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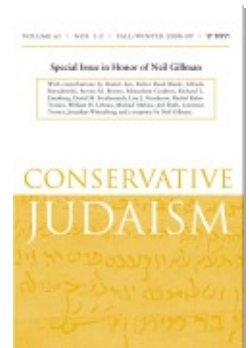
Kiddushin: A Service for Yom Hashoah

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Kiddushin: A Service for Yom Hashoah

DAVID M. FREIDENREICH



Introduction

The Theologian

In the four decades in which I have been engaged in teaching and writing on Jewish theology, the challenge to faith posed by apparently unjustifiable and irremediable human suffering has become increasingly central to my work. It has become the core issue, the issue that threatens to upset the entire system, and I increasingly despair of dealing with this issue in purely theological terms.

The Scholar

God-talk is figurative. We must speak of God, but we are aware, all along, that God is never literally what we think or say God is because we do not see God. We see what we want to see, what we are prepared to see, what we are educated to see. We choose the dots that we seek to connect, and then proceed to connect them. A myth is the connective tissue, the “in-between-ness” which lends coherence and meaning to our experience of the world.

The Theologian

The classical texts of Judaism are populated by a plethora of images of God, many positive, nurturing and comforting, but others quite disturbing.

The very richness of the imagery reminds us that no human being has a fix on God, because ultimately God is God and we are humans. That those responsible for editing the canon felt free to include all of these images permits us, their heirs, to select those images that speak to our own experience at any point in our lives. The failure of any one of these images to address our own needs does not, then, preclude the success of others. In a more extended sense, the unraveling of one corner of the Jewish religious myth does not forecast the undoing of the myth as a whole.

The Scholar

Myths are not to be contrasted with facts. Instead, myths are the means by which we identify the significant facts, thereby enabling the data of experience to form a coherent pattern and acquire meaning. Religious myths are existentially true; we make them true for us, they become true when we embrace them and live them. For me, the acid test is liturgy and ritual. Liturgy articulates the myth and ritual brings it vividly alive. My myth is true because I can daven from the traditional liturgy, and because Jewish ritual works brilliantly for me.

The Theologian

We cannot affirm any single, clear, theologically coherent justification for the suffering of the righteous. On this issue, I have arrived at a theological impasse and, since Judaism is much more than theology, I turn to ritual, liturgy and our tradition's embrace of community for a measure of solace.

* * *

The theologian and the scholar in this quasi-dialogue are, of course, the same person: Rabbi Neil Gillman, a teacher who has shaped the way that I and so many other contemporary Jews understand God.¹ Rabbi Gillman has taught us to recognize the function of "myth" in religious thought and to embrace the multiplicity of Jewish ideas about the divine-human relationship. Through his own struggles with the challenges posed by theodicy, he has inspired us to grapple with the religious implications of unjustifiable and irremediable human suffering ourselves. Gillman's writings highlight

the power of liturgy and ritual not only as a vehicle for the transmission of theology but also as a means of expressing our emotions when neatly packaged ideas about God fail us. “Kiddushin” draws on all of these insights, and it is an honor to be able to publish this Yom Hashoah service in a volume celebrating Rabbi Gillman.

The Jewish community has yet to create an enduring religious ritual for the commemoration of Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Rabbi Gillman suggests that this failure “reflects our continuing struggle to integrate [the Shoah] into our classic religious myth. We are still not clear, in our minds, what the events mean, and therefore, we have not as yet achieved a consensus regarding what the rituals should say.”² As Gillman often explains, facts are like the dots in a connect-the-dots picture: bits of raw data that have no meaning in and of themselves. Only by placing the facts of the Shoah within the framework of “the classic religious myth,” the tissue that connects the dots of our people’s collective experiences, can we render its events religiously meaningful. Our struggle to define the meaning of a religious Yom Hashoah ritual, I would suggest, stems from the fact that the Shoah, an historical instance of intensely unjustifiable and irremediable Jewish suffering, does not fit comfortably into the paradigms of theodicy that figure most prominently in our classic religious myth.

The dominant paradigmatic response to human suffering within biblical and rabbinic literature is to affirm divine justice by interpreting the suffering as deserved recompense for individual or collective transgressions. “Jerusalem has sinned,” declares the author of Lamentations in his account of its desolation (1:8); “Let us search and examine our ways, and return to God,” he exhorts his audience (3:40). The paradigm of divine justice underlies Tisha B’Av, the date on which we commemorate the destruction of the Jerusalem Temples, and underlies as well the liturgy associated with that destruction more broadly. “Because of our sins, we were exiled from our land,” we solemnly affirm in the traditional *Musaf* liturgy. By ascribing to the Jewish people responsibility for its own suffering, the paradigm of divine justice empowers us to reverse our own fortunes through lives of righteousness. This form of theodicy offers a valuable religious message, but it is deeply troubling—indeed, offensive—when applied to the Shoah. As the Book of Job demonstrates, the paradigm of divine justice cannot

account in any meaningful way for unjustifiable suffering. We cannot affirm that the Shoah is the fault of the Jewish People, that its victims deserved their fate; we know this to be false.

Another obvious yet troubling approach to theodicy which can be applied to the Shoah is the paradigm of divine redemption, expressed most powerfully in the Passover haggadah: God delivered us from the suffering of Egyptian bondage and brought us to the Promised Land. The Israelites, according to this paradigm, could not have received the Land without first enduring an extended period of slavery. In its contemporary analog, the establishment of the State of Israel constitutes a moment of redemption, and the Shoah its necessary antecedent. This interpretation of history, reinforced by the fact that Yom Hashoah falls one week after Passover and one week before Israel's Independence Day, implies that the Shoah is ultimately worthwhile, an essential precursor to a greater good. Here, too, an important element of the classic Jewish myth runs aground on the shoals of the Shoah: we cannot affirm that anything could be worth the suffering that the Nazis perpetrated.

