

**“Mending the World” in Approaches of Hassidism and Reform Judaism:  
The Piaseczner Rebbe Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira and the philosopher  
Emil L. Fackenheim on the Holocaust**

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## Abstract

Holocaust raised many theological and philosophical problems that questioned and doubted all previous human experience. Many believers asked is it possible to keep faith in God after mass exterminations, many thinkers were concerned with a future of philosophy that seemed to lose its value, facing unspeakable and unthinkable. There was another ontological question – how to fix all the damage, caused by Holocaust (if it is possible at all), how to prevent new catastrophes and to make the world a better place to live. On a junction of these problems two great works appeared – *Esh Kodesh* (The Holy Fire) by Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira and *To Mend the World* by Emil Fackenheim. The first was a Hassidic leader, the Rabbi of the Polish town Piaseczno and also the Rabbi in the Warsaw ghetto, who didn't survive Holocaust but spent rest of his days, helping and comforting his Hasidim likewise other fellow Jews. Fackenheim was German Reform Rabbi, whose works combined profound knowledge of European philosophy and spiritual devotion of religious thinker. These two authors came from different backgrounds, but devoted themselves to the problem of mending (post)Holocaust world, in Kabbalistic terms – *tikkun*. Both Shapira and Fackenheim transferred the idea of the heavenly catastrophe, adopted from Lurianic Kabbalah, to mundane dimension, seeing a resemblance between cosmologic tragedy and human distress of the Earth. Hereby, in my work I will compare approaches of Shapira and Fackenheim in their description of Holocaust as historic and spiritual catastrophe, pointing out the differences and similarities in comprehensions of Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

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## Glossary of the Kabbalist terms

**Adam Kadmon** – Primordial Man

**Din** – the quality, attributed to *sefira Gevurah* and responsible for divine judgement, punishment and justice

**Dvekut** – the mystical condition of cleaving to God

**Ein Sof** – literally ‘The Endless One’ or ‘the Infinite’; self-manifestation of God before the creation of the world and divine contraction

**Kelal Yisrael** – spiritual community of Israel

**Hesed** – the attribute of divine mercy

**Kelipa (pl. kelipot)** – a husk, which appeared after the cosmic catastrophe of the breaking of the vessels; represents evil powers

**Mitzva** – divine commandment addressed to the Jewish people

**Rakhamim** – the attribute of the divine compassion

**Sitra Ahra** - literally, ‘the other side’, the dark and evil side of the creation

**Tikkun** – mystical mending of the catastrophe of the breaking the vessels

**Tikkun Olam** – literally ‘mending the world’; modern concept of social justice and a communal responsibility

**Tzimtzum** – divine contraction, enabling the creation of the world

**Sefira (pl. sefirot)** – one of the 10 emanations or powers of God

## Introduction

On February 8, 1939, Emil Fackenheim, a 22 year old student of the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, was released from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where he had been detained after arrest on infamous *Kristallnacht*. The Gestapo gave him only six weeks to leave Germany, so Emil went to his hometown Halle to say goodbye to his relatives and friends. In fact, he managed to talk to only one “Aryan” friend, his former Greek teacher, who was brave enough to insist on the meeting. The teacher pleaded Emil to come back after the dictatorship to help fixing Germany together. The student answered that he would never come back to the country which betrayed him, and instead he would dedicate himself to the mending of the Jewish world.<sup>1</sup> And he did not break his word.

Emil Fackenheim was not the only Jewish thinker and philosopher, who was concerned with the question of ‘fixing’ of the world shattered by the Holocaust. His thought can be named alongside Hannah Arendt and her concept of the “banality of evil”, Martin Buber with his idea of “I and Thou”, Emmanuel Levinas and “the responsibility of the Other”, and Arthur A. Cohen with the concept of the Holocaust as *tremendum*. But Fackenheim was the first, who referred to modern European philosophy, Reform Judaism and Jewish mysticism in an attempt to re-interpret the old Kabbalist concept of *tikkun* (mending) in the terms of contemporary Jewish thought and build a whole new system of post-Holocaust philosophy. This new version of *tikkun* was later caught up by Reform Jewish circles in America and turned into an umbrella concept for Jewish political and social activism and also for the Jewish responsibility of the fate of the world. Therefore, the main task of my thesis is to look at the transformation of *tikkun* from a cornerstone Kabbalist term into a leading ethical concept of liberal American Jewry and, eventually, Jewish philanthropy worldwide. I will

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<sup>1</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World. Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Indiana University Press, 1994, xxxi-xxxii

also try to answer the question ‘why Kabbalah?’ What are the reasons for this previously marginal and esoteric doctrine to attain such an influence in the post-Holocaust world? I claim that this transformation had been started already in the time of the Second World War with the re-interpretation of traditional explanations to Evil and suffering in Judaism, and obtained its modern shape in the 1980s-1990s when the question of ‘mending’ became not only religious but also political and, moreover, was adopted from secular perspective. Moreover, it was the specificity of Kabbalah language that gave a room for new interpretations of the post-Holocaust reality.

It is important to say, that for Fackenheim, who was not only a philosopher, but also a reform Rabbi, the question of faith in God after the Holocaust was decisive, while his political views, like his strong Zionist position, were strongly attached to the religious approach. In particular, in his magnum opus *To Mend the World* (1982) he introduces the so-called “614th commandment”, which called Jews to believe in God and follow the tradition to ensure survival of the Jewish nation on the Earth; and the establishment of the state of Israel was one of the cornerstones of this national revival. And although he (as he confessed in the letter to his student Kenneth Hart Green) was more familiar with the heritage of European, especially German philosophy, he also found inspiration in works of religious Jewish thinkers, and in particular Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, who, as David Patterson claimed, had a huge impact on Fackenheim’s thought, especially in the last years of his life.<sup>2</sup> Shapira was the first Orthodox rabbi who applied Kabbalistic knowledge for explanation of the Holocaust and, therefore became a predecessor of Fackenheim and his approach.

Shapira is the second pillar and an intellectual counterpart of Fackenheim in my thesis, as far as their different backgrounds and experiences surprisingly led them to similar conclusions. At the first sight they had nothing in common – Rabbi Shapira was a Hassidic

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<sup>2</sup> David Patterson, *Emil L. Fackenheim, A Jewish Philosopher’s Response to Holocaust*, Syracuse University Press, 2008, xi

leader from the small Polish town Piaseczno; he was also a headmaster of yeshiva and wrote several books on education of Jewish youth in the framework of Jewish tradition. He served as a rabbi in the Warsaw ghetto and perished in Holocaust in 1943, having left behind a manuscript of sermons, which was discovered post-mortem and published in 1960 as his spiritual diary under the title *Esh Kodes* (A Sacred Fire). Fackenheim, having escaped from Germany, taught in the University of Toronto until he retired in 1982, and moved to Israel, becoming one of its most fervent supporters. Shapira was concerned with preservation of Jewish tradition in the face of modernization, while Fackenheim came from the secular background and was more familiar with Kant than with the Talmud. Shapira saw his life only with his flock in Poland, while Fackenheim was a zealous Zionist. The one perished in a concentration camp and the second died old in his home in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, both of them realized that the Holocaust was something more than the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, the battle with Amalek or the divine challenge of Akedah (binding of Isaac), which were traditional rabbinic explanations of anti-Jewish acts throughout history. And it was far more than another expression of typical human cruelty that followed every war since the beginning of times. For Fackenheim as well as for Shapira, it was a rupture in both religious and mundane history, which had no precedents in the past. They were looking for a new language, able to express this dramatic change in the world order and surprisingly, they found their inspiration in the old teaching of Lurianic Kabbalah.

However, whereas for Orthodox Rabbi Shapira Kabbalah was a familiar field of study, for Fackenheim this approach was completely new. Canadian scholar Kenneth Hart Green in his letter to Fackenheim, reacting to the first edition of *To Mend the World*, admitted that he was confused with the word *tikkun*, used extensively in the book. Green asked about the philosophic significance of Lurianic term in his thought. He also wanted to know if *tikkun*



was used as a philosophical and theological, or as a mystical and mythical notion.<sup>3</sup> The answer to this question hides in the complex relationship between Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah as a mystical doctrine. Gershom Scholem in his classical work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* argues that these two approaches of Jewish thought have always been connected. But while philosophers criticized mystics for their irrationalism, the latter claimed that philosophy stopped in the place where Kabbalah only begun.<sup>4</sup>

Scholem emphasizes that the main difference between philosophy and Kabbalah lays in the symbolic dimension. Philosophy uses allegory as its tool; it consists “of an infinite network of meanings and correlations in which everything can become a representation of everything else [...] by becoming allegorical that something loses its own meaning and becomes the vehicle of something else.” On the opposite, the mystical symbol reveals and makes transparent the hidden meanings of another reality. It does not become “an empty shell into which another context is poured”, it represents something that “lies beyond the sphere of expression and communication, something which comes from a sphere whose face is [...] turned away from us”.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, Fackenheim claimed that ‘old’, ‘traditional’ philosophy is not able to vocalize the exceptional and unprecedented Holocaust experience. For this reason he applied to the mystical language of Lurianic Kabbalah, even though, as he confessed in the answer to Green, he did not “know very much about it”. For him the Holocaust was not only a catastrophe of European Jewry, but also a tragedy of the whole humankind and its culture, philosophy and ethic.<sup>6</sup> He borrows the Kabbalistic picture of the cosmic catastrophe of ‘the Shattering of the Vessels’ to describe the similar destruction of human civilization under Nazi

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Hart Green, ‘Emil L. Fackenheim’s response to a letter: Reflections by the author on *To Mend the World*’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, (Volume 12, Issue 3, 2013), 439

<sup>4</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1995, 24

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>6</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World. Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Indiana University Press, 1994, 443

rule. And in his attempt to ‘fix’ this situation, he applies to the concept of *tikkun*. This idea unites him with the kabbalist Rabbi Shapira, who also is desperately trying to find a way how to mend the rupture that occurred in Jewish life with the beginning of the war. Eventually, both of them come to similar conclusions about necessity of faith in God, common work for the survival of Israel and responsibility for the other. However, either for Rabbi Shapira or for Fackenheim this idea is not a solution of the problem, but the only possible way of existence in (post)Holocaust times. This faith contains also a critical aspect: no one should question the existence of God, but he or she must question God’s deeds, which can be wrong and unfair. Speaking in Fackenheim’s terms ‘The Voice of Auschwitz commands the religious Jew [...] to wrestle with his God [...]’.<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Shapira claims that God also has to repent for everything he has done to Israel.<sup>8</sup> Finally, both thinkers argued that the main Jewish goal should not be martyrdom (as far as this is the aim of Nazis) but life in the name of God.

My methodological inspiration I found in the book by Moshe Idel *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism. Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, where he calls for the methodological eclecticism in studies of Kabbalah, applying to the Wendy Doniger’s view of the “toolbox that a scholar should bring to his or her analysis” and Ioan Culianu’s proposal “to apply many methodologies to the same phenomenon, given its multidimensional complexity.”<sup>9</sup> This approach looks more than legitimate in the work, which brings together two representatives of the separate religious streams in Judaism, and which is destined to follow its actors through the different doctrines in the Jewish thought, like Midrash, Talmud, Kabbalah and even modern Jewish philosophy. The presence of German philosophy in the Fackenheim’s thought

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<sup>7</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, “The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz”, *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust*, ed. by Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, Gershon Greenberg, (Oxford University Press, 2007), 434

<sup>8</sup> Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, *Sacred Fire. Torah from the Years of Fury 1939-1942*, transl. by J. Hershey Worch, ed. by Deborah Miller, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004, 50

<sup>9</sup> Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism. Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, Central European University Press, Budapest, New York, 2005, 9

is a nice counterpart to the Jewish intellectual milieu. Hence, I will try to “approach a topic from different angles, including negative ones, including negative ones, in order to understand the complexity of the phenomenon at hand, which includes its critiques and its distortions”.<sup>10</sup> Scholem saw in Kabbalah expression of the hidden reality, Ludwig Wittgenstein saw in religion ‘inexpressible’.<sup>11</sup> In my work I will touch a topic, which so far is the most ‘inexpressible’ and one the most discussed in the philosophical world, and it is the Holocaust. I will look at it from the different perspectives of the intellectual Jewish experience, focusing on the concept of mending, in the way it was seen by Fackenheim and Rabbi Shapira. Jewish thought is based on interpretations, which traditionally ascend from the most simple, to the most profound ones. It is a beautiful Talmudic principle to quote in the discussion sages from the different epochs and schools, not giving a visible preference to any of them and leaving the discussion open. My work will also put together several opinions on the question of the Holocaust, which, I hope, eventually create a polyphony of interpretations, leaded by the two chosen thinkers. I will not avoid criticism if it comes to the problematic views of Fackenheim, but nevertheless I will try to show his novelty and importance for the Jewish philosophical thought alongside his counterpart Rabbi Shapira.

My work consists of three chapters, in which I will introduce a general Kabbalistic framework and then reflect on particularities of the implementation of its mystical approach in (post)Holocaust thought. The first chapter will introduce the concept of evil in Judaism and, in particular, in Lurianic Kabbalah. It will also deal with the questions of theodicy, creation, cosmic catastrophe and the ways of ‘fixing’ its consequences. It will also look closely at some Kabbalistic terms like *Ein Sof* (literally – ‘infinite’, the non-manifest essence of God), *tzimtzum* (Divine contraction), *Din* (Divine judgement), *Hesed* (Divine Mercy), *tikkun*, the Shattering of the Vessels and *kelipot* (husks). Finally, I will mention how the concept of *tikkun*

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 15

was developed by Kabbalists, adopted by Reform Jewish thinkers and philosophers, and how it was finally transformed into the popular idea of Jewish philanthropy and responsibility for the world.

In my second chapter I will talk about the philosophical approach of Fackenheim and the questions of post-Holocaust ethic and theodicy. I will start with his scholarly background, looking at his reflections on the works of German philosophers, like Rosenzweig and Heidegger and then will speak about his ideas about (im)possibility of the Divine revelation and heroism of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, the concept of “The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz” and the 614th commandment. Finally I will analyze his concept of *Tikkun Olam*<sup>12</sup> and show the connections of his philosophy with the Kabbalist thought, and in particular, with the writings of Rabbi Shapira.

In the last chapter I will come back to the more traditional field of Jewish thought and focus on the book by Rabbi Shapira *Esh Kodesh*. In particular I will analyze his thoughts on the problems of evil, suffering, joy, redemption and mending, applying to the method of PARDES, which is usually applied in Jewish theology and mysticism. Eventually, I will show in which way different approaches of Jewish tradition led him and Fackenheim to the similar conclusions about Jewish fate, relationships with God and even special Jewish mission in the world.

