

# **RESPONSE TO MICHAEL HARRIS’S – ‘‘BUT NOW MY EYE HAS SEEN YOU’’: *YISSURIN SHEL AHAVAH* AS DIVINE INTIMACY THEODICY’**

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I am very grateful both to Michael Harris and to the Association for the Philosophy of Judaism for the opportunity to take part in this symposium on Harris’s enormously rich paper, in which he seeks to locate the rabbinic notion(s) of *yissurin shel ahavah* (YSA) within the landscape of defences and theodicies put forward by contemporary analytic philosophers of religion. My comments will divide into two parts. In the first I will raise some questions about the general project of the paper. And in the second I will make some observations regarding one of the aspects of the paper that I find particularly interesting. In both cases my remarks will be very tentative, and I look forward to becoming clearer on these points during the discussion that will unfold over the course of the week.

## **The benefits of philosophizing with the Talmud: some questions**

What is to be gained by bringing the rabbinic discussion of YSA into conversation with contemporary analytic philosophy of religion? The paper seems to touch on four important kinds of benefit, which I will briefly describe, and about which I will raise some questions.

The principal benefit – and the focus of the paper – is the interpretative and analytic light shed on the various interpretations of YSA by categorising them using the finely-grained taxonomy of defences and theodicies that has been developed by contemporary philosophers of religion, and particularly by reference to the category of ‘divine intimacy theodicy’. Here, contemporary philosophy is helping to illuminate the rabbinic discussion of YSA.

The second benefit follows on from the first. More specifically, from the claim that “divine intimacy theodicy is the option in contemporary philosophy of religion that is most fruitful to consider in connection with YSA” (p. 28), Harris draws the conclusion that “divine intimacy theodicy is not just an interesting notion for Christian thinkers but is worthy of consideration as part of a traditional Jewish theological approach to the problem of suffering” (pp. 28-9). Regarding this I would like to ask what significance there is to a certain kind of theodicy being ‘part of the traditional Jewish approach’. Should this fact be important to Jewish philosophers and theologians? And if so, why, and to what extent? To put this more concretely: if a self-identifyingly Jewish philosopher is grappling with the problem of suffering, do they have any reason – other things being equal – to prefer a theodicy that is a part of the Jewish theological tradition over one that is not? And if so, what kind of reason is this? Is it epistemic – taking Jewish traditionality to be a sign of truth (perhaps because the tradition has been found to be a reliable route to truth in other areas and should therefore be trusted here too, or perhaps due to one’s understanding of the nature and trustworthiness of revelation, or the like)? Or is it cultural – recognizing there to be values other than truth which should have some influence over the philosophical positions that one holds? And if the latter, what are these values, and do they trump the value of truth, interact with it, or do they depend on denying that truth is relevant in these areas? There are many more questions that could be asked about the status and significance of Jewish traditionality in the practice of (Jewish) philosophy, but I hope that these will be sufficient to get a discussion started.

The third benefit goes in the opposite direction to the first. Whereas the first saw contemporary philosophical categories shed light on YSA, we now see that the rabbinical discussion of YSA can help to augment contemporary philosophical defences and theodicies. This happens principally in section 5 of the

paper, in which much previously uncharted – and perhaps even previously unnoticed – logical space within the category of ‘divine intimacy theodicy’ is mapped-out and filled-out by various rabbinic positions set out during the course of the last millennium. By drawing on a literature that has been almost entirely untapped by contemporary philosophers, Harris is able to sketch out new forms of divine intimacy theodicy to add to those currently under discussion.

