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The Duality of Divine Presence: *Exploring the Dark Schechina in Jewish Mystical Thought and Post-Holocaust Theology*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex theological concept of the dark side of the Schechina (Divine Presence) as presented in contemporary Jewish mystical thought and its relationship to post-Holocaust theological discourse. Through close analysis of primary texts that explore the feminine divine in Jewish tradition from rabbinic literature through medieval Kabbalah to Hasidic texts and engaging with Christian and Jewish Post-Holocaust theological perspectives, this study investigates how modern theological discourse has reimagined the relationship between human suffering and divine pathos. The paper reveals striking parallels between traditional Jewish conceptions of the darker aspects of Schechina and cross-cultural manifestations of the divine feminine, particularly the Hindu goddess Kali, while also engaging with the theodicy questions raised by the Holocaust/Shoah. By tracing the development of Schechina consciousness from classical rabbinic literature through the writings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov and contemporary theological responses to catastrophe, this study demonstrates how the darker aspects of the feminine divine have been employed to address theological questions raised by historical catastrophe. The paper argues that this reconceptualization of divine suffering represents a significant departure from traditional theodicy, offering a theological framework that acknowledges both human and divine responsibility for evil while maintaining a monotheistic worldview.

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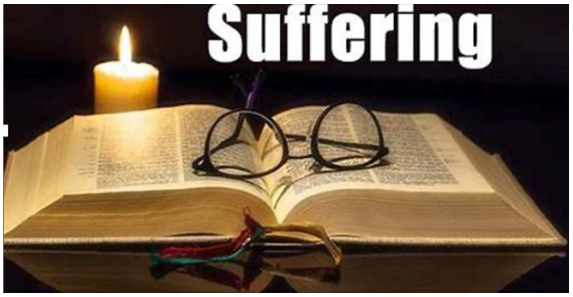

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Holocaust/Shoah and other modern atrocities, traditional theological explanations for human suffering have appeared increasingly inadequate. The systematic murder of millions, the development of industrialized killing, and the apparent triumph of technology over humanity have produced what one author describes as "the worst century in human history" with "the total devaluation of human life". Such horrors demand a profound reconsideration of humanity's relationship with the divine. This paper analyzes contemporary theological responses to this crisis from both Jewish and Christian perspectives, focusing particularly on the development of what might be termed "Schechina consciousness" a reconceptualization of the divine feminine presence that acknowledges both its nurturing and destructive aspects. Building upon kabbalistic and Hasidic sources, this theological approach reframes the relationship between human suffering and divine pathos, suggesting that atrocities like the Holocaust may reflect not just human evil but a deeper metaphysical reality of divine suffering and fragmentation. The concept of the Schechina has evolved significantly throughout Jewish thought, from its origins in rabbinic literature as simply God's presence in the world to its elaboration in medieval Kabbalah as a distinct feminine aspect of divinity with complex psychological and mythological dimensions. This paper examines how contemporary theologians and mystics have built upon these traditions to develop a "darker" understanding of the Schechina that can address the theological challenges posed by modern catastrophes, while also exploring cross-cultural parallels with feminine divine imagery in other traditions, particularly the Hindu goddess Kali.

Following Henri Blocher's approach. The paper will first attempt to locate the Holocaust/Shoah within a biblical framework, identifying contours of the event and finding the proper theological perspective. Then it will draw lessons, reflectively deepening and widening our apprehension of the catastrophe and its theological implications. Finally, it will look beyond the Holocaust/Shoah, searching for import and longer-term significance, particularly through the lens of Schechina consciousness.

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Rabbinic Origins

The term "Schechina" first appears in rabbinic literature to describe God's immanent presence in the world. As Biti Roi notes, passages such as "If two sit together and speak of Torah – the Schechina is among them" (Mishna Avot 3:2) and "When a man and a woman are worthy, the Schechina is among them" (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 17a) establish the Schechina as the manifestation of God in the world. At this stage, while grammatically feminine, the Schechina is not explicitly characterized in gendered terms.

Early midrashic literature already shows signs of using the concept of Schechina to navigate the theological problem of divine visibility. As noted in the second text, Leviticus Rabba XX:10 comments on Exodus 24, where the elders of Israel "beheld God, and did eat and drink," by explaining that they "uncovered their heads and made their hearts swell with pride and feasted their eyes on the Schechina." The midrash substitutes "Schechina" for the biblical "Elohim," suggesting that while the transcendent divine cannot be directly beheld, the Schechina, as divine immanence, can be perceived by mortals. This establishes an early precedent for the Schechina serving as a mediating presence between transcendent divinity and the human world.

