


The Holocaust in the teachings of R. Isaiah Aviad (Wolfsberg)

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R. Dr. Isaiah Aviad (Wolfsberg) (1893–1957) was one of religious Zionism's main thinkers. This article seeks to examine his outlook regarding the Holocaust of European Jewry. Jewish thought contains three main approaches to dealing with the issue of evil in the world: the classic-causal approach, the teleological approach and the indifferent approach. The classic-causal approach explains the evil that exists in the world as occurring in a process of cause and effect; namely, the Israelites did not behave as God expected of them and were therefore punished. The teleological approach does not explain present suffering and evil as a result of past sins but rather as having a future purpose; the indifferent approach attaches no religious meaning to human suffering. People are careless and are therefore negatively affected. R. Aviad manipulates between these three approaches regarding the Holocaust, whilst adding the Hegelian dialectic. His conclusion was that the State of Israel is the redemption and the teleological meaning of Jewish suffering and of the Holocaust.

Contribution: This article helps to understand the theological approach of one of the religious Zionism's main thinkers and contains issues both in Jewish theology and Holocaust studies.

Keywords: Isaiah Aviad; religious Zionism; bad and evil; the Holocaust; Nazism; the State of Israel; Jewish theology; redemption.

Introduction

R. Dr Isaiah Aviad (Wolfsberg) (1893–1957) was born in Germany and immigrated to the Land of Israel after the rise of the Nazi party. He was one of the religious Zionism's main thinkers. R. Aviad was a paediatrician, and after the establishment of the State of Israel, he served as an Israeli diplomat in Scandinavia and Switzerland (Aviad 1986:11–65; ed. Raphael 1958–2000: 12–18). This article seeks to examine his outlook regarding the Holocaust of European Jewry.

World War II and the Holocaust

World War II lasted from 1939 to 1945. Almost all the countries in the world were involved in the war, whether directly or indirectly, and it was the biggest war in the history of humankind. It is estimated that more than 60 million people on three continents were killed in the war, including those killed by two nuclear bombs, amongst other causes. In the Jewish context, the war included the Holocaust, in which the Nazis and their collaborators murdered some 6 million Jews, one-third of the Jewish people, mostly on European soil (ed. Gutman 1990; Gutman & Rothkirchen 1973; Hilberg 1961; Michman 1998). The Holocaust is the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history.

Jewish thought contains three main approaches to dealing with the issue of evil in the world: the classic-causal approach, the teleological approach and the indifferent approach (eds. Meister & Moser 2017; Rosenberg 1987; Team of Editors 2019).

Let us expand on this matter. The classic-causal approach explains the existence of evil in the world as a matter of cause and effect; namely, the people of Israel did not behave as God desired and were therefore punished. God gave the people of Israel 613 precepts that are included in the Torah, which they were commanded to observe. But they did not do so, and in response God imposed on them various punishments such as war, hunger, disease, subjugation and so on. This approach is evident beginning from the Bible and throughout the course of Jewish philosophy until the present.

For instance, it says in the Torah explicitly: 'if you follow my laws ... I will grant peace in the land'; however, 'if you reject my laws ... I will set my face against you: you shall be routed by your enemies' (Lv 26). It also says: 'if, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil'; but the Torah warns: 'take care not to be lured away ... the ground will not yield its produce' (Dt 11). If the people of Israel observe God's

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way and his commandments, they will be rewarded with peace and prosperity; however, if they sin, they will be severely punished. This approach appears throughout the book of Judges. There, a 400-year period is described, a cycle of subjugation that results from the sins of the people of Israel, followed by redemption when they repent. Time and again God sends them a redeemer in the form of Ehud Ben Gera, Deborah the Prophetess, Gideon and others, who redeem them from their subjugation and grant them liberty and prosperity. 'And the land was tranquil forty years' (Jdg 5:31), until the next time around.

The causal approach is evident in rabbinical literature: 'there is no death without sin and there is no suffering without iniquity' (Bavli, Shabat 55a). Death and suffering are a result of human sinning, be it more or less severe. According to another description, 'suffering cleanses a person's transgressions' (Bavli, Berakhot 5a). It is assumed that sins dirty one's soul whilst suffering 'cleanses' one from this 'soiling'. Hence, the existence of evil is a matter of cause and effect – a person who sinned in the past suffers in the present as a result of the past sins. And when they experience bad things, they know that their own unworthy behaviour towards God is to blame. Therefore, the sages recommend 'if a person sees that suffering has befallen him, he should examine his actions'. As it is stated, 'we will search and examine our ways and return to God' (Lm 3:40, Bavli, Berakhot 5a). This searching will lead the person to repent and to be granted salvation.