The fourth benefit – gestured towards at the very end of the paper – is intended to be a more radical way in which the rabbinic sources can illuminate the contemporary philosophical discussion. Namely, that analytic philosophers could perhaps learn from the whole mode of thinking embodied in Talmudic discussions of suffering – such as in the *sugya* of YSA – so as to approach these difficult issues with greater nuance by avoiding, for example, illegitimate neatness, systematicity, and dogmatism. Thus Harris concludes the paper saying:

“Those who find systematic philosophical or theological treatment of suffering ultimately inadequate may well feel that the non-systematic nature of the *Berakhot* YSA *sugya* and, like so many aggadic *sugyot*, its ability to straddle the border between theology and literature so effectively, enable it to combine open-endedness, deep insight, and an awareness of the ambiguities inherent in this most challenging area.” (p. 29)

This is a very thought-provoking possibility which it would be fascinating to see further worked out. My worry in this context, however, is that it seems to stand in direct tension with the preceding benefits – and with the first most of all – since they depend precisely upon importing the neatness, systematicity, and definiteness of analytic philosophy into the *sugya* of YSA. If the key lesson that the Talmudic discussion has to offer us is precisely its ambiguity and open-endedness – whether because the truth regarding suffering and God is not amenable to straightforward statement, or for some other reason – then wouldn’t following through with this fourth benefit involve relinquishing the previous three (or at the very least the first)? I wonder if there is a way to resolve this tension and gain all four benefits from the interaction of rabbinic and analytic philosophical discussions of suffering, or whether a choice will need to be made between the first three and the last.

### **The mechanisms connecting suffering with divine intimacy: some thoughts**

‘Divine intimacy theodicies’ see suffering (or at least some suffering) as a necessary condition for certain kinds of intimacy between the sufferer and God, such that the value of the intimacy significantly outweighs whatever disvalue the suffering might have. Harris surveys numerous examples of divine intimacy theodicy, both from among the rabbinic interpretations of YSA and from contemporary philosophy of religion. In some of these examples the mechanism by which suffering is meant to allow for increased intimacy with God is fairly transparent. For example, Harris discusses Maharal’s position that “YSA is necessary to cleanse and purge the soul of its attachment to the material so that it may attain... intimacy with God in this world” (pp. 26-7). The mechanism at work here is fairly clear: intimacy with God demands a degree of detachment from the worldly, and suffering is taken to be a necessary condition for the inducement of such detachment (perhaps by forcing one to give up certain worldly things, or by prompting the recognition that worldly things are beyond our control, or by embittering us to the worldly, or in any number of other ways). The mechanism in this case may not be simple, but it is not mysterious either.

In general, when it comes to divine intimacy theodicies which take intimacy with God to *follow on* from suffering, the nature of the causal relation between the suffering and the intimacy is fairly plain. However, when it comes to divine intimacy theodicies in which the intimacy with God is taken to be found *within* the suffering itself – the kind of divine intimacy theodicy which I take to be by far the most interesting – the mechanism is often rather more opaque. Consider the paper’s reference to Simone Weil’s position:

“Weil maintains that... [i]n ‘affliction’... [t]he suffering *itself* is experienced as God’s love, like the physical embrace of a friend which is so tight that it hurts.” (pp. 17-18)

This analogy of the painfully tight hug is very evocative, but what exactly does it amount to? How *exactly* is suffering we experience in the world like a hug, expressing God's love for us? What *exactly* is the mechanism by which the suffering relates to divine intimacy in this case?

In what follows I would like to suggest – very tentatively and far too briefly – four possible mechanisms which might begin to help flesh out some ways in which greater intimacy with the divine might be opened up within experiences of suffering. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and even the four mechanisms which I do discuss are likely only centres of variation for potential clusters of related options.

### 1. *Suffering as allowing a communion with God over a shared profound experience:*

One potential mechanism by which suffering may be the vehicle for special intimacy with the divine could be that it allows for a communion with God through the sharing of an intense or profound experience. Just as I might come to feel closer with another human being if we undergo a significant experience together, or if I undergo a significant experience that I know them to have undergone, perhaps something similar might be possible in the human relationship with God: in our suffering we could feel a communion with the God who suffers. Of course, this would only work if God is indeed taken to suffer or to have suffered. Moreover, the communion achieved through this shared suffering would only be significant to the degree that suffering is taken to be central to who God is, rather than a merely peripheral fact.

