

Hope

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and
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What Hope Remains? Leo Baeck as a Reader of Job

YANIV FELLER

Introduction

The Shoah (Holocaust) plays a central role in contemporary Jewish thought and life: how can we make sense of the greatest catastrophe of the twentieth century? Should one even attempt at understanding? How are we to speak of something deemed unparalleled? Can an event, as horrific as it may be, have – or should it have – an impact on our basic philosophical premises, on our ontology and epistemology? Is there a meaning to theodicy and the idea that God is good anymore? What does the election of the Jews mean after the concentration and death camps? Where was God in Auschwitz? Jewish thought, and philosophy and theology more generally, have to face all these questions.

In many of the discussions about post-Shoah Jewish thought, one finds constant references, among others, to Martin Buber, Richard Rubenstein, Eliezer Berkovits, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, and Emil Fackenheim.¹ The name of Leo Baeck (1873–1956) is not often mentioned in this context. This observation is somewhat surprising, because Baeck is identified, perhaps more than any other Jewish thinker, as a symbol of this terrible period of Jewish existence. Baeck played a central role in German-Jewish intellectual life during the twentieth century and when the Nazis rose to power, he assumed a leading role in the Jewish organizations that led programs of social welfare and education. In his official role as the leader of the community, Baeck had to deal and be in contact with the Nazi

¹ Among the anthologies on the subject, see: S.T. KATZ et al., eds., *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); M.L. MORGAN, ed., *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also the following important works: S.T. KATZ, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1983); Z. BRAITERMAN, *(God) after Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); M.L. MORGAN, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

authorities.² In 1943, Baeck was deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp, where he continued to remain intellectually active by lecturing and writing, sometimes in hiding and under personal risk. Leo Baeck survived the Shoah and immigrated to England, where he died in 1956. His name is commemorated in various institutions, among others the Leo Baeck Institute for German-Jewish history.³

Baeck's contribution to Jewish post-Shoa thought has gone largely unnoticed and this article can be seen as an attempt to amend this lacuna.⁴ I submit that it is possible to locate a subtle yet important shift in his theological position regarding suffering and hope: after the Shoah, Baeck avoids explaining suffering, all the while clinging to hope as a moral duty.⁵ This change is evident by a comparison of Baeck's interpretations of the book of Job in his two major works: *The Essence of Judaism* (1905, 2nd expanded edition 1922) and *This People: Jewish Existence* (1955; second volume, 1957). In each case, I begin by presenting some relevant themes of the work before moving to a close reading of Baeck's interpretation of Job.

² On Baeck's role as a leader during that period there are conflicting moral evaluations. On the one hand, his admirers note how he could have fled Germany several times, even as late as 1938, but chose to remain with his people. For many, he was a unifying figure that offered moral and spiritual resistance, see for example M. GRUENEWALD, "The Beginning of the 'Reichsvertretung'", *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 1 (1956), 58: "There was nobody else who could be expected to bring the warring factions together and could serve both as a symbol and as a leader." On the other hand, Hannah Arendt famously called him the "Jewish Führer" and blamed him and other Jews in similar positions for making the work of the Nazis easier. For Arendt's comment see H. ARENDT *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963). It is worth noting that the statement "Jewish Führer" appears only in the first edition.

³ The best biographical account of Baeck's life is L. BAKER *Days of Sorrow and Pain: Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews* (New York: Macmillan, 1978).

⁴ One notable exception is the anthology edited by Baeck's most important commentator. See A.H. FRIEDLANDER, ed., *Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature* (New York: UAHC Press, 1999).

⁵ There is a related moral question that has haunted Baeck's interpreters and biographers: did Baeck, during his time Theresienstadt, know with certainty the destination of the trains to Auschwitz and should he have shared this information? While such a question is related to the question of hope and maintaining hope, it also opens a host of other philosophical questions about ethics of speech and silence and about leadership and responsibility. For some assessments see BAKER *Days of Sorrow and Pain*, 308-314; A.H. FRIEDLANDER, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press), 46-48; IDEM, Forward to W. HOMOLKA, *Jewish Identity in Modern Times: Leo Baeck and German Protestantism* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995).

Job and the Problem of Theodicy

Before discussing Baeck's work, I wish to explain the decision to focus on Job as the hermeneutical key to understanding theology after the Shoah, and Baeck's in particular. The book of Job forces us to confront a fundamental – one is tempted to say existential – question: why do righteous people suffer? Job, who is “blameless and upright, God-fearing and departed from evil” (Job 1:1), suffers for no apparent reason.⁶ The entire text – Satan and his discussion with God, the suffering Job, the speeches of Job's wife and his friends as well as God's theophany – can be seen as an attempt to understand Job's suffering. How do we make sense of suffering and the fact that God is good? Who holds the correct view among the characters of this story?