The paradigms of divine redemption and divine justice are important and valuable aspects of our religious tradition. Application of either one to the Shoah, however, results in the shattering of traditional theology. Alternatively, and perhaps even more disturbingly, the application of these paradigms to the Shoah risks erasing contemporary history.

I imagine that the Israelites who spent their entire lives enslaved to Pharaoh would not have considered their plight worthwhile even if they knew that their descendents would ultimately inherit the Promised Land. Jews who suffered through the trauma of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem or the failed revolt against Rome would surely have objected to the assertions of later authorities that they deserved their fate. Nevertheless, ancient Jewish history is so shrouded in the mists of the mythic that the silent objection of our ancestors does not disturb us very much. In effect, we have chosen to forget the reality of the suffering which our ancestors endured. The Shoah is another matter. "Never forget" is our mantra, and rightly so. We feel an obligation to ensure that the face of Nazi brutality and the immensity of its historical reality remain crystal clear. It is for this reason that we mark Yom Hashoah with lectures by survivors, liberators,

historians, and others who can recount “what really happened.” We refuse to replace the experiences of those who lived through or died in the Shoah with religious lessons for future generations, to let myth ride roughshod over fact. The task of a religious Yom Hashoah ritual, then, is to integrate the Shoah into the Jewish myth while preserving and transmitting the real history of the Shoah.

“Kiddushin” responds to this challenge by exploring a specifically theological question: what does the relationship between God and Israel mean in the face of the unjustifiable and irremediable suffering which Jews endured during the Shoah? “Kiddushin” gives voice to several answers to this question, as expressed in a wide variety of classical and contemporary Jewish sources. These theological responses to the reality of human suffering may be less familiar than the paradigms of divine redemption and divine justice, but they are no less authentic components of the classic Jewish myth. My hope is that the encounter with these heartfelt yet often unsettling conceptions will help participants in “Kiddushin” reflect on their own answers to the questions of theodicy posed by the Shoah.

To state explicitly what is implicit in the preceding paragraph, “Kiddushin” is premised on the notion that our theology should be different on Yom Hashoah than it is on Passover, Tisha B’Av, or other occasions on our annual calendar of celebrations and commemorations. Rabbi Gillman has taught us that our conceptions of God are subjective and that they change in tandem with the transformations that we ourselves experience, individually and collectively.³ Personal events—the birth of a child, the death of a child—shape the way we understand God in different ways. The same holds for historical events: post-Shoah theology cannot be the same as post-Exodus theology or post-Destruction theology. These theologies may be contradictory, but they are not mutually exclusive; how could they be when we experience both births and deaths, when we remember the Exodus, the Destruction of the Temples, and the Shoah? If I am not the same person on Passover, on Yom Hashoah, and on Tisha B’Av—and the rituals associated with each holiday seek to ensure that I am not—then my theology should not be the same either.

* * *

The quasi-dialogue with which this article began serves two functions: it demonstrates the deep connection between the themes of “Kiddushin” and the issues that animate Rabbi Gillman’s thought while also exemplifying the editorial activity that underlies “Kiddushin” itself. Gillman addresses the issue of theodicy in a number of works; the juxtaposition of selected statements from these works encapsulates his overarching ideas on the subject while preserving the particular flavor of the original texts. The combination of these statements in a particular sequence also serves to emphasize elements of each statement that might not have drawn the same degree of attention in their original contexts. As a result of this editorial work, the reader encounters Rabbi Gillman’s ideas and words but does so within a framework that conveys a message which I, the editor, have selected. “Kiddushin” works in the same way: participants in this ritual encounter the ideas and words of a variety of Jewish thinkers, but the juxtaposition of these ideas and words adds further layers of meaning to each individual source. “Kiddushin” preserves its sources in their original form whenever possible, but the new context in which these words appear often demands slight adaptations to the original language and, on some occasions, free-form paraphrasing. I have taken the liberty of not employing ellipses and brackets to denote these changes; this is, after all, a work of liturgy rather than academic scholarship.

The practice of juxtaposing selections from authoritative texts in order to highlight a desired theme is commonplace in Jewish liturgy. Consider, for example, the introduction to *havdalah*:

Surely God is my salvation! I am confident and unafraid because
Adonai is my strength and might, and has become my salvation.

Joyfully shall you draw water from the fountains of salvation.
Salvation is Adonai’s; Your blessing rests upon Your people,
Selah!

Adonai Tzevaot is with us, the God of Jacob is our haven,
Selah!

Adonai Tzevaot, happy are those who have confidence in You.

Save, Adonai! The King will answer us on the day we call.
The Jews experienced light and happiness, joy and honor—so
may it be for us as well.
I lift the cup of salvation and invoke the name of Adonai.

This text consists almost entirely of biblical verses.⁴ Through the combination of these words, however, the author of the *havdalah* liturgy conveys a message that is more potent than that of his sources. The message, in short, is that confidence in God's salvation is a source of joy for Jews, individually and collectively. The potency of the liturgist's message is enhanced by the fact that he expresses it through verses of Scripture (compare the power of the liturgy to that of the summary statement) as well as the fact that he has selected mutually reinforcing statements on his desired theme ("salvation" appears six times, as do words associated with joy if one includes the exclamation "*Selah*"). Further enhancing the potency of this liturgy is the particular context in which we recite *havdalah*: at the conclusion of Shabbat, which the rabbinic tradition considers to be a moment of heightened desire for salvation, and over a cup of wine, symbol of joy. Moreover, the juxtapositions crafted by our liturgist add new meaning to the verses he employs. "The King will answer us on the day we call," a verse from Psalms, lends particular force to the verse from Esther about light and happiness, joy and honor. The liturgist's judicious addition of the words "so may it be for us as well"—the only words in this text that are not scriptural—transforms this biblical verse from the description of an historical moment into a timeless and timely cry for divine salvation and the joy it will bring.

