

Author's Note

The following consists of the final chapter of my book, *The Divine Mind: Exploring the Psychological History of God's Inner Journey*, published by Prometheus Books in 2018. The book tells the story of God's evolution as depicted in the three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This parallels the evolution of human consciousness, as each reflects the other. The book won a Nautilus Book Award in the category of “Religion/Spirituality of Western Thought.”

Reframing the Problem of Evil

It helps to start by admitting that evil cannot be satisfactorily explained—and that perhaps it should not be explained, since explanation is a slippery slope that tends to tilt toward acceptance, by way of that immense inanity, the fallacy of Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner [to understand all, is to forgive all]. At the same time, evil can't be ignored, or dismissed. Evil is emerging with a new urgency; it has to be thought about in a new way.

— Lance Morrow¹

No discussion of God would be complete without some exploration of the problem of evil, that is, his dark side, which naturally is, again, the ultimate source of our own. In our treatment of the Hebrew Bible, we observed many eruptions of this dark side. The account of God's fall from paradise and of his continuous disappointments with humanity suggests that he was traumatized and that his dark side emerged in response to his trauma. However, this does not explain the actual source of evil, which seems to have existed before creation. After all, why was there a diabolical serpent in the garden of Eden in the first place, and why a tree whose fruits were prohibited because eating them

would have dark consequences? And what about suffering, the inevitable corollary to evil? Or as Bono asks in the U2 song, “Yahweh,” why is there always pain in childbirth, and why does darkness precede the dawn? These questions strike at the heart of the problem of evil: Is evil part of God’s nature, or something he somehow acquired? Or is it rather the unavoidable byproduct of complex factors that are built into creation, or perhaps a prerequisite to put teeth into the gift of our free will? The mystics whose words we have read seem to view the Godhead as beyond good and evil. If we follow their lead and do not identify their God as an entirely separate being from the God of scripture, we are faced with a vexing paradox: how could the sophisticated, transcendent Godhead whose substance is absolute nothingness coexist with—and worse, permit!—the evil and suffering in our world?²

For me, this has always been a burning question, even if I didn’t always frame it in these terms. It certainly cast a pall over my childhood. Relatives whom I never had the chance to know—over forty including extended family members—vanished in the Holocaust. My parents, both now deceased, were among the survivors. My father was a victim of torture at the hands of the Arrow Cross—the Hungarian Nazis—and his harsh time in the camps affected him for the rest of his life. My mother, too, was often a hair’s breadth from death, and she carried the pain of her losses to the grave. Yet both my parents had religious experiences during the war; both felt that God saved them. *Why did he save them, and not also the six million who perished, or the sixty million if we include all the others who are estimated to have died in World War II?* I have no sure answers to these questions. They’re still very much a mystery to me. Yet the story of God’s journey and its implications have shed some light on them, some sense of a working hypothesis

with which to proceed. But before we turn to this, I'd like to begin with another story.

Told by the Christian theologian Robert McAfee Brown, it is about the Auschwitz survivor and Nobel laureate, Elie Wiesel. It sets the tone for what seems to me to be the right attitude to take as we face the dense mystery of God's relationship with evil.

By the time he was fifteen, Elie Wiesel was in Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp. A teacher of Talmud befriended him by insisting that whenever they were together they would study Talmud—Talmud without pens or pencils, Talmud without paper, Talmud without books. It would be their act of religious defiance.

One night the teacher took Wiesel back to his own barracks, and there, with the young boy as the only witness, three great Jewish scholars—masters of Talmud, Halakhah [Law], and Jewish jurisprudence—put God on trial, creating, in that eerie place, “a rabbinic court of law to indict the Almighty.” [This practice originated with the 18th-19th century Hasidic master Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev. He not only served God in joy, but protested his unjustice by challenging him in a lawsuit.] The trial lasted several nights. Witnesses were heard, evidence was gathered, conclusions were drawn, all of which issued finally in a unanimous verdict: the Lord God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, was found *guilty* of crimes against creation and humankind. And then, after what Wiesel describes as an “infinity of silence,” the Talmudic scholar looked at the sky and said “It’s time for evening prayers,” and the members of the tribunal recited Maariv, the evening service.³

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Of all the world's traditions of absolute nothingness, Jewish mysticism focuses most on the problem of how to reconcile the existence of evil with a creator God who is also supposed to be absolutely good and loving. Probably this strong interest is influenced not only by theological concerns but also by the fact that Jews have been, with their history of being persecuted and oppressed, victims of evil as have few other peoples. They are especially sensitized to God's dark side, and therefore it should come as no surprise that

the Kabbalists felt obliged to speak about this in view of Ein Sof. What they knew about Yahweh was of little help in this regard because there was, until their discovery of Ein Sof, no reference point outside of him or beyond him upon which they could rely to discuss his darkness with any degree of theological authority. To be sure, Job revealed much about his darkness and did so with a great deal of *personal* authority—human authority—but this did not shed much light on the *cause* of God’s darkness, its source or origin. This became the task of the Kabbalists.

