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(ANTI)THEODICY AND/OR THEADICY – THE FEMINIST POSTHOLOCAUST THEOLOGY OF MELISSA RAPHAEL[2]

Abstract: *Monotheistic theologies have after the Holocaust faced an additionally arduous task in approaching the very notion of theodicy in the context of God's chosen people suffering genocide. Some authors attempted to read meaning into the death and destruction while others refused to even try. Taking into account the attack of the Holocaust on ontological procosmism itself, Melissa Raphael combines Lurianic Kabbalah with feminist theology to offer a primarily poetic narrative of Shekhinah's kenotic descent into the abyss of Auschwitz to be present among and through the women suffering and caring for each other there. Though it may pose more questions than it is able to answer, her 'theadicy' might still be said to offer guidelines for humanity after the Holocaust – and in potentially newly impending crises as well.*

Key words: *postholocaust theology, theodicy, religion and gender*

(ANTI)TEODICEJA I/ILI TEADICEJA – FEMINISTIČKA POSTHOLOKAUSTOVSKA TEOLOGIJA MELISE RAFAEL

Sažetak: *Monoteističke teologije se posle Holokausta suočavaju sa još težim zadatkom u pokušaju da pristupe samoj ideji teodiceje u kontekstu stradanja Božijeg izabranog naroda u genocidu. Neki autori su se trudili da učitaju neki smisao u opštu smrt i uništenje, dok su neki odbili čak i da pokušaju. Uzimajući u obzir napad na ontološki prokosmizam kao takav koji Holokaust vrši, Melisa Rafael kombinje kabalu Isaka Lurije sa feminističkom teologijom i nudi kao rezultat jedan prevashodno poetski narativ o silasku Šekine u ambis Aušvica da bi tamo bila prisutna uz i kroz žene koje tamo pate i staraju se jedne o drugima. Iako možda postavlja više pitanja nego što nudi odgovora, njena 'teodiceja' ipak pruža smernice za čovečanstvo nakon Holokausta – a možda i u novim krizama koje će nemonovno uslediti.*

Ključne reči: *postholokaustovska teologija, teodiceja, religija i rod.*

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1. The Trouble with Theodicies

The Holocaust, or Shoah, indubitably a great rupture in history, created an ontological and epistemological crisis as well, and this arguably partially impacted the emergence of postmodern thought by deconstructing previous grand narratives which had posited a meaningful history with a logical progression. The genocide of God's chosen people poses especially difficult questions to theologians of so-called Abrahamic monotheisms, the most obvious of which is how God could have allowed it to happen. Some more prominent attempts to understand God in light of the Shoah will be given in the introductory chapter, before we move on to the subsequent theology of Melissa Raphael.

1.1. Theodicies or Antitheodicies?

The many questions raised by the Holocaust tend to lead to binary answers, which causes a string of dualities in the theologies. The most pertinent question certainly seems to be the very existence of a God in a universe where the Shoah has taken place. The question seems to have been answered negatively or at least apophatically in Radical 'Death of God' theology, which was both a Jewish and Christian phenomenon, influenced in part by Nietzsche. Its most prominent representative, Richard Rubenstein, declares in his *After Auschwitz* that we are living in the times of the death of God, at least the God we thought we knew. Instead of God, man is now faced with the *Urgrund*, a nameless abyss, the holy nothingness that is the origin of all things (Rubenstein 1966). Others had similarly apophatic responses, perhaps most famously Martin Buber, who termed this refusal of God to reveal himself in the 20th century 'the eclipse of God' (Buber 1957). Neher sees only silence remaining after the Shoah – of God and man both – in his aptly named book *The Exile of the Word* (Neher 1981).

If God exists, what kind of God is left to His people in the Shoah and its wake? Sherwin Wine, the founder of humanistic Judaism, believed humanity is left with a purely philosophical abstraction, one that could and should eventually be discarded (Wine 1985). Conversely, many discarded the dogmatic God but found a stronger connection to a personal one, in whom they invested a Job-like faith, fulfilling the practical aspect of the Law as much as humanly possible in the camps (Cohn-Sherbook 2002: 2-5). Others instead engaged their personal God in Jacob-like wrestling, like Elie Wiesel in his famous memoir *Night*, where he, among other things, accuses God of being nothing compared to the suffering mass who still believe in Him (Wiesel 1982).