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<sup>12</sup> I will mark the modern concept of *Tikkun Olam*, spelling it with the capital letters, while the rabbinic concept of *tikkun olam* I will spell with the lowercase letters.

# 1 The question of evil and justice in the Jewish tradition

## 1.1. The problem of evil and suffering in Rabbinic Judaism

Long before the Holocaust, Jewish religious tradition created and developed its own answer to the question of evil and suffering. Although many Jewish thinkers emphasized the exceptional nature of the Holocaust, this view was not dominant as far as many Orthodox rabbis preferred to interpret this event in the frames of the centuries-long Midrashic tradition, which saw the origins of Jewish distress in a disobedience to the divine law. This position was still frequently expressed during the Holocaust (i.e. the Hungarian Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal or the leader of the Satmar Hassidim, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum) and even after it (Rabbi Irving Greenberg), and its supporters tended to explain Nazi persecutions with the spread of new trends in European Jewish society, in particular Zionism, emancipation, social integration, cultural assimilation, and secularization; in short, everything which contradicted the traditional lifestyle of the observant Jew. Midrashic thought applies to the biblical texts, connecting suffering, sinning and punishment, however, the Bible is also not consistent in this regulations. In particular, a verse from Deuteronomy proclaims „I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me“, on the other hand it also says „Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin“. Ezekiel’s verse confirms this position: "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph A. Turner, “Philosophical and Midrashic Thinking on the Fateful Events of Jewish History”, *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology*, (New York University Press, New York, London, 2005), 64-65

However, already the prophet Jeremiah asked why righteous people suffer, while the wicked ones enjoy success. As the Talmudic passage says (*Berakhot* 7a) Moses asked God why one righteous man enjoys prosperity, while another righteous person suffers from distress, and why one sinner is punished, while another one is rewarded on the earth. Rabbinic answer for suffering is ‘a measure for a measure’, and even though the punishment may seem too harsh, it may be a retribution to the transgression which severity is still unrevealed for us. Nevertheless, in the biblical story Job, whose suffering were incomparable to all his possible transgressions, the reasons for distress are still obscure for him, so he have to rely only on the God’s will and decisions. In *Ethics of the Fathers* (4:19) Rabbi Yannai says: “It is not in our power to explain either the well-being of the wicked or the sufferings of the righteous”. In the Talmudic legend (*Menahot* 29b) Moses wants to know the reason of the Rabbi Akiva’s ordeal under the hand of Romans<sup>14</sup>, and God replies: “Be silent, for such is My decree”.<sup>15</sup> Hence, for rabbinic tradition evil is not easily explicable, it even can be a part of God’s plan.<sup>16</sup> . In particular, the concept of ‘evil inclination’, which appears in the rabbinic literature as a metaphor for human sexual desires, is actually a good thing, insofar as it helps people to perform the mitzvah (divine commandment) of procreation.

The Mishnah gives an example of seven types of divine retributions, which come to the world for seven chief transgressions. Among them are: destruction by the sword, which is a punishment for transgressions in administering the law, and exile, caused by idolatry, forbidden relations and some other sins.<sup>17</sup> Rabbinic thought applied this approach to its

<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Akiva was subjected to a Roman torture where his skin was flayed with iron combs, because he transgressed the Hadrian's edicts against the teaching of the Jewish religion.

<sup>15</sup> This approach survived through the time and revealed itself in Jewish philosophy. In particular, Rosenzweig expressed its logic, claiming that the land belongs to God, and only secondarily to humanity, hence it has to obey divine rules, not necessarily knowing their meaning or purpose. Later this thought found its reflection in the Fackenheim’s philosophy, who also rejected any doubts about faith in God after the Holocaust. (see Turner “Philosophical and Midrashic thinking”, 65)

<sup>16</sup> Louis Jacobs, “Biblical and Rabbinic Responses to Suffering”

<sup>17</sup> Turner “Philosophical and Midrashic thinking”, 64-65

interpretation of various tragedies of Jewish history, starting with the destruction of the First and Second Temples and finishing with the pogroms in Russia. Gershom Greenberg in his article „Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Thought about the Holocaust since World War II“ names several Hassidic rabbis who saw in the Holocaust a traditional biblical war between Jews and Amalek, and compared Jewish suffering to the ‚birth pangs of the Messiah‘ and the completed sacrifice of the Akeda. Moreover, the Orthodox thought interpreted the Holocaust as a part of the divine will, which eventually can be good for humanity. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Rav of Lubavitch, called the Jews for repentance and later claimed that they had been punished to death for failing this mission. In 1972 he claimed that God had proceeded with his punishment, working as a surgeon, who removes the diseased part of the body to save the rest. But even he thought that the suffering went out of all possible proportions.<sup>18</sup>

As we will see later, even Rabbi Shapira thought that the distress of his family was a punishment for his sins, nevertheless, he changed his mind when the scope of tragic events was bigger than any possible punishment. Here we come to the main difference between the Mishnaic interpretation of evil and suffering and the (post)Holocaust theology by Shapira and Fackenheim: the traditional doctrine of punishment assumes that “one suffering is large, the other is small” and that personal or communal retribution will withdraw divine punishment, but in the case of the Holocaust everyone was destined to suffer and there was no escape from it. Hence, this novelty required some new interpretation and new language, able to grasp this theological difference and particularities of the Holocaust as the event beyond-the-tradition. Both Rabbi Shapira and Fackenheim found the tools to express their thoughts in Lurianic Kabbalah, which unlike rabbinic tradition spoke about evil and suffering in terms proportional to the physical, cosmic and mental totality of the Holocaust. Warren Zev Harvey in the article

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<sup>18</sup> Gershom Greenberg, “Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Thought about the Holocaust since World War II: The Radicalized Aspect”, *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology*, (New York University Press, New York, London, 2005), 153

“Two Jewish Approaches to Evil in History” claims that Lurianic Kabbalah presented a completely new approach to the problem of evil in Judaism, presenting the real power of evil, unlike traditional Jewish thought which described evil as the privation of good. He applies to the thought of Gerschom Scholem, who contrasts Jewish philosophy, and Maimonides in particular, to Kabbalah.

Scholem blames the philosophers in „treating the existence of evil as something meaningless in itself, and claims that „the question of the origin and nature of evil was one of the principal motivating forces behind Kabbalistic speculation“. In his *Guide for the Perplexed* (part 3, chapter 10) Maimonides calls evil a “privation” or “non-existence” and in another verse (part 1, chapter 2) he says that „good“ and „evil“ are not objects of the intellect. He also quotes the Babylonian Talmud (*Baba Batra* 16a), which claims that Satan, the power of evil, „the evil inclination, and the angel of death are the same“. According the philosopher, the evil inclinations are the result of the imagination, while evil deeds happen because of human desires and beliefs. Alongside Maimonides Scholem criticizes Hermann Cohen, a modern Jewish philosopher, whose book *Ethics of Pure Will* argues that „evil is non-existent“. As opposed to the „non-existent-evil“, Scholem presents the Kabbalistic power of *Sitra Ahra* which means „the other side“. It is a dark part of creation and is represented by Satan. *Sitra Ahra* is an evil counterpart of the cosmic structure of the ten divine manifestations, called *sefirot*, hence it constructs ten anti-*sefirot* and challenges the rule of God. Harvey claims that according to modern Kabbalah receptoin, humanity was not responsible for the Holocaust, as far as it was caused by *Sitra Ahra*, which created the anti-world, embodied in the planet of Auschwitz (as described by K. Zetnik).<sup>19</sup> Indeed it is easy to agree with Harvey that Kabbalah provided the image of total and comprehensive evil, moreover Fackenheim frequently

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<sup>19</sup> Warren Zev Harvey, “Two Jewish Approaches to Evil in History”, *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology*, (New York University Press, New York, London, 2005), 196-200, for more detailed description of *Sitra Ahra* and evil power in Kabbalah also see David Patterson, *Open Wounds: The Crisis of Jewish thought in the Aftermath of Auschwitz*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, London, 2006, 208



referred to the image of an anti-world, when describing Auschwitz<sup>20</sup>, however, neither he, nor Rabbi Shapira came to descriptions of a Satanic power of evil, undertaking the world. Both of them were ‘plagued by genuine fear and sorrow’<sup>21</sup> and therefore approached Kabbalah, but for Fackenheim as well as for Shapira the source of evil was hiding in the absence of God, caused by the cosmic catastrophe of breaking the vessels, as it is presented by Lurianic Kabbalah.

### **1.2. The question of evil and mending in mystical tradition of Lurianic Kabbalah**

Before we come closer to the issues of Lurianic Kabbalah, it is necessary to circumscribe the general framework in which this doctrine emerged and developed. It is necessary to mention that, following Scholem’s argument, there is no universal notion of mysticism. There is always a mystical tradition of some particular religion – Christianity, Islam, Judaism, etc. However, it is possible to say that in general every mystical experience is an attempt to establish a direct connection with the godhead. On the most primitive stages of religious development, people see the presence of God everywhere and communicate with him, later they start to feel a distance between the finite human world and the infinite divine spheres. Hence God is revealed only through his voice and not present as an active participant of the mundane business. Mysticism appeared when society already passed these phases and felt that the connection between humanity and God was lost and had to be re-established with the help of specific esoteric practices. Jewish mysticism emphasizes this bond between God and the human being; both equally suffer in the Exile and they are also responsible for each

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<sup>20</sup> The idea about the Holocaust as a manifestation of the anti-world was spread among orthodox Jews even in times of the Holocaust. In the memoirs of Holocaust survivors we can find many stories about Jews who risked their lives to perform at least one commandment in the face of death, as far as unlike the normal world, which requires total obedience to the Gods’ commandment, in the anti-world only one commandment is enough to stay obedient to God. (See Yaffa Eliach *Hassidic tales of the Holocaust*)

<sup>21</sup> Harvey, “Two Jewish Approaches”, 194

other's well-being.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, an observant Jew becomes a part of the cosmic drama, and his participation is crucial for the world order.<sup>23</sup>

This notion found a very peculiar embodiment in Lurianic Kabbala, which was a product of the flourishing spiritual life of the Jewish community in Palestinian Safed in the 16th century. Its founder Isaak Luria referred to the classical Kabbalistic work *Zohar* and enriched its doctrine with his own eschatological expectations. Although Luria did not leave a program work of his teaching, his ideas were popularized by his disciples, in particular Haim Vital and Israel Sarug, who spread Lurianic texts in Italy.<sup>24</sup> In the work *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem emphasizes how dramatic the Lurianic worldview is. It speaks about divine contraction which enabled the existence of the world, but simultaneously brought the evil forces to the place of the new creation. Another part of the teaching involves a cosmic catastrophe that Jews have to fix in order to make the Messiah come sooner. Lurianic Kabbalah speaks about a rupture in the divine order and a hope for the future redemption. This dramatism of Lurianic Kabbalah allowed Scholem to connect its emergence with the Expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, which happened in 1492 and raised a wave of messianic and eschatological expectations.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he grouped together Lurianic Kabbalah, the Sabbatian movement and Hassidism as phenomena of the same type, caused by social and political cataclysms and united by messianic ideas. However, the historian of Jewish mysticism Moshe Idel in his book *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* strictly disagrees with Scholem in his conclusions. Idel claims that the Expulsion is not mentioned in the Lurianic texts, therefore it is not possible to prove its impact on Luria. Moreover, he argues that Luria had good reason to regard expulsion as a positive event which brought many Jews to the Holy Land. Idel emphasizes that Scholem was wrong in putting the Lurianic movement,

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<sup>22</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1995, 7-8

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 256-257

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 245-246

Sabbateanism and Hassidism together, as far as social and historical factors did not play a crucial role in the emergence of these mystical movements.<sup>26</sup>

Lurianic texts provide an esoteric explanation of the existence of evil in the world, and not only in heaven but also on the Earth. The rupture is already based in the story of creation which leads us to the doctrine of *Tsimtsum*. The godhead in Kabbalah is called *Ein Sof* or 'infinite' but his infinity prevents him from creating the world, as far as this new entity cannot occur in the space which is already occupied. Therefore God has to contract himself to free the room for his creation. He is making a step inside withdrawing himself into oneself and this is the first divine Exile. Here it is important to mention that Lurianic doctrine sees the source of evil in the divine root, referring to it as to a lack of mercy from Gods side. The godhead has ten manifestations, and the Divine Judgment (*Din*) alongside Divine Mercy (*Hesed*) is among them. According to Lurianic doctrine, before the contraction *Din* was dispersed in God's mercy, but as soon as *Tsimtsum* happened, it crystalized and became more significant. On the other hand, *Din* was also a source of divine boundaries and limitations, so when God limited himself with *Tsimtsum*, its presence was activated. Scholem explains the origins of this doctrine by Gnostic influences, but Kabbalah, although speaking about different emanations of God, always emphasized his unity.<sup>27</sup>

The presence of evil in the world was enabled by a cosmic catastrophe that Isaac Luria called the Shattering of the Vessels. Divine light was so strong that the vessels which kept it (that is, the *sefirot*) broke and the light dispersed all around the world. The husks of the vessels or *kelipot* started to reflect different kinds of evil, infecting various aspects of human life and hiding the presence of God from humanity. As Scholem says, the biggest difference between Lurianic Kabbalah and its main Kabbalistic source, the *Book of Zohar* in this question is the idea on the origin of evil. The *Zohar* describes evil as a by-product of the life processes of the

<sup>26</sup> Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1988, 265-266

<sup>27</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1995, 260-261

*sefirot*, and more precisely *Din*, the *sefira* of strict judgement. In Lurianic thought, this waste was already inherent in *Din* and only the Shattering of Vessels brought evil to existence.

Therefore the mending of this situation or *tikkun* can be achieved through the restoration of the ideal order<sup>28</sup> by collecting all the sparks of the dispersed light. According to the Kabbalistic tradition, *tikkun* can be performed by pious religious life. In Hassidic doctrine simple observance is not enough; one should seek maximal cleaving to God, activating all one's spiritual capacities for this mission. Hassidim saw the way to achieve this unity with the godhead even in the routine mundane acts, therefore it was not necessary to be a skillful scholar to become attached to the Divinity.

