

RESISTANCE AS HAPPINESS<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Human beings have been asking the question, “What is happiness” since time immemorial. Is happiness the gratification of basic human needs such as food, shelter, safety, and reproduction? Is happiness the satisfaction of basic social and intellectual needs such as community, education, peace, and justice? Is happiness the fulfillment of “higher” human needs such as meaning, virtue, inner peace, and reason?

The answer of Jewish tradition is most clearly stated by our late and revered teacher, Abraham Joshua Heschel:

[T]he essence of religion does not lie in the satisfaction of a human need. As long as humanity sees religion as a source of satisfaction for one’s own needs, it is not God whom one serves but one’s own self. . . . It is not *utility* that we seek in religion but *eternity*. The criterion of religion is not in its being in agreement with our *common sense* but in its being compatible with our *sense of the ineffable*. . . . Elimination of the self is no virtue. To give up life or the right to satisfaction is not a moral requirement. If self-effacement were virtuous in itself, suicide would be the climax of moral living. . . . In fact, only one who truly understands the justice of one’s own rights is capable of rendering justice to the rights of others.<sup>2</sup>

It is upon this understanding of happiness as a struggle to make life compatible with the Ineffable that I wish to focus this essay. To be happy is to struggle with oneself, with society, and even with God to make life more holy. To be happy is to challenge God, the world, and one’s inner

being to live up to the covenant of justice and love for all beings. To put it another way: Happiness is resistance. Resistance to evil is happiness.

To be sure, we all stumble as we struggle, and we fail as we strive. Achieving happiness through moral effort cannot be accomplished easily or without failure. But the path is one we must walk. As Rabbi Tarfon says, "It is not for you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it."<sup>3</sup>

#### **Resistance within society<sup>4</sup>**

One of the first conferences that the United States Holocaust Memorial Council held was the one at which, at the behest of Elie Wiesel, the Council brought together rescuers of Jews. Many members of the Council, especially the Jews, bent over backwards to acknowledge the courage, indeed the heroism, of these people. But they would have none of it. Instead we heard: "I was not a hero." "I did nothing extraordinary?" "I was just doing what was expected of me." "I was just doing the normal human thing." At first, I thought these people were just being modest but then I realized that they really meant it. They did not see themselves as heroes, nor as exceptional people. Rather, they saw themselves as ordinary people who were just responding to what they knew was being demanded of them by their church, by their pastor, by their resistance leaders, by their parents, or by their conscience. They were being normal.<sup>5</sup>

This led to one of the strangest outcomes of the study of the shoah: the observation that, when the perpetrators are asked "why did you do what you did," they always respond "I did nothing special; I was just doing what was expected of me" (a variant of "I was just following orders") and, when rescuers are asked, "why did you do what you did," they, too, always respond "I did nothing special; I was just doing what was expected of me."<sup>6</sup> While one would expect this response from the perpetrators, hearing it from the rescuers is always puzzling. We, the observers, see the rescuers as heroes, but they never see themselves that way. Why would they think of themselves as "normal," and appear to excuse themselves by saying that they were "only doing that which was expected of them"?

Further, studies in the social psychology of both perpetrators and rescuers show that social class, education, economic class, religion, and gen-

der are not determinative in the choice a person makes to be either a perpetrator or a rescuer. This means that women are not more likely to be rescuers, or perpetrators, than men, and *vica versa*; that religious people are not more like to be rescuers, or perpetrators, than non-religious persons, and *vica versa*; etc.<sup>7</sup> What, then, does influence a person to become either a perpetrator or a rescuer? In the context of the discussion of happiness: If religious or moral education is, alone, not enough to make for “happiness,” in the sense of the prophetic life of struggle, then what factors would tend to make for a life of prophetic goodness and, hence, of happiness? There are two factors that do this.

First, commensurate and reasoned discipline in childhood helps a person cultivate a prosocial, altruistic life. The Oliners, in their study of the personality of rescuers, noted that:

... significantly fewer rescuers recalled any controls imposed on them by the most intimate persons in their early lives... parents of rescuers depended significantly less on physical punishment and significantly more on reasoning... Thus, it is in their reliance on reasoning, explanations, suggestions of ways to remedy the harm done, persuasion, and advice that parents of rescuers differed most from non-rescuers...