Whether God is philosophical or personal, how does He act? Does He get involved in history and is there a meaning behind this, a plan of any kind? Many of those who offered theodicies had specific ideas about what could have motivated

God to allow the Holocaust. Some saw the catastrophe as kindling the desire to survive. Most notably, Emil Fackenheimn asserts that the Shoah adds the 614. commandment to every Jew, and that is to live (Fackenheim 1972). Some saw it as a punishment for liberal Judaism, or the Enlightenment – while others believed God wanted to revive faith after the Enlightenment. Maybaum, conversely, saw the Holocaust as an opportunity for more liberalism and enlightenment, as Medieval Jewish institutions vanished in it and could be reconstructed in novel ways in the 20th century (Maybaum 1965). There were those who believed the death camps were but darkness before daybreak, as the Messiah would be coming soon, so either suffering was needed as preparatory purification, or the world was experiencing the labor pains of his birth (Cohn-Sherbook 2002: 6-9). Though there are Christians who believe hoping for eschatological solace to be a purely Christian approach, as Christianity is more likely to see meaning beyond history, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, a Jewish theologian, also thought that answers to all questions as well as a better world would only be available after death. There were those who fully rejected the idea of God acting in history as impossible, like Rubenstein who was adamant that Hitler could not have been an instrument of divine will (Rubenstein 1966). There were also many who refuse to ascribe any meaning to death and destruction, perhaps most famously Irving Greenberg, who maintained that there were "no easy pieties" that could be offered as a Band-Aid to the Shoah (Greenberg 1977).

1.2. God's Attributes on Trial

A common problem facing attempts at theodicy, at least since Plato, is striving to explain the existence of evil while simultaneously retaining all of God's customary attributes. How can evil exist if God is at once perfectly good, omnipotent and omnipresent? Some have attempted to cope with the Shoah by questioning some or all of these divine attributes.

Is God perfectly good? David Blumenthal answers this question with a resounding 'no'. In his "Despair and Hope in Post-Shoah Jewish Life" he recounts how he confronted this issue as a Jew and as a theologian and concluded that "God is, indeed, present and responsible even in moments of great evil. God is, indeed, partly responsible for the shoah. In a certain sense, God is capable of tolerating, or even causing, great evil". Jews have a "God who is not perfect, not even always good, but Who is still our God and the God of our ancestors". Towards this God, "protest is the only proper response. Not defensiveness. Not denial. But protest – in thought and in prayer" (Blumenthal 1999: 13). What he offers is a 'theodicy of protest', which affirms that abused children have the right to rebel, though the relationship with the abusive parent might be mended in time. Irving Greenberg also believed God failed His people to the extent that the Covenant is now effectively broken. Keeping the Law is no longer obligatory, but

instead a matter of free will (Greenberg 1977). Others found that God's goodness was the one attribute that they could not part with, so they questioned His omnipotence instead.

Is God omnipotent? Many, like Kushner, Dorotee Sölle, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, answered this question in the negative, believing that no longer seeing God as all-powerful was the only way to still be able to see Him as all-loving. Charles Hartshorne sees God as operating by way of persuasion, not force, as He does not have the power to determine how humans will act (Pinnock 2002: 5-6). Eliezer Berkovits, on the other hand, posited that God intentionally limits His inherently limitless power to honor human freedom (Berkovits 1973). Free will certainly is a common trope of many theodicies. John Hick believes God allows evil as it has a function in soul-building, allowing us to achieve moral and spiritual maturity (Pinnock 2002: 5-6). There were those who in similar ways insisted on retaining God's omnipotence, but claimed that He remains intentionally hidden, or is simply too far away to intervene.

Is God omnipresent? Some saw Him as conspicuously absent from the death camps, or at least in hiding. Eliezer Schweid wrote about the loneliness of the believing Jew before a hiding God (Cohn-Sherbook 2002: 7), and Arthur A. Cohen saw God as so fully transcendent that He is too far away to bear any responsibility for history (Cohen 1981). Others maintained that God always suffers with His people, even perhaps invisibly – notably Colin Eimer among Jewish thinkers. Leaning on the concept of incarnation, Christian theologians, like Paul Fiddes and Marcus Braybrooke, have tended to use the cross as the explicative metaphor of the loving, self-sacrificing, co-suffering God. Franklin Sherman plainly states that in the face of the Holocaust, all theodicies, expositions of plans, and apophatic evasions remain insufficient, and the cross can be the only answer to meaningless suffering and death of innocent human beings (Cohn-Sherbook 2002: 7-11).