Job can be seen as the litmus paper used to examine theological and philosophical responses to the problems of evil and suffering.⁷ The attempt to explain suffering and reconcile it with God's goodness is often referred to as theodicy, a term I understand in a broad way as any attempt to justify or find acceptable interpretation to the connection between a certain image or concept of God and the existence of evil. After the Shoah, such questions became urgent. In the words of Martin Buber: can “Job of the gas chambers” sing with the Psalmist, “praise HIM, for He is good, for His loving-kindness is forever” (Ps. 136:1)?⁸ Hans Jonas saw in Job an impressive formulation of theodicy, relevant to both general and Jewish post-Shoah thought:

the question of Job has always been the main question of theodicy – of general theodicy because of the existence of evil as such in the world, and of particular theodicy in its sharpening by the riddle of election, of the purported covenant between Israel and its God.⁹

⁶ Interpreters throughout the centuries would struggle with the possibility that Job has some sort of guilt in his suffering. This is already evident in the Talmudic discussions about him and whether he even existed or is only a parable (Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 15a-16a).

⁷ Perhaps it is for this reason that the book of Job is one of the most commented upon books of the Hebrew Bible, not only by Jewish theologians but also by Christian theologians and atheists such as Ernst Bloch. For a comprehensive list of sources and bibliographies of interpretations, see D. J. A. CLINES, *World Biblical Commentary: Job 1-20* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), lxiv–cxv, and R. EISEN, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 235 n1.

⁸ M. BUBER, *On Judaism*, ed. N. GLATZER (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 224–225.

⁹ H. JONAS, “The Concept of God after Auschwitz,” in KATZ, *Wrestling with God*, 629.

Zachary Braiterman contends that the book of Job contains not a theodicy but rather a counter-narrative; it challenges common attempts at theodicy. In Job, we encounter a human protesting against God, and even following God's theophany it is not clear that Job's protest was unjustified or that he is satisfied with the answer. Braiterman coins the neologism "anti-theodicy" in order to delineate this alternative mode of thought, which does not attempt to explain the meaning of pain or do away with the existence of evil.¹⁰ Based on their interpretation of Job, scholars have argued that a variety of thinkers, e.g. Maimonides, Kant, Kierkegaard and Levinas, have anti-theodic tendencies.¹¹ The way one interprets Job, and the context in which this interpretation takes place, helps us determine how one understands suffering and its relation to the divine, i.e. whether or not Job is used as anti-theodicy or theodicy.¹²

Now that the importance of the book of Job is clear, we can turn to Baeck's reading of it. The guiding question for me is whether or not Baeck changed his interpretation of the book of Job after the Shoah, and what does this tell us about his later thought and understanding of hope. Two of Baeck's most insightful interpreters suggest that Baeck's interpretation of Job remains unchanged: Nahum Glatzer concludes that Baeck cannot incorporate the Book of Job into his thought, but that he did exemplify its message in his life – remaining always faithful to God; similarly, Albert Friedlander claims that Baeck in this case instructs us more by his life than by his work.¹³ Glatzer's and Friedlander's position helps us appreciate the moral character of Baeck and be inspired by it, but I believe that a focus on

¹⁰ BRAITERMAN, (*God*) after *Auschwitz*, 4; cf. 3738.

¹¹ Although they do not base their discussion on the term "anti-theodicy" the following works suggest this line of reasoning. Cf. EISEN, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 225; C. WELZ, "Reasons for Having No Reason to Defend God – Kant, Kierkegaard, Levinas and their Alternatives to Theodicy," in *Wrestling with God and with Evil: Philosophical Reflections*, ed. H. M. VROOM (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi Press 2007), 167–186.

¹² That the borderline between theodicy and anti-theodicy is blurred and depends on context is recognized by Braiterman. Steven Kepnes pushes this argument further by suggesting that anti-theodicy, while a very useful category, does not necessarily encompass the experience of Shoah survivors and is really useful as a category only when put into relation with theodicy. See S. KEPNES, "Reading Job as a Textual Theodicy," in *Suffering Religion*, ed. R. GIBBS and E. R. WOLFSON (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 38–39.

¹³ N. GLATZER, *Baeck, Buber, Rosenzweig Reading the Book of Job* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1966), 6–8; A.H. FRIEDLANDER, "Leo Baeck and Franz Rosenzweig," in *Der Philosoph Franz Rosenzweig: Internationaler Kongress - Kassel 1986*, ed. W. SCHMIED-KOWARZIK (Freiburg: K. Alber, 1988), 249; IDEM, "Leo Baeck und der Begriff 'Leiden' in seinem Werk," in *Leo Baeck: Lehrer und Helfer in schwerer Zeit*, ed. W. LICHARZ (Frankfurt am Main: Haag & Herchen, 1983), 137–141.

Job as a hermeneutical principle allows us to find a more significant shift in Baeck's thought after the Shoah than has hitherto been recognized.