Another approach is the teleological approach. It does not explain the suffering and evil in the present as a result of past sins; rather, a person who suffers in the present will receive something from his suffering in the future. For instance, 'The Holy One, blessed be he, gave Israel three precious gifts, all of which were given only by means of suffering: Torah, Eretz Yisrael and the world to come' (Bavli, Berakhot 5a). Note that this is not a punishment but rather a 'gift', although it comes with suffering. The suffering grants the gifts, both in the present world, such as the Land of Israel, and in the world to come, in the future.

An example of the tension between the classical and teleological schools is the biblical leprosy, explained by the sages in two ways. The first is that a person sinned and was therefore punished – the classical approach:

Leprosy ... was deemed a sign and a wonder among the people of Israel to warn them against evil gossip. If a man dealt out malicious gossip, the walls of his house would change; if he repented, the house would become clean again. But if he persisted in his wickedness until the house was demolished, leather objects in his home upon which he would sit or lie would then suffer a change; if he repented, they would become clean again. But if he persisted in his wickedness until they had to be burned, the clothes which he wore would undergo a change; if he repented, they would become clean again. But if he persisted in his wickedness until they had to be burned, his skin would suffer a change and he would become leprous. (Rambam, Defilement by Leprosy 16:10)

Then again, the sages gave another interpretation, which is that leprosy is a reward – the teleological approach:

The Canaanites heard that Yisrael were coming upon them, they got up and they hid their money in their houses and in their fields. The Holy One Blessed Be He said 'I promised your forefathers that I would bring their children to a land full of good' ... What did Hashem do? He sent plagues in their houses and he [the owner of the house] would break it down and he would find there a treasure. (Vayikra Rabbah Metzora 17)

Hence, the suffering was not a punishment but rather a reward. Similarly, the Ramban explained that the entire meaning of God's trial of humanity is not as a punishment but rather to 'bring forth the matter from the potential into actuality' (Ramban, Genesis 22). Every person has abilities of which they are not aware. Trials – suffering – make it necessary for people to expose their abilities. Hence, suffering is not a punishment but rather has a positive purpose.

Another approach is the indifferent approach. It gives no religious meaning to human suffering. A person was uncaredful, foolishly, and was therefore hurt. There is no religious punishment or purpose, only one's recklessness with its painful result. 'A man's folly subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord' (Pr 19:3). One can hold only oneself to blame, rather than being angry at God. One must take responsibility and behave wisely and thus avoid harm and pain. God, according to this approach, is passive (Rambam, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:12).

The sages too took this approach and said: 'all [is] in the hands of heaven, except for cold [and] heat' (Bavli, Bava Metzi'a 107b). If a person behaves foolishly and goes out when it is very cold or very hot without suitable clothing or drives without paying attention to the weather and the condition of the road, then if he is hurt there is no religious meaning to his suffering; rather, it is the nature of the world.

This was the approach taken by Yeshayahu Leibowitz (2002), who claimed that the Holocaust has no religious meaning:

Then again, I say as strongly as possible with no consideration for the pain that this causes many, including myself, that I cannot give religious meaning to the Holocaust in which a large part of the Jewish people was annihilated in our era. It resulted from the nature of reality in the world – 'the one in the wrong devours the one in the right'. This is the fate of the helpless who are in the hands of the evil ... and so it is also indifferent from a religious point of view. (pp. 142–143)

After presenting these models, we will now turn to examine Rabbi Aviad's approach to Nazism and the Holocaust.

Against Nazism

R. Aviad attacked the Nazi outlook from an ethical perspective, based on its outcome of acting to exterminate the Jewish people. He argued that Nazism is weak, as its very essence and existence depend on humiliating others, including the Jews.