Lurianic tradition believes that suffering may also help in this task. First of all, when one suffers he is not distracted from the unity with God by simple bodily pleasures. Secondly, pain and distress bring a human to the deep abyss where the *kelipot* are hiding the smallest sparks of the divine light. Therefore, suffering helps to reveal the divine light and restore the order. The most prominent example was Rabbi Akiva, who kept glorifying God even when he was undergoing terrible tortures. Rabbi Shapira quotes his last words in *Esh Kodes* with admiration: “All my days I had been in pains over this verse in the *Sh'ma* (Deut. 6:5) “Love God your Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” “When will I ever have the opportunity to fulfil it properly?” I asked myself. Right now, when I have the opportunity to love God with all my soul, should I not realize it?<sup>29</sup>” In Sabbatian movement, however, the idea of revealing the sparks came to another extreme. In particular, this group believed that transgressions and the breaking of the strictest religious prohibitions could help to reach the abyss and the light, hidden in it, sooner.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 261

<sup>29</sup> Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, *Sacred Fire. Torah from the Years of Fury 1939-1942*, transl. by J. Hershey Worch, ed. by Deborah Miller, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004, 96

<sup>30</sup> See Sholem, 287-324

As it was said before, according to the concept of *tikkun*, the Jew becomes an equal actor of the cosmic drama and he is empowered to fix a rupture, moreover, his actions are even more important than the expected messianic events, as far as the Messiah will come only after *tikkun* is achieved.<sup>31</sup> The same approach, as we will see later, is adopted by Rabbi Shapira. For Fackenheim, it is very important to recognize that human actions can have an impact on the divine sphere. But his *tikkun* does not stop on the theological level. He also wants to embrace its social and ethical dimension. And this leads us to the idea of a collective Jewish responsibility for the fate of the world (*tikkun olam*), which blossomed on the fields of American Reform Judaism. This link between the two traditions looks surprising, but Fackenheim was the person who most contributed to its emergence. His thought found a fertile soil in America due to the particularities of the historical development of American Judaism, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s. Fackenheim, who was a religious person, but not an Orthodox Jew, was embraced by a culture where the whole idea of “being a Jew” was far from synagogue rules and restrictions and where the idea of communal responsibility was very strong. As we will see later, the latter notion, alongside the support of Israel, was one of the central ideas of the Fackenheim’s thought. However, American Judaism neglected Fackenheim’s concern about amalgamation of religion and philosophy and adopted only the ideas that were meaningful for social activism and survival of the Jewish community in the United States.

### **1.3. Communal responsibility and social justice in American Reform Judaism. The raise of American Jewish civil religion**

The openness to the ideas of Fackenheim is a result of processes that are deeply rooted in the origins of American Judaism. As Jonathan Sarna claimed in his book *American Judaism*

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 36

in *Historical Perspective*, Jews creatively adapted their religion to the new American environment. They faced a much lower rate of antisemitism and could enjoy more religious freedoms, but instead of the expected total secularization and integration in the American society, they remained faithful to their religious identity and communal solidarity. Nevertheless, modern American Judaism is a child of the social and political processes which shook the European Jewish world in the 18-19s centuries, and in particular the issues of emancipation and religious modernization, started by Moses Mendelssohn and his followers. American Judaism is primarily a Reform or liberal Judaism; Orthodox tendencies were marginal there until the post-war era, when representatives of different Hassidic courts, who escaped the Holocaust, started to settle and grow in America, recruiting new followers among spiritually-thirsty American Jews.<sup>32</sup>

Reform Judaism in America was influenced by German Jews who emigrated from their country in 1840s, escaping from persecutions, economic and political restrictions, looking for opportunities in the new land. They carried the ideas of Jewish emancipation and incorporation in the Gentile society and also called for the modernization of Judaism, which, according to the ideas of the Jewish Enlightenment, only alienated Jews from the other nations and spread superstitions among them. Reform Judaism rejected the small, dusty and murky hall of the traditional synagogue, the obscure murmuring of rabbis, traditional Jewish education, concentrated on the holy scriptures but completely ignorant about sciences, as well as the ridiculous outfit and absurd restrictions followed by the religious Jews. Reform Judaism wanted to see its followers as active members of civil society and patriots of their land who had nothing to hide from the Christians. Judaism had to become just another religion, while being “a Jew” was interpreted as a religious affiliation, meaning “a citizen of Mosaic faith”,

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism in Historical Perspective*, Ann Arbor, Jean and Samuel Franker Center for Judaic Studies, The University of Michigan, 2003, 1-15

withdrawing from all ethnic connotations. All these transformations were a part of *bildung* of a new “civilized” Jew and they perfectly fit to the American reality and its notion of “civil religion”.<sup>33</sup>

In the essay *Civil Religion in America* (1966) Robert Bellah circumscribes a concept the peculiarly American type of religious affiliation, which was decisive for the creation of the American state. He claims that American “civil religion” is result of the strong bond between society and the American values of freedom, democracy and patriotism. The civil religion was celebrated by the founding fathers of the United States, like Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, and stated in the Declaration of Independence. Its main novelty is in its universalism and inclusiveness insofar as it is not predominantly Christian and is based on the notion of ‘Americanness’, equally welcoming the members of different ethnical and religious groups. Nevertheless, the civil religion, as Bellah argues, is based on the Bible:

Behind the civil religion at every point lie biblical archetypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, and Sacrificial Death and Rebirth. But it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols. It is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all nations.<sup>34</sup>

As we can see, civil religion addresses its followers not as representatives of a certain religious or ethnic group, but as participants of the common venture, spreading the sense of unity among them. Moreover, these civil values are linked to the transcendental purposes and the moral issues, it is legitimized by the traditional religions. In his book *Sacred Survival. The Civil Religion of American Jews* Jonathan Woocher argues that for centuries Judaism played

<sup>33</sup> Alexander H. Joffe, , “American Jews beyond Judaism”, *Society* (July 2011, Volume 48, Issue 4), p 323-29

<sup>34</sup> Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America”

such a role of civil religion for Jewish society. But in America Jews managed to shape Judaism, and Reform Judaism in particular, according to the local standards; when they distanced themselves from synagogue and rabbinic laws, American Jewish civil religion appeared.<sup>35</sup>

Woocher circumscribes seven major trends of the civil Judaism: 1. the unity of Jewish people; 2. Mutual responsibility; 3. Jewish survival in a threatening world; 4. the centrality of the State of Israel; 5. The enduring value of Jewish tradition; 6. *Tzdaka*: philanthropy and social justice; and 7. Americanness as a virtue.<sup>36</sup> As we can see American Judaism loses its connection to the ritual and to the divine transcendence, but turns a notion of communal service and responsibility into the ideal. It was widely represented in the phenomenon of Jewish philanthropy or *tzdaka*, which financially supported both Jewish and non-Jewish charity organizations. The word *tzdaka* originates from *tzedek*, meaning righteousness” of “justice”, and in the American environment it becomes equal to the idea of the social justice.<sup>37</sup> This idea is close to the Charles Liberman’s concept of the ‘folk religion’, for which the ritual aspect of religiosity plays a secondary role; for civil Judaism theological debates are less valuable than the general survival of the Jewish nation.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, this concern is one of the most recent phenomenon in American Judaism alongside the centrality of the State of Israel.

American Reform Judaism inherited the skepticism about the Zionist movement from its German predecessor. Like German Jews, who preferred to stay Germans of the Mosaic faith, American Jews wanted to grasp the sense of Americanness and integrate into the local multicultural society, considering the idea of Jewish national revival backward and utopian. However, the tragedy of European Jewry in the times of the Holocaust and the establishment

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<sup>35</sup> Jonathan S. Woocher, *Sacred Survival. The Civil Religion of American Jews*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indianapolis, 1986, 16

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 85

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 95



of the State of Israel in 1948 as the national Jewish homeland, raised their interest in Israeli affairs and Zionism in general. Nevertheless, the problems of the Holocaust experience stayed marginal for the next twenty years, until the revolutionary turn in the 1960s, when the American civil rights movement, the Eichmann trial and the Six Day War in Israel finally led to the re-memorialization of the Holocaust, the rise of pro-Zionist sympathies and the molding of modern American civil Judaism. By the early 1960s American Jewry enjoyed religious revival, supported by economic growth and political stability. In the 1950s the Jews started to leave the cities, moving to the suburb areas. They finally left the Jewish quarters where they did not feel any distinctiveness and consequently did not care much about their religious and ethnical identity, just to dwell alongside Christian neighbors, experiencing the awakening of their Jewish identity. In that decade Reform Judaism became a part of the well-established life of the middle class. Economic prosperity, alongside the respectability achieved by the American Jews, supported the illusion that the terror of World War II was finally overcome and forgotten.<sup>39</sup> In his famous book *American Judaism* Nathan Glazer (1957) argues that the Holocaust memorialization did not occupy much space in the consciousness of American Jews.<sup>40</sup> Hence, the Eichmann trial, which was one of the first direct exposures of the Holocaust trauma, made a sensation among the ignorant American audience and stimulated them to re-evaluate the Holocaust history and its moral lessons.

The next traumatic event which contributed to the shaping of American Jewish identity was the Six Day War, interpreted by many as the miraculous escape from the second Holocaust. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, writing about the war, exclaimed: “Will God permit our people to perish? Will there be another Auschwitz, another Dachau..?”<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander H. Joffe, , “American Jews beyond Judaism”, 236-37

<sup>40</sup> Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*, Columbia University Press, New York, Chichester, West Sussex, 2009, 39, more about the Glazer’s book in Rachel Gordan, “Nathan Glaser’s *American Judaism*: Evaluating Post-World War II American Jewish Religion”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (Vol. 5, № 4, Fall 2015), 482-506

<sup>41</sup> Kaplan, Dana Evan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 44

victory of Israel was a triumphal event for Israeli Jews as well as for their American brethren. It was the first time in the modern era that the Jews did not go as sheep to slaughter, but defended themselves, fighting against the overwhelming forces of the enemy. The theological and messianic aspect of this victory was clear – the Jewish national state had managed only in twenty years to turn a victimized *goles* (diaspora) Jew into a proud warrior, able to deal with violently anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli Arab forces. Hence, Zionism proved its legitimacy, having achieved redemption and a victory in the millennial battle between Jacob and Esau or Hebrews and Amalek. After 1967, American Jews learnt how to be proud of their Jewishness. American-Israeli cooperation, alongside financial support of Israel, became a significant part of American Judaism. Besides that, the civil rights movement reminded Americans about Jewish rights, while the Renaissance of ethnical movements motivated them to think about their own national affiliations.<sup>42</sup>

The 1960s was a time when Fackenheim's thought also underwent some serious transformations, in particular, he implemented the Holocaust into his philosophy, and started to argue that it was the most crucial event in Jewish history and religion. Here we can see that Fackenheim's thought was influenced by the changes in American Jewish society (although he lived in Canada, he was closely connected with American Jewish intellectual circles), and that eventually it became one of the pillars of modern American civil religion<sup>43</sup>.<sup>44</sup>. Fackenheim was awoken by the events of the Six Day War. He left behind his criticism of the Jews, who voluntarily "closed their ears" to the words of God and started to develop the idea of "the secular holiness" of Zionism. American values of communal responsibility and its

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>43</sup> Woocher names five philosophers who spoke about Jewish return to the history and who contributed the most to the creation of the Jewish civil religion in America, in particular: Emil Fackenheim, Mordecai Kaplan, Martin Buber, Eugene Borowitz and Irving Greenberg (Woocher, *Sacred Survival*, 174).

<sup>44</sup> Woocher names five philosophers who spoke about Jewish return to the history and who contributed the most to the creation of the Jewish civil religion in America, in particular: Emil Fackenheim, Mordecai Kaplan, Martin Buber, Eugene Borowitz and Irving Greenberg.

sympathy towards Israel were transformed into the ideas of global Jewish community, united by the redemptive power of the Jewish State. On the other hand, his interest in Jewish mysticism, which resulted in the creation of the *Tikkun Olam* doctrine, was adopted by American Jewry as a philosophical reflection on the tradition of Jewish philanthropy. Eventually, mending the world became a Jewish responsibility, insofar as Jews, as survivors of the most tragic and meaningful event in human history, started to represent humanity itself.

#### **1.4. *Tikkun Olam* as a cornerstone concept of American Reform Judaism**

Before we can come closer to the concept of *Tikkun Olam*, I have to point out that nowadays it differs distinctively from the initial *tikkun* and *tikkun olam* in the rabbinic tradition and Lurianic Kabbalah, but still it is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition. The terms *tikkun* and *tikkun olam* have their long history in rabbinic literature, but they never had the universalistic approach that is distinctive for their modern usage. In the Talmud it appears around forty times in the form *tikkun ha-olam*, where *tikkun* stands for ‘fixing’ and *olam* means ‘society’. In particular, in *Mishnah Gittin* 4:1-5:3 *tikkun ha-olam* is applied to the marital regulations and deals with the questions of divorce, re-marriage and the legal status of spouses and children. Therefore, *tikkun ha-olam* means ‘repair’ of Jewish society which was extremely dependent on the proper functioning of the nuclear family. Another example of *tikkun olam* in Hebrew texts is in the prayer *Aleinu*, which is a traditional part of everyday liturgy. It is attributed to the third-century Talmudic sage Rav and rooted in the mystical stream of Merkavah literature, which appeared in the late antiquity. Nevertheless, *Aleinu* became a part of the liturgy only in the beginning of the 14th century as a response to atrocities during Crusades. It is also claimed that Jewish martyrs used to recite this prayer before their death. The prayer starts with the juxtaposition of Jews, who believe in one true God, and idol-worshippers among the nations, and it follows with the eschatological images of God, who ‘extends the heaven and establishes the earth’ with his supreme power. The latter part contains

a phrase in Hebrew ‘*letaken olam bemalkhut Shaddai*’, where *tikkun* is used as a verb in its infinitive form ‘l’taken’, but it means ‘to establish’, but not ‘to repair’. And although this term was not unusual for rabbinic literature, it stayed on its margins until it was adopted by Kabbalah.<sup>45</sup>

Kabbalist teaching includes the *Book of Zohar*, the writings of Moses Cordovero, Isaiah Horowitz, Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, the teachings of Isaak Luria and other works. What is distinctive for the Kabbalistic usage of the term *tikkun* (as well as *tikkun olam*), in comparison to rabbinic tradition, is the turn from mundane human business to problems of cosmic scale. As it was said before, *tikkun* was applied to the restoration of the divine order, which was broken after the Shattering of the Vessels, and to the re-establishment of the spiritual harmony in the world. It made a human being an active participant of the cosmic drama; nevertheless the process of *tikkun* was open only to the most educated scholars of Kabbalah. The Hassidic movement adopted Lurianic teaching but made the participation in *tikkun* available for everyone. But still, this approach was far from a universalism in the modern sense of this term.<sup>46</sup> Even at the beginning of the 20th century, Kabbalah was a marginal mystical stream in Judaism. It was not a popular field of study among scholars, and only the works of Gershom Scholem eventually helped make it shine in the academic world. Outside academia *tikkun* was used by different Jewish groups, starting with religious Zionists and Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, who saw the ‘repair’ in creation of the Jewish state, and finishing with aggressive anti-Zionists, who referred to the words of *Aleinu* and waited for messianic redemption.<sup>47</sup> Still, Levi Cooper in his article *The Assimilation of Tikkun Olam*