In advocating a new paradigm of God, the Kabbalists also boldly introduced a mystical theology of good and evil (we shall explore here only one of its ideas). They intuitively knew that Ein Sof must somehow resolve the problem of evil. They knew that a mystical understanding of God would be incomplete if this problem were not sensibly explained. The Talmudic Fathers already established how important evil is in the scheme of creation with their cryptic statement that gave it primacy over good: “By thirteen years is the evil impulse older than the good impulse.” Now the Kabbalists pinpointed why this primacy is so. They postulated that evil originates in the Godhead’s necessary *severity* in the creation process. This is an interesting way to describe the precursor to evil given that the Kabbalists had Yahweh as the original image of God in the back of their minds: if there is any one bleak quality of Yahweh’s that stands out besides his propensity toward evil and that at the same time goes with it, it is his severity, his austerity. By focusing on this quality in the Godhead’s creative process, the Kabbalists implicitly addressed the source of Yahweh’s own severity and, by extension, the source of his evil. They argued that if evil was not inherent in the Godhead, then severity, or at least the capacity for it, was. Severity thus served as the bridge from the Godhead’s innate

condition beyond good and evil to the good and evil in creation. (The Christian mystic Jacob Boehme made a similar connection when he said, “The whole Deity has in its innermost or beginning birth, in the pith or kernel, a very tart, terrible *sharpness*, in which the astringent quality is a very horrible, tart, hard, dark and cold attraction or drawing together, like *winter*, when there is a fierce, bitter, cold frost, when water is frozen into ice, and besides it is very intolerable.” Boehme saw this sharpness or astringent quality, which he also referred to as severity, as one factor among others that gave rise to both evil, in the form of the devil, and an “*angry*, zealous or *jealous* God, as may be seen by the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.”⁴)

But what exactly is this severity, and why is it necessary? Severity is the opposite yet complement of the Godhead’s love. It is associated with the Godhead’s self-restraint, judgment, and power to create things and fix their limits, all of which were required in the hit-and-miss process of making a “good” creation. Some Kabbalists believed that the Godhead made more than one attempt at creation, with earlier efforts aborted due to the Godhead’s dissatisfaction with them. Divine severity is the primal agent that determined if one feature was too much or another too little. Evil, then, arose when severity became isolated from the love and other positive divine forces with which it was originally united. (These forces comprise the previously discussed *sefirot* or ten attributes through which the Godhead manifests. Evil is the result of an excess of *Gevurah*, the *sefirot* of severity or strength.) Humans subsequently further activated this split, as symbolized in the drama of the garden of Eden with its tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of dualism and opposites. We may say that the Godhead’s severity got out of hand. (We

can see an analog to this principle of severity in the ego and superego: their power to restrict and control, when it becomes too severe, can lead to evil consequences.)

Isaac Luria advanced the notion of severity by applying to it a finely honed metaphysical logic. He hypothesized that for creation to be possible, the Ein Sof had to, as discussed earlier, contract into itself to make a space for something new. This first act of creation was what Luria called *tzimtzum*. This idea shows that, to the Kabbalist, creation takes place *within* God, as opposed to the biblical presentation of it as something that God makes outside of himself, much like the way a builder constructs a house. However, the Godhead could not create a perfect world, for this would have been identical to itself. It could not duplicate itself, but only restrict itself. Because creation differs from the Godhead in its pure form, an element of imbalance, defectiveness, and darkness entered it. This element was the source of evil, if not evil itself, but without it, creation would have instantly ceased to exist and would have been reabsorbed into the Godhead. There is thus an element in the Godhead itself that is opposed to creation: it does not want anything lesser than itself to exist.

Now to the discerning mind all this may sound like a clever sleight of hand by which the Kabbalists explained the problem of evil while maintaining the status of the Godhead as beyond evil. Was this merely a reallocation of Yahweh's evil to a neutral Godhead without holding the latter responsible for that evil? Or a subtle way of asserting the theological principle of *privatio boni*, which holds that evil is not a substantial force but merely the absence of good, as St. Augustine believed? Or was it rather an acknowledgment that God is guilty, as Wiesel's tribunal concluded, but guilty with an explanation? The answer to any of these questions is, perhaps so. However, what is

significant about Kabbalistic cosmology is that it sees evil as a function of the unfolding process of creation. By defining it as an effect that naturally occurred when God's different abilities split off from each other, it posits evil as an evolutionary phenomenon (although this, of course, predated the Darwinian idea of evolution). Centuries later Teilhard de Chardin, in his capacity as an evolutionary scientist as well as a philosopher, would insist that evil appears necessarily and abundantly in the course of evolution not as an accident but because it is part and parcel of the very structure of the universe. "Evil," he writes, "is inevitable in the course of a creation which develops within time. Here again the solution which brings us freedom is given us by evolution." The last sentence refers to Teilhard's thought on the future of human evolution, which curiously is not so dissimilar from the Kabbalists' idea of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world that, as also previously discussed, will return it to its oneness with the Godhead. Both Teilhard and the Kabbalists see humankind's future—no doubt a distant future—as a redemption that will occur by virtue of our unification with God.⁵