The entire Nazi doctrine is founded on mystery. The Nazis created a special method concerning the significance of this race or another. The Germans are part of a supreme and lofty race, while the Jews are members of a despicable race. The Nazis' self-esteem is based on detracting from our honor, on diminishing our image. Perhaps this is a mark of weakness. They do not have a healthy sense of power that is not dependent on humiliating others. Just as in the Middle Ages the zealots of the Christian faith perceived the Jews as the anti-Christ, in our times Judaism has become the anti-German principle. (Aviad 1943:183)

According to this outlook, German cruelty is 'unbounded', not only towards the Jews but rather towards all peace-seeking humanists:

In Germany, cruelty is unbounded ... if there remains any doubt about this – the concentration camps will prove it ... there are tens of thousands there. Their fate is not only very bitter, but their life is also not worth living ... Here are not only the leaders of the objectors to the Nazi Movement and political criminals ... rather many people from all parts of the nation and from all professions, whose only sin is that they are among the advocates of progress: socialism, pacifism, and other aspirations in favor of peace and fraternity among the nations, and particularly between nations. The concentration camps are the tombs of all emotion and humanist action, where compassion and benevolence are forbidden and all lofty human assets are condemned to death. (Aviad 1943:183)

And he concludes:

Logic wields no control over this period and movement. The Nazis suspect it in any form it takes. Perhaps we can say that National Socialism is the supreme country of irrationalism. (Aviad 1943:184)

His attitude to the classical and indifferent approaches

Many ideologues do not feel comfortable with the classical approach, as it presents God as far from being 'compassionate and merciful'; on the contrary, the classical approach portrays a God who keeps a petty record of his worshippers and punishes them for every small deviation. Hence, many have preferred the other approaches. R. Aviad too takes this course, but nonetheless utilises a contention taken from the classical approach, as he could not disregard it.

When referring to the classical approach, he notes two sins. One is the sin of assimilation and loss of the Jewish people's religious and cultural identity. 'Assimilation is a mark of distrust in Israel's originality and value for the world' (Aviad 1955:101). In doing so, he contended that:

[T]he Jews in the last century sinned by not seeing and not wishing to see boundaries ... they were disloyal to their national selfhood, denied it, assumed the authority of others and did not notice that this was done without the consent of the nations. (p. 180)

This claim was voiced by many rabbis, as according to the classical Torah-oriented approach, whenever calamity emerges, it is necessary to search for and find the sins that

occasioned the calamity and to correct them through repentance. 'If a person sees that suffering has befallen him, he should examine his actions, as it is stated: "We will search and examine our ways, and return to God" (Lm 3:40)' (Bavli, Berakhot 5a). Therefore, this statement of R. Aviad is no surprise.

Nevertheless, he could not make do with a simplistic approach. As a philosopher, he sought something deeper. Indeed, R. Aviad (1943) claims that the catastrophe that occurred to us in the Holocaust was inflicted upon the Jewish people for a specific offence, namely, for disregarding the calamities of other nations:

We were not sufficiently moved by all the catastrophes that occurred in recent years: the crisis in Ethiopia, the tragedy in Spain, the bloodshed in China, the tribulations of the Assyrians, and others. We kept silent and accepted many terrible acts of injustice. We did not stop and did not resist ... (Mashiach 2006) And after the events happened, we didn't do what was necessary and possible to prevent torment ... to save people and all kinds of troubles and evil decrees ... this may be the main reason. And if our nation sinned together with the nations of the world, it is no surprise that the calamity struck us of all people, because we are the first to atone. (p. 189)

In the last words, 'because we are the first to atone', he referred to the approach of R. Judah Halevi in his book the *Kuzari*, where he claimed that all humanity is a single organism and the Jewish people is its 'heart'. As such, they suffer as a consequence of everyone and for everyone:

In the same way as the heart may be affected by disease ... thus also is Israel exposed to ills originating in its inclinations towards the Gentiles ... Do not consider it strange if it is said in the same sense: 'Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows' (Isaiah 53:4). Now we are burdened by them, whilst the whole world enjoys rest and prosperity. The trials which meet us are meant to prove our faith, to cleanse us completely, and to remove all taint from us. If we are good, the Divine Influence is with us in this world. (*Kuzari*, 2:44)

The tribulations are also a way of bringing divine inspiration to the world. But R. Aviad (1943) quickly says that this is no justification for evil and injustice:

The explanation of the evil inflicted upon the Jewish people according to Isaiah's prophetic method is that we bear the sins of the world. The evil we suffer has a Divine and global role and meaning ... a view that [nonetheless] is far from justifying the atrocities committed and certainly does not side with the oppressors and destroyers. (p. 196)

And, as though apologising, he claims that his statements are intended to grant religious meaning to the evil visited upon the Jewish people, as he cannot accept the indifferent approach that attaches no religious meaning to evil in the world. This approach might, as he sees it, lead to despair. 'If our wounds and the harm to our dignity have no higher function, if they are only a cause and effect ... then we will be beset by despair' (Aviad 1943:196).

