their traditional lifestyle and practices and, in the words of one Russian “enlightened” Jewish leader, Judah Leib Gordon, “Be a man abroad and a Jew in your tent, A brother to your countrymen . . .” (“Awake My Soul,” 1860, cited in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, 1995: 384). For the vast majority of Jews, the bargain was well worth the price. Jews across Europe left the ghetto; gave up Yiddish and Hebrew for the local French, German, Polish, Russian, etc. vernacular; adopted contemporary European garb, manners, education, and careers; and adapted or abandoned Jewish traditions concerning holidays, Sabbath, prayer, and diet. In Germany and Hungary, enlightened Jewish scholars and rabbis redefined Judaism as a religion the essential core of which was “ethnic monotheism” and its various laws, rituals, rules, and customs being nothing more than historical accretions to be tossed aside as history moved forward. The new “Liberal” or “Reform” or “Neolog” Judaisms that emerged soon became the standards for Jewish religious life, with more traditional, later labeled “Orthodox,” Judaism reduced to tiny sub-communities in most of Western and Central Europe. Only in Russia did the Enlightenment not achieve significant penetration in the Jewish community by the mid-nineteenth century, although Russian Jews who migrated to North America between 1880 and World War I very quickly became Americanized and developed their own version of enlightened Judaism, the “Conservative” movement. As late as the 1920s and 1930s, virtually all Western Jews saw the Jewish compact with the Enlightenment to be highly attractive and promising. The vast majority of Jews saw themselves, hand-in-hand with their Christian brethren, on the way to creating a new social utopia for everyone.

To be sure, there were blemishes on this otherwise bright and optimistic worldview. The famous composer Richard Wagner published his polemic against Jewish composers, “Jewishness in Music,” in 1850; Wilhelm Marr, a German publicist credited with inventing the word “antisemitism,” published his pamphlet “The Victory of the Jewish Spirit over the Germanic Spirit Observed from a non-Religious Perspective” in 1873. The Dreyfus Affair, which began with a court case in 1894 and led to over a decade of anti-Jewish agitation in France, shocked many

assimilated Jews, including most famously Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism. Karl Leuger, leader of the Christian Social Party and an outspoken antisemite served as mayor of Vienna from 1897 to 1910. The list goes on. In general, however, none of this seemed to derail the sense of Enlightenment optimism in general, nor its Jewish support in particular.

This optimism began to suffer significant damage by the turn of the twentieth century. In part this was due to the realization that the modern world had not so much eradicated human poverty, hunger, and misery, as it had created a whole new underclass of sufferers: the working proletariat. The horrors of World War I shattered any optimistic hopes that technology would be used only for the good and the betterment of the human condition. The excesses of the Stalinist regime in Russia disabused many of the notion that the socialist revolution in Russia was going to finally institute a utopia on a national scale. The 1920s and 1930s, precisely the years during which the Nazi party rose to power, were a period also of profound questioning, even disillusionment with the purported assurances of the Enlightenment and of modernity.

As far as the Jewish community is concerned, loyalty to the Enlightenment ideal seemed to be shaken but holding well into the 1930s. Many Jews in Germany, and elsewhere in Europe and North America, in fact regarded the rise to power of the Nazi party to be a temporary detour, a sort of political anomaly that would have no long-term consequences. But by the time of the Kristallnacht riots in November 1938, even the most optimistic Jews could see that the German Jewish community was in significant long-term danger. By the outbreak of war in 1939, it was becoming clear that in fact Jewish communities throughout Europe were facing a threat of existential proportions. The unfolding of the Holocaust, with its deportations, ghettos, starvation, labor camps, killing units (Einsatzgruppen), and death camps, and of the massive devastations of World War II altogether, buried any remaining thought, among Jews and non-Jews alike, that the Enlightenment had ushered in a period in which reason would triumph over barbarianism, in which Jews would be accepted by Christians as brothers and colleagues, and in which technology would be employed for the good of all humankind.

The problem facing Jews, and Jewish communal leaders and thinkers, in the post-Holocaust world, was where to go next. The liberal Judaisms of Europe and North America had fashioned themselves as “Enlightenment” communities, treating the Jewish tradition as either a source of a universal spiritual inspiration, or as a part of some general Jewish ethnicity, or as kind of modern liberal Protestant-like movement of social justice. With the total collapse of the Enlightenment assumptions upon which these responses were built, these notions of liberal Judaism came to be seen as naive at best and positively dangerous at worst. The result was that Jews born after the Holocaust exhibited only loose identification, if any, with such classical Enlightenment expressions of Judaism. Those who felt committed to Jewish continuity began searching for new assumptions upon which to anchor their Jewishness. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, several trends were emerging.