The Talmud further develops this idea of the Schechina as divine presence that accompanies and comforts those who suffer: "Just as a mother hovers over the bed of a sick child, so too, the Schechina hovers over the bed of a sick person" (Nedarim 40). This maternal imagery will later be elaborated in kabbalistic literature.

The development of Kabbalah in the medieval period brought significant elaboration of the Schechina concept. In the Zohar and related literature, the Schechina becomes identified as one of the ten divine sefirot (emanations), specifically Malchut (Kingship), the tenth and lowest sefirah. This association solidifies the feminine characterization of the Schechina, establishing her as the feminine aspect of God who mediates between the divine and human realms. Kabbalistic texts, particularly the Zohar, describe the Schechina in explicitly feminine and embodied terms. The Zohar discusses "the structure of its body and attribute[s] to it an ability to accept, to embrace and even to give birth, nurse and nurture." The Schechina is portrayed in maternal and spousal roles, often depicted as the bride of Tiferet (the sixth sefirah, representing Beauty or Compassion). The Zohar further develops the erotic dimension of this relationship, as seen in the passage: "When the Holy King (Tiferet) begins to yearn for the Queen (Schechina) and for Israel, He climbs up on roofs, runs down stairs, scales walls... He peers through the holes in walls just to see them! When he catches a glimpse of them he starts to cry" (Zohar III: 114b). This passionate imagery establishes the Schechina as an object of divine desire, linking the mystical experience to the language of romantic and erotic love.

The Zohar also presents the Schechina as the feminine divine that initiates the devotee into mystical knowledge: "So it is with a word of Torah: she reveals herself to no one but her lover... With love she approaches her lover to arouse love within" (Zohar II, 99b). This establishes the Schechina as not just passive recipient but active initiator of mystical experience. However, even in these early kabbalistic texts, the Schechina exhibits ambivalent qualities. She is associated with judgment (din), restriction, and limitation, as well as with mercy and protection. The Zohar identifies her with the "Tree of Death" as well as with life-giving nurture, establishing a fundamental duality in her nature.

Lurianic Kabbalah and the Exile of Schechina

The 16th century Lurianic revolution in Kabbalah, initiated by Rabbi Isaac Luria (the Ari), further developed the concept of the Schechina by incorporating it into a cosmic drama of exile and redemption. The Lurianic myth of tzimtzum (divine contraction) posits that creation began with God's self-limitation, withdrawing to create space for the world. This act inherently involved the establishment of din (judgment), a force of limitation and restriction.

As Gershom Scholem notes, "The act of tzimtzum itself, in which God limits Himself, requires the establishment of the power of Din (judgment), which is a force of limitation and restriction. Thus the root of evil ultimately lies in the very nature of Creation itself, in which the harmony of the Infinite cannot, by definition persist; because of its nature as Creation - i.e., as other than Godhead - an element of imbalance, defectiveness, and darkness must enter into every restricted existence, however sublime it may be" (Scholem, On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead, 83). This establishes a theological foundation for understanding evil as inherent to the process of creation itself, rather than merely a human deviation from divine will.

In Lurianic thought, the "breaking of the vessels" (shevirat ha-kelim) that occurred during creation resulted in the exile of divine sparks and the separation of the Schechina from the higher sefirot. As described in the writings of the Arizal:
"When the vessel of Yesod was broken the light was revealed and it came forcibly to Malkhut and she too was broken... Had the light come to Malkhut gradually and in proper measure, she would have been able to contain it, but because it came with great force after the breaking of Yesod, she could not withstand its intensity and shattered as well. This caused the divine sparks to fall into the realms of the kelippot, where they remain trapped until the time of tikkun (repair). It is through the mitzvot and kavanot of Israel that these holy sparks are gathered and elevated, restoring the cosmic harmony and preparing for the ultimate reunification of all worlds."

The Lurianic tradition emphasizes that human religious action (particularly the performance of mitzvot) can facilitate tikkun (repair) of this cosmic rupture, helping to reunite the Schechina with the higher aspects of divinity. This establishes a theurgic dimension to religious practice, suggesting that human action affects the divine realm.

Textual Foundations

While contemporary feminist approaches to the Schechina often emphasize her nurturing and protective qualities, classical kabbalistic texts also attribute darker characteristics to the divine feminine. As Gershom Scholem notes, the female character of the Schechina is linked with "restrictive and dangerous features" and the "restraint of the flow of life."