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<sup>45</sup> Byron Shervin, “Tikkun Olam: a Case of Semantic Displacement”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Krasner, “The place of Tikkun Olam in American Jewish life”

emphasizes the concept of *tikkun olam* in its contemporary interpretation was never popular in Israel, until it was imported from the United States in the late 1990s.<sup>48</sup>

The American approach to the question of *tikkun* was shaped between the 1950s and the 1980s due to activities of Jewish educators, activists and social workers. Eventually, it became an issue of personal responsibility for communal problems and social justice, whereas the aspect of divine intervention was completely left aside from the discourse. This universalistic idea spread not only among American Jews who remained secular, but also among the representatives of Reform movement. In particular, in the reformulation of the “Ten principles of Reform Judaism” published in 1999 it is said: “Partners with God in *tikkun*, repairing the world, we are called to bring nearer the messianic age... In doing so, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform beliefs and practices”. Shervin claims that this approach takes its origin in the works of Julius Wellhausen, a liberal Protestant Bible scholar, who lived in the 19th century in Germany. Wellhausen argued that original Judaism was established by ‘classic’ prophets like Isaiah and Micha, who emphasized the idea of universalistic monotheism, while this progressive notion was eventually distorted by the particularism and ritualism of the Pharisees and the rabbinic tradition. This was a discourse which Reform Judaism found relevant for its purposes. Shervin also claims that early Reform thinkers saw in this universalist ethics the essence of Judaism, identifying it with Kantian ethic, which was based on the values of the European Enlightenment, such as individual moral autonomy, rationalism and universalism.<sup>49</sup>

If so, it is not a surprise that Fackenheim, who was disappointed with the consequences of the Enlightenment and its philosophic influence on the Holocaust, decided to re-invent the Kantian imperative, transforming it into the 614th Commandment, and to refer to the

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<sup>48</sup> Levi Cooper, “The Assimilation of Tikkun Olam”

<sup>49</sup> See Shervin

Kabbalist divine universalism, while placing the accent on the question of Jewish redemption. And naturally, he received a positive response from American Jewry, who shared his Zionist inspirations and belief in a specifically Jewish mission in mending the post-Holocaust world, on earth as well as in the heavens. However, since the first publication of Fackenheim's book *To Mend the World*, the idea of *Tikkun Olam* has undergone serious transformations and became the umbrella concept for many various types of social activism, not even directly connected to Israel or the Jewish world in general. *Tikkun olam* has been applied to philanthropy, human rights, animal rights, humanitarian missions in the developing countries, ecological activism, feminism, anti-capitalism and even voting for a right candidate on a president elections.

This term was also adopted by non-Jewish Americans alongside such 'Jewish words' as 'chutzpa', 'shlimazel' or 'bagel'. In particular, Barack Obama was called by liberal Jewish circles 'a tikkun olam candidate'; while Obama in his speech mentioned that the concept of communal responsibility or *Tikkun Olam* has been guiding him in his life. Eventually it was adopted even by American Catholic and Protestant groups. Moreover, this word seems to have lost its Hebrew meaning completely. Byron Shervin in his article "*Tikkun Olam: a Case of Semantic Displacement*" shares an anecdote about some American man, who, having arrived to Israel, asked his relatives how to say *Tikkun Olam* in Hebrew.<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Krasner in the article "*The place of Tikkun Olam in American Jewish Life*" claims that popularity of this term and the frequency of its usage has dramatically increased since the 1980s, and one of the reasons for such a change was the influence of Fackenheim's book as well as the growing power of American Reform Judaism.<sup>51</sup> As many scholars claim, *Tikkun Olam* has

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Krasner, *The place of Tikkun Olam in American Jewish life*, Jewish Political Studies Review 25, 3-4 (2013) 59-98

never been as important as it currently is, but this also leads to the devaluation of the whole concept.

Interestingly enough, the concept got rid not only of its religious background, which was so important for Fackenheim, but also started to lose the connection with its Zionist component. The State of Israel had already lost its progressive reputation, due to the failed attempts to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinian population and the continuous abuses of its civil rights. Israel's policy seems to contradict the whole notion of social justice, proclaimed by the *Tikkun Olam* concept, hence American Jewry, especially the intellectual circles, tend to accept the rhetoric of the critics of Israel. The scandal in the American Anthropological Association, which attempted to accept the pro-Palestinian "Boycott, Divestment, Sanction" movement's resolution for the academic boycott of Israel is the most recent example. The results of the online voting were published on 7 June, 2016; the resolution was defeated, but there were 2,384 votes in favor for 2,423 votes against.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, the glorified Jewish struggle for the homeland has been questioned by Nakba, and the Palestinian national struggle started to occupy the political and philosophical thought. Nevertheless, this tendency is also a heritage of the Holocaust, as far as the sense of communal responsibility and social justice does not let the Jews identify with perpetrators, urging them to remember the fate of their perished ancestors.

Summing up the present chapter, I want to point out several issues that are important for the understanding of the questions of evil, suffering and mending in Judaism. First of all, Jewish religious thought does not have a single answer to these questions, as well as a single image of evil. In the Rabbinic tradition evil was diversified, so suffering and distress could be caused by divine punishment for transgressions or be a result of the challenge of faith as it

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<sup>52</sup> John W. Traphagan, "AAA Boycott of Israel Denied", *Huffpost Education*, June 7, 2016

happened to Job. Satan in this story was God's subordinate and all the power was held in the divine hands. Distress could also be a part of God's plan, the meaning of which was still obscure for humans, and consequently, be good for them. Moreover, God demanded obedience, so no one could question his will. This attitude was shared by many Orthodox rabbis, who saw in the Holocaust a punishment for the Jewish sins and transgressions. The mystical movement of Kabbalah brought a new dimension into the question of evil, arguing that its existence is caused by the divine contraction during the process of the creation of the world, and the consequent absence of God in it. Kabbalists also introduced the separate source of evil, named *Sitra Akhra*, which is the "other", evil side of divinity, constituting an anti-world completely opposite to ours. The ways to "fix" distress in these two traditions also differ: while rabbinic Judaism requires redemption and some rituals of atonement, performed by the sinner or the community which transgressed the law, the Kabbalist tradition speaks about the cosmic process of mending the shattered world to the holistic condition, called *tikkun*. This process is a responsibility of every scholar of Kabbalah, as far as it anticipates the messianic times and the redemption of the whole Jewry.

This approach was adopted by Rabbi Shapira and Emil Fackenheim, who did not support the idea of the Holocaust as a punishment for transgressions and saw in it the manifestation of a gigantic cosmic drama, in which Jews played the leading role. Fackenheim's affiliation with Kabbalah resulted in his ideas about the transcendental and (most importantly) the actual mending of the post-Holocaust world. He applied to the old concept of *Tikkun Olam*, reinterpreting it in the frames of the survival of the Jewish nation after the Holocaust. His ideas were shaped by American Judaism (represented mostly by the Reform movement), with its emphasis on communal service and responsibility, the tradition of philanthropy and the notion of social justice. The Eichmann trial and the events of the Six Day War attracted the attention of American Jewry to Israel and the post-Holocaust traumas,



making Zionism attractive to the Americans who were traditionally skeptical towards this movement. Fackenheim was also influenced by these events, hence in the late 1960s his philosophical thought became strictly pro-Zionist and Holocaust-oriented. Although his book *To Mend the World* had a huge impact on the development of American Judaism (or the so-called American Jewish civil religion) his concept of *Tikkun Olam* eventually underwent significant changes, leaving behind the religious and even Zionist component. Nowadays it has become an umbrella concept for different kinds of Jewish philanthropy and a synonym for social justice, equally used by the Jews and non-Jews.

## **2 *Mending the world* in the philosophy of Emil L.**

### **Fackenheim**

The influence of Emil Fackenheim's works on post-Holocaust Jewish philosophy is widely acknowledged by scholars of Jewish thought. David Patterson calls him the most original Jewish philosopher, and claims that Fackenheim belongs to the same cohort as Martin Buber, Hans Jonas, Leo Strauss, Leo Baeck and Emil's spiritual teacher Franz Rosenzweig.<sup>53</sup> The philosopher is mostly known for his 614th Commandment (there are 613 Commandments in Judaism), which obliges Jews to follow the religious tradition, and thus to prevent Hitler's posthumous victory over the Jewish nation. Fackenheim was also a vocal advocate of Israel and her military policy. He celebrated Israel's success in the Six Day War in 1967, seeing in it a sign of political and also spiritual mending which happened to Jews after the Holocaust with the establishment of the national Jewish state. Therefore, in this chapter I will talk mostly about Fackenheim's ideas, which brought him fame and distinguished him from other philosophers, in particular the concepts of divine revelation, developed from the teaching of

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<sup>53</sup> David Patterson., *Emil L. Fackenheim. A Jewish Philosopher's Response to the Holocaust*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 2008, xii

Rosenzweig and his *Star of Redemption*; his ideas about Jewish resistance in the time of the Holocaust as an ontological category, and the consequent concepts of the 614th Commandment, the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz and *Tikkun Olam*, united by the same idea of re-establishing Jewish particularity and authenticity after the mass destruction in the Holocaust.

### 2.1. Emil Fackenheim. The philosopher's response to the Holocaust

Fackenheim argued that the Holocaust was a rupture not only in the flow of history but also in the notions of reason, logic and humanism. He tried to construct a new post-Holocaust Jewish philosophy, trying to amalgamate works of German philosophers with traditional Jewish forms of thought as Bible, Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah. This approach can be explained by his background – he studied in the theological seminary of German Reform Judaism, the Hochschule für Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, but he was also always interested in German philosophy and felt himself as a part of the Jewish-German intellectual tradition. However, unlike many fellow philosophers, Jews and non-Jews alike, who experienced the rise of Hitler as adults, Fackenheim faced the Nazi persecutions, and eventually the Holocaust, at the young age of the late teens and early twenties. These years were formative for his national, religious and also scholarly identity. His alma mater in Berlin was rather a compelled choice insofar as Jews were restricted from German Universities as students and teaching staff. Therefore, Hochschule became an intellectual shelter for many Jewish thinkers, and eventually it became one of the most influential institutions of Jewish studies in Nazi Germany.<sup>54</sup> Emil confessed that one of his biggest ambitions at that time was ‘understanding Hegel’ but alongside German philosophy<sup>55</sup> he mastered Jewish theology on

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., x-xq, see also Emil Fackenheim, “Hegel and the “Jewish problem”, *The Philosopher as a witness*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2008, 15-17

<sup>55</sup> Emil Fackenheim, “Hegel and the “Jewish problem”, *The Philosopher as a witness*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2008, 16

the way to the rabbinic education. This degree indeed helped him very much in Canada after he fled from Germany soon after he was released from Sachsenhausen. He found a position as a rabbi in a Reform community near Toronto and served there for five years. However, his family, friends and colleagues were left behind in Germany and perished in the Holocaust.

Eventually, all his intellectual career was aimed at answering the question which troubled Jewish thinkers who survived the war: Where was God in Auschwitz? Can we still believe in God after the Holocaust? Why did the innocents die? Why did they not resist? Can we still be Jews after all that, and what is it to be a Jew? He also tried to cope with the failure of European philosophy to deal with the Holocaust, when all the ideals of reason and all-human justice and equity surrendered before the Nazi regime and when Eichmann referred to the Kantian imperative to explain and excuse his own crimes. Kant is one among the non-Jewish philosophers who had an impact on Fackenheim's thought, alongside Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger. He quotes them, argues with them in his works and uses them as a starting point for his own intellectual project of Jewish philosophy.

Fackenheim successively rejects the idea of universality, shared by all the mentioned thinkers. He rejects the notion of the 'man-in-general' or 'humankind-in-general' or 'experience-in-general', and prefers to develop the philosophy which is based of particularities of Jewish thought, Jewish experience and Jewish existence.<sup>56</sup> He emphasizes that Jews have always occupied a special position among the nations, starting with the Biblical stories of Akedah, Egyptian and Babylonian enslavement, destruction of the Temples and exile and finishing with the Holocaust.<sup>57</sup> Fackenheim also criticizes those Jewish thinkers who called for Jewish assimilation and rejected their distinctiveness, in particular Karl Marx,

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<sup>56</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World. Foundations of the Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994. 153

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-41

the Marxists and other leftist groups.<sup>58</sup> For him this approach could lead only to hypocritical silencing of the anti-Semitic nature of Auschwitz, as it happened in the Soviet Union, who was ready to commemorate some abstract “victims of Fascism” but not the Jews, killed only for being Jewish.<sup>59</sup>

The notion of Jewishness in Fackenheim’s thought is tightly connected to the concept of Jewish history and temporality. He, in particular, applies to the Hegelian and Heideggerian ideas of Being and its relationships to Other and Time, and juxtaposing them, he comes to his own thoughts about Jewish historical temporality, the Jewish bond with God and its role in the eternal struggle between Jews and Gentiles. However, alongside the concepts of German philosophers he sees pre-Holocaust Jewish history in the Midrashic frames of perpetual repetition and renovation: the Jewish struggle with Amalek or the destruction of the Temple is destined to repeat itself in many catastrophes faced by Jews throughout history; and the Exodus happens every year during the Pesach Seder.<sup>60</sup> This time loop was supposed to be ended only in the Messianic era, but the Holocaust interrupted into this historical flow of time, rupturing it and creating a new reality, new rules and new commandments. According to Fackenheim, the Nazis rejected the right of Jews to exist, successively diminishing their human features with humiliating tortures in concentration camps, ceasing their access to the basic human needs like water or sanitation.<sup>61</sup> Jews became the ultimate Other, whose life meant nothing and was worth nothing.