Whereas *havdalah* expresses a single message about the relationship between God and Israel, "Kiddushin" expresses a variety of overlapping and even contradictory ideas about this relationship. This complexity is the inevitable corollary to Rabbi Gillman's observations that we cannot speak of God with certainty and that no single conception of God can adequately account for the suffering of the righteous. The inspiration underlying "Kiddushin's" method of expressing the polyphonic nature of Jewish theology derives not from Gillman's work but rather from Abraham Joshua Heschel's *Torah min ha-Shamayim*, which weaves dozens of statements from classical rabbinic texts into a pair of dialectically opposed conceptions of

the relationship between God and Israel.⁵ As Gillman observes, this approach to theology is neither neat nor systematic, but it is both authentic to the rabbinic tradition and to the not-so-neat nature of theology itself, especially with respect to the challenges posed by the Shoah.⁶

The theological import of its words notwithstanding, the power of *havdalah* derives in large measure from its ritual actions: lifting the cup, smelling the spices, experiencing the candle's flames, singing with arms around one another. The same can be said for "Kiddushin," which seeks to speak both to the mind and to the gut through words, actions, and music alike. (For technical reasons, *Conservative Judaism* cannot reproduce the musical notation associated with this service; however, that notation may be found at my Colby College website, <http://www.colby.edu/profile/dfreiden/>.) It draws its inspiration in this regard from David Roskies' memorial service, *Nightwords*.⁷ Rabbi Gillman embraces ritual as an alternative to theology when the latter proves incapable of addressing the challenges posed by the suffering of the righteous. I prefer to place both theology and ritual on a single spectrum of expressions of our relationship with God, the former more intellectual and the latter more visceral. Theology no less than ritual, I believe, can speak to us and speak for us both on sunny days and during stormy nights; it simply does so in different ways.

"Kiddushin," like *havdalah*, consists primarily of citations and adaptations from other sources. I use the standard editions of traditional Jewish sources and indicate the editions used for modern sources in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are original. In the notes, "adapted" indicates that I have made minor changes to the source so that it better fits its present context, while "based on" indicates looser borrowing.

"Kiddushin" is a thoroughly Jewish service, but it is also designed to speak to non-Jews, especially Christians. In fact, this service was originally written for and first performed at Union Theological Seminary in 2003. "Kiddushin" has been revised several times since then, and I am grateful to my colleagues, mentors, and students at Union, at JTS, and at Franklin & Marshall College for their feedback and insights. Daniel H. Bush and Troy Messenger provided invaluable assistance in preparing this service; Rabbi Gillman commented on multiple drafts. The music for "Kiddushin" was selected with the assistance of Cantor Kenneth Richmond. My marriage to

Sara Kahn Troster has profoundly shaped both my own relationship with God and the contours of this service.

I do not expect that “Kiddushin” will become the community-wide Yom Hashoah ritual that Rabbi Gillman anticipates will eventually coalesce. I hope, however, that this ritual’s balance of myth and fact will serve as a model for other commemorations of the Shoah and that its unflinching exploration of the relationship between God and Israel will serve to deepen that sacred bond.

NOTES

1. The statements above, in sequence, appear in “Coping with Chaos: Jewish Theological and Ritual Responses,” *Death, Bereavement, and Mourning*, ed. Samuel Heilman (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005), p. 135; “A New Aggadah for the Conservative Movement,” *Conservative Judaism* 58:2–3 (Winter/Spring 2006), pp. 39–40; “Coping with Chaos,” p. 144; “The Problematics of Myth,” *Sh’ma* 32 (January 2002), p. 587; “New Aggadah,” p. 40. I have adapted many of these statements to fit their current dialogical framework, as explained in the text below.

2. “Coping with Chaos,” p. 149; Gillman refers not only to Yom ha-Shoah rituals here but also to those associated with Israel’s Independence Day.

3. See especially Gillman, *The Way into Encountering God in Judaism* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2000), p. 110.

4. Is. 12:2–3; Ps. 3:9, 46:12, 84:13, 20:10; Esth. 8:16, with the addition of *keyn tihyeh lanu*, “so may it be for us as well”; Ps. 116:13.

5. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Torah min ha-Shamayim be-Aspaklariah shel ha-Dorot* (London/New York: Soncino/JTS, 1962–90); see also *Heavenly Torah as Refracted through the Generations*, trans. Gordon Tucker (New York: Continuum, 2005).

6. See Neil Gillman, “Epistemological Tensions in Heschel’s Thought,” *Conservative Judaism* 50:2–3 (Winter/Spring 1998), pp. 77–83.

7. *Nightwords: A Liturgy on the Holocaust*, compiled by David G. Roskies (New York: CLAL, 2000).

Kiddushin: A Service for Yom Hashoah

This service takes place around a black ḥuppah, under which is a table bearing six unlit Shabbat candles, an unlit memorial candle, and an empty wine glass resting on a piece of cloth.

The congregation, members of the House of Israel in body or in spirit, gather around the ḥuppah, either standing or seated. (For services in which the congregation is seated, directions for when to rise are indicated.)

Six “Readers,” pre-assigned, stand at the inside of the ring of congregational witnesses around the ḥuppah. The musicians stand outside the ring and wander around and through the congregation during the service.

Introduction

Read aloud by one or more congregational leaders:

Yom Hashoah is the day set aside in memory of the Shoah, the Holocaust of 1933–1945, in which the Nazis and their collaborators murdered six million Jews and five million other civilians.

If a bride died between her betrothal and her marriage, the custom among some German and Eastern European Jews was to erect in the cemetery a candle-lit *schwartzte ḥuppah*, a black wedding canopy. The groom would stand beneath the ḥuppah and perform the act of *Kiddushin*. We stand before such a ḥuppah today.

Kiddushin, originally referring to one of the components of the traditional Jewish wedding, is also the title of the entire wedding ceremony, on which this service is based. In this service, however, the partners in marriage are God and the People of Israel.