The Essence of Judaism

Written originally in part as a response to Adolf von Harnack's degenerating portrayal of the Pharisees and Judaism in *The Essence of Christianity*, Baeck's *The Essence of Judaism* offers an alternative exposition of Judaism, one that stresses its ethical character.¹⁴ The organizing principle of the work can be traced, as Albert Friedlander convincingly showed, to a "religion of polarity": Baeck stresses the dual character of human existence and the need to live in this inherent tension, e.g. between the otherness of God as opposed to the inner-feeling that God is near or between the infinite worth of life and human mortality.¹⁵ It is out of this tension that the essence of Judaism is to be understood. Following a long tradition in liberal Judaism, Baeck identifies this essence in the ethical message of the prophets and in the covenant between God and the people of Israel. This covenant, although particular, is not particularistic but inclusive; it is meant to pave the way for the moral betterment of all of humanity.

Baeck's thought, especially in his early writings, shows the imprint of the prominent Jewish neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842–1918). Cohen argued that it is through the suffering of the other that one learns to recognize the fellow-human [*Mitmensch*], a recognition that in turn brings compassion and the discovery of the 'I' as an individual with

¹⁴ A. VON HARNACK, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. T.B. SAUNDERS (London: Williams and Norgate, 1901); Baeck's explicit response to Harnack was published in 1901, see L. BÄCK, "Harnack's Vorlesungen über das Wesen des Christentums," *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 45 (1901), 97–120. On Baeck's reading of Harnack, see FRIEDLANDER, *Teacher of Theresienstadt*, 51–60; HOMOLKA, *Jewish Identity in Modern Times*, 18–44; on the "essence debate" at the turn of the century: U. TAL, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Second Reich 1870–1914*, trans. N. JACOBS (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 204–212; IDEM, "Theologische Debatte um das 'Wesen' des Judentums" in *Juden im Wilhelminischen Deutschland 1890–1914*, eds. W. MOSSE and A. PUCKER (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1976), 599–632.

¹⁵ L. BAECK, *Werke*, ed. A.H. FRIEDLANDER et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2006), 173–174. Cf. FRIEDLANDER, *Teacher of Theresienstadt*, 141–204. All translations are mine. The page numbers are the ones corresponding to the original editions. In the case of *The Essence of Judaism*, these are taken from the second, expanded edition. I have consulted the existing English translation: L. BAECK, *The Essence of Judaism*, trans. V. GRUBENWIESER and L. PEARL (New York: Schocken, 1948).

moral responsibilities.¹⁶ The task of the human being is to alleviate the suffering, which Cohen identifies primarily with the social problem of poverty. In doing so, humans follow the ethical, good Idea, i.e. God. Attempting to come closer to the Idea is the never ending messianic task that despite its never-ending character should be realized in this world.¹⁷ This messianic task is shared by all and is meant to bring the idea of humanity forth, a humanity to be realized throughout history.¹⁸

God as an Idea and the messianic task as inherently connected to suffering allows us to make sense of suffering when seen from the perspective of the end of time; suffering here-and-now should be interpreted from the perspective of the future. Cohen reads history *from* the future backwards and so in his thought, suffering is intertwined with hope to the extent that it is still given meaning seen from that perspective.¹⁹ The people of Israel are in this regard a place-holder, a symbol for an ideal of the humanity who suffers for all. Israel serves in this regard as a double signifier: for those who suffer as well as for those who attempt to alleviate social suffering in the

¹⁶ H. COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Wiesbaden: Marix Verlag, 2008), 157–166. These ideas were already developed in Cohen's more philosophical works, but their connection to Judaism, both historically and philosophically, is made most clearly in *Religion of Reason*. H. COHEN, *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1921). On the impact of Cohen's thought on Baeck's, see A. ALTMANN, "Theology in Twentieth Century German Jewry," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 1 (1956), 198–202; FRIEDLANDER, *Teacher of Theresienstadt*, 148–154.

¹⁷ Cf. A. MITTLEMAN, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 212: "It is integral to Cohen's thought, however, that the 'messiah' is always coming but never arriving. The task of ethics is infinite; it never comes to rest."

¹⁸ Cohen's favorite verse in this regard is "Ye shall be holy for I am holy" (Lev. 19:2), i.e. God can be approached but never reached (COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft*, 306, 312–13). The core of this messianism is therefore privation. In this, Cohen is part of a meontological tradition that is prevalent both in Jewish thought and in Western philosophy. See M. KAVKA, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 3.

¹⁹ Robert Gibbs offers a close reading that is sensitive to the problem of suffering and the limits of the understanding of suffering in Cohen, Rosenzweig and Levinas. See R. GIBBS, "Unjustifiable Suffering," in *Suffering Religion*, 13–35. My reading of Cohen is influenced by Gibbs, but my focus here is on messianism and it therefore stresses the resolution of suffering as seen from the end, and not the fact that the poverty of the other cannot be completely grasped. For an analysis of Cohen's way of reading history see IDEM, "Lines, Circles, Points: Messianic Epistemology in Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Benjamin," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. P. SCHÄFER and M.R. COHEN (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 365–384. IDEM, "Hermann Cohen's Messianism: The History of the Future," in "*Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*": *Tradition und Ursprungsdenken in Hermann Cohens Spätwerk*, ed. H. HOLZHEY et al. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2000), 331–349.