2. How Can God Be Present in Auschwitz?

Authors debating the presence of God in the death camps tended to fall on either side of yet another binary opposition: whether God could have been present as a *subject* or as an *object*. As a subject, God was supposed to exhibit agency and save His people, which, according to many taking this approach, He failed to accomplish. As an object, God was deigned to have been present by the authors seeing Him as a co-sufferer, co-martyr, or in the case of Christian theologians, as a crucified deity showing His love by (also) enduring torment and death.

An attempt at transcending this binary opposition, and several others as well, has been made by Melissa Raphael, whose feminist postholocaust theology envisages a gently present deity who simultaneously suffers with and cares for humans through women imprisoned in the death camps. In her words, she offers

"a post-Holocaust feminist theology of relation that both affirms the redemptive presence of God in Auschwitz" and "seeks to change our conception of that presence in ways that do not entail divine or theological complicity with evil". Her proposed methodology is a combination of "the feminist historiography of women's experience in the death and concentration camps" and "a traditional Jewish mystical understanding of the processes of exile and restoration within God as a structuring redemptive metaphor" (Raphael 1999: 54).

The feminist aspect of Raphael's theology lies in questioning the patriarchal image of God as a father and monarch. As already seen, God's perceived omnipotence is one of the greatest issues that attempts at theodicy are faced with, and it is, according to Raphael, an unnecessary and potentially harmful construct. In her words, as "God's omnipotence is as much a political value as it is a religious hope", theologians have a duty to problematize the insistence on it as "a necessary attribute of divinity and prerequisite to redemption". She makes a distinction between the notion that "God can be infinitely powerful" and the notion that "God is omnipotent, that is, controlling everything that is, was and will be the case" (Raphael 2003: 38). Infinite power should not be identified with determining the outcome of history.

Raphael reminds that at least feminist theologies have the capacity to critique the attribution of omnipotence to God because "of all the divine attributes of classical theism, omnipotence seems most a patriarchal fantasy; a projection of the ultimate patriarchal aspiration onto God". How God should and does act in the world has nothing in common with "the way dominant men attempt to dominate and control history" which in turn could in fact be said to be the very cause of atrocities such as the Holocaust (Raphael 2003: 40).

Who failed Israel in the Shoah? The culprit was not God, but instead "a model of God which was reliant upon an idea of masculine power" though it "could not withstand the actual masculine patriarchal power that confronted it" (Raphael 2003: 5). Raphael likens this model, as "a projection of patriarchal ideals of masculine power, control and domination", to – a "golem, a soulless clay servant of its own secret making and naming, conjured by patriarchy's own will to usurp or exploit the power of its creator". She reminds her readers of the legend of Elijah Baal Shem, Rabbi of Chelm, who created a golem so big and powerful that it finally escaped his control and, dissolving back into the original mud it was made of, crushed its own creator underneath the pile (Raphael 2003: 36). She uses this as a metaphor for the patriarchal, monarchical God in Auschwitz, an imaginary creature that still crushed his creators once he dissipated.

If God did not dominate history in Auschwitz, did he then let it happen to honor the free will of human beings? In Raphael's view, theodicies based upon free will necessitate the masculine agency of the autonomous, cerebral, privileged individual, but human dignity and worth cannot be predicated upon autonomy and

freedom, as these are unavailable to many humans at any given time. Under normal circumstances, this most notably excludes women caring for the future generation and sometimes simultaneously the previous generation and others in their social networks. In the death camps, however, free will and agency were granted to none of the prisoners. The ability to be there for each other was. The prerequisite for human dignity, therefore, could instead be "the capacity, however vestigial, to honor communal or familial obligations", one's relational duties towards the other, as this is something every human can avail herself of (Raphael 2003: 43-44). In the camps, according to the testimonies, women seem to have "invested their dignity less in freedom as such than in the degree to which they were needed and bound to others by ties of love and obligation" (Raphael 2003: 44).