Communing with Christ's sufferings on the cross might be a good example of this mechanism at work, but this needn't be the only one. Jacob Boehme, for example, takes *anguish* to be one of the fundamental metaphysical moments of the eternal dynamic that makes up the inner life of God<sup>1</sup>. On this account, then, any anguish we experience could perhaps allow us to feel a communion with this aspect of God's primordial essence. It is an interesting question whether this 'communion' form of divine intimacy theodicy is rendered problematically circular if God's suffering results entirely from empathy with human suffering, as many of the Jewish sources brought by Harris claim (pp. 20-2) – in this case, perhaps the value of communion with God as the justification for our suffering is undermined.

### 2. *Suffering as a form of imitatio dei:*

A related but distinct mechanism that could convert (at least some kinds of) suffering into divine intimacy might be that of *imitatio dei*. Many theists strive to make themselves similar in nature, action, and feeling, to the most perfect being. And if God is taken to suffer, then the sufferings that humans undergo could be considered to take them forward in the project of conforming themselves to the divine. The same caveats that applied to the previous mechanism will apply to this one as well – namely, that it assumes a suffering God, and that it is powerful only to the degree that God's suffering is taken to be central to his being. That said, this mechanism avoids the worry raised at the end of the previous mechanism, because it is clear that *imitatio dei* would work fine even if God's suffering were taken to be entirely the result of empathy with human suffering – for in that case, occasions of empathic human suffering, or of non-egotistical human suffering more generally, would certainly serve to make one more similar to God.

### 3. *Suffering as a revelation of God's inner nature:*

A further closely related mechanism, by which the experience of (at least some kinds of) suffering could be converted into greater divine intimacy, takes suffering to be a revelation to the sufferer of a fundamental aspect of God's nature. Suffering therefore becomes an occasion of God's self-exposure and an occasion for encountering the divine, allowing for it to be an experience of great intimacy.

There are as many ways of fleshing this out as there are aspects of suffering that could be taken to reflect God's nature. If suffering itself is taken to be as essential part of God's being – as in the above examples of Christ's suffering on the cross or Boehme's conception of the inner anguish of the divine –

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium magnum; or, An exposition of the first book of Moses called Genesis, Vol I*, ed. CJ Barker, trans. John Sparrow, London, JM Watkins, 1965, Chap 3, §§12-7.

then it is straightforward to see how an experience of suffering could give one a glimpse into the heart of the Godhead. Indeed, if we concentrate on these examples, then there is not a very sharp distinction between suffering as allowing a vision of God's inner nature (i.e. this mechanism) and suffering as allowing communion with God through shared experience (i.e. mechanism 1).

But there are other examples that we can look to, which – perhaps surprisingly – do not rely on God himself suffering. Joseph Soloveichik's description of the insight that he had just before undergoing a serious operation (quoted in fn. 59), beautifully exemplifies what I have in mind:

"Suddenly one realizes that there is no help which his loved ones are able to extend to him. They are onlookers who watch a drama unfolding itself with unalterable speed. They are not involved in it. This realization brings to an abrupt end the feeling of togetherness. I stand before God; no one else is beside me. A lonely being meeting the loneliest Being in utter seclusion is a traumatic but also a great experience."<sup>2</sup>

We might take this to be an example of the 'divine revelation' mechanism working on the very specific category of suffering that is loneliness, for this loneliness can act as a revelation of a fundamental aspect of God's nature – namely, his aloneness, i.e. his singularity. The person who suffers from acute loneliness has this aspect of the Godhead revealed to them more profoundly than one who has never experienced loneliness to that degree. The important metaphysical fact of God's singularity is revealed to the lonely person in their own experience so that they can appreciate it existentially rather than just theoretically.

But Soloveichik's insight might also have application to suffering more generally, for one of the common effects of serious suffering is its tendency to isolate the sufferer. It might turn out, therefore, that most cases of serious suffering contain in them an element of loneliness, meaning that this particular kind of revelation will be more widespread than it initially seemed.