Isaiah Tishby, in "Wisdom of the Zohar," identifies three manifestations of the Shechina's judgmental power in the world:
Justice and the promotion of righteousness and virtue
Forces of vengeance acting in order to protect Schechina and rescue her from her tormentors
Judgment of fury, which is aroused by the sins of the world in reaction to the harm done to her. This produces the Tree of Death (Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, Vol I, 374-5)

The Zohar describes situations where the Schechina can experience "the complete separation of the Schechina from the forces of holiness, and her union with the 'other side' which by its very nature seeks to act as a force of death and destruction" (Tishby, 374). When Israel sins, "the Schechina is filled with sacred fury" (Zohar III 79a), potentially directing destructive forces against the very people she normally protects. The texts also note the Zohar's remarkable statement that the Schechina is "the angel who is sometimes male and sometimes female" (Zohar I, 232a), highlighting the gender fluidity attributed to this divine aspect in classical sources. Scholem observes that "the female character of the Schechina is linked here with its restrictive and dangerous features. The restraint of the flow of life, a quality intrinsic to the activity of judgment (Din), frequently entails destructive consequences for the world" (Scholem, On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead, 186). This ambiguity challenges essentialist interpretations of the divine feminine while maintaining the Shechina's complex relationship with both nurturing and destructive powers.

Hasidic Interpretations

Hasidic texts place particular emphasis on the development of these kabbalistic concepts, especially in the teachings of the Degel Machaneh Efraim (the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov) and Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. The Degel's teaching on distinguishing between pure and impure animals provides a metaphorical framework for understanding the Shechina's dual nature:

"This is the law pertaining to animals and birds in order to distinguish between those that may be consumed and those that are prohibited." Here is a hint (remez) regarding the notion of Passover for I received from my masters the idea that the Schechina is called by the name chaya. And the sitra achra is also called by the name chaya...so making a distinction between pure and impure animals means distinguishing between the Schechina represented by matza and that aspect represented by chametz. (Degel Machaneh Efraim: Parsha Shemini, quoted in Ungar-Sargon, "The Darker Side of the Feminine Divine," 2).
This teaching suggests that the Schechina energy can be "channeled" in different ways toward light or darkness, judgment or grace depending on the spiritual state of the "receiver." The Degel thus provides a framework for understanding the ambivalent nature of the Schechina while maintaining human agency in determining how divine energy manifests.

Rebbe Nachman's teaching in Torah I:260 (Likutei Moharan) provides a more radical interpretation that connects human suffering directly to the cosmic needs of the Schechina. Nachman teaches:
"A name (reputation) is the soul of a person. And there is a concept of 'mesiras nefesh' (martyrdom) as there occurred in the history of the Ten Martyrs gave themselves over for martyrdom 'al Kidush Hashem' for the sake of the unification of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Schechina as is known. (And according to the Ari the main function of 'mesiras nefesh')." (Likutei Mehoran I:260, quoted in Ungar-Sargon, "The Divine Feminine II," 25).

Nachman teaches that when souls are martyred and return heavenward, they return to the Schechina, "since they originated there." This return "beautifies" (*mitpaeres*) the Schechina, evoking desire in the supernal world and causing a unification (yichud) between the separated aspects of divinity. Most controversially, Nachman suggests that this cosmic process sometimes requires violence against Jews:
"And on occasion this requires a pogrom, God forbid, in which some Jewish souls must be killed, God forbid, in order that the Yichud is accomplished by the souls returning above. And on occasion this Yichud requires many souls, God forbid, so a pogrom arises, God forbid." (Likutei Mehoran I:260, quoted in Ungar-Sargon, "The Divine Feminine II," 26-27).

This radical theology suggests that human suffering, even mass killing, may serve a necessary function in the divine economy facilitating the reunification of the fractured godhead.

This interpretation builds upon earlier kabbalistic and midrashic traditions regarding the Ten Martyrs (Aseret Harugei Malchut), whose deaths were understood as atonement for the sale of Joseph by his brothers. The piyyut "Eleh Ezkerah," recited on Yom Kippur, portrays the martyrs as accepting vicarious punishment for this ancestral sin. As the Roman ruler tells the rabbis in this liturgical poem: "If they [your forefathers] were alive I would judge them before you, but you will bear the sins of your fathers" (Midrash Mishlei 1:13, cited in Ungar-Sargon, "The Divine Feminine II," 30).