The Kabbalah evolutionarily reframed even the human role in promulgating evil. Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona reached an intriguing conclusion about this based on a passage in Leviticus in which God instructs the Israelites to not eat the fruit of the Promised Land for the first five years after their arrival there. He said that God's instruction to Adam to not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge was similarly intended for its *first* fruit only. In other words, Adam had to *wait* until the creation process—which included his own development—had evolved to the point at which the potential problem of evil could be humanly dealt with. He had to become *ready* to eat from it. By

acting prematurely, he disturbed the harmony of the world and unleashed the inherent power of disharmony, or evil. Scholem writes:

Man's two urges or drives, for good and for evil, are implanted within him as possibilities of action, just as the qualities of love and severity are present in God Himself. Had Adam subordinated his will to that of God, in which all contradictions function in sacred harmony, then the restrictive factor within himself, the Evil Urge, would have been nullified with the totality of his being, and evil would never have emerged as a reality, but only remained as a potential, to be defeated repeatedly within the totality of his being. We learn here that evil is nothing other than that which isolates and removes things from their unity. . . . So long as man absorbs this separation into his being—this is the meaning here of the eating of the fruit, which belongs to the “fruits of the soul”—he creates inauthentic, false systems of reality, productive of evil—i.e., that which is separated from God. Both man's experience of reality and his moral nature are damaged by this misguided contemplation.⁶

By defining evil as the extraction of things from their unity and making this something that we ingest, that we take into our being, the Kabbalah reframes the problem of evil not only mystically but psychologically. Evil is a function of—or rather, a dysfunction in—our consciousness. It is a distortion of awareness of the nature of things, so that we create “inauthentic, false systems of reality.” This neatly coincides with Buddhist thought, according to which evil derives its power more from our *ignorance* than from any other factor. We are ignorant of our fundamental emptiness and unity with all. We do not see that our ego is, although a requirement of living, ultimately a mirage. With its sense of itself as other than this emptiness and unity, it exaggerates its self-importance. This ignorance is partnered with our cravings and hatred, the three together forming Buddhism's “Three Poisons” (or, in Sanskrit and Pali, *akusala-mula*—the “roots of evil”). From these stem the suffering we unnecessarily create and add to the basic,

unavoidable suffering of life (aging, sickness, death, and so forth). The opposite of the Three Poisons consists of wisdom, unselfishness, and compassion (or *kusala*). Once we admit and own our ignorance, *we have* the problem of evil rather than *it having us*. Jesus, too, gave voice to this idea of ignorance as a source of evil when on the cross he pleaded on behalf of those who crucified him, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”⁷

Some points to consolidate our treatment of evil thus far:

1. Evil does not exist in the absolute nothingness of the Godhead other than as a latent possibility. Evil and hate arise as a result of what God’s original condition had to go through in order to propel itself out of its eternal nothingness. (This condition was also our own; as the Zen masters would say, it was our original face before our parents were born.)⁸
2. The dark side of God is therefore not really a flaw. It is an epiphenomenon of what happens when absolute nothingness embarks upon creation and enters time and space (as the Zen master Shuhō Myōchō said, “Where the wheel of free activity turns, the empty void gnashes its teeth”). Similarly did Teilhard de Chardin understand evil as a natural feature and consequence of evolution. Our biblical traditions, too, hint at this by ascribing to Satan a key role in creation (he was the “bringer of light,” as indicated in the etymological meaning of the name “Lucifer”).⁹
3. Lurianic Kabbalism, like other Abrahamic traditions, views human life as a constant struggle between good and evil. (Buddhists understand this as the struggle between wisdom and ignorance, or *kusala* and *akusala*.) If love is the overarching and highest principle of the universe, then severity is its primary and leading one. Auschwitz

and all other horrors of this kind reflect severity that has gotten out of God's hand and into human hands. They are living proof of extreme severity, or evil. Yet with ethical conduct and good deeds, evil is countered and *tikkun olam* and the human condition are advanced. This is a long and arduous process in which each human being moves up the ladder of creation until finally freed from the cycle of rebirth (another parallel with Buddhism).¹⁰

And 4. Evil, like everything else in creation, is essentially empty. This however does not alter its capacity to seize and hypnotically grip us, a phenomenon that in former times was understood as demonic possession. Today we would describe this rather as an archetypal possession: the ego overidentifies with and becomes the willing instrument of some dark archetype of the collective unconscious, the transpersonal part of the psyche known for its inner angels and demons. But either way we are possessed, and the ego and moral faculty's discrimination between right and wrong is extinguished. An example of this: Canadian Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, the commander of the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda during the genocide of 1994, said that he had the impression, when attempting to negotiate with the murderous and crazed Hutu leaders, that he "literally was talking with evil, personified. . . . they weren't human." Journalist Lance Morrow describes this effect aptly: "You know evil when you are in its presence. I think you do, anyway. You feel it as a vibration, a hum that seems to emanate almost from a disorder of the molecules." (I will always remember the sensation I had of this when a psychotherapy patient once proudly confessed to me that he had committed multiple murders for which he was never caught and prosecuted.) Because the core nature of evil is nothingness doesn't mean it loses its numinous energy and force of

attraction. Nor does it mean we are exempt from our moral responsibility to stand against it. As Camus writes, “We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and in others.” Knowing that evil is empty helps us to fight it without getting swept up in a crusade against it, which would likely lead to other evils.¹¹