Fackenheim frequently refers to Primo Levi’s image of *Muselmann*, a living corpse, stripped to his bare life and left without any feature of a human being. *Muselmann* for him is a half-live example of the necessity of survival and resistance. Together with Pelageia

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 134; 142-143, see also Emil Fackenheim, *God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*, New York University Press, 1970, 91

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 96

<sup>60</sup> Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 140-41

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 206-09

Lewinska, who realized that the only way to fight with the evil of Auschwitz is pure survival, Fackenheim claims that the Jewish survival is a part of the struggle with Hitlerism.<sup>62</sup> According to Fackenheim, ultimate survival by any means was a driving force for an authentic Jewish response to Nazism. For this reason the philosopher celebrates the heroism of the rebels of the Warsaw ghetto and of the defenders of the State of Israel in 1967. For him resistance is also a way to mend the rupture caused by the Holocaust, although it could not be overcome completely. And when in his earlier works Fackenheim criticized secular Jews for their alienation from God, which was unacceptable for him, already in *To Mend the World* he equalizes the spiritual and the armed resistance of Jewish people, despite their religiosity. Eventually, a group of Hassidim, trying to fast and to put on *teffilin* in Auschwitz showed an example of resistance as heroic as in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>63</sup> The whole concept to response and resistance in Fackenheim's thought is a part of his notion of Revelation which occupied him since his years in Hochschule. Thinking about this question Emil tried to answer the question which bothered many philosophers of the post-Holocaust era – why did God never appear in Auschwitz to save the Jews. Fackenheim reveals the whole complexity of revelation in traditional Jewish thought, which enabled him to claim that Jews still have a special bond with God which cannot be rejected by humans even after the Holocaust.

## 2.2. Response, resistance and revelation in Fackenheim's thought

Fackenheim's doctrine of revelation possesses a very important place in his works, moreover, for him the revelation on Mount Sinai is a cornerstone of the Jewish religion and even philosophy,<sup>64</sup> it is the event which distinguishes Jews from other nations and makes them carriers of the universal human values. Moments of the Divine revelation are described by Fackenheim as 'root experiences'. Among them he names the Exodus from Egypt, the miracle

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 219-23

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 139

at the Red Sea, or the giving of the Torah. They are also called ‘the epoch-making events’, decisive for Jewish existence. Also the Holocaust was one, and the most important of them. The concept of revelation is crucial for the understanding of Fackenheim’s ideas about relationships between human and divine and the place of humans in the universe. Revelation as an ultimate representation of the divine love also leads us to the question of the presence or absence of God in Auschwitz and all the possible philosophical problems, caused by the possible answers to it.

The concept of revelation attracted Fackenheim’s attention already in his student years. David Patterson points out that many scholars mistakenly attribute the emergence of this problem in his works to the Six Day War, while the philosopher started to work on this problem even before the Holocaust, looking for an intellectual response to the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, 1967 indeed was a decisive year for Fackenheim; the shock of the possible ‘second Holocaust’ was so strong that his thought underwent a ‘turn’ from existentialism to the questions of temporality, hermeneutics and Jewish philosophy itself.<sup>66</sup> For 20 years after the Holocaust he did not consider it as a theological problem for Judaism, looking at the Jewish history in its Midrashic continuity, but in the late 1960s he placed the Holocaust in the center of Jewish philosophy, theology and history.<sup>67</sup> Fackenheim also found his inspiration in the works by Martin Buber *I and Thou* (1937) and *Eclipse of God* (1952). In the latter work Buber re-interpreted the old Kabbalistic concept of ‘the hidden face of God’, which according to Lurianic Kabbalah enables the existence of evil in the world. Fackenheim does not give a direct answer to the problem of the failed revelation in Auschwitz,

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<sup>65</sup> Michael L. Morgan, “Fackenheim and the Holocaust. Setting the Record Straight”, *Shofar*, (Summer 2004, Vol. 22, №4), 116

<sup>66</sup> Michael L. Morgan, “Emil Fackenheim. Fidelity and Recovery in the Post-Holocaust Epoch”, *Beyond Auschwitz. Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America*

<sup>67</sup> Richard L. Rubinstein, “Concerning Emil Fackenheim: A Personal Statement”, *Shofar*, (Summer 2004, Vol. 22, №4), 123-124

nevertheless he develops his own theory which aims to re-establish relationships between God and a Jew after the Holocaust.<sup>68</sup>

Fackenheim did not support the idea that the Holocaust was a punishment for sins, since too many innocent people had to suffer and die. Nor did he agree that God had broken a covenant, hence we could be free from any obligations to him. He also did not agree with the idea that God is hiding from his people. For Fackenheim the Holocaust was an ultimate evil, going beyond any reasons; human or even divine logic. According to him, the Holocaust was not only anti-Jewish persecutions; it was an assault on God, a diabolic attempt to kill the God of Abraham, targeting his beloved children. And hence, it was an action, addressed against the Jews alongside their God, the Jewish nation had to participate in the re-establishment of the natural bond between God and his people.<sup>69</sup> In his early works, Fackenheim praised *teshuva*, which means repentance and a return to the religious life. The exemplary *baal teshuva* (a Jew who came back to Jewish tradition after the secular life) for him was Rosenzweig, and Fackenheim saw in *teshuva* another way to mend the Holocaust rupture.<sup>70</sup>

This re-establishment of the divine bond, in his view, could only be obtained through a realization of the active role of humans in their relationships with God. He emphasized, that God is not It, but Thou. Following Buber's thought, God cannot be an object; he cannot be utilized by humans. He can only be a part of mutual relationships where everyone equally participates and contributes to their development and both partners are equally responsible for one another. And as far as our encounter with God is a result of our deep love, which does

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<sup>68</sup> Michale L. Morgan. *Fackenheim's Jewish Philosophy: An Introduction*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2013, 21

<sup>69</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, "Abraham's Covenant under Assault. The Need for a Post-Holocaust Theology, Jewish, Christian and Muslim", *Good and Evil after Auschwitz. Ethical implications for today*, ed. by Jack Bemporad, John Pawlikowski, Joseph Sievers. Ktav Publishing House, Inc, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2000, 1-10

<sup>70</sup> Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 141

not require any proofs and benefits, we cannot demand from him revelation, we can only obey him from the depth of our hearts. Moreover, this bond with the Godhead requires an adequate response to Antisemitism, and this response is any kind of action that sanctifies Jewish life, Jewish religion and Jewish right for existence. As far as Jews were also ceased from basic human rights as a free choice of life or death, pure Jewish life is already an act of heroism.<sup>71</sup> Here Fackenheim applies to the old Jewish concept of *Kiddush HaHayim*, a sanctification of the God's name, juxtaposing it to more popular concept and traditional Jewish response to persecutions as *Kiddush HaShem* (Death in a God's name). Martyrdom in God's name was frequently chosen by Jews in the times of Crusades, it was a honorable response to the attempts of the church to convert Jews to Christianity, but in Auschwitz no one could choose death over life, since the Nazi regime, unlike the church, did not want to convert Jews but to terminate them. Therefore, Nazis destroyed Jewish martyrdom, and the only possible response to their resolution was to live despite all the possible distress.<sup>72</sup> And Fackenheim claims that it is not only one of the possible responses to the Holocaust, it is the only response to it, Commanded by the Voice of Auschwitz.

### 2.3. "The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz" and the 614th Commandment

Jews are traditionally called the people of the Covenant. The Covenant with God is a decisive concept for understanding Jewish religion. For Fackenheim the same concept was decisive for understanding Jewish philosophy as well. He claimed that the Jewish philosopher is "one who exposes his Jewish commitment to general philosophy and the letter to his Jewish commitments".<sup>73</sup> Fackenheim praised German philosophy, but for him speculative philosophy, without the concrete background of the divine presence in it, was too vague,

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<sup>71</sup> Morgan, "Fidelity and Recovery in the Post-Holocaust epoch"

<sup>72</sup> To Mend the World, 223-24

<sup>73</sup> David Patterson., *Emil L. Fackenheim. A Jewish Philosopher's Response to the Holocaust*, xiii



hence, German Idealism and the thought of Heidegger was an ontological opponent of Judaism and Jewish philosophy for him.<sup>74</sup>

David Patterson in his book *Emil L. Fackenheim. A Jewish Philosopher's Response to the Holocaust* claims that Heidegger did not even have to be tricked by the Nazi ideology as far as his thought was a direct ancestor of it. He called Nazism the “new unconcealment of Being”, claiming that ‘will to power’ is natural for all the human beings, and supporting the appropriative inclinations of the *Volk*, which was an ideal community of German people for him. Fackenheim rejected Heideggerian ideas of “*Dasein* in its own self” and of the *Volk*, which became a self-sufficient structure with no need in God. For him human existence has meaning only in connection with God and obeying his Commandments. Moreover, he juxtaposed the Jewish idea of Community and responsibility for the other to the *Volk*, which cares only about itself and, being unable for empathy, appropriates the other physically, spiritually, politically and philosophically.<sup>75</sup> This is an example of pure idolatry, as far as Maimonides in his *Guide for Perplexed* claimed that idolatry is a failure of responsibility before God.<sup>76</sup> Fackenheim never stops to remind that Nazism started a spiritual and actual war with Judaism, exactly for the reason of its otherness. And while Nazi ideology shared the Heideggerian thought on being-for-oneself and dying-for-oneself, the most horrific thing to do to destroy Jewry was to take from them a possibility to fulfill their ontological mission of living-for-the-other and also dying-for-the-other as well as for their God. However, Fackenheim’s criticism of Heidegger is especially peculiar due to great affiliation to his works and particular intellectual connection to his philosophy. Heidegger had a great impact on young Fackenheim, but apparently the disappointment in his idol was so great that he re-

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 39-43

<sup>76</sup> Martin J. Plax, “Fackenheim’s Paradoxical 614th Commandment”, *Emil L. Fackenheim. Philosopher, Theologian, Jew*, ed. by Sharon Portnoff, James A. Diamond, Martin D. Yaffe, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2008, 96

interpreted Heideggerian thought in a most unfavorable light, contrasting it to his own ideas. He did not take to consideration that Heidegger was affected by Nazi ideas only in the early 1930s and later tried to avoid participation of the political life of the Reich, besides that he did not intend to turn his ideas into a political statement. And even though he juxtaposed the idea of *Dasein* as being-towards-death to the idea of Redemption and life, embodied by the figure of Isaac who was chosen to live, surprisingly, late Heidegger's thought resembled Fackenheim's ideas. In particular, in the famous interview to *Der Spiegel*, entitled 'Only a God can save us', Heidegger speaks about 'changing the world', but he sees it as a gradual and a slow process. He also claims: "Only a God can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of God [...] in the view of the absent God we are in the state of decline". This interview was published in 1976, nevertheless even in 1983 Fackenheim criticizes Heidegger for 'universalism' and his ideas of temporality, expressed in *Being and Time* (1927). He also overestimates Heideggerian idealism and depicts his philosophy much more self-oriented as it was in reality. Fackenheim prefers not to notice the unifying potential of the Volk concept and overlooks the moment which unites him and Heidegger the most – the existential perception of being. He refers to Heideggerian thought to introduce his own philosophical views. He claims that human here-being cannot exist without the divine presence in history, and he contrasts it to the lack of God in the Heideggerian philosophy. Therefore, the Holocaust, which was not only a philosophical rupture but also a loss of connection between God and man, is described by him as a catastrophe of the heavenly and also mundane chronotope.

According to Fackenheim there was not revelation and no divine voice of Auschwitz and all the rules of the normal world did not work there, transforming that place into a separate anti-world, or, as it was called by K. Zetnik – the planet of Auschwitz. The only way to resist this evil was to stay alive and stay conscious about oneself, not committing a suicide or not

turning into a *Muselmann*. In *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* these two tragedies are united by one concept *ibed atzmo* which means ‘suicide’, but also ‘losing oneself’ and ‘losing one’s substance’. Another phrase for ‘suicide’ there is *ibed atzmo ladaat* which means ‘lose knowledge about one’s essence’.<sup>77</sup> But according to Fackenheim’s thought a Jew shall never forget that he is a Jew, hence there is a Commanding Voice of Auschwitz which is ready to remind him about his obligations. This Voice is not a direct voice of God, it is not a *Bat Kol*, which as we remember from the story of Rabbi Jose, can be embodied in a dove’s cooing and crying for its children. It is a new theological category, born in a gas chamber and tempered in the flame of crematorium. Fackenheim spoke about it for the first time in his book *The God’s Presence in history* and very soon it became one of the most influential concepts of the post-Holocaust Jewish philosophy. This voice also announced the 614th Commandment which brought a world fame (and harsh criticism) for Fackenheim.

One of the most obvious critical remarks on the concept of the Voice and the 614th Commandment is the accusation of blasphemy. However, as Fackenheim explains in the preface to the chapter “The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz” in the book *God’s Presence in History*, the Holocaust is a philosophical and theological *novum* where the whole ground of human and divine (co)existence is smitten.<sup>78</sup> In an essay on Rosenzweig, Fackenheim explains that the philosopher described Jewish experience as eternal in time, because of Yom Kippur, when a normal flow of time stops and Jews appear outside of it. But in Auschwitz it was doctor Mengele who appropriated the God’s job, and forcefully divorced Jews from their eternity.<sup>79</sup> In these conditions of Nazi temporality, the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz emerges to lead the Jews through the flames during and even after the Holocaust. It proclaims:

<sup>77</sup> Patterson, *A Jewish Philosopher’s response to the Holocaust*, 37

<sup>78</sup> Fackenheim, *God’s Presence in History*, 85-87

<sup>79</sup> Patterson, *A Jewish Philosopher’s response to the Holocaust*, 36

Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair at man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. A secularist Jew cannot make himself believe by a mere act of will, nor can he be commanded to do so. And a religious Jew who has stayed with his God may be forced into new, possibly revolutionary relationships with Him. A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself, cooperating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond Hitler by doing his work.<sup>80</sup>

"Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories" are also the words of the 614th commandment. This is the new Categorical Imperative, aimed to replace the Kantian Imperative, which failed to prevent the Holocaust. It is ceased from the universality and is addressed to the Jews especially. Fackenheim consciously emphasized that he speaks about the Jewish tradition, but not Christian one with its 10 Commandments. The Commandment is a duty to religious and non-religious Jews. There is no question of free will, the word of the Voice is holy. Fackenheim emphasizes: "The religious Jews still possesses this word. The secularist Jew is commanded to restore it. A secular holiness, as it were, has forced itself into his vocabulary".<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History*, 84