Cross-Cultural Parallels: Kali and the Dark Feminine

The second text draws explicit parallels between the dark aspect of the Schechina and the Hindu goddess Kali, providing a cross-cultural perspective on the ambivalent nature of the divine feminine. The author describes a personal encounter with the image of Kali during a visit to India, which initially provoked horror and repulsion but later became a catalyst for understanding the darker aspects of the divine feminine.

Kali is described as "the fearful and ferocious form of the mother goddess" with "four arms, with a sword in one hand and the head of a demon in another." Her appearance, including "a string of skulls as necklace, and a girdle made of human hands," initially appears terrifying and violent, seemingly the antithesis of nurturing feminine divinity. However, the text goes on to explain the symbolic significance of these features:

Her black complexion symbolizes "her all-embracing and transcendental nature" as "Just as all colors disappear in black, so all names and forms disappear in her" (Mahanirvana Tantra).
Her nakedness represents primordial transparency "like Nature — the earth, sea, and sky"
Her garland of fifty human heads symbolizes "infinite knowledge" through the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet
Her sword represents "the destroyer of false consciousness" and "the eight bonds that bind us" (Das, quoted in Ungar-Sargon, "The Darker Side of the Feminine Divine," 5).

This symbolic interpretation transforms the seemingly violent imagery into a representation of cosmic knowledge and spiritual liberation. The parallel with Rebbe Nachman's teaching about the Shechina's need for martyred souls becomes apparent both traditions incorporate death and violence into a larger cosmic framework of spiritual transformation and divine unity.

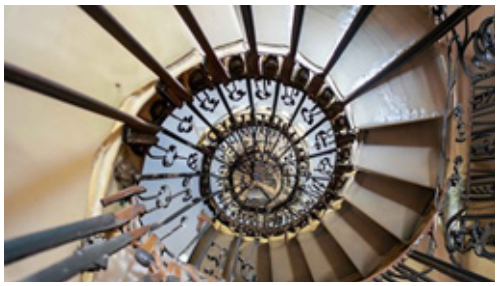
The text also notes Jung's concept of the "Great Mother" archetype, which manifests in various cultural forms, including both Kali and the Schechina. This archetype includes nurturing and destructive aspects, reflecting the complexity of the feminine divine across cultures. The reference to Neumann's statement that "the moon has its own rays, they are the dark rays of the moon" suggests that the feminine divine possesses inherent darkness, not merely reflected light.

Locating the Shoah in Biblical Framework

Blocher notes the importance of accurate terminology, acknowledging the debate between using "Holocaust" (which

carries sacrificial connotations) versus "Shoah" (meaning "disaster, calamity" from the Hebrew שואה). As Blocher writes: "Prestigious voices, such as Elie Wiesel's, have deplored this lexical choice, with the comment that a 'holocaust' is a sacrifice offered to God – the opposite of the brutal murder of millions of helpless human beings" (Blocher, "Post-Holocaust/Shoah Theology," 1). The term שואה (shoah) appears in Proverbs 1:27 meaning "storm, tempest" and then "disaster, calamity" (Isaiah 47:11), and was used by Polish Jews as early as 1940 to describe what was beginning to befall them (Kingdom, "Holocaust," New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics, 322a). While acknowledging that in a sense every event in history is unique, he recognizes that biblical metaphysics maintains both the truth of the Multiple (each singularity) and the unity of God's government, which entails that analogies warrant the recognition of classes and categories. The Shoah should not be isolated from the long series of persecutions and massacres that preceded it, as Hermann G. Adler noted, "from the day of Original Sin the Holocaust became possible. However, he identifies three features that mark the Shoah to an unprecedented degree: magnitude, method, and dehumanization. The scale of the destruction, with five to six million Jewish victims, was exceptional. The method employed was uniquely systematic, with Alistair McFadyen describing the Holocaust as "a triumph of rationality in planning and action." The dehumanization of victims was systematic and the very presupposition of the system, with everything done to downgrade Jews to a sub-human level, even in their own eyes.

Elie Wiesel cautions against characterizing the Holocaust as "absolute evil," ("Auschwitz can only be the absolute revelation of something absolute, absolute evil," Schuster & Boschert-Kimmig, 72) and others have done. They argue that "absolute" language is problematic for rigorous theological thinking, as "an absolute is a second god, and we should realise that there can be no relation, no contact, between different absolutes (this is even unthinkable)!" Rather, the biblical doctrine of evil understands it as secondary, radically relative to the good evil is deprivation, "the lack of some goodness that was due" or the perversion/corruption of the good. As Blocher explains, only within the framework of divine sovereignty "can evil be denounced, can evil be named. Without that framework, indignation disintegrates and dissolves into meaninglessness" (Blocher, 4).