If we should now integrate these Kabbalistic points with the biblical premise of God’s departure from the stage of history, an explanation will emerge—even though it may not be one that we like—as to why he did not prevent the Holocaust or stop it once it began. However, before we turn to this I would again like to present a story, this one serving as an illustrative preface to this explanation.

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The following is from an autobiographical essay, “At Age Eighty-four,” by the Jewish-German psychologist James Kirsch, who was a personal friend of Jung’s and who helped establish a number of Jungian training institutes, most notably in London and Los Angeles. He here relates an event that occurred when he was seventeen. Having finished school, he was working during World War I in the Museum of Gas Shells as a member in the Hilfsdienst or “auxiliary service” of Germany’s War Department.

On the 9th of November, 1918, I heard in the morning that an armistice had been declared on the Western front. The war was over. This was the end of my “Hilfsdienst.” I simply walked out of the “Museum,” never to return.

While I was standing in the street, waiting for a streetcar, I suddenly heard, again, a low voice speaking to me. This time it said: “There is a man who should have been killed in the war but was not. He will try to kill all the Jews.” In my opinion, God had spoken to me again. I took this statement of the “voice” very seriously. I never doubted that it told me the truth and that its message was a genuine prophecy. While I was studying Medicine, my soul was

attentive to everything that was going on in Germany and the world. I tried to identify the man whom the warning voice had characterized as Killer of the Jews. When the first “Hitlerputsch” occurred in 1921, I knew at once he was the man whom the warning voice had referred to. Throughout the 20’s and the beginning of the 30’s, I knew what fate was waiting for us Jews. I warned many of my Jewish friends, but mostly to no avail.

Well-prepared by the voice, I knew what to do when Hitler was elected chancellor. This historical event occurred on January 30th, 1933. On the 31st, I went to the police station and got passports for myself and my whole family. . . . I left Berlin in August 1933.

The matter of whether this voice was truly God’s or the manifestation of some paranormal force within the human psyche, or both, is a complicated one outside the scope of our present inquiry. Suffice it to say that if it was purely a force of the psyche, it was likely the same kind encountered by the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. (It was in part occurrences like this that prompted Jung to famously say, when asked if he believed in God, “Difficult to answer. I *know*. I don’t need to believe. I *know*.”) For our purposes, we will simply treat the voice, in the spirit in which Kirsch experienced it, as God’s.¹²

So, why didn’t six million other Jews, including my mother and father, hear this voice?, we may ask with indignation. Well, unfortunately, this is just not the way God works in modern times. He is, as the latter part of the Hebrew Bible established, no longer a God of history, of global events. As such, he had made a decision *not* to intervene in such global affairs as our wars. To have provided Kirsch’s auditory vision to six million others would have signaled a return to the times of Mount Sinai, to the paradigm of collective theophany, that is, a more widespread, commonly shared revelation. God would then once again have been a biblical God, not the mystical one he

has become. As Eckhart might say, he would have regressed to god and would no longer be the Godhead. Kirsch's experience, though transpersonal by nature, occurred distinctly in the personal realm of the individual as opposed to the collective sphere. It was also an experience of grace, a gift, and not the first, since he states above that he heard the voice "again." There is no method or formula for making grace happen, no collective recipe. But as an individual who had cultivated a dynamic inner relationship with the divine since childhood, when he had first heard the voice, he was at least open to receiving this gift.¹³

A personal experience of God entails a covenant of spiritual freedom grounded in one's inner life, while a collective one usually involves a covenant of spiritual submission to some standardized social norm, even if it is a religious one. The personal dimension becomes objectified to the extent that the revelation of the "voice" to the individual becomes the dogma—the law—of the masses, an occurrence that took place to some degree or another in the founding of all religions. The Christian existential philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, a kind of mystic in his own right, upholds the value of our unique personhood or identity over and against collective, social forces. A person's self-determination must come from within, not without. Berdyaev writes that "not even God can do it," for that would make us dependent upon him in a servile way. "It is for this reason that the mystics have taught that man should cut himself off even from God. This is the path man has to tread."¹⁴

Hence, as much as we might wish that God had spoken to the six million the way he had to Kirsch, we can see that it would have reestablished an archaic precedent. In his poignant *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner wrestles with

the question, “Why didn’t [God] strike Hitler dead in 1939 and spare millions of lives and untold suffering, or why didn’t He send an earthquake to demolish the gas chambers?”