It is not only God's omnipotence that tends to be questioned in times of dire crisis, but simple, optimistic procosmism *per se*. Explanations as to the origin of evil in the universe that posited God as perfectly good tended to deny Him the attributes of omnipotence and/or omnipresence in this world, especially in those periods that were particularly testing, which in turn led to various dualisms, in particular anti-cosmisms. The Apocalyptic literature that proliferated after the fall of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and which eventually enabled the emergence of Gnosticism, is but one example of this phenomenon (Brandt 1989).

Another, more relevant to the present discussion, as it is the second aspect Raphael uses to formulate her theology, is the Kabbalah of Isaak Luria Ashkenazi (1534-1572) developed after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (Yates 2003: 25; Frank/Leaman 1997: 462). It is in the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria that Jewish mysticism – quite possibly owing to yet another exile of God's chosen people – takes a distinctly anti-cosmic turn. As Freedman notices, the myths of Lurianic Cabala, Gnosticism and Manichaeism are very similar, which does not necessarily mean, she warns, that the "origin of these views in the lurianic cabala is necessarily gnostic," as "they may equally reflect a parallel development of themes from Jewish exegesis or Jewish influence on gnostic texts; but the consciousness, if not gnostic, shows gnostic sensibilities" (Freedman 2006: 75). Armstrong agrees, stating that the "Gnostic character of these ideas, which constitute a new mythology in Judaism, cannot be doubted" (Armstrong 2007: 171).

Building on the older kabbalistic cosmogony of En Sof as the ineluctable source of the ten Sefirot emanating from it and forming the Tree of Life, the spiritual basis of the visible universe (Armstrong 2007), Lurianic Kabbalah sees the universe as already a consequence of a catastrophe, God's contraction, *tzimtzum*, which created an absence to allow space for creation. God's subsequent emanation of light then could not be contained by the vessels of the seven lower Sefirot, shattering them and spilling itself into 'Other Side'. The sparks scattered around in the darkness of the material world, and the lowest of the divine emanations, the feminine Sefirah Malkhut, closest to humanity, also known as the Shekhinah,

became alienated from her masculine counterpart, Sefirah Tiferet, and exiled/imprisoned within creation. Adam Kadmon, primordial man, failed to retrieve the sparks and offer them up back into the higher world.

Taking elements from Lurianic Kabbalah, Raphael's theology is in fact not itself anti-cosmic – quite the opposite may be said to be the case. What she takes from Luria's cosmology and cosmogony is the idea that fragmentation and rupture in the world and cosmos are related and that humanity can play an active role in rectifying the situation. Human efforts can enable the feminine Sefirah Malkhut to be reunited with the masculine Sefirah Tiferet in a holy marriage effecting harmony in the universe (Armstrong 2003; Brandt 1989, Freedman 2006). When "Jews consecrate the world by their goodness, if necessary by descending into the very abyss of impurity to rescue the hidden or imprisoned sparks, and, by their elevation, return them to God", then the cosmos itself may be mended as well (Raphael 1999: 62; Raphael 2003: 147). An aspect of God also descends into the abyss of impurity to retrieve the lost sparks, but who is this God who is present in this descent?

3. Who is the God Present in Auschwitz?

Raphael laments the fact that too many have asked the question "*where* was God in Auschwitz?" and too few the question "*who* was God in Auschwitz?" Simultaneously, she asserts that answering the second question also offers an answer to the first, as Jewish feminism had been asking it for decades and had already come to the conclusion that the God of their experience should be named Shekhinah, the traditional signifier for God's immanence (Raphael 2003: 54). If in the death camps Shekhinah appeared to be hidden it was "by virtue of the non-numinousness of the medium of her presence, the depth of evil into which she was plunged, and her very soft tread" (Raphael 2003: 54).

But she was always present by definition, as the word 'shekhinah' is derived from the verb *shakhan*, which means to be present, indwelling, immanent, "as in a tabernacle, sanctuary or tent" (cf. Exodus 25:8). In the earliest midrashim and in the rabbinic literature there is a strong belief in the unceasing presence of God among Israel – the presence, that is, of the feminine aspect of God that cares for the chosen people in exile, as there is, according to the Talmud, "no place without Shekhinah" (Midrash Exodus 2:9, cited in Raphael 1999: 64).