As I understand him, Levinas – drawing on Philippe Nemo – make a very similar move, but in a way that is immediately applicable to all serious suffering:

"How and where is there produced, within the psyche of experience, the major break capable of accrediting an *other* as irreducibly other and, in this sense, as *beyond*, even though in the tissue of the thematized thinkable every rending preserves or renews the texture of the Same? How can a thought go *beyond* the world... Suffering, as suffering, is but a concrete and quasi-sensible manifestation of the nonintegratable, or the unjustifiable. The 'quality' of evil is this *non-integratableness* itself, if we may use such a term... In the appearing of evil, in its original phenomenality, in its *quality*, there is announced a *modality* or a manner: it is the not-finding-a-place, the refusal of any accommodation with \_ \_ \_ , a counter-nature, a monstrosity, the disturbing and foreign in itself. *And in this sense transcendence!*... Evil... signifies the excess, refusing every synthesis where the wholly-otherness of God shall come to be shown."<sup>3</sup>

Serious suffering is characterized by its radical unassimilability, and since God is *the ultimately unassimilable*, to experience serious suffering is to experience a revelation of God's essence.

I will bring one final example of the 'suffering-as-revelation' mechanism at work, this time from the testimony of a survivor of the Treblinka extermination camp:

"Before the war I would never believe that God had anything to do with such terrible suffering and inhumanity, but during the war I thought there is no other explanation because it was almost supernatural and far, far too massive and too terrible, the suffering we endured, not to be connected in some direct way to God's active presence..."<sup>4</sup>

There is a certain ambiguity to this passage. On the one hand it sounds as though the author means to make a causal inference from the unique nature of their suffering to the claim that only God could have brought it about. But there is also, I feel, a hint of the idea that the very awfulness of the suffering of the camps made God's presence sharply and immediately felt, for it provoked the sense of awe and terror that

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph B Soloveichik, 'Out of the Whirlwind', *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition*, eds. David Shatz, Joel B Wolowelsky, & Reuven Ziegler, Jersey City NJ, Ktav Publishing House, 2003, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Evil', in his *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans Bettina Bergo, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 124, 127-8, & 132.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Reeve Robert Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, New York, The Free Press, 1980, pp. 127-8 (chap 4).

is fitting to God's awful and tremendous nature. Terrible suffering, then, might be one essential way through which God's presence – the presence of the *mysterium tremendum* – can be felt<sup>5</sup>.

4. *Suffering as intensifying one's experience of existing and therefore also one's sense of God's presence:*

The final mechanism I will touch on is rather different to the others. There are many variable ways that suffering can affect people – depending the circumstances, the kind of person, and the kind of suffering involved – but one effect that it sometimes has is that of jolting people into an intensified awareness of their own existence. Our attention is usually so fully absorbed in the details of life's everyday routines and tasks, that it takes a shock to jog us out of this unconscious absorption. Very often that shock is the shock of suffering. Thus, rather as Heidegger describes objects only becoming 'visible' to us when they break down<sup>6</sup>, so too sometimes our own lives only become 'visible' to us when they go awry.

Now, if one believes that God governs everything that happens with particular providence directed at each individual, then a heightened awareness of one's existence will also be a heightened awareness of God's presence. But even more powerfully: if one believes that God sustains everything in existence at every moment through an act of continuous creation – or more powerfully still, if one thinks that all of existence is really somehow formed from God himself – then heightened awareness of one's existence will be a heightened awareness of God's presence with and indeed *within* oneself. Perhaps something along these lines is close to what Simone Weil had in mind with the analogy of the painful hug, as she says:

"Let the whole universe be for me, in relation to my body, what the stick of a blind man is in relation to his hand. His sensibility is really no longer in his hand but at the end of the stick... We have to feel the universe through each sensation. What does it matter then whether it be pleasure or pain? If our hand is shaken by a beloved friend when we meet again after a long separation, what does it matter that he squeezes it hard and hurts us?"<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes the simple awareness of the beloved's presence is so significant and so and profound that it does not matter whether the vehicle of that awareness is pain or pleasure. Indeed, it may even be that on some occasions pain is better suited to the role of waking us up to that presence. In this way some suffering can bring with it awareness of God's intimate presence in our lives and in our very being, and this awareness in turn can serve to further deepen that intimacy.