His answer, in accord with Berdyaev, is that if God were to miraculously intervene in humanity’s affairs he would usurp its freedom to determine its own destiny. If the Kabbalists argued for an endless God in contrast to the biblical one, Kushner argues for a God who is self-limited in his capacity to change events in the world. In essence they are arguing for the same thing: an endless God cannot squeeze himself into carefully measured acts of history any more than a self-limited God can set himself loose upon the world without further limiting both himself and humanity.¹⁵

The argument that God’s intervention in the Holocaust would have been at the expense of our free will appears like rationalization only when we overlook the importance of free will for our spiritual development. We might recall here that as God diminished his biblical role as a miracle worker we increasingly evolved into freer beings. Or was it the other way around? Remember, it was Job’s advanced moral consciousness and what he mirrored back to Yahweh about himself that sent him into retreat. Either way, it is now up to us to work our own miracles. God’s absence on the stage of history provides an incentive for us to step up to the plate and practice strong ethics on our own initiative. Our maturity can be measured by the degree to which we voluntarily do for ourselves what we previously relied on him to do, namely, to discern the difference between right and wrong, between good sense and nonsense. As Jung said, “Freedom of will is the ability to do gladly that which I must do.” In this way, God’s silence in the face of such horrors as the Holocaust can empower our own humanity as we confront evil.¹⁶

The principle of spiritual freedom, which includes not only the freedom of will but of how we think about our personhood or identity, is closely bound up with the problem of evil in modern times. Evil is exacerbated by the objectivization and collectivization of our personhood and by our lack of authentic self-determination. How well social psychologist Stanley Milgram's obedience experiments, influenced by the Holocaust and the Eichmann trial, demonstrated this: like submissive automatons his subjects knowingly inflicted pain on others simply because they were told to. When we forfeit our inner freedom we fail to recognize ourselves and each other as living images of God, images not in the physical or visual sense but the spiritual one. God didn't fail humanity at Auschwitz; it failed him and itself by failing to *keep up* with him in the changes he underwent with the mystics. The self-discovery he shared with them was, again, limited to a relatively few number of individuals, too few. The majority of Western civilization remained fixated upon the old biblical God who could no longer grip the religious imagination.¹⁷

This is a subtle but important factor in the inner dimension of abominations like Auschwitz. The death of the familiar, biblical God—an event Nietzsche intuitively grasped at the beginning of the modern era—left a vacuum of absolute nihilism as the inverse effect of our failure to apprehend the absolute nothingness that this God had become and to which we were guided by the premodern, medieval mystics. (Again, as Jesus said in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”) Of course, we could not fill this vacuum of absolute nihilism, which naturally included a moral nihilism. It consequently filled us, as it

continues to do today with one genocide after another. Auschwitz—an act of absolute annihilation—was a manifest expression of this vacuum that took up residence in our souls. Our barbarism was released not by the death or disappearance of the biblical God (as Dostoevsky would contend), but by the loss of moral values that were historically tied to the belief in him. After all, there has also been much murder in the name of this God when he was alive and well, and reversely, atheists have demonstrated the capacity to be moral in every way that believers have (as an “anti-anti-Semite,” Nietzsche was himself arguably an exemplar of this). It is absolute meaninglessness and amorality that set the stage for genocidal insanity, not the disappearance of God, which both the biblical authors and the mystics have shown is a vital facet of religious experience.¹⁸

God’s silence during the Holocaust belongs to the same order of mystery as his innermost nature as Godhead. Possibly he is even more his true self, his unbounded nothingness, in silence. I could only hope that my relatives, if not also the multitude of others who faced horrific deaths, were able to hear this mystical silence with the same clarity with which Kirsch heard the voice, and that they also knew, as did the mystics, that his silence didn’t mean he wasn’t there.

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Again, it is important that we do not fall prey to a mystical quietism and dismiss evil simply because it is part and parcel of the structure of the universe. On a human level we must exercise our moral responsibility to deal with it. The mystics and sages of history have known this better than anyone. A good example of their own confrontation with evil is provided by the Talmudic Father and Merkabah mystic Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph, who lived during the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. Fighting against the oppression of his

people, Akiva is said to have participated in the Bar Kochba Revolt, known also as the Third Jewish-Roman War. Not long after that, he violated the Roman emperor Hadrian's edicts forbidding the practice and teaching of the Jewish religion. For this the Romans tortured him to death by flaying him (that is, skinning him alive). In legendary fashion the Talmud tells us that he recited the *Shema* prayer calmly throughout his agony, prolonging the last word of its opening sentences—"Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is *ONE*"—until he expired. A heavenly voice was then heard proclaiming, "Happy are you, Akiva, that your soul has departed in oneness with God."¹⁹