Physical punishment is rare: when used, it tends to be a singular event rather than routine. Gratuitous punishment—punishment that serves as a cathartic release of aggression for the parent or is unrelated to the child’s behavior—almost never occurs.<sup>8</sup>

From this, the Oliners deduced the simple conclusion that, to cultivate the prosocial, or altruistic, personality, one should practice measured and reasoned discipline with children:

Reasoning communicates a message of respect for and trust in children that allows them to feel a sense of personal efficacy and warmth toward others. It is based on a presumption of error rather than a presumption of evil intent. It implies that had children but known better or understood more, they would not have acted in an inappropriate way. It is a mark of esteem for the listener; an indication of faith in his or her ability to comprehend, develop and improve...

Parents have power over children; they are not only physically stronger but also have access to material resources they can bestow or withhold. Societal norms generally support their superior position. . . . When adults voluntarily abdicate the use of power in favor of explanation, they are modeling appropriate behavior toward the weak on the part of the powerful. Faced with powerless others, children so raised in turn have at their disposal an internal “script”—a store of recollections, dialogues, and activities ready to be activated. They need not depend on innovation or improvisation but rather simply retrieve what is already imprinted on their memories.<sup>9</sup>

As one would expect, the converse is also true: An environment in which discipline ranges from strictly authoritarian to abusive, produces persons in whom submission to authority is the “best” and most intelligent response:

. . . punishment implies the need to curb some intrinsic wildness or evil intent. Routine gratuitous punishment implies that powerful persons have the right to exert their will arbitrarily. . . . Having had little influence over their parents’ behavior, [such children] are more inclined to feel a sense of helplessness in influencing others generally. . . . Human relationships are construed in power terms, superordination and subordination viewed as the inherent social condition of humankind. The best one can do in the face of power is to succumb.<sup>10</sup>

In its most extreme form, this can produce a culture of evil and, eventually, mass murder by otherwise normal people.

Second, insertion into a social hierarchy that practices, encourages, or at least tolerates, the doing of good helps a person cultivate a prosocial, altruistic life. The Oliners reach the astounding statistic “that only one-third of the rescuers began helping Jews on their own initiative; the rest—fully two-thirds—of the rescuers undertook rescue activity only after being asked by a potential victim, a parent or other relative, a religious functionary or representative of the resistance, a teacher, or an acquaintance or a friend.”<sup>11</sup>

Fogelman quotes one Christian as asking, “What would Jesus do?” and another as saying, “I have to save these people, as many as I can. If am disobeying orders, I’d rather die with God and against men than with

men and against God.” She also observes: “Indeed, this conviction among religious rescuers—that they were accountable to a higher and more fearsome authority—was the most salient aspect of their rescuer self. It overcame anti-Semitism, transcended fear, and impelled them to action.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Kurek-Lesik cites the following:

“I come from nationalist circles, often charged with anti-Semitism. Why did I save Jewish children? Because they were children, because they were people. I would save any man [sic] in danger of death, and a child—every child—is particularly dear to me. This is what my Catholic religion orders me to do.” . . . A persecuted Jew somehow stopped being a Jew and became simply a man, woman, or child in need of help. The Polish nuns were motivated by a Christian duty toward others and by their fidelity to the ideal that they were pledged to do so in a special way by their vows. . . . This is why saving Jews and Jewish children should first of all be seen in the broader context of monastic service to humanity.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes, the authority invoked was not religion but national resistance. Thus, Baron notes that 42% of the Dutch rescuers were also in the resistance, and, hence, saving Jews was sanctioned by the political authority of the resistance even if one had no particular religious or social feeling for Jews.<sup>14</sup>

As one would expect, the converse is also true: an environment in which society, the state, the church—indeed, any of the authoritative institutions of society—practices, encourages, or tolerates the doing of evil in the form of discrimination, persecution, incarceration, and even extermination is an environment in which the “normal” person is likely to choose to do evil.<sup>15</sup>

On the basis of this evidence and more data from social psychology, one can conclude that having someone in authority order, ask, model, encourage, or at least morally permit prosocial behavior is a very effective means of preparing people to choose prosocial, or altruistic, action.