Interpretative Schemes

Thinkers have examined two primary biblical schemes for interpreting disaster: retributive justice and innocent suffering. The retributive justice scheme, where calamities are understood as punishment for sins, has been applied to the Holocaust by some ultra-Orthodox rabbis who have attributed it to assimilation, participation in the Enlightenment (Haskalah), or Zionism. Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum of Satmar, for instance, viewed the Holocaust as punishment for the founding of a Jewish state before the coming of the Messiah. Among Christians, Daniel P. Fuller argued that the threats in Deuteronomy 28 were being executed. The alternative biblical scheme is that of suffering unrelated to particular faults, exemplified by Job JJ. Davis sees significant parallels between Job and the Holocaust: the role of Satan in Job corresponds to the "demonic dimensions of Hitler's genocidal project," and there is a "randomness" element in history (Ecclesiastes 9:11) that helps purify religion from self-interest. Davis also applies the concept of martyrdom to Holocaust victims. For Blocher, the problem for Christian theology concerns the value, coram Deo (before God), of the Jews' righteousness and testimony. While stern New Testament statements suggest a negative assessment, Paul does credit non-Christian Jews with real zeal for God (Romans 10:2), and there is a privileged relationship between the Jewish people and Jesus "according to the flesh" (Romans 9:5). This establishes a kinship between the Shoah and the Cross there is a common factor in the world's rejection of Jesus and of the Jewish people.

Revealing the Depths of Evil

The Holocaust/Shoah reveals evil in particularly profound ways that spur theological reflection. As Hannah Arendt observed in her report on Eichmann's trial, many perpetrators were remarkably ordinary people. Blocher notes this "banality of evil" (Arendt, Eichmann à Jérusalem, 460f) and cites a survivor's profound comment on the Nazi doctors: "But it is demonic that they were not demonic" (Fasching, Narrative Theology after Auschwitz, 133). This illustrates Jesus's teaching about the continuity between secret inclinations of the heart and spectacular crimes, and the universal nature of sinfulness.

The role of apathy is also significant. Elie Wiesel noted that "the victims suffered more 'from the indifference of the onlookers, than from the brutality of the executioner'" (Eckardt & Eckardt, Long Night's Journey into Day, 20). The Nazi enterprise might have been checked if more people who did not hate Jews had reacted in time, as suggested by the efficacy of resistance by the Danish King and the Sultan of Morocco. He highlights how the Nazis displayed "the Devil's knowledge of the human soul" (Primo Levi), using all the mechanisms of human psychology and physiology, and even turning many Jews "into the accomplice of his executioners." This reveals evil as the corruption of goodness the perversion of originally good motives like loyalty to group, devotion to country, and the conviction that they were redressing injustice.

The perfection of method in the Holocaust reveals the perversion of one form of rationality: "scientific and technical-bureaucratic reason" (Fasching, 41). Alistair McFadyen characterizes the Holocaust as "a triumph of rationality in planning and action, which was threatened wherever irrationality – even of over-zealousness – intruded into and interrupted efficient organisation" (McFadyen, Bound to Sin, 83). Elie Wiesel states bluntly: "I am convinced that what happened in Auschwitz is a result of rationalism" (Schuster & Boschert-Kimmig, Hope against Hope, 71). This serves as a warning against divorcing ends and means, and against "reification" associated with instrumental reason.

Schechina Consciousness and Divine Suffering

Both the Jewish mystical tradition of the dark Schechina and post-Holocaust/Shoah theological reflection converge on the concept of divine suffering. The Lurianic concept of divine fragmentation and the need for tikkun (repair) offers a theological understanding of suffering that goes beyond traditional theodicy. Rather than seeing suffering as divine punishment or meaningless chaos, it becomes part of a cosmic drama of divine fragmentation and potential reunification. Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira (the Piaseczner Rebbe), writing in the Warsaw Ghetto, developed what Nehemia Polen calls an "anthropopathic" understanding of God a God who feels and suffers in response to human emotion. According to Rachel Sabath's analysis of Polen's work, Shapira taught that "God's emotions are a divine response to human emotion" and that "precisely because God is infinite, His suffering is infinite and beyond human conception" (Sabath, "Human Suffering, Divine Sorrow," 117). This establishes a "dynamic relationship with God, in which God is held responsible" while also acknowledging "God's deep empathy for the suffering of the individual" (Polen, The Holy Fire, 21ff).