More recently, the German and Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who during his studies in America became sensitized to racial injustice, took an active stand against the Nazi regime from its beginning. Banned from Berlin in 1938, he immediately went there the same year to investigate the destruction of synagogues and Jewish businesses in the event known as Kristallnacht. Later, he publicly voiced his strong opposition to Hitler and his "final solution," which he learned about as a member of the Abwehr, a German military intelligence organization that was part of the Ministry of Defense and that eventually became a covert center of anti-Hitler resistance (its operatives took part in a number of assassination attempts against Hitler, including the most famous one on July 20, 1944). Imprisoned in 1943 by the Nazis for his efforts to evacuate Jews from Germany, he wrote that the "ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live. It is from this question, with its responsibility towards history, that fruitful solutions can come, even if for the time being they are very humiliating."²⁰

Bonhoeffer believed that when Jesus died for the guilt of others, this was a *responsibility* that he took on as an act of love—a responsibility that we are also obliged to take on in whatever form is appropriately required in the moment. We must each carry our own cross. “A love which left man alone in his guilt,” he wrote, “would not be love for the real man. As one who acts responsibly for the historical existence of men Jesus becomes guilty. . . . and for that reason every man who acts responsibly becomes guilty.” Consequently, Bonhoeffer insisted that his political action was not guilt-free and did not make him guilt-free. As early as 1932 he predicted in a sermon that the time will come “when the blood of martyrs will be demanded. But this blood, if we really have the courage and honor and loyalty to shed it, will not be so innocent and shining like that of the first witnesses [for the Christian faith]. Our blood will be overlaid with our own great guilt.” When the full range of Bonhoeffer’s activities was discovered by the Gestapo—he had garnered international support for a coup against Hitler—he was transferred from military prison first to Buchenwald concentration camp and then to Flossenbürg concentration camp, where he was hanged in 1945 two weeks before the U.S. army liberated the camp and four weeks before Germany surrendered.²¹

And then there is the renowned Persian and Muslim poet Saadi Shirazi, who in the 13th century witnessed what has been described as the Mongol holocaust that swept across Eastern Europe, Russia, and Persia and included the devastating Siege of Baghdad in 1258. Saadi traveled widely, observing the upheaval and anguish ordinary people suffered at the hands of their Mongol invaders. Though the story that he was enslaved by Christian Crusaders for seven years and was forced to do hard labor is probably not true,

it nevertheless conveys his very real familiarity with the hardships of life and the dark side of God. Speaking to God, this is how he expressed this familiarity:

If the sword of your anger puts me to death,
 My soul will find comfort in it.
 If you impose the cup of poison upon me,
 My spirit will drink the cup.
 When on the day of Resurrection
 I rise from the dust of my tomb,
 The perfume of your love
 Will still impregnate the garment of my soul.
 For even though you refused me your love,
 You have given me a *vision of You*
 Which has been the confidant of my hidden secrets.²²

What can we learn from figures like Akiva, Bonhoeffer, and Saadi? Although we hopefully will never have to suffer as they did, we could help assure that we won't by making certain that the world around us doesn't become like the Roman or Mongolian Empire or Third Reich or some other form of tyranny. We must stand against evil and stand against it *intelligently*. What is "intelligent" varies from situation to situation, but in every case the right action depends on our strength of character. Figures like Akiva, Bonhoeffer, and Saadi teach us that regardless of whether character is inborn or developed, or both, it is fortified by a religious attitude that sees evil against the larger backdrop of the mystical dimension of the human spirit. This reminds us of who we really are and helps to give us the courage and stamina to fight evil. Such an attitude depends less on our faith in this or that God than on the experientially grounded conviction that the Godhood in us and in our fellow beings is our true nature, even if at times it doesn't seem that way.

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professor at Vanier College, Montreal. Lecturing widely on psychology, religion, and contemporary culture, he is the author of Modern Mysticism, The Way of the Small, The Divine Mind, America's Identity Crisis (the latter two each winning a Nautilus Book Award), Far From This Land, and, most recently, Legacy of Darkness and Light: Our Cultural Icons and Their God Complex. His website is www.michaelgellert.com.

NOTES

¹ Lance Morrow, *Evil: An Investigation* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), pp. 55–56.

² “Yahweh,” *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, music by U2, lyrics by Bono with The Edge, Universal Music International BV, 2004.

³ Statistic of sixty million based on The National WW II Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana, <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/ww2-by-the-numbers/world-wide-deaths.html>. Robert McAfee Brown, introduction to Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God* (1979), trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Schocken, 1995), p. vii. The quotation in the story, “a rabbinic court of law to indict the Almighty,” taken from Irving Abrahamson, ed., *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel* (New York: Holocaust Publications, 1985), pp. 112–13. I am grateful to J. Marvin Spiegelman for introducing me to this story.