He concludes with the following:

This teaching on tribulations does not diminish the pain, the outlook expressed here does not resolve the complaints at the facts and the expressions of rage and anger ... it is with sorrow that we are reminded of the special role with which history has burdened us: to be an exemplary suffering nation, for the improvement of all. (Aviad 1943:196)

Here he refers to his main approach to understanding the tribulations of the Jewish people, the teleological approach, as follows.

Zionism and the Land of Israel – An era of redemption

Before we expand on R. Aviad's teleological approach, we shall note that in his perception we are now in the era of redemption. Understanding that period of time as an era of redemption was a common thought amongst many thinkers of religious Zionism, such as Rabbi Reines (Mashiach 2018a), Rabbi Nissenbaum (Mashiach 2017), Rabbi Kook (Mashiach 2020b), Rabbi Hirschensohn (Mashiach 2018b) and others. This does not mean that one must wait passively for the Messiah. R. Aviad calls for activism and perceives it as a 'religious action'. He was aware of the national awakening in his time to immigrate to the Land of Israel and cultivate the land, and he saw this as a sign of the redemption:

The nation is not merely waiting for a miracle to occur at some future time ... rather it is initiating action ... the awakening of the collective and of the individual ... denote an era of revival ... redeeming the soil is the most prominent and typical symbol of the great transformation that is occurring in our time. (Aviad 1946:70)

Hence, he said that Zionism will outline the path to be taken after the terrible Holocaust, in preparation for the redemption:

Zionism is at present not a method, arrangement, ruse, or strategy. Zionism must now be a fiery flame, a beacon of Jewish life, a pillar of fire that will illuminate for us the darkness of night ... Zionism is currently not a personal matter or an aristocratic matter, it is now a tool of longing for life and creation, for continued action in the Land of Israel and throughout the world towards the redemption. (Aviad 1943:217)

R. Aviad (1943) espoused the teleological approach and saw the death of the victims and the tribulations experienced by the nation as a shortcut to the redemption itself:

I hereby express my modest opinion: The pains of all the tormented are not in vain, the oppressors will be stricken from the world and those persecuted will live and will be resurrected. They, in all that they have undergone upon accepting their tribulations in their sanctity that will accrue to them, forged by poverty and misfortune, will bring the days of the Messiah closer, and are already doing so. If we have any hope and comfort in these days, it is with the best and safest knowledge that the persecution in recent years might shorten the exile that is the equivalent of all the curses and bring upon us the redemption. (p. 197)

He could not bring himself to say that the deaths have no meaning. Now the suffering was given considerable meaning by saying that the death of these masses would hasten the redemption. The deaths were not in vain, they would benefit the nation and the world.

The teleological approach

On the Hegelian dialectic

I cited above several statements of R. Aviad in which he ascribed teleological meaning to Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. R. Aviad's meaningful statements with regard to the teleological approach are related to the Hegelian dialectic. To clarify, the Hegelian dialectic deals with three concepts that together create a process outlining the world's progression: thesis, antithesis and synthesis (Kaufmann 1951:459–486; Mueller 1958; Wheat 2012). To expand on that, the existing state of affairs is called the thesis. In time, in order to advance and improve the world, a contraphenomenon is generated called the antithesis. Then, in interaction between the thesis and antithesis, an anticipated improvement occurs, called the synthesis. Over time, the new reality will become the given reality, the synthesis will become the thesis and once again, in order to improve it, an antithesis will be generated, leading to synthesis and so on. The world is in a constant process of improvement.

As an example, the situation in France before the revolution in 1789 can be termed the thesis. France was ruled by an absolute monarchy and bourgeois aristocracy that lived a life of wasteful splendour. In order to improve and upgrade the regime in France, the French Revolution was initiated – the antithesis. However, the revolution itself still did not provide the anticipated response, and the simple French citizen continued to suffer under the reign of terror introduced by Robespierre and his colleagues. Now, the glum reality that resulted from the revolution and the interaction between thesis and antithesis generated the French Republic, a much better form of government. This was the synthesis (Mashiach 2020a, 2020b).