In medieval times, kabbalistic literature construed the Sefirah Shekhinah as a discrete feminine hypostasis in God's manifestation in the world, and in Hasidic theology she allows humanity to endure by suffering with each soul individually as well as with God's people collectively. In the later mystical tradition, the Shekhinah – as mother, daughter, and Sabbath Bride – signified presence no longer contained to any place such as an ark or a tent, but instead an exiled God wandering

with Israel in any desert or wilderness after the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem. There had by the seventeenth century been representations of Shekhinah as a woman mourning for and consoling her people. The synagogue and the home had already become refuges for Shekhinah driven from the Temple, when under the Nazis, who had now destroyed the synagogues and homes as well, she had to flee into even deeper exile – the ghettos and camps where her children were (Raphael 1999: 64).

Raphael offers a feminist reading of the Shekhinah tradition in which she concludes that God present in Auschwitz was revealed as the Shekhinah, and not as the omnipotent, controlling monarch "imagined by patriarchal, androcentric post-Holocaust theology" (Raphael 1999: 64-65). The presence of God in the death camps was instead a maternal active immanence inherent to the Shekhinah, who is often represented "in the curvature of the maternal posture" denoting "a capacity to bend over and cover, stroke, warm, feed, clean, lift and hold the other, was an embodied resistance to Auschwitz which had institutionalized the exposure, breakage and waste of bodies" (Raphael 2003: 10). This nurturing maternal manifestation of God conveys the suggestion of a bond between the divine and the female personality, which could restore the trust the faithful have "in the loving presence traditionally ascribed to God but which in post-Holocaust theology, betrayed by the desertion of its Father-God, has been substantially lost" (Raphael 2003: 121).

4. The Heroine's Kenotic Journey

Both in her 1999 essay "When God Beheld God" and in her 2003 book *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* Raphael offers towards the end – and instead of a conclusion – her mythical-poetic narrative of the Shekhinah's descent into the death camps. The name Raphael uses to describe the genre to which her narrative belongs is *maaseh* – the traditional Jewish allegorical tale, which packs magical, religious and mythical elements into the classical fairy tale structure (Raphael 2003: 161). The structure of the narrative will also serve here as the organizing principle for the exposition of the main points of Raphael's theology.

The narrative structurally resembles the mythical trope, noted by Frazer, of deities and heroes descending into Hades to return regenerated (Frazer 1993: 325). A noteworthy example of the trope is Odysseus' descent into Hades in search of Tiresias (Homer 1984: 126), but perhaps even more meaningfully Demeter's descent to retrieve her daughter Persephone. Jung famously used *nekyia*, the title of this episode in Homer's *Odyssey*, to name the archetype of regenerative descent – a kenosis or catabasis of consciousness – into the abyss (Jung 1984: 60; cf. Igrutinović 2009b, Igrutinović 2013). In Raphael's mythical narrative, Shekhinah as the feminine, immanent aspect of God which signifies presence, is represented

as a regal figure opting to leave the luxurious palace of her betrothed so she could be with her people in their time of need. Her kenotic journey takes her from the exaltation of the throne all the way down to the abomination of death and impurity that is Auschwitz, where she is one of the women suffering with others and caring for them.

The first stage in the heroine's journey is her escape from the palace, which is paradoxically an absence to mend an absence and an exile to mend an exile. The primal absence is *tzimtzum*, the retraction of the En Sof creating a God-shaped hole to fit creation in, and the secondary exile is *galut*, the fall of the Shekhinah into the Other Side of material existence. Both have been seen by feminist theologians as reflected also in the patriarchal forgetting of the maternal face of God. The obscuring of that face of God which is devoted to nurturing the sanctity of life is thus seen as an aspect of both *tzimtzum* and *galut*.

It is important to note again here that throughout Raphael speaks in terms of the cultural construction of gender, and not sex. Though God in monotheisms is transcendent and sexless, humans insist on ascribing gendered attributes to this deity, and these are commonly exclusively masculine, sometimes in direct opposition to scriptures or tradition. This, according to Raphael, results in "human alienation from the divine, where what is worshipped in its place is a masculine numen; an idol whose name and will is perceived and articulated by the projections of the patriarchal interest". However, the alienation does not stop there, for "the dehumanization of women is the cause and the result of the patriarchal de-divinization of God" (Raphael 2003: 149). Patriarchy causes the alienation of humanity from God, but also the universe from God and God from God.