This conception of divine suffering provides a theological framework that acknowledges both divine and human responsibility for evil without resorting to simplistic explanations that either blame victims for their suffering or render God powerless. Instead, it establishes a complex relationship of mutual suffering and responsibility between humanity and the divine.

The author proposes "Schechina consciousness" as a theological framework capable of addressing the challenges posed by modern catastrophe. This approach incorporates both the nurturing and destructive aspects of the divine feminine, acknowledging the complexity and ambivalence of divine presence in human history. By drawing on the Lurianic concept of divine fragmentation and the need for tikkun (repair), Schechina consciousness offers a theological understanding of suffering that goes beyond traditional theodicy. Rather than seeing suffering as divine punishment or meaningless chaos, it becomes part of a cosmic drama of divine fragmentation and potential reunification.

The author writes: "In reconstructing a theology for a new age, this darker image of the divine allows me to relate in ways hitherto unaffordable for the weight of exile sin and punishment were too great to bear. As we travel with the Schechina into this new age we both share in God's pain and in humanity's darkest hours in a mutuality of mirroring. This is a healing notion of the divine, a god image I can deal with, a call for Tikkun on both sides of the aisle."

This theology reframes the relationship between human and divine suffering, suggesting that catastrophes like the Holocaust reflect not just human evil but a deeper metaphysical reality of divine suffering. By acknowledging both human and divine responsibility for healing this suffering, Schechina consciousness offers a theological framework that can address the enormity of modern catastrophe while maintaining the possibility of meaningful relationship with the divine.

Feminist Critiques and Appropriations

The examined texts acknowledge the complex relationship between feminist thought and the Schechina tradition. As Or N. Rose observes:
"Historically, Kabbalah is a tradition written by men for men and is deeply misogynistic. While the mystics have great concern for the physical well-being of women and believe that women play a vital role in the Jewish family, they largely ignore the spiritual lives of their mothers, wives, and daughters. And when they do speak of women in relation to spiritual matters, much of their attention is focused on staving off the sexual temptations they feel women present." (Rose, "Madonna's Challenge: Understanding Kabbalah Today," Tikkun 19:6)

The feminine qualities attributed to the Schechina often reflect gender stereotypes portraying the feminine as "passive and receptive, receiving and transmitting the power of the masculine." Some feminist thinkers have attempted to reclaim the Schechina as a positive feminine divine image while minimizing her darker aspects. The Jewish Renewal movement, for instance, has adapted the myth of Shechina's exile to frame gender issues, with her exile representing "the absence of women's voices and feminine spirituality from Judaism." As Chava Weissler observes, "Renewal Jews have adapted this

myth as a way to frame gender issues. The exile or eclipse of Schechina refers to the absence of women's voices and feminine spirituality from Judaism while Shekinah herself symbolizes women's presence and power" (Weissler, "Meanings of Shekhinah in the 'Jewish Renewal' Movement"). However, the texts argue that this selective appropriation fails to engage with the full complexity of the Schechina in kabbalistic tradition. By focusing exclusively on nurturing aspects while ignoring the destructive dimensions, such approaches may inadvertently reinforce gender essentialism. Weissler further notes, "While Renewal's Schechina differs from the kabbalistic Schechina in certain ways, it, too, is founded on gender difference. More than that, as we shall see, Renewal's version of the Schechina valorizes certain 'feminine' qualities" (Weissler). As Zalman Schachter-Shalomi warned, "Don't try to shlep the Schechina into the cognitive realm" (quoted in Ungar-Sargon, "The Darker Side of the Feminine Divine," 20).

The second text explicitly warns against this simplification: "Modern feminism seems to have focused solely on the nurturing side, notable exceptions include Neumann's student Camille Paglia who has critiqued her feminist co-scholars" (Ungar-Sargon, "The Darker Side of the Feminine Divine," 21). In Osho's commentary on the feminine archetype, he observes that "Freud remained completely sun-oriented. Jung moved a little toward the moon... The sun-oriented person always feels that the moon-oriented person is dangerous" (Osho, "The Meeting of Sun and Moon, Secrets of Yoga," quoted in Ungar-Sargon, "The Darker Side of the Feminine Divine," 3). This suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the divine feminine must incorporate both nurturing and destructive aspects, avoiding the reduction of two gender stereotypes.