In conclusion I will make one final observation. Harris discusses the question of whether divine intimacy theodicies depend on God being such as to himself suffer (pp. 20-2). In this connection it seems worth pointing out that divine intimacy theodicies that work by means of mechanisms 3 and 4 – as opposed to those working through mechanisms 1 and 2 – can function even if God is impassible and cannot suffer. Mechanisms 3 and 4 therefore provide us with particularly strong – and fascinating – forms of divine intimacy theodicy.

I look forward to discussing the strengths and weaknesses of these mechanisms – and any others which I did not mention – over the coming week.

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<sup>5</sup> Compare, for example, AJ Heschel's powerful description of the terror and destruction of the divine encounter which of necessity must utterly overwhelm our senses and categories: "The ineffable has shuddered itself into the soul... A tremor seizes our limbs; our nerves are struck, quiver like strings; our whole being bursts into shudders. But then a cry, wrested from our very core, fills the world around us, as if a mountain were suddenly about to place itself in front of us. It is one word: GOD. Not an emotion, a stir within us, but a power, a marvel beyond us, tearing the world apart" (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion*, New York, Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1976, p. 78. [chap 9]).

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, New York, Harper and Row, 1962, pp. 95-107 (I:3:A:§§15-6).

<sup>7</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, ed. Gustave Thibon, trans. Emma Crawford & Mario von der Ruhr, London, Routledge, 2003, p. 141 ('Meaning of the Universe'). For a similar remark, see also her essay 'The Love of God and Affliction', in her *On Science, Necessity, and the Love of God*, trans. Richard Rees, London, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp. 180-1.

## Does Violence Foster (the Right Kind of) Intimacy?

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In his rich paper, ““But Now My Eye Has Seen You”: Yissurin Shel Ahavah as Divine Intimacy Theodicy” Michael Harris draws compelling parallels between the Rabbinic concept of *yissurin shel ahavah* (YSA), “the afflictions of love,” and what has been called a divine intimacy theodicy in contemporary, analytic philosophy of religion. While I am unqualified to assess Harris’s extensive interpretation of, and interaction with, the Rabbinic tradition, assuming that these are defensible, his argument that YSA is a species of divine intimacy theodicy, rather than a kind of soul-making theodicy, is quite strong. Furthermore, the narrowness of application of YSA to a limited subset of human suffering lends it credibility in my view. Reflection on the empirical evidence available (especially related to trauma—my area of interest) quickly reveals that there is a great deal of human suffering in the world which not only fails to foster intimacy with God, but which doesn’t seem like the kind of thing that *could*, in principle, foster such intimacy, no matter how virtuous the response of the sufferer. Nonetheless, it does seem plausible that *some* instances of suffering can foster intimacy with the Divine. Religious traditions are replete with testimony of individuals who take themselves to have found or grown closer to God in seasons of suffering. Harris’s account of YSA suggests a Jewish philosophical framework for understanding this phenomenon as providing a theodicy for this sub-set of human suffering.

However, I would like to press on Harris’s responses to two of the objections that he considers near the end of the paper: the objections from cruelty and pathology. In so doing, I draw on themes articulated by Jewish and Christian feminist theologians to suggest that there may be both spiritual and mundane harms in believing that intimacy is achieved through suffering. These harms not only call the character of God into question but also pose significant obstacles to the project of liberation for oppressed social groups. For sake of brevity, I will restrict my comments to the proposal that “God’s love is experienced not just *through* suffering but...*in* suffering.”<sup>1</sup> On this proposal two criterion are met. (1) God directly causes the suffering, and (2) the very act of inflicting the suffering is an expression of divine love. God’s is a “crushing, loving ‘embrace.’”<sup>2</sup>

On a spiritual level, the relationship between the righteous person and the Divine suggested by Harris’s account of YSA begins to look remarkably like the relationship between an abuse victim and their abusive partner. This is the objection from cruelty. Indeed, the comparison to a friend who hugs so tightly that it hurts is suggestive. A human may make such a mistake in their over-abundance of enthusiasm, but the person who continues to squeeze after