world. The two are connected in Cohen's thought. Israel – and by this Cohen means the remnant who is true to the teaching of the prophets – is the messiah, the “suffering servant” (Is. 52–53). It suffers through the process of bringing humanity together.²⁰

Cohen's influence is evident in Baeck's messianic vision, which combines election with a task, origin with a goal. Baeck reads the ethical task as belonging for the future, as constantly in need of realization. For him, a task that is fulfilled is not a task at all.²¹ One paradigmatic example should suffice to make this point clear:

The election [*Auserwählung*] is understood as the prophetism of the entire people. In it, is a belief in the mission over and behind itself, it is being-elected for the sake of the others. All Israel is the messenger of the Lord, the Messiah, the Servant of God [*Knecht Gottes*], who guards religion for all other lands, from whom the light to all the people shall shine forth.²²

Election is singling-out [*aus-erwählen*]. A separation of the Jewish people is required in order for it to fulfill its task, the promoting of ethical monotheism and for the bringing of humanity together. Israel is the messiah that is the suffering servant of God.²³

Religion is for Baeck a meaning-giving power; it explains existence in one of two ways: the pessimist assumes there is none whereas the optimist finds one. While Baeck recognizes pessimistic tones in the Bible, he firmly

²⁰ COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft*, 273–275; through his interpretation of election and its emphasis on universality and the role God places in it, Cohen in fact significantly challenges the idea of the election of Israel. Cf. D. NOVAK, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 53.

²¹ L. BAECK, *Werke*, I, 251–253.

²² *Ibid.*, 66. That the English translation omits the word “Messiah,” therefore making the polemic with Christianity about the interpretation of Isaiah 53 a little less evident, is unfortunate. Cf. BAECK, *The Essence of Judaism*, 67. On this paragraph, see also A.H. FRIEDLANDER, “Die messianische Dimension bei Franz Rosenzweig und Leo Baeck,” in *Aus zweier Zeugen Mund: Festschrift für Pnina Navè Levinson und Nathan Peter Levinson*, ed. J.H. SCHOEPS (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1992), 172–173.

²³ BAECK, *Werke*, I, 65. Baeck can cling here to Jewish interpretations of the figure of the suffering servant as Israel, such as that of David Kimchi, as well as to the modern sage Cohen, who himself acknowledged the influence of Kimchi (COHEN, *Religion der Vernunft*, 305). Recently, however, Daniel Boyarin challenged these Jewish interpretations of Israel as the Suffering Servant, claiming that there is an early and long Jewish tradition that recognizes the Suffering Servant as the person of the Messiah who suffers, and not all of Israel. See D. BOYARIN, “The Suffering Christ as a Jewish Midrash,” in *Religion und Politik: Das Messianische in Theologien, Religionswissenschaften und Philosophien des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, ed. G. PALMER and T. BROSE (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 220–223.

states that Judaism's belief in the one God is by definition a belief in the good – once again Cohen is evident here – and is optimistic:

In the willing *belief in the good* consists the optimism of Judaism. It is a belief *in God* and from that follows *belief in the human*: in God, through which the good has its reality, and in the human, who is able to realize the good.²⁴

This good is to be found even in face of death. Martyrdom contains the undying hope for the redemption of all humanity; the suffering of the person is connected to a never ending longing for the future.²⁵ Even in the second edition, after the First World War, Baeck maintains his optimistic belief. Despite an apparent emphasis on suffering in their thought, both Cohen and Baeck stress that suffering, when seen from redemption, has meaning and that the future will prove in the end better.

Job and the Meaning of Suffering

The first thing to note about Baeck's interpretation of the book of Job in *The Essence of Judaism* is that it is not a systematic analysis or exegesis but is composed of only scattered references at various parts of the work. Nonetheless, a careful look at these references shows that they are consistent with the broader theodicy in Baeck's work around that time.²⁶ The comparison with Cohen helped us see some aspects of this theodicy: it consists of a firm optimism and an attempt to give religious meaning to the suffering of the human being, and in particular of the people of Israel.

A central verse for Baeck, so central that he cites it twice throughout the book, is the verse: "and he said to the human: fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is reason [*bina*]" (Job 28:28).²⁷ The Hebrew word *bina* is rendered by Baeck as *Vernunft*. This might imply that Baeck had in mind something similar to Kantian practical reason. This claim is supported by the fact that Baeck mentions that there is only one reason and nearness to God is connected to this reason. This is further evident by

²⁴ BAECK, *Werke*, I, 90, emphasis in original. Cf. FRIEDLANDER, "Leo Baeck und der Begriff 'Leiden' in seinem Werk," 134.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁶ Klappert claims, however, that because of the lack of their centrality, there is a reason to believe that Job receives attention by Baeck only later in his career, and that the subject of suffering is best understood by a reference to the *aqeda* (the binding of Isaac). Cf. B. KLAPPERT, "Das Midrasch aus Theresienstadt und das Testament Leo Baecks: Eine Einführung in 'Dieses Volk. Jüdische Existenz,'" in *Zwischen Geheimnis und Gebot: Auf dem Weg zu einem progressiven Judentum der Moderne*, ed. F. WÖSSNER and W. HOMOLKA (Karlsruhe: EPB, 1997), 92–97.