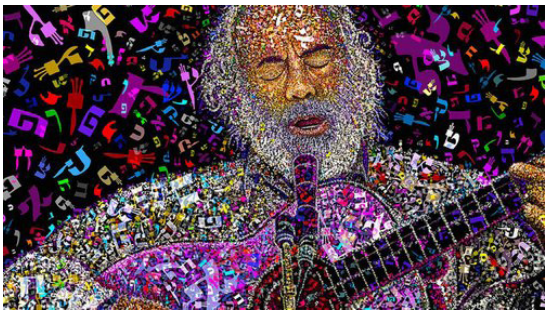
Beyond Gender Essentialism

Drawing on Elliot Wolfson's work, the texts argue for understanding gender in kabbalistic symbolism as a "cultural construct" rather than reflecting essential biological differences. Wolfson's analysis reveals how the Schechina alternates between female and male potencies depending on context, with passages in the Zohar describing the "transformation of daughter into mother" and the Schechina being "masculinized" in certain relationships. Wolfson explains that "in one passage the Zoharic author describes the transformation of daughter into mother in terms of the image of Binah bestowing her garments to Malchut such that the latter is vested in the form of Israelite males".

This fluid understanding of divine gender challenges both traditional patriarchal interpretations and some feminist reclamations that rely on essentialist views of femininity. The "dark Schechina" emerges not as essentially feminine but as representing fundamental tensions within divinity itself between judgment and mercy, limitation and expansion, immanence and transcendence.

The author writes: "Between these two poles of biology and social construction of gender, lies a description that resists appropriation and objectification, psychodynamic analysis and subjective interpretation, where, in the scholarly writings of such writers as Scholem, Wolfson and Magid one can tease out the complexity of the myth and its evolution in Jewish and kabbalistic thought over centuries without appropriating the feminine quality of the divine for other purposes."

This approach avoids both the traditional reduction of the feminine to passive receptivity and the modern feminist reduction to nurturing empathy, instead acknowledging the complex interplay of light and dark, male and female, transcendence and immanence within the divine.



Survival and Restoration

Following Wiesel's approach, post-Holocaust/Shoah theology must look beyond the event itself to what happened, or is still to happen, afterward. The first significant fact is survival a remnant did return from the camps. As Blocher notes, "Deliverance materialized. The words of Psalm 66 came true: 'For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, BUT YOU BROUGHT US TO A PLACE OF ABUNDANCE' (vv.10-12)."

Even Primo Levi, who remained a stranger to faith, described how the few left in Auschwitz felt when they discovered the Germans were gone: "it is certain that the remembrance of biblical deliverances in the worst moments of distress went through every mind like a breath or a breeze." Eliezer Berkovits, an Orthodox rabbi, insists that the same pattern of trial and in extremis salvation recurs in Scripture and history.

The second major post-Shoah event is the creation of the modern State of Israel. Many have noted the close link between the Shoah and Israel's establishment: "Without the trauma of universal conscience, the Powers would not have granted Israel its recognition." Louis Goldberg interprets Hitler as a "vessel of wrath" that God used, comparing him to Pharaoh in the Exodus: "The more pharaoh hardened his heart, the more he became the vessel of wrath by which many Jewish people afterward would be able to escape out of Egypt. In the same way, Hitler was also the vessel of wrath by which many of those

who remained after the war would go to Israel."

Experiential Reality

The texts include several accounts of visionary encounters with the Schechina, suggesting that Schechina consciousness is not merely an intellectual construct but a lived experiential reality. The story of Rabbi Abraham Berukhim, as related by Moshe Idel, describes a dramatic encounter at the Western Wall: "Suddenly, he raised his eyes and saw on the Wailing Wall the image of a woman, from behind, in clothes, which it is better not to describe, that we have mercy on the divine glory. When he had seen her, he immediately fell on his face and cried and wept and said: 'Zion, Zion, woe to me that I have seen you in such a plight'." This visionary experience, which left Rabbi Abraham in a state of emotional distress and eventual unconsciousness, portrays the Schechina as a real presence that can be encountered through intense devotional practice. Similar accounts of other prominent rabbis, including Joseph Karo, Solomon Alkabetz, and Hayyim Vital, suggest a tradition of visionary encounter with the Schechina. These accounts emphasize the emotional intensity of such encounters, involving weeping, fainting, and profound compassion for the Shechina's suffering state. The Schechina appears not as an abstract theological concept but as a real presence with whom the mystic can establish a personal relationship.