There are very many prosocial values such as compassion, caring, justice, inclusiveness, empathy, righteous anger, and many more. Some of these are embodied in secular culture; some are embodied in various religious cultures. All of them can be implemented by social authorities. This leads to five recommendations:<sup>16</sup>

1. *Teach the nature of social processes.* Discuss the terms: authority, obedience, disobedience, resistance, protest, heteronomy and autonomy, norms, rules, values, permission, in-group/out-group, conflict management, conflict resolution, win-win, socialization, modeling, peer support, and incremental learning. Discuss the nature of hierarchies and the effect of excessive vs. caring discipline. Ask: “What is the social hierarchy in this particular situation? Is there more than one authority at work here? Upon what is the legitimacy of the authority in this situation based? What would one have to do to challenge the authority? Are you, as an authority, acting in a responsible way, within the limits of your legitimacy? And, if not, how do you as an authority challenge your own authority and reshape it?”

2. *Establish a means by which authority can be challenged.* The evidence clearly shows that, under normal circumstances, the overwhelming majority of people will not defy legitimate social authority even if asked to do something they know is wrong. Therefore, responsible leadership requires that authority itself set up a means by which its own judgment can be challenged. In a school, business, hospital, government, synagogue, church, or volunteer organization, even in a family: Set up an ombudsperson or an ombuds-committee who will hear appeals of disciplinary action taken by the central hierarchy. Set up a whistle-blowing mechanism that will enable criticism of the hierarchy. Set up a “care team” that will evaluate, not the efficiency with which the task of the organization is being carried out, but the caring quality of the relationships between members of the organization, particularly those relationships that are hierarchical.

3. *Identify and teach prosocial skills.* There are specific prosocial skills that, if learned and practiced, facilitate the doing of prosocial acts. Teach the identifying and coding of one’s own feelings. Ask: “What did you feel when you saw such and such a person being beaten up or being verbally abused? Can you yourself recall feeling ashamed, guilty, joyous, powerful, hurt, nurturing, modest, immodest, content? What is the difference between anger and rage? Have you ever felt either? How do you feel when someone threatens you, challenges you publicly, or praises you in front of others?” Then, teach perspective taking and empathy. Ask: “What do you think he or she feels? What does she or he feel even if she or he cannot express it? How angry, happy, ashamed, proud ... is he or she?”

What would you feel in that person's place? What is empathy? What is sympathy?"

4. *Use the language of justice and caring.* Discuss the words: pity, compassion, concern, affection, love, care, cherish, nourish, protect, understanding, empathy, kindness, mercy, sympathy, attachment, devotion, heart, feeling, respect, awareness. And their complements: pain, sorrow, grief, worry, anxiety, distress, suffering, intimidate, persecute, threaten, and terror. Discuss the terms: inclusiveness, globalism, goodness, kindness, justice, fairness, law, integrity, virtue, uprightness, equity, impartiality, righteousness, caring, morality, protest, resistance, bonding, humanness, and humanity. And their complements: exclusiveness, isolationism, ethnic superiority, injustice, oppression, prejudice, unfairness, uncritical compliance, and inhumanity.

5. *Do something.* In cultivating a prosocial society, all the teaching and all the discussing is useless unless it leads to action. Pick a cause, join an action group, and protest, or organize, or lobby. Seek out models and imitate them. Do whatever you legitimately need to do to bring your cause to the attention of the authorities. At first, it may seem awkward but, through incremental learning, it will get easier.

Happiness is resisting the social pressure to "go along with" evil, and using these insights to pursue justice, caring, fairness, and love in society.

### **Resistance to God<sup>17</sup>**

The shoah<sup>18</sup> raises a terrible theological question for Jews: Where was God? How did God permit the murder of six million Jews? There are five possible answers.