²⁷ BAECK, *Werke*, I, 33; I, 236.

the context of the quotes. In both times, Baeck stresses that this reason is connected to the deed and the commandment. The second time he cites the verse – this time only the last part, “fear the Lord” is not mentioned – it is as part of a discussion of the love of the neighbor. The verse is immediately followed by the comment, “hence always the ‘you shall not’ in the Bible.”²⁸ Whereby other interpretations, e.g. Rashi and David Altschuler (Mezudat David), have stressed the fear of God as conditioning the wisdom and reason of the human, Baeck in this interpretation focuses on the end clause.²⁹ The message of the verse according to Baeck is not so much about fear but much more about the moral duty of the human.

For the ethical task one should be willing to suffer. The suffering is part of the unending task of being human, of being ethical and trying to alleviate suffering in the world. This is also present in Baeck’s reading of Job and in what he finds to be its main message:

“He saves the afflicted in their affliction” [Job 36: 15], so is the answer that the speeches of Elihu give to all enigmas and all question, which, to the suffering of the righteous, confront with the meaning of life.³⁰

Baeck notes that Elihu’s claim that the affliction is brought about out of love is a common notion in the Hebrew Bible that is further developed in the Talmud. In order to fully appreciate Baeck’s choice of verse, we need to remember the special place of Elihu in the book of Job. Elihu seems to be one of the friends, like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but he appears, seemingly from nowhere, only in chapter 32. Unlike the other friends, he accepts the fact that Job is innocent and in front of Elihu’s speeches, Job remains speechless.

In recognizing the words of Elihu as the crux of the argument of the book of Job, Baeck follows a long tradition, most notably Maimonides’ interpretation of the book.³¹ For Maimonides, the book of Job is concerned with the question of providence and the limits of knowledge about it. He seems to suggest that knowing we cannot know the exact work of providence, and realizing that in the end natural forces will overcome us,

²⁸ Ibid., 236.

²⁹ The modern interpretation of Clines goes along the same lines as the traditional interpretations mentioned. He takes this verse to mean that, “to fear God is a very wise thing to do, an act full of wisdom.” See D. J. A. CLINES, *World Biblical Commentary: Job 21-37* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 924.

³⁰ BAECK, *Werke*, I, 151.

³¹ MAIMONIDES, *Moreh Nevukhim*, trans. M. SCHWARZ (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 2002), III, chapter 23. Cf. EISEN, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 56.

are forces that give us psychological immunity to suffering.³² Baeck is in agreement with Maimonides that the answer to Job's suffering is expressed in life and in the meaning of life, but his emphasis on the verse "he saves the afflicted in their affliction," a verse not cited by Maimonides, seems to orient the reading of the text differently. There is a meaning of the suffering here. For Baeck, the meaning of life is understood through suffering, that suffering has a purpose.

Although we have placed Baeck's interpretation as part of a long tradition here, there is still a glaring gap in it. Glatzer notes that Baeck disregards a central aspect of the story, namely God's answer to Job out of the storm (Job 38–42).³³ While this certainly makes Baeck's reading of the story very selective, we need to remember that he does not write a systematic verse-by-verse commentary but makes only several references to it at different points of the text. Furthermore, it is not clear that adding the theophany would significantly change his interpretation or that he has no means of dealing with it. Although Job 28:28 stresses wisdom as fear of the Lord, Baeck is not concerned with fear of God per se or even with revelation, therefore God's description of the glory of creation is of no crucial significance for Baeck's argument.

The same holds true for Job's succinct and ambiguous response to God. Before he heard of God and now he saw Him: "therefore do I recant \ And I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6).³⁴ The important thing is that this sentence does not tell us whether or not Job accepts God's explanations.³⁵ Whether or not Job accepts God's explanation is not the central theme for Baeck. The central point is the moral responsibility that Job and all of us face. This already seems to move in an anti-theodic direction, but I think it pales in front of the emphasis on the theodic explanation of Elihu – suffering has meaning. There is no need for God's speech that immediately follows Elihu's because the answer is already given. All one needs to know is that one does not suffer in vain.

³² In this understanding of Maimonides' argument I rely heavily on EISEN, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 63–68.

³³ GLATZER, *Baeck, Buber, Rosenzweig Reading the Book of Job*, 6.

³⁴ This sentence is hard to translate and the Hebrew has some ambiguity to it. I have followed here Robert Alter. See R. ALTER, ed. and trans., *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes – A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton and Company, 2010), 177. The NRSV translation is "therefore I despise myself \ and repent in dust and ashes."