This derives from the kabbalistic teaching that *galut*, the present state of exile the world and humanity endure as their existence, is to an extent caused by "the alienation of the masculine from the feminine in God, the alienation of God and the Shekhinah" (Raphael 2003: 150). The return of the Shekhinah, or Sefirah Malkhut, and her mystical reunion with her masculine counterpart, Sefirah Tiferet, is slated to bring harmony to God, the universe, and humanity once more, and mend the broken ties connecting all of them.

It should also be noted that there is little specifically modern or revolutionary about the maternal aspect of God. In Isaiah, God is likened to a nursing mother, in a passage precisely questioning the feeling of desertion that the chosen people experienced: "But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49: 15, KJV). Continuing this Jewish prophetic tradition, Jesus similarly laments: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

(Matthew 23:37, KJV). This is the wording according to Matthew, whereas, in Luke's phrase, God would gather the children of Jerusalem as "a hen doth gather her brood under her wings" (Luke 13: 34, KJV).

There is likewise nothing novel about the notion that the exile of the divine feminine causes chaos and suffering in the cosmos. Under the influence of Lurianic Kabbalah, William Shakespeare used this as a plot device quite frequently and most notably in *King Lear*, when the aged male monarch expels his daughter Cordelia only to discover – as his universe unravels and sinks into oppressive darkness – that it had always been her bond of love, tragically deemed insufficient by him, holding it together in the first place (Igrutinović 2017b; cf. Kahan 2008). In Raphael's mythical narrative, the alienation between the king and his betrothed happens because he has opted to distance himself from the people, whereas she hears their plight and wishes to travel to their aid. This initial alienation causes the king to age and weaken, and his palace to grow cold, which is further exacerbated by the departure of the princess.

When the divine feminine is expelled or escapes, she descends, as does the cosmos. Why is Auschwitz the final destination Raphael's Shekhinah descends to? Auschwitz is where God's presence is most sorely needed, especially God's feminine presence among the suffering women. Throughout the duration of the Holocaust, women were statistically more vulnerable than men. It has been estimated that only a third of Auschwitz survivors were female, and it was specifically mothers – pregnant women and those arriving with small children – that were immediately doomed to die (Raphael 1999: 56).

There was also in Auschwitz a surplus of what Sara Horowitz terms the "gender wounding" of Jewish women: the infliction of harm to their sense of womanhood in various ways, from torturous gynecological experiments by the likes of Josef Mengele to being forced to endure abortion, pregnancy and childbirth in places where death was the only conceivable end result of all processes that might have otherwise led to life (Horowitz 2000).

Under these extreme conditions, what was a faithful woman, alone and abandoned, supposed to do? *Kiddush hashem*, the celebrated dignified martyrdom of offering one's life to God while calmly awaiting death, was not available to, for instance, "a mother comforting her child all the way to the gas chamber". A woman's obligations to God and her people had certainly always before been "mediated through her care and nurture of others as a living wife and mother". What could have been available was the "traditional though less heroic" notion of *kiddush hahayim*, sanctifying God's name in life and worshipping "through the everyday conditions of life in community" (Raphael 1999: 60-61).

It is this relational worshipful life in community that women in Auschwitz attempted to live and that Raphael posits the Shekhinah also lived among them. The main purpose of her descent was, according to Raphael, her very presence

in the midst of human death and suffering. Presence of a caring other, the Holocaust memoirs seem to agree, is crucial even when salvation seems impossible. Women writing about their experiences in the camps likewise tended to position the importance of God's *presence* above God's *power* to determine life and death (Raphael 2003: 51).

The figure of the mother is invariably seen as liminal figure, being lovingly present in both birth and death (2003: 50-51). The Shekhinah as the mother is a feminine giver of life, but the kiss of the Shekhinah is also known to take the righteous into death, most notably Moses, according to some kabbalistic traditions. A notion connecting these seemingly disparate manifestations of divine love is *devekuth*, an absorptive love of a mystic clinging to God's breast like an infant to the mother's – a love ultimately consummated in death (Raphael 2003: 124-25, cf. Igrutinović 2017a).