Among the most dramatic was the so-called “baal teshuva” movement which saw tens of thousands of Jews “return” to a form of Orthodoxy or discover a new and “authentic” Jewish spirituality through Lubavitch/Chabad Hasidism. Even among liberal Jews in the Reform movement, there was greater acceptance of tradition, from the wearing of *kippot* (yarmulkas) to a greater amount of Hebrew in the worship service. Beyond the religious denominations themselves, there was a marked increase in identification with Zionism. Jewish voting patterns across the country registered a slow but significant shift to the right with a rough average of 25 percent of American Jewish voters casting ballots for conservative candidates in local, state, and national elections. Overall, it is fair to say that Jewish faith in the ultimate trustworthiness of the outside world became much shakier than it had been prior to the Holocaust.

The people who had to deal with the disillusionments of the post-Holocaust world most directly were Jewish theologians. Jewish theology was traditionally based on the notion that the Jewish people had a covenant with the deity and that this covenant implied a certain divine protection. But the divine seemed strikingly silent, if not totally absent, in “Auschwitz.” How, then, was one to talk about a Jewish god, the importance of obedience and faith in that god, and the importance of Judaism altogether, in the face of what felt like divine abandonment?

Theological Questions

I should start this section by noting that Judaism historically has not been a theology-based religion in the way that most forms of Christianity are. There have throughout Jewish history been Jewish theologians, but for the average Jew in his or her everyday life, the real questions have to do with Halakah, what are the right and wrong, good and bad, things to do, based on the Jewish legal tradition. Most Jews do not ask, nor do they expect clarity on, major theological issues such as theodicy (the existence of evil in the world). Nonetheless, the impact of the Holocaust naturally raises these kinds of questions. So while there are a number of post-Holocaust thinkers who have tried to put together a theological response to the Holocaust, it cannot be said that there is any broad consensus within the Jewish community about these issues.

Needless to say, the question as to how to account for the absence of the divine during the Holocaust has sparked a variety of answers. One of the initial questions was whether or not the Holocaust required a new theology at all. Traditional theologians tended to think not. From their point of view, catastrophes had befallen the people throughout history, from the enslavement in Egypt, to the destructions of the First and Second Jerusalem temples, to the massacres of the Middle Ages, to the nineteenth-century Russian pogroms. To be sure, the Holocaust represents a different degree of atrocity, but that in and of itself does not raise new theological questions.

From the perspective of these ultra-conservative rabbis, the answer to why the Jews were allowed to undergo the punishments of the Nazis was the same as why the Babylonians were allowed to ransack Jerusalem in biblical times – the sins of the Jewish people. In this present case, the sins had to do either with the mass apostasy during the nineteenth century (to liberal Judaisms, or to assimilation into Gentile culture) or to the secularist Zionist movement (or to both, which could be seen as opposite sides of the same coin). One of the proponents of the former view is Rabbi Eliezer Menahem Schach, a former leader of the Lithuanian Yeshivah Orthodoxy in Israel (he died in 1999) who claimed that yet another Holocaust could occur because of the widespread abandonment of Judaism (by which he meant of ultra-Orthodoxy) and the pervasive “desecration” of the Sabbath. Those blaming Zionism itself include most notably Rabbi Josef Moshe Teitelbaum, the rebbe of the anti-Zionist Satmar sect of Hasidism (Ravitsky, 1996: 124). These views, it should be noted, are very much of the fringe elements of ultra-Orthodox Judaism.

A more central theological response, still from the Orthodox world, is that of Eliezer Berkovits (1973). Berkovits draws on a mystical Jewish concept of the “hiding of the divine face” (*hester panim*). The roots of the doctrine are biblical (“I will hide My countenance from them, / And see how they fare in the end” – Deuteronomy 31:20; Jewish Publication Society translation). In general, the phrase has been used as a metaphor to indicate the transcendence of the divine from human comprehension. Martin Buber, in his 1952 book *The Eclipse of God*, used the terms more as a way of talking about the inability of modern people to have a close personal relationship with the divine. For Berkovits, the “hiding of the divine presence” was used to explain why divine care seemed to be absent during the Holocaust. It was not so much, Berkovits argues, that the divine is unknowing, uncaring, or incapable of helping. Rather, the Holocaust represents one of those periodic times when the divine face goes into eclipse so that human beings have full freedom. That the covenant at Sinai is still operative is proven, for him, by the fact that not only did the Jews as a people survive, but are now building a new life in Israel.