This service is comprised of numerous voices from within the Jewish community. Some are old, some are new. Some were first raised in response to the Shoah, some were not. Some are theologically conservative, some are

radical. All, however, are authentically Jewish, and all respond with heart-wrenching honesty to the relationship between God and the People of Israel. On this day when we are called to re-examine that relationship in the face of the Shoah, we must open our ears to all of these voices and reflect on how they speak to each of us.

Some of the sentiments expressed in this service may be foreign to our own experiences or our own understandings of God. We, as witnesses to—and participants in—this ceremony of *Kiddushin*, are called to engage many different understandings of the relationship between God and Israel over the course of this service. Please offer your voice to these words, even if you do not share their sentiments. But if ever you feel that you simply cannot utter a statement included in this service, please reflect on its words in silence instead.

The service will begin in a few moments.

The musicians play the Modzhitzer wedding march and sing its melody as a niggun; the congregation is invited to join in.

Betrothal

The congregation rises.

First Reader

Ve-erastikh li l'olam.

Ve-erastikh li b'tzedek uvmishpat uvhesed uvrahamim.

Ve-erastikh li b'emunah v'yadat et Adonai.

Music A niggun is a type of song without words popular among the hasidic Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. This melody, composed by the first Modzhitzer Rebbe, Israel Taub (d. 1920), is sung by his followers as the groom and bride approach the huppah.

First Reader Hosea 2:21–22. These verses are traditionally recited while wrapping tefillin at the start of the morning prayers.

— Kiddushin: A Service for Yom Hashoah —

I will betroth you to me forever.

I will betroth you to me with righteousness and with justice,
with love and with compassion.

I will betroth you to me with faithfulness, and you will know
God.

All

We betroth ourselves to you forever.

We betroth ourselves to you with righteousness and with justice,
with love and with compassion.

We betroth ourselves to you with faithfulness, that we might
know you.

Six Shabbat candles are lit beneath the ḥuppah (by the six readers).

The musicians play and sing “Od yishama.” As it concludes, however, the melody becomes that of “El malei raḥamim.”

Od yishama be-arei Yehudah uveḥutzot Yerushalayim
Kol sasson vekol simḥah, kol ḥatan vekol kallah.

(May the sound of joy and happiness, the sound of bride and groom, be heard again in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem.)

Kiddushin

Second Reader

Now—if you listen to my voice and observe my covenant, you
will be for me a treasure among all the nations.

Music Jeremiah 33:10–11, adapted. “Od yishama” is traditionally sung at betrothals and weddings. “El malei raḥamim” is a memorial prayer.

Kiddushin, “sanctification,” is the first component of a traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. Betrothal occurs prior to the date of the wedding.

Second Reader Exodus 19:5–6; Leviticus 19:2.

Truly, the whole earth is mine, but you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, *goy kadosh*.
You shall be holy, *kadosh*, for I, Adonai your God, am *kadosh*.

Third Reader

We shall make your name *kadosh* in the world,
just as the angels in heaven declare your name to be *kadosh*:

All

Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh
Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of
God's glory.

Third Reader

Yitgadal veyitkadesh sh'mei rabba
May God's great name be made glorious and *kadosh*
in the world God created, for such is the divine will.
May God's kingdom be established in our lifetime.

First Reader (chanting)

*El malei raḥamim, shokhen bamromim,
hamtzey menuḥah nekhonah taḥat kanfey hashkkinah
b'ma-alot kedoshim utehorim kezohar harakia mazhirim
le-nishmot kol aḥeynu b'nai yisrael shenitbeḥu bashoah,
anashim nashim vataf sheneḥneku veshenisrefu veshenehergu,
shemasru et nafsham al kiddush hashem . . .*

Third Reader The introduction to the Kedushah, a prayer recited daily in communal worship.

All Isaiah 6:3, a centerpiece of the Kedushah.

Third Reader The Kaddish, recited repeatedly in the daily liturgy, frequently by mourners.

First and Fourth Readers "El malei raḥamim," the traditional memorial prayer, as recited for those who perished during the Shoah.

— Kiddushin: A Service for Yom Hashoah —

Fourth Reader (simultaneously)

God, full of mercy, dwelling on high,
grant perfect rest under the shelter of your Presence
among the *kedoshim*, the holy and the pure,
to the souls of our brothers and sisters in the House of Israel
slaughtered in the Shoah,
men, women, and children who were suffocated and burned and
killed,
who gave their lives *al kiddush hashem*, for the sanctification of
Your name.

Fifth Reader

Who will make my head into water and my eyes a source of tears,
that I may cry day and night over the corpses of my people?

Sixth Reader

Do you still hold on to your innocence? Curse God and die!

All

We have received the good from God—should we not accept the
bad?
God has given and God has taken away. May the divine name
be blessed.

Third Reader

I will praise God all my life, for God sets prisoners free and loves
the righteous, healing their broken hearts, binding their wounds.
God shall reign forever.

Fifth Reader Jeremiah 8:23.

Sixth Reader Job 2:9.

All Job 2:10, 1:21.

Third Reader Psalm 146:2, 7–8; 147:3; 146:10; adapted. These verses are recited in the daily liturgy.

Second Reader

Blessed are you, God, who makes Israel holy by means of
huppah and Kiddushin.

The musicians reprise the melody for “El malei raḥamim.”

The congregation may be seated.

Memorial Candles

Fourth Reader

El malei raḥamim . . .

“God Full of Mercy,” the prayer for the dead.

If God were not full of mercy,

mercy would have been in the world, not just in God.

I, who plucked the flowers in the hills

and looked down into all the valleys,

I, who brought corpses down from the mountains

can tell you the world is empty of mercy.

I know that if not for the God full of mercy,

there would be mercy in the world,

not just in God.

Sixth Reader

O God of Mercy,

for the time being

choose another people.