⁴ “By thirteen years”: qtd. in *The Living Talmud: The Wisdom of the Fathers [Pirkei Avot] and Its Classical Commentaries*, ed. and trans. Judah Goldin (New York: New American Library, 1957), p. 107. On the Kabbalistic idea of creation, see Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 217. On the Kabbalistic theory of evil, see Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, ed. Jonathan Chipman, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken, 1991), chap. 2, “Good and Evil in the Kabbalah,” pp. 56–87. “The whole Deity has in its innermost or beginning birth”: Jacob Boehme, *Aurora* (1656) (Kennewick, WA: Spirit’s Day Christian Publishing, 2012), chap. 13, v. 65, p. 135, <http://www.janelead.org/files/66046947.pdf> (accessed October 27, 2016). Boehme’s references to severity: ibid., chap. 8, v. 164, chap. 10, v. 93, chap. 13, v. 67, and chap. 24, v. 78. “[A]ngry, zealous or jealous God”: ibid., chap. 13, v. 75, p. 136. I inserted a comma after “angry,” capitalized “Mount,” and deitalicized “Sinai.”

⁵ St. Augustine, *The Enchiridion [or Handbook] on Faith, Hope and Love*, trans. Albert C. Outler, 1955, chap. 3, “God the Creator of All; and the Goodness of All Creation,” item 11, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/augustine_enchiridion_02_trans.htm (accessed October 27, 2016). Teilhard on evil’s appearance necessarily and abundantly in the course of evolution: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 313. “Evil is inevitable in the course of a creation”: Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “How I Believe,” in *Christianity and Evolution* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1974), p. 132.

⁶ Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona’s conclusion: Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, *Sod ‘Ets ha-Da’ath*, qtd. in Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 79–80. The passage in Lev. is 19:23–25, any translation. “Man’s two urges”: Scholem, ibid., pp. 69, 70–71.

⁷ The definition of *akusala-mula*: see Damien Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 8. Jesus, qtd. in Luke 23:34, KJV.

⁸ The term “original face” (sometimes translated as “true face”) appears most famously in “Think Neither Good Nor Evil,” case 23 of the koan collection *Mumonkan*, or “Gateless Gate.” This koan or riddle is used as a meditation exercise in Zen training: the student focuses on the question, “What was your original face before your parents were born?” See *Gateless Gate*, 2nd edition, trans. Zen Master Koun Yamada (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1979), pp. 111–17.

⁹ Shuhu Myochō (also known as Daito Kokushi), “Daito Kokushi’s Last Poem,” 13th–14th century, qtd. in Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, 2 vols., trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), 2 (Japan):190.

¹⁰ On the long and arduous process of *tikkun olam* and human advancement: see Allison P. Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont* (1614–1698) (Danvers, MA: Brill, 1999), p. 121. I have borrowed the author’s succinct description of this process almost verbatim.

¹¹ Roméo Dallaire, in *Ghosts of Rwanda*, dir. Greg Barker, a Frontline documentary co-produced with the BBC and Silverbridge Productions, PBS, 2004, available in print at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ghosts/interviews/dallaire.html> (accessed October 28, 2016). Morrow, *Evil: An Investigation*, p. 31. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (1951) (New York: Vintage International/Random House, 1991), p. 301. I am grateful to Wendy Goldman Rohm for sharing this quote with me.

¹² James Kirsch, “At Age Eighty-four,” in *A Modern Jew in Search of a Soul*, ed. J. Marvin Spiegelman and Abraham Jacobson (Phoenix, AZ: Falcon Press, 1986), p. 150. On whether such voices are God’s or paranormal manifestations of the psyche, or both, see my book, *Modern Mysticism: Jung, Zen and the Still Good Hand of God* (York Beach, ME: Nicolas-Hays, 1994) (originally published in 1991 by the same publisher under the title *The Still Good Hand of God: The Magic and Mystery of the Unconscious Mind*). “Difficult to answer”: C. G. Jung, *C. G. Jung Speaking: Interviews and Encounters*, eds. William McGuire and R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series 97, 1993), p. 428. (With Cordovero we observed a similar conviction in the value of direct knowledge vs. belief.) Elsewhere Jung explains the reason why the question of God’s existence is

difficult to answer: “It is only through the psyche that we can establish that God acts upon us, but we are unable to distinguish whether these actions emanate from God or from the unconscious. We cannot tell whether God and the unconscious are two different entities. Both are border-line concepts for transcendental contents” (C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job* [1952], in *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, vol. 11 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series 20, 1973], par. 757).

¹³ On God’s intervention in worldly affairs: there are similar explanations for why he did not or could not prevent the Holocaust. Philosopher Hans Jonas, for example, also posits a God whose ability to intervene in history is limited due to factors shaped by his mystical or core nature. However, he does not address why God intervened in history in biblical times but no longer does. See Hans Jonas, “The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice,” *Journal of Religion* 67, no. 1 (January 1987): 1–13. On Kirsch hearing the voice “again”: he was thirteen when he first heard it. It told him that he would follow in the steps of Abraham and Moses, which he evidently did in helping to establish a number of Jungian training institutes (Kirsch, “At Age Eighty-four,” p. 149).

¹⁴ On revelation becoming dogma or law in the founding of all religions: see Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York: Arkana/Penguin Books, 1994), chap. 4, “Organizational Dangers to Transcendent Experiences,” pp. 30–35. Nikolai Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R. M. French (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944, pp. 26, 92).