³⁵ For a good presentation of the problem with Job's answer in these verses and the way modern interpreters struggled with them, see G. PALMER, "Some Thoughts on Surrender: Martin Buber and the Book of Job," in *New Perspectives on Martin Buber*, ed. M. ZANK (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 185–188; cf. BRAITERMAN, *(God) after Auschwitz*, 48–49.

This People: Jewish Existence

Around fifty years passed since the publication of the first edition of *The Essence of Judaism* and the publication of the second volume of *This People: Jewish Existence*. A great gulf, an unconceivable rupture, separates them. Baeck started writing *This People* in Nazi Berlin and continued to work on it in the Theresienstadt concentration camp under extreme conditions. The work was completed after the Shoah and the final version of the second volume published posthumously. It can thus be read not only as a theological work, but as a reflection on Baeck's own life and experience. *This People* is his "testament."³⁶

In many ways, the core of Baeck's thought remains intact even after the Shoah. The system of polarities is still at work and the tensions between the polarities are maintained and further developed.³⁷ The continuity in Baeck's thought receives, however, a new accentuation, already evident in the name of the book: there is a move from essence, "an abstraction peculiar to history,"³⁸ to an emphasis on the existence, also in the physical sense, of this people. The life of the Jews and the challenges they and their faith had to endure are presented here in very concrete manifestation. It is a theology that is concerned with the history of Israel. Although essence is connected to existence already in *The Essence of Judaism*, now the concern is with the way in which Jewish life itself, not just its ideas, develops.³⁹ Existence is not an abstract and theoretical organizing principle; it is material and concrete.

The second volume of *This People* details the historical development of Judaism and the Jewish people. Its last section is titled "Hope" and is therefore of special interest for the present discussion. Here Baeck discusses the present time, from around the renaissance to ours. After the Shoah, Baeck can still speak of modern times in terms of hope. Friedlander and Klappert

³⁶ The chapter "Exodus" might allude, for example, to the end of German-Jewry. KLAPPERT, "Das Midrasch aus Theresienstadt und das Testament Leo Baecks," 90–91; BAECK, *Werke*, VI, 361–364 is a rare exception in which Baeck does talk about his own experience. E. BOEHM, *We Survived: Fourteen Histories of the Hidden and Hunted in Nazi Germany* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003), 284–298 is another. Since Boehm's text is a reworking of an interview with Baeck given as a first-person account of Baeck himself, some have questioned its validity. See A. BARKAI, "Manhigut Be-Dimdumei Hidualun", in *Leo Baeck: Manhigut Ve-Hagut, 1933-1945*, ed. A. BARKAI (Jerusalem: Leo Baeck Institute, 2000), 69–70.

³⁷ FRIEDLANDER, *Teacher of Theresienstadt*, 220–224.

³⁸ Cf. E. TROELTSCH, *Writings on Theology and Religion*, ed. and trans. R. MORGAN and M. PYE (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), 130.

³⁹ The roots of this understanding might have already been present in the *The Essence of Judaism*. Cf. H. LIEBESCHÜTZ, "Judaism and History of Religion in Leo Baeck's Work," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 2 (1957), 10.

attempt to make sense of this by analyzing Baeck's division of history into epochs: while the Shoah is the great darkness of the night, in whose shadow we still stand, there is hope in Baeck that the night will end. We are in the middle of a period, but not at its end.⁴⁰ In this important sense, Baeck's hope remains intact.

Hope for Baeck is grounded in the covenant between God and Israel. It is therefore oriented toward the future, but is grounded in an unshakable foundation. Baeck never abandons his trust in the covenant even after the Shoah. In fact, the covenant between God and Israel is the topic of the very first chapter of *This People*. The covenant is presented in this late work as the foundation for the existence of the Jewish people both in conceptual terms (*Ursprung*) and in terms of its historical beginning, with the exodus from Egypt (*Anfang*).⁴¹ Baeck also reiterates the argument in *The Essence of Judaism*, the ethical character of the covenant with God is stressed, as well as the role it plays for humanity as a whole.⁴² Yet *This People* not only begins with a discussion of the covenant; it also ends with it. At the end of the work, Baeck calls the covenant "the Enduring" and quotes Jeremiah (33:25–6) to that end in order to show that just as God will not abandon his covenant with the earth, i.e. the rules regulating the natural world, so will the covenant with Israel endure. The text can be read as a form of theodicy, because earlier in the same chapter Jeremiah does not hesitate to accuse Israel of guilt and sin (Jeremiah 33:5) that they have brought upon themselves. Yet such a reading does not fit the context in which Baeck uses the citation, i.e. to stress the eternity of the covenant, nor the general tendency of *This People*. A more plausible interpretation is that Baeck reads this text as one of comfort after destruction. It is thus a fitting in a section titled "Hope" in the aftermath of the Shoah.

Job and Wisdom

The treatment of the Book of Job in *This People* is much more systematic than in *The Essence of Judaism* and is done via a parallel analysis of Job and Kohelet (Ecclesiastes).⁴³ This pairing is not unique: both are considered – along with Proverbs – part of the genre of "wisdom literature," i.e. they are concerned with the formation of character and instruction about how to

⁴⁰ A.H. FRIEDLANDER and B. KLAPPERT, Introduction to L. BAECK, *Werke* II, 25.