Healing Through Schechina Consciousness

Both the Jewish mystical tradition and post-Holocaust/Shoah theological reflection present Schechina consciousness as a healing theological framework capable of addressing both personal psychological wounds and the larger theological crisis provoked by modern catastrophe. By acknowledging the dark aspects of the divine feminine alongside the nurturing aspects, this approach offers a more complete and integrated understanding of divine presence in the world.

For the author, this integration provides personal psychological healing: "In my spiritual recovery I am more able to relate to a complex divine, torn and conflicted within, as portrayed in the midrashim of Eichah Rabba and Pesikta deRav Kahana, than the god of the philosophers". At the same time, it offers a theological framework for understanding historical catastrophe: "In stretching this notion into a post-Holocaust theology I feel we need to re-discover the Kali energy that is so taboo". This framework acknowledges the reality of divine darkness and suffering without abandoning the possibility of meaningful relationship with the divine.

The integration of nurturing and destructive aspects of the divine feminine provides a theological language for addressing both personal and collective trauma, offering what the author calls "a healing notion of the divine, a god image I can deal with, a call for Tikkun on both sides of the aisle". This approach resonates with Blocher's "theology of humble trust," which acknowledges the limits of human understanding in the face of catastrophe while maintaining faith in divine presence.

Conclusion

The examination of the "dark side of the Schechina" and post-Holocaust/Shoah theological reflection reveals a theological tradition that refuses easy answers to the problem of evil while maintaining the possibility of relationship with the divine. By acknowledging both divine and human responsibility for suffering, this approach offers what the author calls "a healing notion of the divine" capable of addressing even the most profound catastrophes of modern history.

This theological perspective suggests that human suffering, particularly the suffering of the Jewish people, participates in a cosmic drama of divine fragmentation and eventual reunification. The dark aspects of the Schechina her judgment, her fury, her association with death are not denied or minimized but integrated into a complex understanding of divinity that encompasses both light and shadow. Such a theology does not explain or justify atrocities but provides a mythic framework for understanding their transpersonal dimensions. By recognizing that the "demonic" forces that grip humanity have roots in the divine itself, this approach avoids both simplistic theodicy and complete abandonment of religious meaning.

It also resists the possible passive ethical response in the face of evil on the part of humanity by invoking "demonic" in the perpetrator's actions and thus transferring it to the divine realm to deal with. As Blocher concludes, when God answers Job "out of the storm" (seʿàrâ, הרעס, a near synonym of האוש), "does he explain why evil and suffering occur? Does he explain why he, as an all-powerful God, allows such things? No. He does, however, impress upon Job the limits of Job's understanding of such things".

A Post-Holocaust/Shoah theology, incorporating Schechina consciousness, will be the theology of humble trust and confident hope, acknowledging the limits of human understanding while maintaining faith in divine presence even, and perhaps especially, in its darker manifestations or its absence.

Blocher's approach complements the concept of Schechina consciousness by emphasizing the importance of humble trust rather than comprehensive explanation. He writes: "We surely have no intention of 'explaining God' and our goal is not to 'understand' the event: but, with our merciful God, under the teaching of his Logos and the guiding assistance of his Spirit, we do pray that we shall think in a more wholesome way of the event – rather than darkening his counsel 'by words without knowledge'".

This acknowledgment of the limits of theological understanding in the face of catastrophe resonates with the Jewish mystical tradition's emphasis on the mystery of divine suffering. The convergence of these perspectives suggests a post-Holocaust/Shoah theology that acknowledges the darkness within divinity while maintaining faith in ultimate redemption. The image of a suffering divine feminine, exiled alongside her people yet sometimes requiring their suffering for her own cosmic needs, offers a radical reconceptualization of the God-human relationship. In this vision, human religious action including the bearing of suffering participates in the healing not only of the world but of God. The call for tikkun becomes, as the author says, a call "on both sides of the aisle," recognizing the wounded nature of both divine and human existence while affirming the possibility of their mutual healing.

This framework allows for a theological response to catastrophe that neither minimizes its horror nor abandons faith in divine absence/presence. By integrating the concept of the dark Schechina with the biblical themes of remnant, survival, and eventual restoration, it provides resources for addressing both personal and collective trauma while maintaining hope for future redemption. As Blocher concludes: "Let the Shoah mark the beginnings of the birth-pangs, and life surge from the dead!".

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