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Harris, ““But Now My Eye Has Seen You”: Yissurin Shel Ahavah as Divine Intimacy Theodicy” *The Torah u-Madda Journal* 17 (2016-17): 81.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

observing the pain it causes their friend starts to look less like a friend and more like an abuser. This is not to say that inflicting violence on others never fosters intimacy. Setting aside consensual BDSM,<sup>3</sup> Stockholm Syndrome is perhaps the starkest case of violence fostering a sense of closeness to, and identification with, an abuser. On a smaller scale, we see a similar dynamic in more common abusive relationships. “He only hits me because he loves me.” “She only screams degrading insults at me because she trusts me with the truth.” While there is a kind of intimacy involved in these relationships, it doesn’t seem like the right kind of intimacy. It is a degrading intimacy that undermines genuine trust, respect, and even the personal agency of the recipient of the “love” in question. There is a worry that the same may apply to the divine case.

One might point out that a human abuser lacks many of the features that make God’s painful expressions of love morally acceptable. A human abuser is neither omniscient (able to perfectly know what is in the individual’s best interest) nor omnipotent (able to produce the desired effects without mishap) nor wholly benevolent. However, there are good reasons to think that it is the nature of relationship itself—the receiving of violence as love—that causes many of the ill effects, quite apart from any of the virtues or vices of the people involved. If that is right, it isn’t obvious that God’s perfect nature will completely alleviate the worry I raise here. This suggests that if Harris wants to further develop this second option of divine love *in* suffering, he will need to tell a story about how humans can identify violence with love without it causing them spiritual and moral harm.

On a more mundane level, the view may also encourage already vulnerable individuals to patiently accept suffering rather than avoiding it. This is the objection from pathology. It is true that Harris goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the Rabbinic tradition teaches that YSA is compatible with the rationality of preferring not to suffer and even rejecting the intimacy with God that would come from the suffering if it were cheerfully received. However, it is not clear that this goes far enough. As I see it, the primary problem is not that YSA renders pursuit of release from suffering irrational, but that it makes acceptance of suffering rational in cases where it should not be.

Consider the following testimony reported in Rebecca Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock’s book *Proverbs for Ashes*:

[My husband] beats me sometimes. Mostly he is a good man. But sometimes he becomes very angry and he hits me. He knocks me down. One time he broke my arm and I had to go to the hospital. But I didn’t tell them how my arm got broken. . . I went to my priest twenty years ago. I’ve been trying to follow his advice. The priest said I should rejoice in my sufferings because they bring me closer to Jesus. He said, ‘Jesus suffered because he loved us.’ He said, ‘If you love Jesus, accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross.’ I’ve tried, but I’m not sure anymore.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It isn’t at all clear that BDSM involves the inflicting of *suffering* in the relevant sense, and the presence of consent and safe words creates a dynamic much different from anything possible in the divine-human case.

<sup>4</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 20-21.



This particular cases arises within the Christian tradition, but it is easy to imagine similar advice being given in a Jewish context based on YSA. Imagine that the woman is devout. She longs for greater intimacy with God. While she believes that it would be perfectly rational to escape to the safety of a shelter or contact the authorities, she also believes that this abuse may be an expression of God's crushing, loving embrace and that it may be an opportunity to come to enjoy greater intimacy with God. Thus, if she accepts Harris's account of YSA, it is rational for her to choose to stay and patiently endure the abuse. Indeed, the more righteous she is, the greater value she is likely to place on intimacy with God and the more likely she is to be willing to endure greater abuse. But most of us want to say that staying with her abuser is not a reflection of piety. This is a particularly pressing problem when we consider that some groups, those most oppressed within a given society, are disproportionately likely to find themselves in relevantly similar situations, and thus are disproportionately likely to be practically harmed by theology that considers suffering an expression of divine love.