Second Reader The blessing over Kiddushin, which concludes the first portion of the wedding ceremony.

Memorial candles are traditionally lit on the anniversary of a loved one’s death. Some light six memorial candles on Yom Hashoah in memory of the six million Jews killed by the Nazis.

Fourth Reader Yehuda Amichai (d. 2000), “El malei raḥamim.”

Sixth Reader, All Kadia Molodowsky (d. 1975), “God of mercy,” trans. David Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*.

— Kiddushin: A Service for Yom Hashoah —

All

We are tired of death, tired of corpses,
we have no more prayers.

Sixth Reader

For the time being,
choose another people.
We have run out of blood
for victims,
our houses have been turned into desert,
the earth lacks space for tombstones,
there are no more lamentations
nor songs of woe
in the ancient texts.

Third Reader

God, merciful and compassionate, is this what you meant when you said,
“Through those who are close to me I shall be made holy”?

All

Because of you we are murdered all day—we are like lambs to the slaughter.

Third Reader

Who can live when God has thus decreed it? We have been taught that you
came running to greet us at Mount Sinai like a groom toward his bride, and
that the other nations had refused to accept your marriage contract, your

Third Reader “God, merciful . . .”: Exodus 34:6; this verse appears frequently in Jewish penitential liturgies and prayers for divine assistance. “Through those . . .”: Leviticus 10:3; this verse follows upon the death of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu.

All Psalm 44:23.

Third Reader “Who can live . . .”: Numbers 24:23. “We have been taught . . .”: Based on Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael (3rd century), Ba-Hodesh 3 and 5; both interpretations are based on the same clause of Deuteronomy 33:2.

Torah. Had we known then what we know now, perhaps we too should have refused your offer.

The first candle is extinguished (by the Third Reader).

The musicians play and sing “Et dodim kalah.”

Et dodim kalah, bo-i el gani (x2)
Pareḥah hagefen, hanetzu rimonim (x2)

*(The time for marriage is ripe, come to my garden.
The vines have flowered, pomegranates have appeared.)*

First Reader

For the celebration of my beloved, who is pure and unmatched,
I shall sing sweetly this *ketubbah*, this marriage contract;
Through its merit may redemption come.
On the sixth day of Sivan, at the mountain of Sinai,
The groom, Lord of lords, the One and only,
Said to his beloved: Be mine for countless days, and I shall be
for you a Redeemer.
Be my wife, according to the law of Moses and Israel,
And I shall honor and support you, protect you as well.
And the bride accepted and became his wife.
I call upon the faithful witnesses, the heavens and the earth:

All

Let the groom rejoice with the bride!
Happy is the people for whom it is so!

Music A wedding melody, whose words are ascribed to the Yemenite poet Shalom Shabazi (d. 1720). This song was popular among the Jews of the Balkans, and became a part of the klezmer repertoire as well.

First Reader, All Based on “Yarad dodi,” a poetic *ketubbah* by Israel Najara (d. 1625) for Shavuot, the Festival of the Giving of the Torah. This poem is recited in the Sephardic liturgy for that holiday. The conclusion of this poem is Psalm 144:15, recited as part of the Ashrey prayer three times daily.

— Kiddushin: A Service for Yom Hashoah —

First Reader

Ashrey ha-am shekakha lo, ashrey ha-am she-Adonai elohav.

Happy is the people whose God is Adonai.

Fifth Reader

“Every day I will bless you, and will praise your name forever.” In the death camps, some would rise early to say the morning prayers, despite the death penalty imposed for such actions. In barracks where inmates managed to find, save, or smuggle in a set of tefillin, lines would form at four or even three o’clock in the morning to put them on.

All

I will betroth you to me forever.

I will betroth you to me with righteousness and with justice,
with love and with compassion.

Second Reader

We are taught that Israel says to God, “Set me as the seal upon your heart, as the seal upon your arm, just as we do with our tefillin to show our love for you, for love is as strong as death. God, act on your love for us, just as we act on our love for you. Our love is as strong as death, for the nations kill us with all manners of cruel deaths. Yet we suffer it all out of our love for you.”

Fifth Reader Based on Yaffa Eliach, “Popular Jewish religious responses during the Holocaust and its aftermath,” in Shalom Carmy, ed., Jewish Perspectives on the Experience of Suffering. “Every day . . .”: Psalm 145:2, recited as part of the Ashrey prayer.

All Hosea 2:21, traditionally recited while putting on tefillin.

Second Reader The commentary of Joseph ibn Yahya (d. 1534) on Song of Songs 8:6, adapted; this commentary was written in the aftermath of the fifteenth-century Inquisitions and the expulsions from Spain and Portugal.

Fourth Reader

Three days after I visited Auschwitz, I was asked, “Do you love God?” I replied, “I should. We are enjoined to love God ‘with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might,’ but I cannot. I am aware of God’s holiness. I am struck with wonder and terror before God’s Nothingness, but I cannot love God. I am affrighted before God. Perhaps, in the end, all I have is silence.”

The second candle is extinguished (by the Fourth Reader).

The musicians play and sing “Di Sapozhkelekh.”

Farkoyfn di sapozhkelekh
Un forn oyf di droshkelekh,
Abi mit dir in eynem tsu zayn.
Oy, ikh on dir un du on mir
Vi a klyamke on a tir,
Ketsele, feygele mayn.
Ta ra ra ray . . .

*(I'll sell my boots and ride on wagons, just so I can be together
with you.
Oh, I without you and you without me are like a doorknob
without a door.
My kitten, my little bird.)*

Fifth Reader

The wheels hurry onward.
What do they carry?
They carry a cartload

Fourth Reader Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism, adapted.*

Music A Yiddish folksong, transcribed, transliterated, and translated in *Songs of Generations: New Pearls of Yiddish Song, compiled by Eleanor Gordon Mlotek and Joseph Mlotek.*

Fifth Reader, All Abraham Sutzkever, “A cartload of shoes,” *written in the Vilna ghetto, 1943. In David Roskies, Nightwords: A Liturgy of the Holocaust.*

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of shivering shoes.
The wagon like a wedding canopy
in the evening light;
the shoes—clustered
like people in a dance.