R. Aviad (1955) mentioned Hegel and the dialectic several times in his works. For instance:

The thesis leads to the antithesis until a synthesis is formed: What they have in common is that history is inclined to be gradually transformed into its opposite. Even a process that begins with and centers on deviating from the desired path contains a creative force. And this may be a different manifestation of the Hasidic outlook whereby even in sin there are holy sparks. (p. 80)

With regard to the exile and the misfortunes, he claimed that there is good in evil too, mentioning the Hasidic-Kabbalistic philosophy which contends that there are sparks of holiness in everything, even in sin, evil and suffering.

R. Aviad also speaks out against the pessimistic approach, apparently of Schopenhauer, (Magee 1983) who in his book

The World as Will and Representation claimed that the world evolves irrationally, with no purpose or aim. The automatic conclusion of this irrationality is pessimism. Any purpose is merely a fantasy (Copleston 1975).

R. Aviad disagrees with him. As a religious thinker who believes in God and in Providence, it is clear to him that everything has an intention and a good purpose. Therefore, his point of departure is optimistic because if God directs reality and history, then everything, even grave disasters, has religious meaning related to the redemption. For this reason, he perceived the Hegelian dialectic as a source of optimism, where despite the antithesis (bad), synthesis (good) would result:

It is not possible to determine the exact beginning of the current troubled times afflicting our nation. Perhaps it is hard to find the beginning because the evil is natural and unceasing for us. I am not speaking from a philosophical point of view as a complete pessimist who fully believes that evil reigns worldwide and that evil is the main principle in the world ... I also do not mean those people who, without an ancient jurisprudence deriving from their own qualities, rather according to their life experience, are inclined to pessimism because they have resolved that the degree of evil exceeds that of the good and joyful. Rather I mean the history of the Jewish people as an exilic nation. (Aviad 1943:178)

Therefore, 'there is a special regularity to history and a type of dialectic that generates an antithesis which follows the thesis' (Aviad 1943).

R. Aviad's teleological approach is on several levels: the purposeful tribulations of the Jewish people as the chosen people, the establishment of the State of Israel and refining the Jewish people's values.

The tribulations are evidence that the Jewish people are the chosen people

R. Aviad sees the tribulations afflicting the Jewish people as proof that they are the chosen people, following his embracing of R. Judah Halevi's approach cited earlier. This designation, 'the chosen people' (*am segulah*), grants them no special rights; on the contrary, it has brought upon them many misfortunes. But the grave misfortunes and the survival of the Jewish people despite the misfortunes are evidence that they are the chosen people, God's people, who spread the Divine message to humankind:

Our nation has boasted from time immemorial its designation as the 'chosen people'. It did not assume this honor from arrogance, rather this designation was given it following the supreme will: 'You shall be My treasured possession'. (Exodus 19:5) Until the present, our nation has not benefited from this honorable designation. On the contrary: terrible suffering, unbounded tribulations, were the fate of the Israelites, a lengthy bitter exile was decreed for this 'chosen people' ... The Israelites accepted their tribulations lovingly, because they understood that through them they could sanctify the Name of God publicly and fill their role of spreading knowledge of God in the world. Our people knew and know that such a supreme role requires sacrifices and that it is worthy of being killed for. (Aviad 1943:224)

The many misfortunes that afflicted the Jewish people were, for the 2000 years of the exile, the basis for the debate with Christianity, which saw the suffering of the Jewish people as proof that God had abandoned them. R. Aviad claims that in contrast to the statements he made previously, whereby the Jewish suffering is because of sins (that is, the classical approach), the tribulations are not because of sins; rather, they are only because the Jewish people are God's people:

Everything we are being subjected to in these terrible years, during the time of madness, is not new ... The hatred discards one form and assumes another, but our role is one, now as previously. And I think that I am not wrong in claiming that our misfortunes are first and foremost not such that result from sin and they do not indicate a punishment ... They are proof of our nation's main mission, which elevates the People of Israel to the heights. It is not the baseness of our nation that causes all the tortures, rather its moral level ... Only for these virtues was it chosen to suffer. (Aviad 1943:195)

He contends that not only are the tribulations during the war and the Holocaust not evidence of God's abandonment of the Jewish people, as claimed by the Christians, but also the tribulations are proof that the Jewish people are God's people.

