



The International Book-Sharing Project

The Holocaust as a Personal and Cultural Crisis Point for Faith Tzippi Tal

"Where is God now?"
And I heard a voice within me answer him:
"Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this
gallows..."

Wiesel, *Night*, Bantam Books – Random House, 1982, p.62

The Holocaust as a Personal and Cultural Crisis-Point for Faith

Rationale:

In the book *Night*, which we read in the high school program of the International Book-Sharing Project, Eli Wiesel expresses the deep crisis and sense of betrayal by God that he feels. The questions of the belief in God and the meaning of human and Jewish existence and faith after the Holocaust occupy intellectuals, literature and art. The questions refer to the existence and place of God in the world – and simultaneously – man's place in the world: what does it mean to be a human being, to be a Jew or a Christian, in the post-Holocaust world? Are the people of Israel really the chosen people, and if so – what does being chosen mean during and after the Holocaust?

What does the Holocaust mean to Christian believers? Is the world after Auschwitz a world without God? Without Man?

Goals:

1. Getting to know the questions referring to the crisis of faith during and after the Holocaust.
2. Exploration/examination of the painting "Creation" by Samuel Bak, a poem by Yaakov Barzilai and a selection of texts from Wiesel and other philosophers.
3. Experiencing a virtual discussion about the puzzlement over the subject, expressed by various means in the artistic and philosophic works
4. Understanding the contribution of computer communication to value-based learning.

Activity:

1. Presentation of the International Book-Sharing Project

The Israeli director of the program will show the workshop participants a computer presentation of the international project and its four main aspects:

- the academic aspect (interdisciplinary, uniqueness of survivor literature, etc.)
- the human/moral aspect
- the social aspect
- the technological aspect

2. Elucidation of the Questions of Faith in the Face of the Holocaust

The Holocaust forced believers to face difficult questions with regard to the essence of God and His place in the world, parallel to and in accordance with man's place in the world.

- Is God responsible for history? If yes, is Auschwitz part of God's plan?
- How is it possible to reconcile the death camps with God's justice? Can we still believe that "the Strength of Israel will not lie"? (1 Samuel:15:29)
- Does the idea of righteous judgment pass the test of the murder of 6 million human beings, among them one and a half million children?
- In *Night*, Wiesel identifies with Job. Can the solutions offered to Job's problems be applied here as well?
- Can we await the Messiah after his failing to come, even when millions of Jews were murdered? Would we be ready to accept him after his not responding to Auschwitz?
- What is the place of the Christian nations after the Holocaust? The place of the non-Jewish neighbor who was a silent witness and bystander when his Jewish neighbor was led to the deportation vehicle? Or the neighbor who collaborated with the murderers? Can anyone in the world cultivate belief in his neighbor in the face of the Holocaust experience? Cultivate a policy of peace? etc.

3. Study of the Texts and Works of Art on which the Learning Focuses

The workshop participants will learn about Samuel Bak's work "Creation 2" from the series "Creation of Wartime":



The work, like the entire series, alludes to Michelangelo's "The Birth of Man", while shattering the conventional perception of the relations between man and God, in the wake of the war and the Holocaust.

Yaakov Barzilai's poem "Fire in the Town Square" depicts the burning of books in the town square as a parallel to the breakdown of culture and faith in the Holocaust:

Fire in the Town Square

By Yaakov Barzilai

And then, during that cursed century,
at night, HE said:
Let there be light
and the town-square went ablaze,
and all eyes watch the sights
and all ears hearken to the sounds
and Lo! A mountain arises in the square-
a mountain of books higher than the summit of the Himalayas!
Myriads of words crowd all pages-
words composed of thick letters, thin letters,
all caught in fire
and they cry, they moan
in vain they beseech.
Amidst the square, like in the Stone Age
a herd of humans dance around the fire.
One by one the poems burn away
Verse by verse they suffocate in smoke.
For six whole days the words were aflame,
on the seventh, as the last of the books expired
the fire extinguished
and darkness descended on the town square.

Translated from the Hebrew by Elisheva Gal

We will examine the place of this metaphor and the use of Biblical allusions in the poem. We will carry out a discussion in which we will formulate our position with regard to these works of art, by means of selected statements of various philosophers and selected passages from Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

4. Analysis of the Contribution of Online Communication as a Pedagogical Tool in Value-Based Discussion

There are two options for this part of the workshop:

- a) If we discussed the works of art using online communication, we will analyze the workshop participants' newly-created discussion.
- b) If we cannot carry out the discussion in a computer classroom, the workshop facilitator will prepare the dialogue of project students on this topic, in order to analyze the pedagogical value of using a technological tool.