While Berkovits’ views draw on traditional Jewish vocabulary and metaphors, albeit in a somewhat new way, his theology is hardly comforting. The notion of a divine savior who on random occasions simply disappears renders trust in such a deity insecure at best. One possible response to this is simply to say that reliance on the divine is not the issue at all. Rather, the Holocaust is a sort of modern-day revelation that the Jewish people are being called upon to ensure their own survival at all costs. The most well-known advocate of this view was the philosopher Emil Fackenheim, himself a Holocaust survivor, who argued that the most important “commandment” issuing forth from the Holocaust was never to allow Hitler to have a posthumous victory (Fackenheim, 1999). In fact, Fackenheim claimed that this imperative to survive is on the level of the revelation at Sinai (Fackenheim calls this the 614th Commandment, adding on to the traditional number of 613 commandments held to have been given by the divine), and therefore makes it

part of the core of post-Holocaust Judaism. He has been criticized for turning Judaism, in effect, into a community whose purpose is to survive the Holocaust, not to fulfill any other divine or human role. Insofar as Fackenheim avoids any discussion of the divine and focuses only on the human response to the Holocaust, he can be categorized as a non-theologian.

At this point, one may well ask why bother to believe in any divine promise at all in the wake of the Holocaust. Richard Rubenstein takes this challenge seriously and declares, in his *After Auschwitz* (1961), that we must now squarely face the reality that “God is dead.” By this he means that reliance on divine salvation in history is meaningless, that there is no larger divine plan, and that there is no deity that really cares. Like Fackenheim, but without the theological sounding language, Rubenstein also is announcing that the old covenant with the god of Sinai has to be understood in the aftermath of the Holocaust to be no longer relevant.

None of the above three approaches (Holocaust as deserved punishment, as a result of the self-abstinence of the divine, as reflecting the “death” of the divine) has achieved much traction in the general Jewish community. Most Jews who think about matters theological are caught in the middle of two unacceptable extremes. On the one hand, the total absence of the divine renders Judaism nothing more than an ethnic group with no meaning beyond its own survival. On the other hand is a deity who is so vindictive and “jealous” so as to allow the Holocaust, including the death of 1.5 million children. Why, it is rightly asked, would anyone want to worship such a deity? The dichotomy is most starkly stated and dealt with by David Blumenthal, who argued in *Facing the Abusing God* (1993) that while God has revealed the divine self as loving and kind, there are also incidences in which the divine is also capable of tolerating, sometimes even commanding, incredible cruelty. Our vocation, in the face of such a deity, is to stand as a community both of faith and of protest. In essence, we have to accept God for what God is and celebrate and support the good and positive while protesting the abusive.

While obviously a difficult theological position for most people to live within, Blumenthal’s argument may in the end reflect the sentiment of most modern Jews. It is not so distant in orientation to probably the most popular voice of the Holocaust survivor community, Elie Wiesel. Wiesel, a writer more than a theologian, describes in his many books the profound difficulties of living with the God who allowed the Holocaust, but also stresses that in the end this is the God we have and that believing in God, no matter how hard, is better than a universe with no god at all.

As noted at the beginning of this section, theology has never been a major stream of Jewish intellectual activity. The Holocaust obviously raises all sorts of questions about the nature of God, the nature of the Jewish people, and the meaning of history more generally. For the ultra-Orthodox, there is a theological imperative to justify God. For other Jews, belief in God has become tangential or immaterial anyway, so talk about the death of God does not come across as particularly threatening. For many, if not most Jews, the Holocaust has simply cast the

questions of theodicy and of the nature of God into the public forum and has left in its wake a series of unsatisfactory answers. The Jewish relationship to the deity remains today as fraught, confused, and ambivalent as it has ever been.