All

A wedding? A holiday?
Has someone blinded my eyes?
The shoes—I seem
to recognize them.

Fifth Reader

I should not ask,
but something tears at my tongue:
Shoes, tell me the truth,
where are they, the feet?
The feet from those boots
with buttons like dew—
and here, where is the body?
and there, where is the bride?

All

Why do you hide your face, God?
Why do you forget our suffering and distress?

Second Reader

Now the Israelite who is tormented by his afflictions thinks that he alone suffers, as if all his personal afflictions and those of all Israel do not affect

All Psalm 44:25.

Second Reader Kalonymus Shapiro, sermon delivered in the Warsaw ghetto, Feb. 14, 1942, trans. David Roskies, Literature of Destruction. “In all their troubles . . .”: Isaiah 63:9. “When a person suffers . . .”: Babylonian Talmud (6th century) Sanhedrin 46a.

God above, heaven forbid. Scripture states, however, “In all their troubles, God was troubled,” and the Talmud states, “When a person suffers, what does the Holy One say? ‘My head is too heavy for me, my arm is too heavy for me.’”

Our sacred literature tells us that when an Israelite is afflicted, God suffers, as it were, much more than the person does. Since the divine is not subject to any limitation, God’s suffering from Israel’s troubles is also boundless. It is not merely that it would be impossible for a person to endure the experience of such great suffering, but even to conceive of God’s suffering is impossible.

Now, the suffering is so great that the world cannot contain it; it is beyond conception. In this state, God’s suffering is, as it were, hidden from the angels and from all the world.

First Reader

Mi khamokha ba-elim Adonai?

Mi khamokha ba-ilmim Adonai?

All

Who, God, is like you among the gods?

Who, God, is like you among the mute?

You see the suffering of your children and remain silent!

Second Reader

As for me, my prayer is still to you, God.

In your abundant and eternal love, answer me with your redemption!

The third candle is extinguished (by the Second Reader).

The musicians reprise the Modzhitzer wedding march.

First Reader, All Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael (3rd century), Shirta 8, citing Exodus 15:11.

Second Reader Psalm 69:14.

First Reader

We have been taught a parable: A king took a woman and wrote a magnificent *ketubbah* for her. Then he left her to travel across the sea and was gone for many years. The woman's neighbors taunted her: "Your husband will not return to you!" She would sob and sigh, but then she would sit beneath her *huppah*, read her *ketubbah*, and be comforted. For it says, "I shall return to you, I shall maintain my covenant with you, I shall be ever-present with you."

Third Reader

Remember, God, what has befallen us! We have become orphans, fatherless.

Fifth Reader

The time has come for you to choose:
Be our Father, our God, for whom we have always yearned,
Or declare that we are free from the covenant of Sinai, that we
have been the faithful ones.

All

My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from delivering me, and from my anguished
roaring?

First Reader Lamentations Rabbah 3.7 (ca. 6th century), citing selections from *Leviticus* 26:9–12.

Third Reader Lamentations 5:1, 3.

Fifth Reader Uri Zvi Greenberg (d. 1981), "Beketz haderakhim omed Rabbi Levi Yitzhak mi-Berdichev vedoresh teshuvat ram," *Rehovot Hanahar*.

All Psalm 22:2.

Fourth Reader

Avinu malkenu, “Our Father, Our King.” What does a father do
when his children are orphans and he
is still alive? What will a father do
when his children have died and he becomes
a bereaved father for all eternity? Cry
and not cry, not forget and not remember.

Sixth Reader

Avinu Malkenu, “Our Father, Our King,” what does a child do
when a father is abusive? Cry
and accuse, not forget and not accept.
God, we call you our Father, our King, and our Lover, yet we
have been abused in your presence.
Avinu Malkenu, you have sinned before us.
Avinu Malkenu, ask forgiveness for your purposeful sins.
Avinu Malkenu, remember the merit of our ancestors and our
good deeds, and return to us.

Third Reader

God, I shouted during the day,
At night I was against you.
Let my prayer come before you,
Bend your ear to my cry.

Fourth Reader Yehuda Amichai (d. 2000), “Gods change, prayers are here to stay,” trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, *Open Closed Open*.

Sixth Reader Based on David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*. “*Avinu Malkenu, You have sinned . . .*” Blumenthal’s inversion of a traditional penitential prayer.

Third Reader Psalm 88:2–3.

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All

Why do you reject us, God?
Why do you hide your face from us?

Sixth Reader

All our lives we have been afflicted and dying,
We have borne your terrors and we are empty.

The fourth candle is extinguished (by the sixth reader).

The musicians play and sing the Lubavitch melody for Avinu Malkenu.

Avinu malkenu, avinu ata.
Avinu malkenu, eyn lanu melekh ella ata.

*(Our Father, our King, you are our father.
Our Father, our King, we have no King but you.)*

Fifth Reader

One day in Auschwitz, when we came back from work, we saw three gallows rearing up in the assembly place, three black crows. Three victims in chains—and one of them, a young boy, a sad-eyed angel. The three victims mounted together onto the chairs. The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses.

“Long live liberty!” cried the two adults. But the child was silent.

“Where is God? Where is he?” someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over. Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues were swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was alive . . .

All, Sixth Reader Psalm 88:15–16.

Music This setting of a line from the Avinu Malkenu prayer is attributed to the founder of Habad hasidism, Shneur Zalman of Lyady (d. 1812).

Fifth Reader Elie Wiesel, Night (1958), trans. Stella Rodway, adapted.

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking: “Where is God now?”

And I heard a voice within me answer him: “Where is he? Here he is—he is hanging there on this gallows . . .”