The first answer is that God punished the Jews for their sins. Disaster as a punishment for sin appears already in the Bible. Thus, in Leviticus and, again, in Deuteronomy, God threatens:

And if you do not listen to Me in this and you go rebelliously with Me, I shall go in the rage of rebellion with you, punishing you sevenfold for your sins . . . You shall eat the flesh of your boys and consume the bodies of your girls. . . . As He rejoiced over you to show goodness to you and to multiply you, so will He rejoice over you to destroy you and to annihilate you . . . In the morning you will say, "Would that it were evening" and in the evening you will say,

“Would that it were morning” because of the fear which you will feel in your heart and the sights which you will see with your eyes. (Leviticus 26:27,29 and Deuteronomy 28:63,67)

After the destruction of the temple and the Jewish state, the prophet laments:

Righteous is the Lord; it is I who have rebelled against His word . . . Let us examine our ways and scrutinize them, and return to the Lord. Let us lift our hearts in our hands to God Who is in heaven: “We have sinned and rebelled, and You have not forgiven” . . . The Lord vented all His wrath, He poured out His powerful anger, He lit a fire in Zion that ate away at its foundations . . . Because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests who spilled the blood of the righteous . . . For You have rejected us, and have been very, very angry with us. (Lamentations, 1:18; 3:40—41; 4:11,13; 5:22).

This motif repeats itself in rabbinic texts, especially in the liturgy.

There are Jews who adhere to this interpretation of the relationship of God to the shoah. They accept that, in the modern period, Jews sinned by assimilating to the Christian society around them thereby violating the covenant with God. For this, God punished them with the shoah or, at the very minimum, that the shoah constitutes a warning of the punishment that is yet to come if we do not return to God’s covenant. However, most contemporary Jews are not satisfied with this answer, for what sin could justify the death of six million? And what iniquity could justify the murder of one and one-half million children? The shoah, as critics of this view see it, cannot be a punishment for the sins of the Jews or the Jewish people.

The second answer is that we cannot fathom the ways of God; that we simply cannot know why God allowed the shoah to happen. We must simply accept God’s will. This answer, too, appears already in the Bible. Thus, in the chapters of comfort, Isaiah says:

Be comforted, be comforted, My people, says the Lord . . . Who measured the waters with the hollow of His hand, and gauged the skies with a span? And meted earth’s dust with a measure, and weighed the mountains with a scale, and the hills with a balance? Who has plumbed the mind of the Lord? And who could tell Him His plan?

Whom did He consult? And who taught Him? Who guided Him in the way of right? And who taught Him wisdom and who showed Him the way of understanding? . . . For My thoughts are not as your thoughts, and My ways are not your ways, said the Lord. For, as the heavens soar above the earth, so do My ways soar above your ways and My thoughts above your thoughts. (Isaiah 40:12-14; 55:8-9)

This motif, too, repeats itself in rabbinic theological and liturgical texts.

Most contemporary Jews accept this answer: that the shoah was somehow caused, or allowed to happen, by God but we can never understand why; we must simply accept the unfathomable nature of God's will. "It is a decree from My Presence. Accept it." (Day of Atonement liturgy) There is, however, a stream of Jewish thinking—biblical, rabbinic, and modern—that is not satisfied with this answer, which sees this answer as "dodging the bullet," as what deconstructionists call "erasure." How can we "solve" the question of God and the shoah by burying our heads in the sand and saying that there can never be an answer? How can we maintain our moral and intellectual integrity in matters of faith in God if we purposely avoid confronting this problem? Rather, we must persevere and find something more just, more consonant with God's covenant with us.

The third answer is that God used the shoah to test our loyalty to God, to test and purify our faith in God. This view draws heavily on Genesis 22 which begins, "After these things, God tested Abraham, saying to him, 'Abraham' and he replied, 'I am here.' And [God] said, 'Take, I pray you, your son, your only one, the one you love, Isaac, and get you to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you.'" This is also the accepted understanding of the troubles that God visits upon Job in which he loses his property, his family, and is afflicted with disease. His wife urges him to deny God. His friends urge him to admit guilt and seek God's forgiveness. Yet Job, despite the test of his troubles, maintains his innocence and his faithfulness to God.