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

Fackenheim gives an explanation to this duty to obey the Voice, which is undisputable for any Jew – the struggle for the right of Jews to their own existence is not over yet. According to Fackenheim being a Jew also meant to be a Zionist. The well-being of the State of Israel as the first Jewish victory over Hitler, was a primary importance for him. Interestingly, though being vocally pro-Zionist, the philosopher never engaged himself with any stream of this movement, preferring to speak about Zionism in more abstract and philosophical terms. The philosopher claimed that the Voice of Auschwitz called the Jews to defend themselves in the Six Day War, religious and non-religious alike, and it is still calling to defend Israel from Arab invasion.<sup>82</sup> His militant Zionism was praised by numerous pro-Zionist Jewish thinkers and was also criticized by many. In particular, one of the harshest among Fackenheim's opponents, Richard Rubenstein, pointed out that religious Jews has no need in the 614th Commandment, as far as they already perform everything which is prescribed there, like observing 613 Commandments, preserving their Jewishness and procreating. He also objected the peremptoriness of the Fackenheim's words, claiming that atheism can also be a genuine human reaction to the trauma of Holocaust.<sup>83</sup> Finally, he completely disagreed with Fackenheim's ideas about the holiness of the State of Israel, claiming that God took neither the Jewish nor the Arab side.<sup>84</sup> However, for Fackenheim, who made Aliyah in 1982 right after his retirement and died in 2002 in Jerusalem, the protection of the Jewish land of Israel in Palestine was still a sign of the post-Holocaust mending of the world.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 86-87, 91

<sup>83</sup> Richard L. Rubinstein, "Concerning Emil Fackenheim: A Personal Statement", 124-25

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 129

## 2.4. *Tikkun Olam*<sup>85</sup> or “Mending of the world” in Fackenheim’s thought

Fackenheim introduced the concept of *Tikkun Olam* in his book *To Mend the World* (1982) which immediately became one of the most influential works of Jewish Philosophy. In this book he refers to the Kabbalistic term, which was developed by the followers of Isaac Luria, and eventually, by various Hassidic writers. In the book Fackenheim tried to harmonize his reflections on European philosophy after the Holocaust, historical circumstances which challenged Jewish existence and religious particularities of the world which saw horrors of Auschwitz. The chapters of his book, which is truly a magnum opus of his life, are dedicated to various topics. He analyzes the works of Hegel, Heidegger and Rosenzweig in the perspective of the modern Jewish thought; he holds a discussion with his contemporaries Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Martin Buber, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel; he brings to life the dark shadows of Hitler, Eichmann and Mengele; he speaks about the future of Jewish-Christian relationships and, finally, he dives into Jewish mysticism, in an attempt to find a new language for his philosophical ideas after the previous one was corrupt by the Holocaust.

The concept of *Tikkun Olam* in Fackenheim’s thought is a unifying element for all his Jewish philosophy. He speaks about mending of the ruptured world by any means – by reinventing post-Holocaust Jewish philosophy, by following the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz, by looking for new relationships with God, and by preventing the Hitler’s posthumous victory. Unlike Kabbalistic mystical *tikkun*, His *Tikkun* requires direct action and response.<sup>86</sup> Even a legitimate question, why to recall his name in the Commandment, while according Jewish tradition one should say ‘Let his name to be forgotten’ (as it happens in case of Haman or other enemies of Jews), there is the legitimate answer – Hitler was an exceptional

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<sup>85</sup> Although Patterson argues that one should use the form *Tikkun Haolam*, to distinguish the Fackenheim’s term from the rabbinic one, I will stick to the form which appears in the book *To Mend the World*, which is *Tikkun Olam*. (Patterson, *Emil L. Fackenheim, A Jewish Philosopher’s Response to Holocaust*, 25)

<sup>86</sup> Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 253-54

enemy and his name should not be forgotten neither by the Holocaust survivors, nor by their descendants. And although the total *Tikkun Olam* is not possible till the Messianic times, the highest point of mending for Fackenheim was the establishment of the State of Israel and its struggle for its Jewish character and independence. He quotes Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, who in his book *Em Ha-Banim Smeha* (The mother of children is happy) claims:

Now if we shall rise and ascend to Zion we can yet bring about a Tikkun of the souls of the people of Israel who were murdered as martyrs since it is on their account that we are stimulated to return to our ancestral inheritance. ... Thus we bring about their rebirth.<sup>87</sup>

Rabbi Teichtal wrote these words in 1943. Later he perished in Auschwitz. Fackenheim, who was a Holocaust survivor, shared with the Rabbi the same feelings and sees in Israel a place where all the Jews should come to create their homeland, the place of their freedom and glory, where it would be safe to be a Jew. And this should be done in the name of people whose right for freedom and human honor were taken from them. As Fackenheim claims any Tikkun should start with the weeping for the children in exile (*Tikkun Rachel*) and then go on to rejoicing in redemption (*Tikkun Lea*), as it was written in the Midrash and in the Liturgy to the Ninth of Av, called *Tikkun Hatzot* (the ‘midnight mending’). He also quoted the following passages from an *aggadah* from the Talmud (Ein Yaakov, *Berakhot*, Chapter 1):

When the Holy one, blessed be he, remembers His children who dwell in misery among the nations, He sheds two tears into the sea and the sound is heard from one end of the Earth to the other. [...] The night is divided into three watches, and in each watch sits the Holy One, blessed be he, and roars

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 254-55

like a lion: “Woe unto me that I have destroyed My house and burned My temple and sent My children into exile among the nations”.<sup>88</sup>

This idea leads us to the concept of divine weeping, which reflects the Fackenheim's thought about mutual I-Thou connection between human and God and which he shared with Rabbi Shapira. As David Patterson claims, Rabbi Shapira's thought had a huge impact on Fackenheim, especially in the last years of his life, especially his idea about God, suffering together with Jews from the Nazi evil. Shapira argued that if God intervened his punishment would destroy the world, so he stayed hidden in his inner chambers where he secretly cries and roars. However, the Jews have no place to hide, so they must suffer together with God; at the same time, they have to force him to come to the world and fulfil the Covenant with the Jewish nation. And he also has to repent and to make *teshuva*, returning to his children after the Holocaust. Fackenheim argues that He also must be ready to fulfill the promise of bringing the Jews to Jerusalem. But eventually their trip will start not in exile, but in Auschwitz.<sup>89</sup> However, it is the promise which makes people's existence meaningful and fulfilling. Therefore, the creation of the State of Israel not only proves that God is taking care of his children, but it also reflects the process of mending of the post-Holocaust world alongside the Jewish nation itself.

Nevertheless, Fackenheim's way to adapt Kabbalah to his thought could not avoid criticism from the side of scholars of Kabbalah. Fackenheim never studied Kabbalah systematically, he was inspired by the works of Gershom Scholem and his interpretations of this teaching, hence his approach may be considered as philosophical and synthetic, but not mystical. Aubrey L. Glazer in her article “*Tikkun* in Fackenheim's *Leben-Denken* as a Trace of Lurianic Kabbalah” claimed that Fackenheim misused the whole concept, which in

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 253

<sup>89</sup> Patterson, *A Jewish Philosopher's response to the Holocaust*, 121-122



Lurianic writings had more esoteric and spiritual meaning and transformed it into a statement of Jewish social activism.<sup>90</sup> Reiner Munk shares her concerns about Fackenheim simplifying Kabbalist thought, and in the article "Revelation and Resistance: A Reflection on the Thought of Emil L. Fackenheim" he criticizes the philosopher for his ignorance of the approach in medieval biblical exegesis, which was frequently used by the Kabbalists in their writings. According to this method any text can be explained using one of four levels of interpretation, combined by the acronym PARDES, which means 'Paradise' or 'Orchard' in Hebrew. The first letter P (pey) stands for *pshat*, the literal meaning of the verse; the R (reish) stands for *remez* and the philosophical-allegorical meaning; the D (dalet) is *drash* which is the Talmudic-haggadical level and the final S (samekh) is the most profound and mystical level of interpretation which is *sod*. This approach is a crucial part of the Kabbalistic thought, as far as it is applied not only in textual analysis, but also for the explanations of the processes in the whole universe.<sup>91</sup> As Rabbi Zadok ha-Kohen Rabinowitz of Lublin said in his work *Tsidkat ha-Tsaddik* "there is a 'Pardes' in everything"<sup>92</sup>. However, Fackenheim gives only one interpretation of Tikkun, emphasizing the urge to mend the broken connection between man and God. And as Munk argues, he interpreted the whole idea of Tsimtsum incorrectly because according the Kabbalist tradition the bond between humane and divine was never ruptured. Munk claims that even if Fackenheim used the works of Scholem as his source, Scholem's description of the terms *tzimtzum*, the 'breaking of the vessels', and *Tikkun* does not support Fackenheim's conclusions. *Tszimtzum* does not imply a breach between God and *Adam Kadmon*, which is an archetypical primordial man. And although the breaking of the vessels

<sup>90</sup> Aubrey L. Glazer, "Tikkun in Fackenheim's *Leben-Denken* as a Trace of Lurianic Kabbalah", *Emil L. Fackenheim: Philosopher, Theologian, Jew*, ed.by Sharon Portnoff, James A. Diamond, Martin D. Yaffe, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2008, 235-50

<sup>91</sup> Munk, Reiner, "Revelation and Resistance: A Reflection on the Thought of Emil L. Fackenheim", *Fackenheim: German philosophy and Jewish Thought*, ed. by Louis Greenspan and Graeme Nicholson, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1992), 238-39

<sup>92</sup> Zadok ha-Kohen Rabinowitz, *Tsidkat ha-Tsaddik*

led to crisis in creation, exile of the *Shekhina* and the creation turned into the chaos, mingling with the demonic world, nothing says that God and man lost their connection. Munk concludes his critical response asking a rhetorical question: “In which way is the meaning of the terms rupture of Tikkun changed, when transposed from a mystical-religious context to a philosophical one, and what is gained in using these mystical terms? They seem to me to be concealing instead of revealing”.<sup>93</sup>

Summing up, it is important to say, that although Fackenheim frequently applied to the traditional Jewish sources, like Torah, Talmud, Midrash and even Kabbalah, he was a Jewish philosopher in the first place. His constant search for an authentic Jewish existential experience and the ways to comprehend it, brought him to the reflections on the role of history and religion in the Jewish tradition. Being raised and taught in the German philosophical tradition, Fackenheim, however, develops his own Jewish philosophy, able to overcome the speculative thought. He circumscribes two major events of the Jewish history which became decisive for the national existence – the revelation on Mount Sinai and the Holocaust. The first one revealed a special connection between Jews and God, based on love and mutual responsibility, the second one was a manifestation of the ultimate evil, which led to rupture not only in historical reality, but also in the all the spheres of human spiritual life. The Holocaust aimed to disconnect Jews from God, to de-humanize and to de-spiritualize them, turning into a living corpse, and eventually, to destroy everything Jewish in the world. For Fackenheim it was not only the war against Jews but also an assault of the idol-worshippers on God. He was also impressed with the ideas of Rabbi Shapira who claimed that God suffers together with the Jews. So the most authentic Jewish response to this destruction was to resist in the name of God and preservation of the Jewish life in the world. This notion became a core of the 614th Commandment, a new imperative, proclaimed by the Commanding Voice

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<sup>93</sup> Munk, Reiner, “Revelation and Resistance”, 239

of Auschwitz, which banned Jews from giving Hitler posthumous victories. This Commandment aimed to re-establish broken spiritual bond with the divine and also start a process of mending of the post-Holocaust world which should become a better place to live either for the Jews or for the whole humankind. Fackenheim started his own mending of the philosophical language, corrupt by the Holocaust, applying to Lurianic Kabbalah for inspiration. Eventually he adopted the term *Tikkun* for his idea of mending, but he divorced it from its initial esoteric meaning. Fackenheim proclaimed making of *Tikkun* in different spheres of human life, but the highest point if it was the establishment of the State of Israel which meant fulfillment of the Gods promise for the Jewish homeland and also reflected new Jewish abilities to fight for their own lives, resisting antisemitism and hatred. But still, his mystical affiliations and the attempt to use Kabbalah for the philosophical purposes face criticism from the scholars of Kabbalah, who find his approach simplifying and problematic in general. In particular, according Munk, his avoidance of the PARDES method leads to manipulations when it comes to the thought of Lurianic Kabbalah, therefore Fackenheim overlooks many essential particularities of this stream.

## 3 Tikkun in theological thought of Kalonymus Kalmish

### Shapira

#### 3.1. Pshat (plain sense) – *Esh Kodesh* as personal and collective therapy in the years of the Holocaust

Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira (1889-1943) was a descendant of a famous Hassidic dynasty: among his ancestors were Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk, Rabbi Israel the Magid of Koznitz, and the Seer of Lublin. The father of Rabbi Shapira, Rabbi Elimelech of Grodzisk, passed away when Kalonymus was only three years old, and the boy was raised by his mother Hannah Berakhah, who was famous in Hassidic circles due to her piety and knowledge. Since the infancy Kalonymus was raised in a highly pious environment, for instance, Rabbi Elimelech covered this son's head and washed his hands after a night sleep even when the latter was still a baby. The boy was a devoted student of his father's works and grew up being known as a wunderkind. As an adolescent he was taken under protection of a close relative, Rabbi Yerahmiel Moshe Hapstein of Kozienc, and eventually married his daughter.

Soon after the death of his father-in-law in 1909 Shapira became the Rabbi of Piaseczno – a small Polish town from 16 kilometers from Warsaw. In 1923 he founded the *yeshiva Daas Moshe*, named after his father-in-law, which became one of the largest Hassidic *yeshivot* in pre-war Poland.<sup>94</sup> The son of Rabbi Shapira, Rabbi Elimelech, named after his grandfather, also followed his steps and became a devoted Hassid. After the Shapira's family moved to Warsaw in 1924 their house on Dzielna 5 was open to Hassidim from Piaseczno and students from his *yeshiva*. The interwar period in Poland was challenging for the Orthodox community as far as the processes of secularization, modernization and assimilation withdrew many

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<sup>94</sup> Nehemia Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004, 1-2

young people from Judaism. Warsaw at that time was attracting many young people, who were coming there from the smaller towns and villages and were exposed to the all temptations of the big city life. Hence, Rabbi Shapira, feeling his responsibility for the young generation, tried to keep the youth in the framework of Jewish tradition and prevent their affiliation with the secular movements like Zionism or Bundism (socialist Jewish movement).