¹⁵ Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken, 1981), p. 84.

¹⁶ C. G. Jung, qtd. in Frances G. Wickes, *The Inner World of Choice* (Boston: Sigo Press, 1988), p. 8. This was evidently a personal communication from Jung to Wickes.

¹⁷ See Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: HarperPerennial/HarperCollinsPublishers, 1974). See also the excellent film *Experimenter*, dir. Michael Almereyda, 2015. Of interest too and along the same lines is psychologist Philip Zimbardo’s Stanford University prison experiment. See Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2008) and the film *The Stanford Prison Experiment*, dir. Kyle Patrick Alvarez, 2015.

The case of Adolf Eichmann is especially instructive on the matter of obedience. As Hannah Arendt observed at his trial, unlike Hitler, he was not driven by the seething hatred, rage, and lust for power that one might expect of a diabolical madman. Rather, he was merely a cog in the wheel of the Third Reich’s machinery of murder. The “banality of evil” is how she famously described the phlegmatic, casual way he implemented the operational details of the “final solution”—as if this were just another ordinary job. He “not only obeyed orders,” she writes, “he obeyed the law. . . . he had consoled himself with the thoughts that he no longer ‘was master of his own deeds,’ that he was unable ‘to change anything’” (Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* [New York: Viking Press, 1964], pp. 135, 136). Although Eichmann was an intelligent man who claimed to adhere to Kant’s moral philosophy (*ibid.*, pp. 135–37), in the inner place that is the seat of morality, there was no one home. In his confession, he wrote, “to sum it all up, I must say that I regret nothing. Adolf Hitler may have been wrong all down the line, but one thing is beyond dispute: the man was able to work his way up from lance corporal in the German army to *Führer* of a people of almost 80 million. I never met him personally, but his success alone proves to me that I should subordinate myself to this man. He was somehow so supremely capable that the people recognized him. And so with that justification I recognize him joyfully and I still defend him. . . . I must say truthfully that if we had killed all the 10 million Jews that Himmler’s statisticians originally listed in 1933, I would say, ‘Good, we have destroyed an enemy’” (Adolf Eichmann, “To Sum It All Up, I Regret Nothing: Eichmann’s Own Story, Part 2,” in *Life*, vol. 49, no. 23, December 5, 1960, section entitled “A Corporal Named Barth,” p. 161, <http://www.phdn.org/archives/einsatzgruppenarchives.com/trials/profiles/barth.html> [accessed October 28, 2016]; original article in *Life* at <https://books.google.com/books/about/LIFE.html?id=900EAAAAMBAJ> [accessed October 28, 2016]).

¹⁸ “If you bring forth what is within you”: *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. J. M. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 45:30–33, qtd. in Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books/ Random House, 1979), p.126. On Dostoevsky: I am referring to his famous comment, “If God does not exist, everything is permitted,” in *The Brothers Karamazov*, specifically, in part 4, bk. 11, chap. 4 (“A Hymn and a Secret”). There are various translations of this. Constance Garnett translates this as, “without God and immortal life? All things are lawful then” (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett [New York: Signet Classics, New American Library, 1957], p. 534). On Nietzsche as an “anti-anti-Semite”: I say he was “arguably” this because his attitude toward Jews and Judaism was complex. See Robert C. Holub, *Nietzsche’s Jewish Problem: Between Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016) and Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), pp. 338–40. Also noteworthy, Nietzsche, in his opposition to what he considered to be the slavish morality of Judaism and Christianity, in fact called himself an *immoralist*. For an interesting treatment of this, see Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁹ On Akiva as a Talmudic Father and Merkabah mystic: although known more for the former than the latter, he did, indeed, frequently engage in Merkabah practices. See David Ariel, *Kabbalah: The Mystic Quest in Judaism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 26–27. On Akiva’s death: see Talmud, Berakhot 61b.

²⁰ On Bonhoeffer going to Berlin in 1938: see “Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Bonhoeffer.html> (accessed October 28, 2016). “[U]ltimate question for a responsible man”: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), p. 7.

²¹ “A love which left man alone in his guilt”: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 6th edition, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 240–41. “[W]hen the blood of martyrs will be demanded”: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, qtd. in Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), p. 112. I have changed the British spelling of “honour” to the American spelling.

²² On Saadi Shirazi’s enslavement by Christian Crusaders: the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states that “this story, like many of his other ‘autobiographical’ anecdotes, is considered highly suspect” (<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Sadi> [accessed October 28, 2016]). “If the sword of your anger”: Saadi Shirazi, qtd. in Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the*

Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series 91, 1998), p. 283. (Originally published in 1969 by Princeton University Press under the title of *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*.) I am grateful to Sherri Mahdavi for introducing me to these verses by Saadi in her lecture, “An Exploration of Henry Corbin’s Vision of the Imaginal Realm of the Soul in Persian Sufism,” delivered in the Public Programs of the C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles, November 18, 2015.