Raphael's story, as told in the book, is aptly titled "The Princess and the City of Death". The life-giving Shekhinah descends to the place of death, from the palace into the prison, from her exalted spiritual position to the abyss of the material (cf. Igrutinović 2009a; Cole). Confined Auschwitz is the absolute antipode of the walled city of heavenly Jerusalem, and becomes a place where the Shekhinah is through her kenosis at once imprisoned and exiled (Raphael 2003: 157-8). However, by way of her kenotic descent, the Shekhinah makes it a place of presence, as she was always present in every wilderness and desert where Israel found itself. In Raphael's narrative, the king's palace had grown dark and cold, and the light and warmth could only be found where the fires burning his people were – and where the princess also chose to be.

It was also the light and warmth of mutual care that the women in the death camps offered one another that summoned Shekhinah into this abyss. Raphael connects this summoning to the traditional notion that acts of *hesed*, lovingkindness to others, invite God's presence. This is seen as analogous to "lighting the Sabbath candles which traditionally invite the Shekhinah into the home", which is a ritual performed by women. The women, present for each other in the death camps, "elevated the profaned spark of the divine image in each woman they supported" and this process continues "wherever religious feminist resistance rescues the sparks from the 'shells' of patriarchal oppression" (Raphael 2003: 157-8). The princess in Raphael's story collects her bundle of sparks in the City of Death and ascends with them through the chimney when she herself is burnt.

Purification rites like *mikveh* – not exclusively but predominantly relegated to the female domain – performed by women at least symbolically in a place where dirt was meant to utterly extinguish human dignity, also had the power to summoned Shekhinah. Washing the face of the other was a holy act, an act of revealing the face of God to humanity, as Auschwitz had previously obliterated the face of humanity, making God invisible both to humanity and to God. For

humanity was made in God's image and "humanity images God" (Raphael 2003: 157-8). This is why God's face was once more visible also to – God.

Raphael explains this *tikkun* through a string of paradoxes:

Because women are made in the image of God, Shekhinah suffered in the suffering of women. So that what has been called the 'gender wounding' of Jewish women in the death and concentration camps was also a wounding of God. But conversely, that mutual care by which women restored the divine image to each other also restored God to God. For the erasure of the femaleness of God has divided God from God-self over millennia of patriarchal theological and religious domination. In this sense, the redemption of both women and God from patriarchy was occurring at the same time as their fall into a pit of total darkness (Raphael 1999: 54).

Though the identification of women as reflections of Shekhinah, the female aspect of God is restored to God and she can "behold herself in her creation" (Raphael 1999: 63). Raphael's Shekhinah remains with the women in the world to this day, willing to return when she is not so sorely needed here and once she is welcome back to the palace and to the royal wedding as an equal.

5. A Theadicy for Times of Crisis

Melissa Raphael's theology attempts to transcend the dualities inherent in previous attempts. Her God undoubtedly exists, but is discreet; can be both personal and philosophical; acts in history but in subtle ways, through the gentle care shown towards others; can simultaneously be all-loving, all-powerful (but not omnipotent), *and* present both as a subject and object in the darkest corners of the world. The female face of God is both exiled and imprisoned in Auschwitz and, through acts of caring while suffering, women return God to Auschwitz and liberate Her, allowing Her to behold Her own image in the faces of Her creation. The Shekhinah in the Shoah was not only personified by women, but also by the nurturing, maternal care of men, as Raphael clearly states and amply illustrates; it is likewise clear that noticing that the catastrophe strengthened 'women's spheres' of influence (Raphael 2003: 42-44) refers to all cooperative strategies for survival that foster solidarity – which might be globally needed once more.

Referring to the previous major rupture and crisis, but written in and for this late modern age and its current and recurring impending crises, Melissa Raphael's theology offers an alternative source of guidance and hope. While the God of Hosts might today be imagined wielding destructive nuclear weapons on various imperialist sides, the Shekhinah of a maternal feminist theology would instead urge cooperation and solidarity geared towards protecting and nurturing the sanctity of life, the world, and all creation.

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