This theme, too, repeats itself in the rabbinic sources.

There are Jews who take this position of God's treatment of the Jews in the shoah: that God was testing us, as God tested our ancestors. I have

known personally survivors who have lived the life of Job, and retained their faith in God and in God's goodness. I stand in awe of these people. But I and most others—many survivors and most non-survivors—cannot accept a God Who sets the industrial massacre of six million Jews, and especially of over a million babies, as a “test” of our loyalty and faith. The shoah may, indeed, turn out to be a test of our faith but it cannot have been initiated by the God of the covenant Who, in that covenant, established justice and fairness as the rule of all creation.

The fourth answer is that God is transcendent, a power above the universe, Who does not control humans, and Who is not responsible for the shoah. According to this mode of thinking, God had nothing to do with the shoah. It was solely the work of human beings. Humans designed and carried out the shoah; God is not responsible.

This stream of interpretation finds its roots in modern Jewish (and Christian) thought which tends to see God as a “force” or “power” that is the “ground” of reality but that does not actively intervene or interfere in human affairs. God, to very many people in the modern world, is the “source” or “root” of goodness, but God is not a present, active Presence or directing force in human life.<sup>19</sup>

However, this stream of interpretation does not have roots in biblical or rabbinic Judaism in which God is providential; that is, God influences and sometimes intervenes in human affairs. We do not know the ways God acts; that is, how God influences our lives. But we do admit that God is a felt Presence in our lives and that this Presence is experienced by many in daily living as well as in special moments in our lives. People for whom God is a living Presence reject the interpretation that God bears no responsibility in the shoah even as they certainly assert the responsibility and judicial culpability of the humans who carried it out.

What other answer could traditional biblical and rabbinic Judaism give to the question: Where was God in the shoah? How did God allow, or permit, the murder of six million Jews, and especially of one and one-half million children?

The fifth answer is that God's covenants with creation and in particular with the Jewish people permit, and perhaps even require, that we recognize that the shoah, as an act of God, was unjust and, that we protest to God.

The underlying worldview of the Bible and also of Rabbinic Judaism is that the universe manifests a deep order. Religious Jews see, and sense, this order whenever they contemplate the wonders of creation. From subatomic particles to the borders of time and space, from Higgs bosons to the aggregate of human society, order and balance form the basic structure of reality. The universe, as biblical civilization sees it, did not spring from conflict among the gods, nor did it evolve from chaos; it was “created,” ordered.

Similarly, human society, itself a part of creation, is based on order. It, too, did not evolve out of chaos but is shaped and guided by the principles of both justice and love. While the demands of justice and love are often in conflict, human society, as biblical civilization sees it, must put forth the effort to resolve these motives as best we can. Humans, and human societies, often fail to find the proper moral social order but we are charged with seeking it. Perhaps the biblical Hebrew word *mishpat* best expresses this goal. It means “fairness” or “judgment,” and it is always the result of a negotiation between justice, love, and reality. Perhaps, too, the rabbinic Hebrew words *middat ha-din* and *middat rahamim* best express this goal. They mean “justice” and “loving kindness” respectively. Society, we are taught, cannot exist on justice only—who would not be guilty—and it cannot exist on loving kindness only—who would be guilty. It is the orderly, balanced mixture of the two that we call “judgment” or “fairness.”

Contrary to secular culture, biblical and rabbinic religion maintain that the standards we use to exercise fairness or judgment are not totally human in origin. We believe that God revealed the basic principles of fairness to humankind. Though there are many theories of how that revelation took place, the conviction that the principles of justice, fairness, love, judgment, and many other moral principles, all derive, in some way, not from humans alone but also from God, is clear. Furthermore, biblical and rabbinic religion maintain that, when God revealed these principles, God made a covenant with human beings in general, and then made a more specific covenant with the Jewish people. In these covenants, God agreed that humans would implement God’s principles and that God would guard and guide us; that we would observe God’s Torah and that God would protect and bless us. This is what “covenant” (Hebrew *brit*) means.