⁴¹ BAECK, *Werke*, II/1, 79. Available English translation for *This People* is L. BAECK, *This People Israel: The Meaning of Jewish Existence*, trans. A.H. FRIEDLANDER (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964).

⁴² BAECK, II/1, 32.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, II/1, 123–130.

make sense of anomalies and inequities in life.⁴⁴ While discussing these two books, Baeck does not blur the vast difference between them: Kohelet is a human philosophizing on God and world; the book puts a mirror in front of us and reflects on all sides; it is a work of “both and.” Job, by contrast, is a work of “either-or,” in it there is constant struggle until the end with God and with the humans. Job and Kohelet are different but they share an important theme: the wisdom, *chochmah*. Baeck emphasizes at the beginning and end of this section that this word is untranslatable, just like the people of Israel: it encapsulates the meanings of *sophia*, *logos*, serves as evidence of revelation and creation, and is what makes the world a coherent whole, a cosmos, and the human into a personality. In *chochmah*, “world and human and likewise ideal and reality, metaphysics and the ethical are merged.”⁴⁵

Unlike in *The Essence of Judaism*, Baeck begins the discussion of Job in *This People* with the recognition that Job was “blameless and upright, God-fearing and departed from evil” (Job 1:1). This conveys the question about the meaning of the suffering of Job in unequivocal terms and the option that Job suffers for his sins or for something he has done is immediately excluded. The problem is that Job’s friends continuously and unjustly try to find the meaning in his suffering in his own fault. Job refuses to accept their verdict:

He struggles before God with the humans for his right; he fights for the light in the course of his life. He is always ready to profess that God is God and the human [is] human, but he never wants deny the way of his life. He wants to humble himself before God every hour, but he refuses to bow down to earth before humans and their accusations.⁴⁶

Although Job is always ready to submit himself to God, Baeck still maintains that the text is more concerned with the human. It seems as if in order to secure God’s relation to the human, expressed as we have seen in the covenant, Baeck takes God out of the discussion: Job recognizes God’s otherness. God’s otherness is in no way the cause of Job’s suffering, his “friends” are. It is the friends’ words that bring Job pain and against their accusations which he fights.⁴⁷

Nowhere is this point stated more clearly than in a pastoral-letter (*Hirtenbrief*) composed by Baeck in 1935, several weeks after the racist

⁴⁴ J. L. CRENSHAW, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2010), 4. Further non-canonical books that can be considered “wisdom literature” are the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach.

⁴⁵ BAECK, *Werke*, II/1, 124.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II/1, 126.

⁴⁷ There are also modern interpretations that go along the same line, for example R. GIRARD, *Job: The Victim of His People* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

Nuremberg Laws were passed. It was to be read before *Kol Nidre* prayer, at the beginning of the liturgy in Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement):

We stand before our God. With the same strength with which we have acknowledged our sins of the community, we shall express our abhorrence of the lie directed against us and of the slander of our faith and its expressions. This slander is far beneath us. We believe in our faith and our future. [...]

We stand before our God. Our strength is in Him. It is in Him that our history finds its truth and honor. He is the source of our survival through every chance, of our fortitude in all our trials [...]. We turn to it [our history] when attack and insult are directed against us, when need and suffering press upon us. God led our fathers from generation to generation. He will continue to lead us and our children through our days.⁴⁸

The parallel to the later description of Job in *This People* is evident: on Yom Kippur 1935, at a time of distress, suffering and uncertainty, the people of Israel recognize their sins and stand humbly before God, but they reject the slanders of the other humans. The Gestapo recognized this pastoral letter for what it truly was, a brave call for spiritual resistance, and tried to stop its circulation and public recitation. Baeck was arrested for its composition, but subsequently released.⁴⁹

Baeck's pastoral letter also makes clear that it is the covenant with God that gives the community its strength and hope for the future, and this covenant, Baeck writes later in this letter, is based on the commandment. This, I suggest, is also implicit in Baeck's interpretation of Job in *This People*. Since Baeck treats the book of Job as a book of wisdom, he locates its message in chapter 28, the most explicit *chochmah* chapter, cited in *This People* almost in full. This chapter deals with the question of the source of wisdom and ends with the verse already mentioned in our discussion of *The Essence of Judaism*: "and he said to the human: see, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding" (Job 28:28).⁵⁰ After the citation, Baeck notes: "this is the answer, which the mystery gives. It stands in the center of the book of Job. In it, the life of Job finds its self-justification".⁵¹ Who is the speaker of these verses, of "the answer" to Job's question? Baeck does not comment on this point, but it merits careful

⁴⁸ Quoted from D. MARX, "Liturgy Composed on the Brink of Catastrophe: Examination of 'Akdmut Millin' by R. Meir from Worms (Late 11th Century) and R. Leo Baeck's Hirtenbrief for Kol Nidre Service (1935), in *Leo Baeck – Philosophical and Rabbinical Approaches*, ed. W. HOMOLKA (Berlin: Frank&Timme, 2007), 90.