Second Reader

Bekhol dor vador omdim alenu lekhalotenu, veba-Kadosh Barukh Hu matzilenu mi-yadam. In every generation, enemies rise against us to annihilate us, but the Holy One rescues us from their clutches.

Third Reader

We live in the time of the death of God. The thread uniting God and humanity, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?

Fourth Reader

After Auschwitz, no theology:
the numbers on the forearms
of the inmates of extermination
are the telephone numbers of God,

Second Reader An affirmation recited during the Passover seder.

Third Reader Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, adapted.

Fourth Reader, Sixth Reader, All, First Reader Yehuda Amichai (d. 2000), “Gods change, prayers are here to stay,” *Open Closed Open*, trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld. “Who has no likeness . . .”: a play on Moses Maimonides’ description of God’s incorporeality, as expressed in the liturgical poem Yigdal.

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numbers that do not answer
and now are disconnected, one by one.

Sixth Reader

After Auschwitz, a new theology:
the Jews who died in the Shoah
have now come to be like their God,
who has no likeness of a body and has no body.

All

They have no likeness of a body and they have no body.

First Reader

*She-eyn lo demut haguf ve-eyn lo guf,
Eyn lahem demut haguf ve-eyn lahem guf.*

Fifth Reader

God, Creator of humanity in the divine image and likeness, is this what you meant when you said, “Be holy, *kadosh*, for I, Adonai your God, am *kadosh*”? That not only individuals, but entire communities should give their lives *al kiddush hashem*, for the sanctification of your name? They were beloved and beautiful in their lives, and in their deaths would not separate from you. But have they become united with you in eternal life, or have you become united with them in their eternal deaths?

The fifth candle is extinguished (by the Fifth Reader).

The musicians reprise “El malei raḥamim.”

Fifth Reader “God, Creator . . .”: based on Genesis 1:26–27. “Be holy . . .”: Leviticus 19:2. “They were beloved . . .”: taken from Av Haraḥamim, a memorial prayer for martyrs, composed in the aftermath of the Crusade massacres of 1096 and recited during the Shabbat liturgy.

Third Reader

I feel like saying a prayer—but to whom?
He who once used to comfort me won't hear it now.
So to whom shall I pray?
The prayer holds me like a vise.
Yet I must say a prayer. Someone very near,
within me, tortured, demands the prayer.
Senseless, I begin to babble
until dawn.

All

God is near to all those who call. God fulfills the desires of the faithful,
hearing their prayers. God saves.

Fourth Reader

I will help you, O God, that you do not forsake me, but right from the start
I can vouch for nothing. Only this one thing becomes more and more clear
to me: that you cannot help us, but that we must help you, and in so doing
we ultimately help ourselves. That is the only thing that matters: to save in
us, O God, a piece of yourself.

First Reader

I shall dwell amidst the Children of Israel, and I shall be their
God.

Third Reader Abraham Sutzkever, "I feel like saying a prayer," written in the
Vilna ghetto, 1942, trans. Seymour Mayne, *Burnt Pearls: Ghetto Poems of Abra-*
ham Sutzkever.

All Psalm 145:18–19, adapted. This passage is part of the Ashrey prayer.

Fourth Reader Etty Hillesum (d. 1943 in Auschwitz), *An Interrupted Life*, quoted
by Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality.*

First Reader Exodus 29:45; 1 Kings 6:13; Psalm 91:15, adapted.

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I shall dwell amidst the Children of Israel, and I will never abandon my people, Israel.

They will call upon me and I will answer them.

I am with them in trouble, I will save them and glorify them.

Second Reader

How can we lift ourselves up at least a little bit in the face of the terrifying reports, both old and new, which tear us to pieces and crush our hearts? With the knowledge that we are not alone in our sufferings, but that God, may God be blessed, endures with us: “I am with them in trouble.” But more: there are some sufferings that we suffer on our own account, in which God suffers along with us. There are, however, some sufferings that we suffer along with God, as it were. These are the sufferings of *kiddush hashem*.

Third Reader

If it were not written in Scripture, one could not say it, but we have been taught that everywhere Israel has been exiled, the Divine Presence was exiled with us. We were exiled to Egypt and God was with us, as it says, “Thus said God: I was exiled with your father’s house when they were in Egypt”; we were exiled to Babylon and God was with us, as it says, “For your sakes, I was sent to Babylon . . .”

Fifth Reader

We were sent to the ghettos, to the death camps . . .

Second Reader Kalonymus Shapiro, sermon delivered in the Warsaw ghetto, July 11, 1942, trans. David Roskies, Literature of Destruction.

Third Reader Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael (3rd century), Pisha 14, and Babylonian Talmud (6th century), Megillah 29a, citing (in adapted form) 1 Samuel 2:27 and Isaiah 43:14.

Sixth Reader

The first to be rounded up were the beggars. All the unemployed and the homeless were gathered up off the streets. They were loaded into wagons on the first morning of the Deportation and driven through the town. They cried bitterly and stretched their hands out or wrung them in despair; or covered their faces. The youngest of them cried, *Mame, mame!* And indeed, there were women to be seen running along both sides of the wagons, their headshawls slipping from their heads as they stretched their hands out toward their children.

Grandfathers and grandmothers with an abundance of grandchildren. With hands like withered leaves; their heads white. Who already trembled at the latter end of their days. They were not destined simply to decline wearily into the ocean's waves. No. It was decreed that before they died they would get to see the destruction of all that they had begotten.

And where are the Jewish young men? World-improvers and flag-bearers of every revolution? Youths whose passions made them ready to fill the prison cells of all the world. And where are the other youths, simpler than they? Young men with ebullient spirits, their heads lowered like those of bulls against the decrees spoken against our people?

Little ones, and those smaller still who not long ago were to be seen in the arms of their mothers, smiling at a bird or at a sunbeam. Who still played patty cake or cried "giddyup," waving their tiny hands in the air. O, unrecognizable world in which these children and their mothers are gone. "Giddyup."