The concept of covenant implies that there is no exception to the rule: If humans observe the covenant, they will be blessed and, if humans violate the covenant, they will regret it; they will be “punished,” in scriptural language. But, the converse is also true: If humans observe the covenant, God is obligated by God’s own commitment to it to protect and bless them and, if humans disobey the covenant, God is obligated to reprimand and/or punish them.

But, what if humans are good but God punishes them? This is the question of “theodicy”: Why do the wicked prosper? Biblical and rabbinic religion recognize the four answers given above. But biblical and rabbinic religion have a fifth answer: When God acts outside the covenant—that is, when God punishes people who are innocent—then humans must protest. Humans may not deny God. Humans may not deny the fundamental order of the universe and the principle of covenant. Rather, humans must affirm God, affirm the orderliness of creation, affirm the existence of the covenant, and protest. Humans must affirm God’s goodness and say, “God, what You have done is a violation of Your covenant with us.” Covenant implies mutual commitment and mutual accountability. Covenant implies the right, perhaps the obligation, to protest violation of the covenant.

This tradition of protest is very deeply rooted in the Bible.<sup>20</sup> In Genesis 18:25, as God is about to destroy the city of Sodom, Abraham challenges the justice of God’s decision in words that shake us even today: “Far be it from You to do this thing, to kill the righteous together with the wicked, so that the fate of the righteous be as the fate of the wicked. Far be it from You. Shall not the Judge of the whole universe do justice?”<sup>21</sup>

In the Book of Job, the protagonist, Job, never denies God, nor does he reject God’s covenant. However, he does systematically maintain that he is innocent and does not merit the punishment that has been visited upon him and, hence, claims that God is in the wrong:

And Job answered [the friends] saying: “How long will you aggravate me and oppress me with words? Ten times you have humiliated me; are you not ashamed that you have dealt harshly with me? . . . Know now that it is God Who has twisted me, Who has cast His net upon me. I shout “Violence” but I am not answered. I cry out, but there is no fairness. He has blocked my way; I cannot pass . . . My skin and flesh cling to my bones, and I am left with

[only] my skull. . . . For I know that my R/redeemer is alive and, though H/he be the last being in the universe, when the period of my abuse is at an end, [all] this shall be struck away and then, from my [reconstituted] body, I shall see God, Whom I once envisioned, Whom my eyes once saw, and Who was [then] not strange to me. . . ."<sup>22</sup> (Job, 19)

Perhaps the strongest statement of protest in the Bible is in Psalm 44.<sup>23</sup> There, the psalmist acknowledges God's role in the defeat suffered by the people, staunchly maintains their covenantal innocence, and ends with excoriating God:

<sup>10</sup>But now, You desert and shame us.

You do not go out with our armies.

<sup>11</sup>You put us to flight from our enemies.

Those who hate us tear us to pieces at will.

<sup>12</sup>You hand us over like sheep to be devoured.

You cast us among the nations.

<sup>13</sup>You sell Your people for nothing.

You do not make a profit on their sale price.

<sup>14</sup>You make us an object of shame for our neighbors,  
a thing of scorn and derision for those around us.

<sup>15</sup>You make an example of us to the nations,  
an object of head-shaking among the peoples.

<sup>16</sup>All day, my humiliation confronts me,  
my shame covers me,

<sup>17</sup>from the sounds of the taunter and the blasphemer,  
from the fantasy of revenge on the enemy.

<sup>18</sup>All this happened to us  
yet we did not forget You,  
nor did we betray Your covenant.

<sup>19</sup>Our hearts did not retreat,  
nor did our steps deviate from Your way.