I see in the current events in Germany and Austria a new stop in the scroll of torture, a new link in the chain of misfortune afflicting us, attesting to our role as God's servants. (Aviad 1943:195)

Establishment of the State of Israel

As part of his teleological conception based on the Hegelian dialectic, R. Aviad argued that the State of Israel is the next ascent following the descent embodied by the destruction of the Holocaust. The antithesis – the Holocaust of European Jewry – led to the synthesis – the revival of the State of Israel, the redemption:

Hence, it is not by chance that two visions are occurring in a single era: the revival and the destruction. The revival is a manifestation of the redemption, and the destruction is a distinct mark of rejecting life that is based on a foundation of goodness ... That is precisely why all instruments of ruin are concentrated around a single personality or a main idea, so that it will stop the progression of the noble good ... after which the government of peace can emerge in full (Aviad 1943:186–187)

And the State of Israel, as part of the redemption of the people of Israel, is universal. The entire world will benefit from the redemption, although before it is realised, there will be a terrible plunge, an antithesis, which he identifies with the Holocaust, although it is hard for him to say so:

The great calamity that occurred from 1933–1945 brought a Holocaust upon our people and upon humankind, one that is hard to overcome. And although it is hard to say that it has positive aspects as well, the heart refuses to agree to anything positive, still we must admit the truth and reality – the revival of Israel in its state ... is the result. (Aviad 1958:202)

As he sees it, the revival of the State of Israel is a miracle (Aviad 1955:110), and although this miracle carried an extremely high blood price, it was so decreed that this cannot be denied. 'This event had to happen. Only one who does not believe or who does not want the nation to exist can deny this' (Aviad 1955:114). And he stresses that 'the state is the ripe fruit of the nation's efforts and tribulations' (Aviad 1955). The antithesis resulted in the synthesis.

Refining the values and universal meaning

As part of his teleological approach, R. Aviad sees the suffering of the Jewish nation as a purpose intended to refine the nation's values. The people of Israel are the people of God who have a universal mission. As such, they must refine their values so that they can pass them on and have an impact. Although he mentions the classical approach, he immediately adds his teleological approach:

What is the designation of the exile and its interpretation? The classical answer is this ... it was caused by the nation's crimes and iniquities. But the exile is not a mere result and punishment ... We may add that tragedy and tribulations have an effect ... refining the soul and purifying the heart are acquired only through suffering. (Aviad 1958:202)

He sees these refined values as the means for saving the moral world from the Nazi movement and its distorted values. He mentions Kant's categorical imperative (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 'Kant's Moral Philosophy') as part of the moral values on which human ethics should be established. And this can only be done, he contends, by strengthening and refining Torah-based values. Only through suffering is it possible to improve the ethical-moral world:

Perhaps there is still time to stand up against the currents, to arouse all the powers of the intellect and of ethics based on the categorical imperative that accepts no moral cheats ... in the claim that the national ethics rejects the individual ethics, justifies the wicked, and beautifies the villain ... He who wishes to help save the world from danger and from the negative forces [of the Nazi movement] has no other way but to strengthen all the existing values and intensify them. (Aviad 1943:185)

A teleological approach is based on the Hegelian dialectic – a descent before the ascent, the antithesis before the synthesis. Improving the world.

Conclusion

R. Aviad saw Nazism as a complete distortion of world ethics, leading to the death of tens of millions, including 6 million Jews. Many took the classic-causal path and explained the Holocaust as a punishment for the nation's sins. R. Aviad too mentions this approach and claims that the Holocaust resulted from a double sin – firstly, forgetting the Jewish identity, which led to assimilation; secondly, disregarding the suffering of many nations. Therefore, quid pro quo, the Jewish people suffered, and many disregarded their suffering.

However, R. Aviad's main approach to Jewish suffering and to the Holocaust in particular was not the classical approach, as it portrays a cruel God, one who is far from the 'compassionate and merciful God'. He also criticised the indifferent approach, which grants no religious meaning to human suffering, as it leads to despair. As a religious person, R. Aviad believed that God watches out for the world, and that everything has a reason. His approach to the Holocaust was the teleological approach. He used the Hegelian dialectic, which he saw as a source of optimism. And although at present humankind and the nation are experiencing a decline and a tragedy – an antithesis – at the end of the process the synthesis will occur, enhancing and improving their condition, for themselves and for humanity in general.