⁴⁹ BAKER, *Days of Pain and Sorrow*, 203–208.

⁵⁰ Note that in *This People*, unlike in *The Essence of Judaism*, Baeck renders *bina* as understanding and not as reason. This might imply a shift in emphasis from Kantian and neo-Kantian philosophy to a connection between mystery and commandment.

⁵¹ BAECK, *Werke*, II/1, 127.

examination. At first sight, it seems that the speaker is Job himself, as this text proceeds from a speech by Job (Job 27) without introducing any new speaker. Read this way, Baeck's interpretation of the book of Job suggests that message, the core of the work, comes not from the outside, but from the suffering person, from Job himself. This is probably how Baeck understood it.

There is, however, another possibility: commentators have noticed that this hymn in praise of *chochmah* looks out of context, it does not make sense for Job to praise wisdom the way he does in this chapter. That the next chapter begins with "and Job carried with his parable" (29:1) strengthens the feeling that we are dealing here with an interpolation of a later editor. If Job is not the speaker, who is? David Clines suggests that chapter 28 is in fact the concluding part of Elihu's speech, which should have originally placed before Job's speech (Job 29). Elihu is the character that speaks about wisdom most of all and it is therefore reasonable that this will be part of his address to Job.⁵² Following this novel suggestion means, in the context of our discussion, that Elihu's words still hold the hermeneutical key to the book of Job, but this time, Baeck locates it in the imperative to "depart from evil and do good."

Regardless of who the speaker of the verse is, it is clear that for Baeck the crux of the book lies in it; it is the answer of the mystery. "Mystery" is a key term in Baeck's thought. His important essay "Mystery and Commandment," delineates another polarity in the "religion of polarity" that governs his theology: the mystery is connected to the feeling of being created, the commandment is the consciousness that one shall create; the mystery is sensibility for the depth, for one's place, for the fact that one exists; the commandment is the sensibility to the fact that there is something above oneself; it is the challenge, the fact that one needs to answer to God. In Judaism there is no antinomy between mystery and commandments, the two merge into one: mystery indicates commandment and vice versa.⁵³

Based on this understanding of mystery, what Job learns – either himself or via the words of Elihu, depending on the identity of the speaker in Job 28 – is that life of *chochmah* is an ethical life, it is departing away from evil and fearing the Lord. Ethical life conduct is a self-justification because it is grounded in the mystery that is always connected to the commandment and through it to God. Job is wise and is justified in his life not because of his suffering but because he is "God-fearing and departed from evil" (Job

⁵² D. J. A. CLINES, *Job 21-37*, 908–909; IDEM, "Putting Elihu in His Place: A Proposal for the Relocation of Job 32–37," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29.2 (2004), 243–253.

⁵³ BAECK, *Werke*, III, 35.

1:1).⁵⁴ He does not gain knowledge of any kind and does not learn the reason for his suffering. Indeed, we do not know if there is one. This is the significant change between the Job of *The Essence of Judaism* and that of *This People*, between Baeck's thought before the Shoah and in its aftermath.

And Yet...

Leo Baeck's life serves as a reminder of an enduring faith after the Shoah. It symbolizes hope for and belief in a better future. Baeck's analysis of the book of Job in *This People* is a tremendous personal testimony of the suffering Baeck himself had to endure in Theresienstadt.⁵⁵ We should not let the personal, however, obscure the profound theoretical claim: after the Shoah the covenant, while sustaining hope for the better, no longer gives meaning to suffering. Suffering is unintelligible and remains so. Through the implicit anti-theodic interpretation of the book of Job in *This People*, Baeck implies that to find eschatological meaning in the Shoah is almost blasphemous.

Yet Baeck still maintains hope, despite everything. What remains of hope is a belief with a great "and yet" (*und dennoch*), a "despite-belief" against all suffering experienced.⁵⁶ This belief in the enduring covenant allows Baeck to hope for a better future.⁵⁷ The trust in the covenant is what makes enduring hope possible. It is thanks to the covenant that one can act ethically with the goal of realizing the Kingdom of God in this world. This hope is now aimed not at meaning and making sense, but is a commandment: thou shall not despair; thou shall keep living ethically, despite everything. Hope emerges as ethical orientation grounded in faith in the covenant. Suffering perhaps has no theological meaning anymore, but the commandment for alleviating it does. Even if it is theologically impossible to explain or justify the horrors of the past, we may hope to redeem the future from further suffering and pain.

⁵⁴ For the connection between the two verses see also CLINES, *Job 21-37*, 924.

⁵⁵ FRIEDLANDER, "Leo Baeck und der Begriff 'Leiden' in seinem Werk," 139–140.

⁵⁶ BAECK, *Werke*, II/1, 57, 125.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, II/2, 325–326.