<sup>20</sup>Though You crushed us into a desolate place

and covered us with deep darkness,  
<sup>21</sup>did we forget the name of our God  
 or spread our hands in prayer to a strange deity?  
<sup>22</sup>Let God Himself investigate this  
 for He knows the hidden recesses of the heart.  
<sup>23</sup>Truly, for Your sake we are killed all day long,  
 we are considered sheep to be butchered.  
<sup>24</sup>Wake up!  
 Why do You sleep, Lord?!  
 Arise!  
 Do not abandon forever!  
<sup>25</sup>Why do You hide Your face?!  
 Why do You forget our persecution and our oppression?!  
<sup>26</sup>For our souls have been pounded into the dirt,  
 our stomachs are stuck to the ground.  
<sup>27</sup>Get up!  
 Help us!  
 Redeem us for the sake of Your gracious love.

The tradition of protest is also present in the rabbinic sources though often muted. Thus, rabbinic midrash envisions the crucial moment of the Akeda as follows: “In that moment, Isaac agreed to [being sacrificed] verbally but in his heart he said, ‘Who will save me from the hand of my father? I have no help other than the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says, “My help is from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalms 121:2).’”<sup>24</sup> This is protest, but muted. A stronger statement is found in the words of the Kotzker Rebbe:

Send us our Messiah, for we have no more strength to suffer. Show me a sign, O God. Otherwise I rebel against You. If You do not keep Your covenant, then neither will I keep the promise, and it is all over: we are through with being Your Chosen People, Your unique treasure.<sup>25</sup>

The tradition of protest also appears in the modern period, even in non-rabbinic sources. Thus, Elie Wiesel:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in the camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and

seven times sealed. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, I have suggested my own rabbinic, modern texts of protest for liturgical use.<sup>27</sup>

The fifth way, the way of protest, is, to my mind, the proper response to the question of God and the shoah. It is the very embodiment of resistance as happiness, of the prophetic life of struggle in our innermost spiritual lives as a form of biblical and rabbinic happiness. Though this is surely not a “happy” state to be in, it is a way of spiritual courage in the face of reality and, as such, brings one the satisfaction of knowing that one has affirmed God and God’s covenant, and that one has responded in a dignified and covenantal way to injustice.

Happiness is confronting God Godself in the name of the justice, caring, fairness, and love.

### Conclusion

“The criterion of religion is not in its being in agreement with our *common sense* but in its being compatible with our *sense of the ineffable*.” The pursuit of the ineffable, of holiness, includes the prophetic life of struggle—the struggle against society when it exerts social force upon us to do evil, and the struggle against God in the form of protest against acts that violate the covenants God has made with creation and humanity. An inward state of peace of mind, the pursuit of life as virtue, and certainly the quest for self-fulfillment (or self-denial) are not the way. The struggle for fairness, justice, and protective love are the Jewish way to happiness.

### Notes

1. This essay was developed with a grant from the Emory University Center for the Study of Law and Religion as part of a forum on happiness attended by, among others, the Dalai

Lama and the former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. It appears on their Web site and is published here, in modified form, with their permission.

2. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, New York: 1955) 350-51, 398. I have edited the text to accommodate the egalitarian language that was surely Heschel's intent. For an authoritative sample of the traditional elite Western view, see Aristotle: "the function of man [sic] is to live a certain kind of life, and this activity implies a rational principle, and the function of a good man is the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed it is performed in accord with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case, then happiness turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a13). And: "He is happy who lives in accordance with complete virtue and is sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1101a10).

3. *Mishna*, Avot 2:16. Perhaps, following the motto of Alcoholics Anonymous, we should all say of ourselves, "I am a recovering sinner."

4. For a full study of this issue, see my *The Banality of Evil: Moral Lessons from the Shoah and Jewish Tradition* (Georgetown University Press, Washington DC: 1999); transl. *La Banalité du Bien et du Mal* (Le Cerf, Paris: 2009); and my Web site.

5. In 2005, I spoke on this subject at a conference and the chaplain to the firemen who served in the 9/11 inferno came to me and said that this was exactly what his firemen were saying: that they had not been heroes; that they were only doing their job, doing what was expected of them.