Although Kalonymus wanted to join his brother, who settled in Palestine and even bought there a piece of land, he always felt involved in the life of his flock and wanted to stay with it under any circumstances. So when the World War II started, Rabbi Shapira made all the efforts to help and comfort his Hassidim. In particular, he hosted refugees from Piaseczno in his own house, which happened to be at the border of the Warsaw ghetto, and supported food kitchen for people in need. He tried to be a good example for the others: he strictly observed all the commandments and encouraged others to follow his steps despite all the distress. He also performed circumcision for boys and went to *mikvah* (a ritual bath), what was strictly forbidden for Jews and whoever would transgress the law could have been sentenced to death.<sup>95</sup> Shimon Huberband, who was Rabbi Shapira's friend, in his book *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust* recalls his devotion to the idea of maintaining underground *mikvaot*, which helped Hassidim to keep their bodies ritually pure. Interestingly this fact corresponds with the idea of *Muselmanner*, who lost his human appearance after the Nazi 'torture of filth'. Even before this term appeared, Rabbi Shapira knew the importance of purity and cleanliness and a part of spiritual resistance to the Nazi policy of dehumanization.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 12-14

<sup>96</sup> Shimon Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural life in Poland During the Holocaust*, Ktav Publishing House, Inc, Hoboken, New Jersey, Yeshiva University Press, New York, 1987, 199-201

From the very beginning of the war Rabbi Shapira also tried to maintain the normal religious life of the community and started to record his sermons in a book which he later called *Hiddushei Torah* and which would be published as *Esh Kodesh* after the war. The first sermon was delivered on September 14, 1939; the last record was written on July 18, 1942. Starting to write in the middle of September 1939, Rabbi Shapira quits for a while and comes back to his diary in November. This gap in the records can be explained with the terrible tragedy which the Rabbi of Piaseczno experienced in September and October 1939 – exactly in that two month he lost his son, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law, who were killed by bombing during the first weeks of the Nazi invasion, and also his beloved mother, who died from a heart attack after she could not handle the terrible news (Rabbi's mother died right before the war and his only daughter was deported to the concentration camp in 1942). He continued writing for three more years, intensifying toward the very end of the book. His last chapters are the longest and the most complex, reflexive and deep. It is not possible to say why he stopped writing, but the most probably he had no flock to address to any more. On January 3, 1943 Rabbi Shapira hid several manuscripts of his books in a milk can, and wrote a letter with the instructions what to do, to those who would find them. Right after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising he was deported to a concentration camp near Lublin. Rabbi Shapiro was killed on November 2, 1943 during the infamous *Erntefest action*.

Although it is called 'a book', *Esh Kodesh* it is not a single piece of literary work; it is a collection of sermons, written by Rabbi Shapira for Shabbat services, festivals, *yortzait*<sup>97</sup> of his relatives and for his Hassidic *tish*.<sup>98</sup> The sermons are written in traditional style for Jewish scholar– at first Rabbi Shapira quotes a verse from the Torah and then gives different explanations, starting with the simplest level and finishing with the most elaborate Kabbalistic

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<sup>97</sup> Yortzait is the anniversary of the passing of a close relative.

<sup>98</sup> Traditional Hassidic Shabbat meeting in the house of Tsaddik.

interpretations . It is curious that even though the Rabbi of Piaseczno was writing his work under the Nazi occupation, he never explicitly speaks about neither Nazis, nor Germans, nor his mundane businesses in the ghetto. The books emphasizes that divine life and God is a much more real world for the Jews than all the political turbulences on the Earth. So following this approach, Rabbi Shapira kept reminding Jews about greatness and strength of Israel, who can be compared to the favorite son of a King, entrapped by evil people. He also emphasized that Israel was the reason why the world was created, so the Godhead would never leave his children without help. That was his way to cheer up his fellows and students in the struggle with constant humiliation and dehumanization during their life in the ghetto. Consequently, the sermons of Rabbi Shapira had some therapeutic effect, which helped the author and his believers to save their dignity in unhuman circumstances of Holocaust and inspired for a better service to God.

### **3.2. Remez (hint) – sin and suffering in the doctrine of Rabbi Shapira**

Before the war Rabbi Shapira was known as an accomplished pedagogical and educational theorist, in particular, he wrote a famous book *Hovat Ha-Talmidim* (The Students' Obligation; 1932) where he advised teachers to speak the language of the students and help them feel their own greatness. He was against authoritarian methods of teaching; on the contrary, the Torah study, according to him, had to be followed by the great joy. Rabbi Shapira was very keen to keep the Jews 'under the divine yoke' and under the control of the traditional Jewish community; he also complains that the generation of contemporaries is weaker than their fathers, insofar as the Jewish youth seeks for independence before maturity and rejects the guidance of the parents<sup>99</sup>. Questioning the sovereignty of the family leads to questioning sovereignty of God and induces to transgressions. His skepticism towards non-Jewish culture

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<sup>99</sup> Kalonymus Shapiro, (Shapira), *A student's obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw ghetto*, transl.by M. Odenheimer, Northvale, Jason Aronson, New Jersey, 1995, 1-22

and philosophy is revealed also in *Esh Kodesh*, where he describes Amalek, the ancient persecutor of the Jews, as an educated and civilized person who is knowledgeable in ethics and philosophy, but this knowledge is only a cover for his wicked heart. And although Rabbi Shapira never mentions Nazi Germany in his book, the metaphor is quite clear.<sup>100</sup> Even speaking about the distress of the German Jews after *Kristallnacht*, he is compassionate about their sufferings, but nevertheless underlines that they became victims of the illusion of emancipation and equality in the non-Jewish culture which is wicked by its nature.<sup>101</sup>

In Jewish sins Rabbi Shapiro sees the reason of suffering which inclines from day to day. In the book *Derech ha-Melekh* (it is the collection of letters and homilies from the years 1921-1939, compiled after the Holocaust by the survivors of the Piaseczno Hassidim) he openly speaks about suffering as a Divine punishment. So as we can see, the question of suffering and their part in communication with the Godhead started to intrigue him long before the Holocaust. Avichai Zur, in particular, emphasizes that it is extremely important to look at the development of Rabbi Shapira's thought gradually, starting with his early writings, as far as *Esh Kodesh* is not a detached piece of writing, but the climax of his thought which went through significant changes during the Holocaust.<sup>102</sup>

Rabbi Shapira was writing his manuscript during three difficult years. But behind his scholarly devotion one can easily trace how the terror of the first days of war, when the author lost his beloved ones, at some point transforms into fear of apathy to the suffering of others. On the beginning of the book he still follows his previous idea of suffering, which should be accepted as a punishment for sin. But he changes his mind in 1942, when the totality of

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<sup>100</sup> Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira, *Sacred Fire. Torah from the Years of Fury 1939-1942*, transl. by J. Hershy Worch, ed. by Deborah Miller, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004, 56-57

<sup>101</sup> Avichai Zur, "The Lord Hides in Inner Chambers": The Doctrine of Suffering in the Theosophy of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira of Piaseczno", *Dapim, Studies on the Holocaust* (Volume 25, Issue 1, 2011), 193

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 187-190



destruction of European Jewry became obvious for him. On the third year of war he came to the conclusion that all such extreme suffering cannot be a punishment for sins, moreover, he claimed that the extermination of Jews was nothing less than a way to destroy the Divine power on the Earth. However, Rabbi Shapira emphasized the importance of being compassionate to the fellow Jews and putting their survival above personal interests. He says that saving a life of a Jew who is a prince, a son of the King of the Universe, brings one closer to God. Still, according to Rabbi Shapira, simple observance and rejection of sin will not help a person in achieving *dveikut* (cleaving to God) nor blind faith, so he demands from his flock to serve God in joy in the heart. Although the Rabbi of Piaseczno admits that it is almost impossible because of a huge scope of suffering around, he makes an effort to rejoice despite all. This notion reminds about a passage from Zohar, saying: “One, who hardens his heart walls into the evil”.<sup>103</sup>

### **3.3. Drash (interpretation) - suffering, joy and redemption in the doctrine of Rabbi Shapira in the perspective of the Holocaust theodicy**

Although Rabbi Shapira speaks a lot about suffering, he is sure that a Jew shouldn't forget about devotion to God, and the most important thing in it is joy. Here he follows a classical Hassidic doctrine of *simkha* (happiness) that is rooted into another two concepts of *emunah* (faith) and *bitahon* (trust and confidence), moreover *simkha* in a face of adversity strengthens *emunah* <sup>104</sup>. Depression is a sin – it makes enemies of Israel stronger, it impairs *bitahon*, it weakens *emunah* and interferes with the worship to the Creator.<sup>105</sup> Shapira admits that suffering makes some people desperate and weak, so tried to comfort those who need it,

<sup>103</sup> *The Zohar, Pritzker Edition, Volume 1*, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Metz, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2004, 82

<sup>104</sup> Pesach Shindler, *Hasidic Responses to the Holocaust in the Light of Hasidic Thought*, Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey, 1990, 22-23

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 32

despite his own family tragedy. He called to celebrate the holiday of Purim<sup>106</sup> and used to dance and sing, gathering his *tish*. Still, he couldn't escape common melancholic mood in his sermons. Huberband admitted that "predominant spirit wasn't on Purim but on Tisha B'av<sup>107</sup>". On Purim Rabbi reminded to his flock, that though being the happiest day of the year, Purim is tightly connected to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) as far as the latest can be read as '*yom ki Pur(im)*' – the day like Purim. Nevertheless, Shapiro told his Hasidim to look for the smallest sparkles of joy in their souls.<sup>108</sup>

The following notion of Rabbi Shapira is rooted in mystical concept of *Ahavat Yisrael* (Love to Jewish people). He says that Love to Jews is Love to God and gives as an example the martyrdom of Rabbi Shimon b. Gamliel, who after the defeat to Romans in the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–136 CE), asked to kill him first, because he didn't want to see the suffering of his friends. Rabbi Shapira also speaks about compassion to the fellow Jews, for him compassion is also "a channel for salvation".<sup>109</sup> He praises self-sacrifice for another Jews as well as self-diminishing in general, performed in sake of *kelal Yisrael* (The totality of Israel).<sup>110</sup>

Nevertheless, the axis of the whole *Esh Kodesh* is concept of suffering. Rabbi Shapira tries to give answers to several questions: why does God allow such suffering, what to do to stop suffering, how long to wait for salvation, and the major one – what kind of relationships should be developed between God and Jews in such circumstances. He starts with the notion that everything given is given by God, following the Hassidic idea that there is no pure evil

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<sup>106</sup> Purim a Jewish holiday that celebrates the victory of the Jewish people over Haman, who was planning to kill all the Jews

<sup>107</sup> Tisha B'av is an annual fast day in Judaism which commemorates the destruction of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem

<sup>108</sup> Polen, *The Holy Fire*, 54-55

<sup>109</sup> Hershy J. Worch, "Introduction", *Sacred Fire. Torah from the Years of Fury 1939-1942*, transl. by J. Hershy Worch, ed. by Deborah Miller, (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), xxii; xxiv

<sup>110</sup> Shindler, *Hasidic Responses to the Holocaust*, 79-80

in the world. Consequently, if suffering happens, God plays a role in the distress. In particular, Shapiro blames his own sins for the death of his beloved ones.<sup>111</sup> He also says that current sufferings are similar to sufferings in the past, but people pay so much attention to them only because they became more self-oriented<sup>112</sup>. Shapira calls to be even more devoted to worship to God, despite all the problems and pray even more ecstatically, so it would be easier to God to hear his people and put an end to their suffering. He quotes a verse from the Talmud: “Yelling and crying are the highest forms of prayer.”<sup>113</sup> God tests people, like it happened with *Akedah*, and expects loyalty and even more profound sacrifices than he demanded from Abraham (He also compares the Holocaust to binding of Isaac and finds that it is a divine demand to complete a sacrifice<sup>114</sup>). That is why there should be no doubt in faith.<sup>115</sup>

Moreover, as far as God and man are invisibly connected, God also suffers for him and with him.<sup>116</sup> The suffering of God is so strong that he has to weep in secret, because his tears can destroy the world<sup>117</sup>. His *Din* (judgement) and *Rakhamim* (mercy) are always connected and mercy is rooted in Judgement<sup>118</sup>. So human beings shouldn't forget that God went to the condition of *Tsimsum* to enable the creation of the world, so they also have to be ready for sacrifices in the name of God<sup>119</sup>. Rabbi Shapira also praises martyrs for faith (*Kidush ha-Shem*) and mentions about prosecution of Rabbi Akiva, who was happy to take terrible suffering because they brought him closer to God<sup>120</sup>. Besides, Gods takes the pain of a martyr on his behalf, so he does not feel suffering any more or it lasts only for ‘a moment’<sup>121</sup>. Still,

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>112</sup> Worch, “Introduction”, xx

<sup>113</sup> Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, 9

<sup>114</sup> Worch, “Introduction”, xxiii

<sup>115</sup> Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, 250

<sup>116</sup> More precise about suffering of God see Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, “Holy Fire”, *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust*, ed. by Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, Gershon Greenberg, (Oxford University Press, 2007), 40-50

<sup>117</sup> Greenberg, Gershon, “Wartime Orthodox Jewish Thought about the Holocaust: Christian Implication”

<sup>118</sup> Worch, “Introduction”, xxvii

<sup>119</sup> Shindler, *Hasidic Responses to the Holocaust*, 22

<sup>120</sup> Worch, “Introduction”, xxvi

<sup>121</sup> Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, 113

not only man, but God as well needs redemption, if he abandons the people of Israel and makes them suffer disproportionately to their sins<sup>122</sup>. God also weeps and regrets for what he has done to Israel<sup>123</sup>. So God, just as the people of Israel, has to repent and this *tshuva* is the main way to *tikkun*, alongside *simkha* and *Ahavat Yisrael*<sup>124</sup>.

### 3.4. Sod (secret) – the Kabbalistic approach to the question of *tikkun* in *Esh Kodesh*

The concept of *tikkun* is one of the most important notion of the Kabbalist thought, but surprisingly Rabbi Shapira applies to it explicitly only twice in the whole book. The first mentioning of *tikkun* appears in the chapter Shabbat Shuva (Shabbat of Repentance), dated September 27, 1941. The translator of *Esh Kodesh* J. Hershy Worch translated it as ‘fixing’ in the phrase “It is not just because they need fixing that we must look at our character flaws.” In this paragraph Rabbi Shapira called for individual repentance as far as each and every person is unique and alongside the collective repentance he or she should work on the individual flaws.<sup>125</sup> The second time he speaks about *tikkun* or mending of the *sefira Malhut* (Sovereignty) in the Chapter Mattoth, written in July 11, 1942. He gives an elaborate Kabbalistic explanation, saying that *tikkun* of *Malhut* helps to reveal the quality of the world *Mah* (what), which stands for the scared and divine knowledge.<sup>126</sup> But as it was said before, there are many types of *tikkun* in the Jewish tradition and even the mystical tradition is not always consistent about this question, hence we should take a closer look at the dimensions of *tikkun* which appear in *Esh Kodesh*.