As R. Aviad saw it, the Jewish people have a mission – to improve the world, and this can only be done through suffering. There must be a descent before the ascent, an antithesis before the synthesis. Unlike the Christian philosophy, however, which saw Jewish suffering as a proof of God's abandonment of the Jewish people, R. Aviad took the course of R. Judah Halevi, whereby it is precisely the tribulations that prove the Jewish people's status as the chosen people. 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows' (Is 53:4).

R. Aviad also claimed, as part of his teleological approach, that suffering is the way to refine the Jewish values. This has universal meaning as it will be a blessing upon the world. Here too, R. Aviad continues in the footsteps of R. Judah Halevi, who claimed that the height of accepting suffering is receiving divine inspiration:

The trials which meet us are meant to prove our faith, to cleanse us completely, and to remove all taint from us. If we are good, the Divine Influence is with us in this world. (*Kuzari*, 2:44)

R. Aviad, however, claimed that the height would be the redemption. R. Aviad saw his era as the era of redemption, and the establishment of the State of Israel is proof of this – 'the enterprise of revival'. The state is also the response to the distortion brought upon the world by Nazism:

Against the people of Israel, who in general and due to their history contain the positive assets by which the world was built on foundations of judgement and justice, who are loyal witnesses to God's will on earth, and against all marks and signs of love, compassion, and integrity as active forces in history, against all other representatives of these values is the national-socialist attack directed. (Aviad 1943:188)

R. Aviad positioned several principles of a redemption state, such as his call against violence, as a response to Nazism. The Jewish people have experienced enough violence throughout history to understand and behave differently with others:

The essence of our aim in the revival enterprise: In the current world we wish to become rooted in the homeland, in a life of creation, without detracting from the rights of others. We shall buy land with money, as we have done up to now. We shall honor the rights of the Arabs. The revival of the Land of Israel shall benefit them as well. We have not come to take anyone's place.

We have not and shall not take the course of occupiers for whom the life of the [local] population has no value. And at this time of clashes, when many are overcome by madness, we are unwilling to carry out improper acts ... acts of violence, terrorism, robbery, and destruction – we will not be part of them. Revenge – we object to it, even in times of anger and pain. We do not reject the concept, but we have learned that revenge is not for us to apply. If the Jew appeals to his God in the demand ‘Avenge the spilled blood of your servants before our eyes’, then whether intentionally or unintentionally he is saying that there is indeed need for judgement and law in the world, however ‘judgement is God’s’. (Aviad 1943:198)

R. Aviad (1943) claimed that three practical steps must be taken following the tribulations of the Jewish people in the Holocaust: empathise with the sorrow of those afflicted, help them and defend oneself so that such a tragic event will not recur:

The many misfortunes that reemerge daily among our wretched people demand a three-sided attitude. The first unmediated response is: to empathize with the victims, to feel their pain ... The second response ... is completely practical. To help those afflicted, to save them, to transport them elsewhere, and to allow them to rebuild their life. And we must of course stress the role of the Land of Israel in this enterprise. Also defense, defending our desecrated honor, is considered a practical obligation. (p. 198)

As a religious Zionist ideologue, R. Aviad linked the responses to the Land of Israel, Zionism and the State of Israel. ‘We have more solidarity in face of these facts, much more than ever before. A brother in distress is a brother all the more’ (Aviad 1943:186).

R. Aviad saw the death of those murdered in the Holocaust as a testament – to live. (In this he preceded philosopher Emil Fackenheim, who claimed in his speech ‘The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz’, given on 26 March 1967, that the main lesson of the Holocaust is the ‘614th commandment’ – to live!) And living means living in the Land of Israel. ‘Those killed ... in their death command us to live – to live for all time, and to live means: to traverse the lands of the living. And the sages have already interpreted this as the Land of Israel’ (Aviad 1948:293). For this reason, he appealed:

We must search anew for the proper course. We must attract the Jews of the diaspora and convince the nations of the world once again that we cannot relinquish life, honor, liberty, our living conditions, the route of revival and regeneration, and relinquish the Land of Israel, immigration, creation, stately conditions... We shall not go into exile again, to the exile of our people, to dissemination, to assimilation, to conforming. (p. 293)

The State of Israel is the redemption is the teleological meaning of the Jewish suffering and of the Holocaust.

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