6. For the perpetrators, see, for example: S. Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (Harper and Row, New York: 1974); also available as a film; Film, "In the Eye of the Storm" and later in a film, "A Class Divided"; the latter appeared as a book by W. Peters, *A Class Divided Then and Now* (Yale University Press, New Haven: 1987); and C. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (Harper Collins, New York: 1992). For the rescuers, see for example: J. M. Darley and C. D. Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27:1 (1973) 100-08; E. Staub, "Helping a Distressed Person," in L. Berkowitz, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Academic Press, New York: 1974) 7: 293—341; and S. and P. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (Free Press, New York: 1988).

7. On this, see *The Banality of Good and Evil*, chapters 3 and 4.

8. *The Altruistic Personality*, 179—81 and 249.

9. *The Altruistic Personality*, 182—83.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *The Altruistic Personality*, 312—17, cited in *The Banality of Good and Evil*, 45.

12. E. Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (Anchor Books, New York: 1994) 176—77 and 201.

13. E. Kurek-Lesik, "The Role of Polish Nuns in the Rescue of Jews, 1939—1945," in P. Oliner, et al., *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives* (New York University Press, New York: 1992), 330—32.

14. *Ibid.*, 312—13.

15. See *The Banality of Good and Evil*, chapter 3, and my Web site. Hannah Arendt's characterization of Adolf Eichmann fits this category. See *The Banality of Good and Evil*, chapter 5, as well as articles on my Web site, for more on the "banality" of evil.

16. Part Two of *The Banality of Good and Evil* is devoted to the analysis of these values and to specific recommendations on how to implement them. Part Three is devoted to a presentation of these values and patterns within Jewish tradition. I look forward to the work of colleagues in other traditions that will identify such sources in those traditions.

17. For more on this motif, see my *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Westminster / John Knox, Louisville, KY: 1993), especially pp. 165–66 and 243.

18. For many years, I used the word "holocaust" to designate the destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War. I have since been persuaded that "holocaust" should not be used for two reasons: (1) It bears the additional meaning of "a whole burnt offering," which is certainly not the theological overtone to be sounded in this context. And (2), the destruction of European Jewry happened to Jews and, hence, it is they who should have the sad honor of naming this event with a Hebrew term. The word "shoah" has been used for a long time in Hebrew to denote the catastrophe to Jewry during World War II and has even been adopted by many non-Jews as the proper designation. In addition, as a matter of theological and moral principle, I do not capitalize words like: "shoah," "holocaust," "führer," "final solution," "nazi," etc.

19. This idea begins in medieval rationalism, develops its logical conclusion in deism, and is modified into a source of energy that humans can tap into in order to do good in modern rational religious forms such as Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism. I suspect that, like the Force in such popular cultural works as "Star Wars," this concept of God is very widespread among modern Jews.

20. For more on this, see *Facing the Abusing God*, 449–57 and the references to Anton Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition*, (Jason Aronson, Northvale, NJ: 1990).

21. Perhaps better rendered as: "It would be an act of sacrilege for You to do this thing, to kill the righteous together with the wicked, so that the fate of the righteous be as the fate of the wicked. It is an act of sacrilege. Shall not He Who acts in fairness (Heb. *shofet*) with the whole universe act fairly (Heb. *lo ya'aseh mishpat*)?"

22. The King James translation renders: "My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth. . . . For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." For my translation, cf. D. Blumenthal, "A Play on Words in the Nineteenth Chapter of Job," *Vetus Testamentum*, 16:4 (1966) 497–501; also available on my website.

23. See *Facing the Abusing God*, 85–110.

24. Manuscript of "Avot de-Rabbi Nathan cited in M. Kasher, *Torah Shelema*, "Vayera," *ad loc* (vol. 3b, page 882), cited in *Facing the Abusing God*, 181.

25. Cited in *Facing the Abusing God*, 252 from Laytner, 192–93.

26. E. Wiesel, *Night* (Bantam Books, New York: 1960; reprinted 1982) 32, cited in *Facing the Abusing God*, 249.

27. See *Facing the Abusing God*, 265–99.