Pesach Shindler in his article “Faith after Auschwitz in the light of the Paradox of Tikkun in Hassidic Documents” claims that the ‘commandment’ of Rabbi Shapira ‘not to

<sup>122</sup> Worch, “Introduction”, xxiii

<sup>123</sup> Greenberg, Gershon, “Wartime Orthodox Jewish Thought about the Holocaust”

<sup>124</sup> Gershon Greenberg praises Shapira as a representative of the ‘optimistic brunch’ of Hassidic leaders. See more Gershon Greenberg, “Hasidic Thought and the Holocaust (1933–1947): Optimism and Activism”, *Jewish History* (2013), 360–61

<sup>125</sup> Shapira, Kalonymus Kalmish, *Esh Kodesh*, 10

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 72

despair' is a form of *tikkun*. Re-establishing of the bond with God, which was so important for the Rabbi of Piaseczno, as well as embracing the imperfect world due to improving is a form of *tikkun* too. Other topics, described by Rabbi Shapira in his book can be also considered as *tikkun*. In particular, if a man perceives in suffering some degree of the divine, he starts to repair the flaws of the universe. *Kiddush ha-Shem*, is also a form of *tikkun*, a restoration of an incomplete portion of Jewish destiny connecting the covenant of Abraham with the Holocaust of our own day. The theme of protest against God's decisions is an attempt to restore the process of justice in a world of injustice. And if the Jew resists despair, he also participates in the process of *tikkun*, where the man proceeds to restore himself, to remember who he is<sup>127</sup>.

Coming closer to the concept of *tikkun olam*, it is important to mention, that the Hebrew word *olam* means not only 'the world' but also 'a community' and both of them were represented on a micro-level by a single Jew. If to leave aside strict frames of Lurianic Kabbalah, the Piaseczner, even though he rarely used the word *tikkun*, spoke about mending on all those levels. He was concerned with 'fixing' of the Jewish life in Poland, which was influenced by secularization and the Haskalah movement.<sup>128</sup> He also battled with despair among his flock on the private level, and finally, he developed the doctrine of the collective suffering of Jews and God which, as he believed, led to fixing the Divine cosmic catastrophe with the broken vessels. The last approach will be discussed in more specific details.

According to the Lurianic tradition, creation of the world was not possible until God retracted himself (*tzimtzum*) in his indefiniteness and vacated a space for it. However, as far as there is no existence without the Divine Presence, God surrounds the space and is present

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<sup>127</sup> Pesach Schindler, "Faith after Auschwitz in the light of the Paradox of Tikkun in Hassidic Documents", Reprinted from *SIDIC, Journal of the service international de documentation judeo-chretienne*, (Vol. VIII, #3, 1974), 27

<sup>128</sup> A Movement for Jewish Enlightenment, which spread around Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries

in his absence, providing meaning to the meaningless world. This leads us to the theory of Rabbi Shapira about meaningful and meaningless commandments likewise meaningful and meaningless suffering. A commandment is meaningful when it is possible to rationalize it, like the commandments “thou shalt not kill” or “thou shalt not steal”. But the most important are the commandments which are illogical and demand faith and obedience, because they show real loyalty to God. The same notion is applied to suffering – there are sufferings which are punishment for sinning and require repentance. But the sufferings during the Holocaust are not caused by any sin, they have no meaning and only the Divine presence makes them meaningful. The reason of these sufferings is clear only to God, therefore a human being is not capable to comprehend them. Moreover, one even does not have to search for an explanation, because the divine glory and infiniteness is unbearable for a mortal.<sup>129</sup> One has to accept that *tzimtzum* also made God suffer, but he retracted himself to create a separate world which would be able to recognize his sovereignty and separateness. God initially needs an imperfect world which strives for perfection because He can’t be infinite in the perfect space with no deficiency<sup>130</sup>.

The consequent question, following this notion is why to perform *tikkun* if God does not need perfection. The point is that *tikkun* is needed by human beings. When the divine vessels broke and the light was scattered in the form of sparkles, the divine grace, which was a part of this light was also dispersed, causing suffering. Human redemption, as a part of *tikkun*, enables creating new vessels, capable of receiving more of infinite light. Moreover, it also helps finite to embrace infinite without breaking or suffering<sup>131</sup>. However, according Zur, Rabbi Shapira’s thought underwent changes during the Holocaust. At the beginning he still

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<sup>129</sup> Avichai Zur, “The Lord Hides in Inner Chambers”: The Doctrine of Suffering in the Theosophy of Rabbi Klonymus Kalman Shapira of Piaseczno”, *Dapim, Studies on the Holocaust* (Volume 25, Issue 1, 2011), 194

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 214-218

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 218

believed that redemption would save the Jews from extermination or the condition of *dvekut* will help martyrs to overcome physical pain, as it happened with Rabbi Akiva on his ordeal. But later he accepts the meaningless and inevitability of suffering, seeing in them only a path to *dvekut*. His position changed from waiting for redemption to humble hope in possible salvation<sup>132</sup>. Still, accepting incomprehensibility of the divine will and fury, Rabbi Shapira finds a way of maintaining his Hassidic doctrine of joy in such terrible times. He explains that God is simultaneously rejoicing and weeping. He rejoices together with Jews in his outer chambers while he weeps together with them in his inner chambers. Everyone who reached the inner chambers receives strength from suffering and weeping. Consequently God, who is hiding in the inner chambers does not reveal himself not because his indifference, but because of his deep sorrow for his beloved people. He cannot reveal himself also because his sufferings are so great that one spark of them would be enough to destroy the world.<sup>133</sup> In one of the final sermons in *Esh Kodesh*, delivered on July 11, 1942, Rabbi Shapira says that Jews suffer on God's account, being his representatives in the world. Moreover, accepting the divine sufferings as their own, they save the world from immediate destruction<sup>134</sup>. On the other hand, Israel is stricken as a God's servant on the Earth. Consequently, Rabbi Shapira saw the Holocaust as another cosmic drama, in which Jews are destined to play the main part. Moreover, they share responsibility for the fate of the world and even God himself, in the desperate attempt to turn *Din* into *Rakhamim*.

Summing up the chapter I would like to underline several points: The book *Esh Kodesh* by Rabbi Shapira can be studied from different perspectives – as a therapeutic work, aimed to comfort people during Holocaust, as a record of personal struggle by its author and also as an evidence of deep transformations in the connection between mortal and the Divine in the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 221-223

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 212; see also Polen, *The Holy Fire*, 118-120 and Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, 315

<sup>134</sup> Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, 334

time of distress. It is possible to trace how Rabbi Shapira was changing his approach from patronizing leader who calls for repentance of sinners to a perplexed believer who admits that Jewish sufferings have nothing in common with sin and embraces his unclear and misty future with all the humility. Although Rabbi Shapira emphasizes the importance of joy, compassion and love, he finally admits that suffering disabled almost all the positive revelations of human nature. The only thing that was left intact is a faith in God and unbreakable connection with him. Rabbi Shapira allows questioning the Divine justice but not the faith in God. Jews are the representatives of God on the Earth and this is the reason of their distress. However, their exclusive closeness to God allows them to weep with him in his Divine chambers trying to transform Judgment into Grace. Although Rabbi Shapira rarely applies to the concept of *tikkun* in his works, it is an integral part of his doctrine. Kabbalistic idea of *tikkun* requires direct involvement of a human being, who can change the divine world(s) by his physical or spiritual activities. Rabbi Shapira describes the different types of human interaction with the Divine, like repentance, suffering, and martyrdom from one hand and rejoicing from the other. All of them can be described as a part of mending the reality, divine or mundane.

As we can see, at this point the Kabbalistic thought of Rabbi Shapira comes close to the philosophical reflections of Fackenheim. Although the philosopher did not possess the deep knowledge of Kabbalah and did not apply to the more profound concepts of ten *sefirot*, the divine attributes or *dveikut*, his arguments reflected the Piaseczners thread of thought. Eventually both of the thinkers came to the conclusion that the Holocaust and the Jewish suffering could not be a result of a divine punishment, nevertheless, the real cosmic and metaphysical reason of this event remained obscure. The second similarity between the two thinkers is their conviction in the incomprehensible nature of God. The limited consciousness of a human being cannot understand the whole scope of a divine plan, likewise what is good or bad for him. Consequently, even facing such a horrific event as the Holocaust one should



despair in God and stay faithful to him till the very end. Rabbi Shapira also applies to the notion of the God, suffering together with humanity and hiding his face in the inner chambers, not to destroy the world with his pain, and as we could see before, this idea was adopted by Fackenheim directly from the Rabbi Shapira's writings. The thinkers saw the way to the redemption is in the maintaining communal responsibility and sympathy to the people of Israel which in the Fackenheim's case transformed into pro-Zionist affections. Finally, both of the thinkers voted for the preservation of the Jewish tradition even before the face of evil. Therefore, personal participation of every member of the Jewish community was necessary for survival of the Jewish nation and for the mending of the ruptured world. Still, for Fackenheim the question of mending was not only religious, but also a philosophical and even political issue. Therefore his *Tikkun Olam* was rooted not only in the Kabbalistic tradition but also in German philosophy, and the way to perform it required the direct action rather than religious obedience in following the *mitzvot*. Unlike Shapira he did not rely only on mystical *tikkun*, but demanded on inclusion of the Jews into the history as active players, what was completely absent in the Rabbi Shapira's thought. Even though, either Shapira or Fackenheim agreed that the Holocaust was the new page in the Jewish sacral and actual history, which brought so much evil and suffering to the world, that this wound would never be finally healed.

## Conclusions

More than 30 years passed since the time when Emil Fackenheim published his work *To Mend the World*. The concept of *Tikkun Olam*, which he introduced in the book underwent many transformations and became one of the most influential concepts of the American Reform Judaism. The ideas of Fackenheim, who voted for mandatory restoration and continuation of the Jewish tradition after the Holocaust, and celebrated Jewish return to the history under the Israeli flag, were welcomed by American Jews. The specificity of American religious life and history give a fertile soil for the development of Jewish Reform movement and also for the emergence of so-called Jewish civil religion, based on the values of communal responsibility, philanthropy and social justice. The ideas about *tikkun* as a way for restoration of Jewish tradition and education already existed in the 1950s, but it was the Fackenheim's book which brought a new political and philosophical dimension to this term. Since the 1980s *Tikkun Olam* has become an umbrella concept for the different kinds of social activism, getting rid from the religious and Zionist components of this idea.

Nevertheless, this adaptation of the Fackenheim's thought to American Jewish life was a two-folded process as far as the philosopher developed his ideas after social and political changes, which happened to the American society in the 1960s. The Eichmann's trial, the Six Day War, the human rights movement and the revival of ethnical minorities had a huge impact on American Jews, making them re-memorialize the Holocaust, and re-think their own ethnic and religious identity. The War of 1967 and the glorious victory of Israel in it reminded the Jews that the second Holocaust is still possible, however, Zionist dreams about creation of the new Jew, able to defend himself happened to come true. Fackenheim, who avoided the topic of the Holocaust for twenty years, re-evaluated its significance for the Jewish history and the Jewish thought. He came to the conclusion that the Holocaust was an epoch-making event, which had no equivalents in the human history. Fackenheim applied to the Bible, Mishnah,

the Talmud, Kabbalah, and also German philosophy, to develop his thought about the Holocaust, which represented for him a failure of the ideals of Enlightenment and was a manifestation of the ultimate evil. Fackenheim saw the origins of the Nazi ideology in the philosophy of Heidegger and his ideas of Volk and Dasein as “being-towards-death”. Although his ideas about communal responsibility and ‘being as experience’ were close to the Heideggerian thought, and moreover, were influenced by it, he accused him in Idealism, and rejected so-called speculative philosophy. Fackenheim referred to the Kantian imperative to show its inconsistency in the post-Holocaust world and created his own imperative, which he called the 614th Commandment, and which ordered the Jews not to give Hitler posthumous victories. Fackenheim was disappointed in the European philosophy and ethics which allowed the Holocaust to happen, hence he tried to shape the ideas about new Jewish philosophy and ethics. His search for the new concepts, led him to the Lurianic Kabbalah, in the interpretation of Gershom Scholem. From the whole Kabbalistic heritage the philosopher picked and then elaborated the concept of *tikkun*, which had a long history as a legal concept in the rabbinic tradition, but became a symbol of a cosmic drama in the esoteric teaching of Isaac Luria. According to Kabbalah, *tikkun* was a mystical mending of the catastrophe of breaking the divine vessels and scattering the divine light, which happened after the creation of the earth. Although Kabbalistic *tikkun* was primarily an esoteric practice, Fackenheim adopted it to his own philosophy of the Holocaust as a rupture in a normal flow of life and made it actual and physical. He saw *tikkun* in the creation of the State of Israel and preserving Jewish life even after the destruction. However, his ideas had also metaphysical aspect; for him *tikkun olam* also meant the re-establishment of the bond between God and humanity and to elaborate his idea he applied to the work by Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira *Esh Kodesh*.

Unlike Fackenheim, Shapira did not survive the Holocaust, but his ideas had a deep impact on the post-Holocaust thought. *Esh Kodesh* was published post-mortem as an edited

version of the manuscript of sermons, hidden by Rabbi Shapira before his deportation from the Warsaw ghetto. Before the war he was a leader of the Hassidic community in a small town of Piaseczno, and a head of the *yeshiva* where he tried to educate the Jewish youth in the framework of Jewish tradition and keep them far from the threats of secularization. From the very start of the Nazi invasion, Rabbi Shapira tried to lead and comfort his flock, emphasizing on the necessity of compassion, rejoicing and a strong faith in God. In his sermons he wrote about the origins of evil and suffering, and, starting with the traditional rabbinic explanation of distress as a punishment for transgressions, he eventually rejected this idea, although it was shared by many Orthodox rabbis even after the Holocaust. Like Fackenheim, he realized that the Holocaust was an exceptional event which cannot be compared to the previous Jewish catastrophes like the destruction of the Temple or the Khmel'nitsky massacre due to the scope of suffering of Jewish people. He emphasized that God also suffers together with his people, hence it was important not to lose faith in the time of distress. This idea was welcomed by Fackenheim who also applied to the concept of suffering God, who hides from the human eyes in his inner chambers. Eventually Shapira came to the similar conclusions as Fackenheim, which can be formulated in the three profound notions: the first is the necessity and importance of the communal service to *kelal Yisrael*, the second is the strong devotion to the Judaic religion, and the last one is communal and individual responsibility for the process of mending the corrupt reality, and the attempt to change the world, either on the heaven or on the Earth.

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