Zionism

The term “Zionism” covers a range of movements that developed in the second half of the nineteenth century that called for the creation of a Jewish national homeland. In broad strokes, the idea of a modern day Jewish homeland grew out of the various nationalisms that were taking hold in Europe during this century. One of the creations of the Enlightenment was the notion of the nation-state as we now conceive of it. In essence the idea was that the various peoples of Europe comprised “nations” (or ethnic groups) each of which had its characteristic history, language, folklore, customs, religion, and so on. During the nineteenth century, each of these “nations” found itself caught in a struggle to create its own geographic and political space (a “state”) in the wake of the collapse of the older medieval order. Just as there emerged a secular state of France for the French, the assumption was that there should also be a “Germany” for the Germans, an “Italy” for the Italians, a “Hungary” for the Magyars, a “Serbia” for the Serbs, and so on. One of the persistent issues that arose with each of these movements was the question of what status should be accorded to non-national minorities within such nation-states. This question led to the ongoing political discussions about “minority rights” that dominated almost all international meetings of the nineteenth century. A subset of these discussions, of course, was the place of the Jews, as we have seen above in the case of France and Napoleon’s Sanhedrin. In fact, some form of the Jewish Question was a topic at almost every one of the international conferences of the period.

The idea that there should also be a “Jewish” state was far from self-evident on both the Jewish and the non-Jewish side. The various Jewish communities of Europe had markedly different attitudes to the topic. The Jews in France had already been “emancipated” and were perfectly happy to consider themselves, and be considered by others, as fully French. German-speaking Jews also were anxious to be seen as fully Germans, albeit of the “Mosaic persuasion.” The same was true for all the Western European countries. The further east one travelled, however, the more complicated the attitudes became. In Poland, there was a large assimilated Jewish Polish population in the big cities, but Jews in the small towns, villages, and shtetls of the Polish hinterland hardly thought of themselves, or were seen by their neighbors, as Poles. Jews of the Ukraine and Russia also almost never saw themselves as sharing a nationality with the Ukrainian and Russian peasants around them. In their own minds, these Eastern European Jews saw themselves as a distinct national group.

When the modern Zionist movement began to take shape, it is hardly surprising that it gained what little traction it did in Russia. The first real Zionist movement

was the “Lovers of Zion” (*Hovevei Zion*) which emerged in 1881 largely in the Russian city of Odessa. It focused from the very beginning on returning Jews to “Zion” (then, of course, Turkish Palestine) to work the land. Although this movement did send some tens of thousands of Jews and did succeed in establishing a few villages, it was largely a failure. The first fully organized Zionist movement, the World Zionist Organization, was founded in 1897 by Theodor Herzl, then a newspaper reporter covering the Dreyfus Affair unfolding in France. The movement was highly organized and gradually was able to set up the social, economic, and political structures that would become the State of Israel. It was largely run and financed by Western Jews, especially in Germany and England (and to a lesser degree in France), while the people who actually arrived in Palestine were largely “Russians.” Back in Germany, Britain and France, the movement was considered by the vast majority of Jews as at best a fringe movement of Russian dreamers, and at worst an active threat to their own status. The whole argument of the Zionist movement, after all, was that Jews were not really Germans or Frenchmen or British at all, but did constitute a distinct nationality of their own. Well into the 1920s, virtually all Jews in Western Europe and North America would have described themselves as non-Zionist, and some even as anti-Zionist. What sympathy the movement did have in the West was linked mostly to its being seen as a charity for helping Russian Jews fleeing Tsarist, and later revolutionary, Russia. Even Russian Jews regarded Zionism as a last resort. It is significant that of the roughly three million Jews who fled Russia between 1881 and World War I, the vast majority came to North America, and most of the rest remained for whatever reason in Europe. Only a tiny fraction, maybe forty thousand, took the Zionist route, and many, possibly up to half, found the difficulties too great to overcome and subsequently abandoned Palestine.

Until the rise of the Nazis, then, a nationalist movement to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine was not considered a reasonable program by the overwhelming mass of Jews in Western Europe and North America. Even the wave of Jews fleeing to British Palestine from Poland and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s (the so-called “Fourth” and “Fifth” wave of *aliyah*, or immigration) were there not out of Zionist or nationalist conviction, but because of lack of any alternative. Until 1939 there were very few slots for refugees altogether in any Western country, let alone Jewish ones, and after 1939 emigration out of Europe was all but impossible anyway.