No. No. I can't stop. Each day I recall another one of those who are gone. And when I come to the end of the list, I start over again from the beginning, and always in pain. Each of them hurts me individually, the way one feels pain when parts of the body have been surgically removed. When the nerves surviving in the nervous system signal the presence of every finger on amputated hands or feet.

Sixth Reader Rachel Auerbach (d. 1976), "Yizkor 1943," trans. David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*, adapted.

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Yizkor elohim es nishmas avi mori ve-imi morasi . . . Remember, God, the souls of those who passed from this world horribly, dying strange deaths before their time. Yizkor. Remember. At the end of the prayer in which everyone inserts the names of members of his family, there is a passage recited for those who have no one to remember them and who, at various times, have died violent deaths because they were Jews. And it is these people who are now in the majority.

Third Reader

. . . And when Israel will eventually be redeemed, God will be with us, as it says, “God will return with those among you who return.”

First Reader

The relationship of God and Israel, we have been taught, is like that of a prince and a princess engaged to be married. The princess anxiously awaits her happiness, the prince anxiously awaits his happiness, but what causes the delay? The day of the wedding has not yet arrived. So too, God anxiously awaits Israel’s salvation, while Israel waits for God’s salvation, but what causes the delay? The day of redemption has not yet arrived.

All

It will be too late for six million of God’s beloved, members of the House of Israel.

The memorial candle is lit and the sixth candle is extinguished (by the First Reader).

The musicians reprise “Od yishama” (slowly and mournfully).

Third Reader Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael (3rd century), Pisha 14, and Babylonian Talmud (6th century), Megillah 29a, citing (in adapted form) Deuteronomy 30:3.

First Reader Midrash Tehillim 14.6 (medieval), adapted.

Sheva Berakhot

First Reader

This was the custom among some Jews: When a bride died before her wedding, the community would gather in the graveyard around a black ḥuppah and the groom would perform the act of *Kiddushin*. Now, mourning the deaths of millions of Jews, members of the People of Israel whom God betrothed at Sinai, we have gathered around such a ḥuppah. Some may wish to recite *Sheva Berakhot*.

A Member of the Congregation: First Blessing

God, you formed light and created darkness, you made peace and created evil. Blessed are you, God, who created everything to reflect God's glory.

A Member of the Congregation: Second Blessing

God, you have seen how great the wickedness of humanity can be, how utterly evil the fashionings of human thought, yet you restrain yourself from striking the world with your anger or flooding it with your tears. Blessed are you, God, who fashioned humanity.

A Member of the Congregation: Third Blessing

God, you formed humanity in your image, endowed with the power of dominion over others and the power to choose life and goodness, or death and wickedness. Blessed are you, God, who fashioned humanity.

Sheva Berakhot, the seven blessings that constitute the final component of a Jewish wedding ceremony. The blessings that follow are all based on the traditional sheva berakhot.

First Blessing "You formed light . . .": Isaiah 45:7; a modified form of this verse, replacing "evil" with "everything," is recited as a blessing in the daily liturgy.

Second Blessing "You have seen . . .": Genesis 6:5, adapted. "You restrain Yourself . . .": based on Genesis 8:21, 9:11.

Third Blessing "You formed . . .": based on Genesis 1:27 as interpreted by Saadia Gaon (d. 942). "Choose life . . .": Deuteronomy 30:15.

A Member of the Congregation: Fourth Blessing

God, you hear the wailing cries of Rachel, weeping over her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are no more. You hear the cries of countless Rachels crying over millions of children who are no more—is there hope for their descendants? Comfort them, God, among the mourners of Zion. Blessed are you, God, who enables the mourners of Zion to find happiness in their children.

A Member of the Congregation: Fifth Blessing

God, you have caused your beloved friends to rejoice in all of the good that you have given them, yet you are also the creator of evil. We lift up ourselves to you, God—cause us to rejoice as well. And may you, God, be glorified in this world and rejoice in your creations. Blessed are you, God, who causes the bride and the groom to rejoice.

A Member of the Congregation: Sixth Blessing

God, you created rejoicing and happiness, merriment and song, love and fellowship. You created sorrow and sadness, mourning and tears, death and destruction. Our relationship with you has not been one of constant joy, yet we still hope that you will bring a day when that relationship is perfected, when the only sound we hear is the sound of rejoicing and happiness, the voice of the bride and the voice of the groom, the voice crying out, “Praise be to God, for God is good and God’s graciousness is everlasting!” Blessed are you, God, who causes the bride to rejoice with the groom.

Fourth Blessing “You hear . . .”: Jeremiah 31:14, adapted. “Is there hope . . .”: based on Jeremiah 31:16. “Comfort them . . .”: the traditional words of comfort offered to Jewish mourners.

Fifth Blessing “You have caused . . .”: based on Deuteronomy 26:11. “We lift up . . .”: Psalm 86:4, adapted. “May You . . .”: Psalm 104:31, adapted.

Sixth Blessing “The sound of rejoicing . . .”: Jeremiah 33:11.

Third Reader

God, you created the fruit of the vine to make the human heart happy, to sanctify those days that are holy between us, to celebrate the wedding of bride and groom. Yet on this day, dedicated to the memory of those murdered in the Shoah, we cannot celebrate or rejoice. To their blood, with which they sanctified their relationship with you, we add our tears. That must suffice.

The wine glass is wrapped in cloth and broken (by the Third Reader).

Silence.

Third Reader “You created . . .”: Psalm 104:15.

Breaking of glass is traditional at the conclusion of a Jewish wedding ceremony. This custom is commonly understood to remind participants in the celebration that the world remains unredeemed. On November 9, 1938, the Nazis and their supporters systematically ransacked Jewish homes, shops, and synagogues in a night of terror known as Kristallnacht, “the night of broken glass.”

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