The Holocaust had a radical effect on Jewish attitudes toward a Jewish national home. It first of all unleashed a sizable migration of survivors, many erstwhile Displaced Persons Camp inmates, into British Palestine (which still limited Jewish migration into the region) and then into the newly declared State of Israel. Altogether some two hundred and fifty thousand Holocaust survivors were part of the Israeli population of just over 1.2 million in 1950, comprising slightly over one fifth of the population. The United States accepted the second largest number of survivors, something in the area of eighty to a hundred thousand. These

immigrants brought with them both tremendous anger and a fierce determination to survive the Arab attacks on Jews during the Israeli War of Independence and the years immediately following. From the Israeli perspective, the Holocaust affirmed two central concepts. One was that Jewish life in Europe in particular and in the Diaspora more generally was doomed, a concept often termed “negation of the Diaspora” (*Shelilat haGolah*). The other was that the only real solution to the Jewish Question was the creation of a strong and independent Jewish homeland to which the scattered “exiles” of the Diaspora would return. These attitudes were symbolized in institutionalized form in diverse ways in the new State, for example the creation of a kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta’ot (“Fighters of the Ghettoes”) located in Western Galilee, which included a number of survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, or the naming of kibbutz Yad Mordechai (“Memorial of Mordechai”) near the Gaza Strip in honor of the fallen commander of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, Mordechai Anielewicz. In addition, a national day of Holocaust remembrance (Yom Hashoah) was established in 1951, and linked to Israel Independence Day, eight days later (eight days is the length of several traditional Jewish holidays like Sukkot and Passover). The linkage suggests the death of Diaspora Judaism and its rebirth in the State of Israel.

In America, by far the largest, wealthiest and most influential Jewish Diaspora community in the post-Holocaust era, the effect was equally striking, although quite different in direction. In particular, the American Jewish community did not understand the lesson of the Holocaust to be the negation of Diaspora Jewish life. Yet support for Israel, whether as a way to aid Holocaust survivors, or as a more ideological turn to embracing the concept of Jewish national identity, became a standard public feature of the “organized” Jewish community. Anti-Zionism in America retreated to the extreme margins of the community. While very few American Jews actually made the decision to leave the United States and settle in Israel, despite the calls by Israeli leaders to do so, American Jews came to feel a tight kinship to, and even a kind of shared destiny with, the State of Israel, that had not existed before the Holocaust. Support of Israel in fact moved very much into the center of American Jewish public identity and political activism. This was especially noticeable in the wake of the 1967 Six Day War, during which time the very existence of the State seemed in doubt. Combined with the growing ethnic power movements, the new generation of American Jews in the 1960s and 1970s was much more open about its pride in, connection with, and support for, the State of Israel.

As the State of Israel grew, gained military hegemony, and began to be economically self-sufficient, with a Jewish population that grew to roughly equal or even outnumber the American Jewish population by the early 2000s, a bipolarity developed in Jewish life, with a center in Israel characterized by strong Zionist and religious streams on the one hand, and an American center, assimilated but ethnically identified, on the other. Each of these centers, of course, was fully aware of the Holocaust, but was drawing different lessons from it about homeland versus Diaspora, about the character of the Jewish state, about the nature of Jewish

identity, about the proper teachings and practice of the Jewish religion, even about the very question of who is or is not a legitimate part of the Jewish people. Over the last few decades, the gap between these different answers to these very basic questions has not only failed to diminish, but in fact has broadened and deepened at times to near crisis point. Internal discussions of all these foundational questions almost inevitably have the differing sides invoke the Holocaust and its lessons to “prove” their point of view.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, it seems clear that the world Jewish community is still reeling from the effects of the Holocaust and is still trying to recover its sense of identity, the meaning of its history, its relationship to the divine, and its relationship to the rest of the world. The shattering effects of the Holocaust are still sending out shockwaves two generations later. Several patterns are emerging however. One is that the easy optimism of the Enlightenment, with its promise of the acceptance of the Jews, as Jews, into the modern world, is largely dead. The second is that Zionism, whatever that term might mean, has moved from the margins of Jewish life to the very center of Jewish internal discourse. The third is that the Jewish struggle with the divine has been given new energy, both positive and negative. Where this all leads is of course very unclear. What is clear, however, is that the Judaism that entered into the modern world in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, is now fully of the past and a whole new sense of Jewishness and Judaism is emerging. Whatever evolves over the next generations, it will clearly be a Jewish community that has been radically reshaped and reconceived in light of the Holocaust and its myriad lessons.

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