In her paper, "Suffering as Religious Experience," on which Harris draws extensively, Laura Ekstrom considers a similar objection raised against religious ascetics, such as Therese of Lisieux and Beatrice of Nazareth. Her response is that "as it stands, the objection from pathology amounts to no more than the claim that it seems to the objector that the proposed view is crazy, or in other words, false." And Ekstrom is surely correct. But I think the objection may be made more robust. The fact that the theological perspective in question is likely to increase the harm done to the most oppressed members of society—the very orphans, widows, and poor whose cause the prophets so consistently defend—is itself evidence against the truth of the theology. There is good reason to believe that truth would not have such ill effects. Indeed, Judith Plaskow and Mellissa Raphael make similar points in their work in Jewish Feminism.<sup>5</sup> Raphael, for example, points out that "the first moment of feminist theology's diagnostic criticism of patriarchal religion as oppressive to women is...not that it is unjust, but that it permits itself the liberty to be unjust because it is idolatrous. Women's liberation was to be, most fundamentally, liberation from an oppressive fantasy or false idea of what God is and what a woman should be because that idea prevents the becoming of both."<sup>6</sup> In a similar spirit, I suggest that as we see it presented here, YSA as divine intimacy theodicy harms the oppressed *because* it presents a distortion of the divine-human relationship.

In closing I would like to reiterate that there is much to praise about this paper. Harris's careful interaction with both the theological and philosophical texts is an example of the kind of conversation that I would like to see more of. However, I hope to have shown that the more radically claim that divine love is sometimes expressed in the very act of causing suffering is spiritually and morally problematic as it stands.

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Plaskow, "Male Theology and Women's Experience" in *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*, edited with Donna Berman, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Mellissa Raphael, "A Patrimony of Idols: Second-Wave Jewish and Christian Feminist Theology and the Criticism of Religion," *Sophia* (2014) 53:247.



### Comments on Michael J. Harris's "But Now My Eye Has Seen You': Yissurin Shel Ahavah as Divine Intimacy Theodicy"

Michael Harris's fascinating paper develops the thesis that the concept of *yassin shel ahavah* (YSA), which Maurice Simon translates as "sufferings of love", can be seen as a form of divine intimacy theodicy. Roughly speaking, whereas soul-making theodicies justify God's permission of suffering in terms of the perfection of moral character that results from suffering, divine intimacy theodicies justify God's permission (or perhaps even infliction) of suffering in terms of the closeness with God that is attained through the experience of suffering. My aim in these brief comments, then, will simply be to raise a few questions which will hopefully aid further exploration of this intriguing approach to the problem of suffering. Harris canvasses various Rabbinic writings on YSA, opting to focus on those understandings of the concept which interpret it in terms of God's non-punitive infliction of suffering upon a person for the purpose of bringing him or her closer to God. The story of Job is a powerful Biblical case study.

One issue that merits further exploration is that of the relationship between divine intimacy theodicies and soul-making theodicies. As Harris notes, "one could argue that greater closeness to God is itself an improvement of the soul" (p. 90). So it would seem that whether a theodicy makes intimacy with God the goal of suffering isn't straightforwardly sufficient for categorising it as an instance of divine intimacy theodicy as opposed to soul-making. Harris seems to suggest that the reason that a theodicy that makes use of non-punitive YSA should be thought of in terms of divine intimacy rather than soul-making is that it emphasises "attainment of intimacy with God *in this world*" (p. 90, emphasis added). By contrast, the thought is, soul-making theodicies postpone (at least for many cases of suffering) the attainment of the compensating goods until the afterlife. I'm not sure whether this is quite the right way to draw the line, however. A distinction between ultimate goals and subordinate goals may be useful here. A bank robber aims to break open the safe in the bank and take a large amount of money. Taking the money is his goal. But the goal of taking the money is subordinate to his ultimate goal of acquiring wealth. There are several distinctions, then, that may be employed to carve up the space of possible theodicies:

(A) the ultimate goal at which suffering aims is achieved within this lifetime

*versus*

(B) the ultimate goal at which suffering aims is (often) not achieved until the afterlife

(C) the ultimate goal at which suffering aims is achieved *in* the suffering itself

*versus*

(D) the ultimate goal at which suffering aims is achieved *as a consequence of* the suffering

(E) intimacy with God is the ultimate goal of suffering

*versus*

(F) perfection of character is the ultimate goal of suffering

Let's take each distinction in turn. Harris seems to emphasise the A-B distinction as a way of distinguishing divine intimacy from soul-making theodicies. For two reasons, I'm doubtful that this is the best way to draw the distinction between these two types of theodicy. Firstly, although it is undoubtedly true that in the actual world many sufferers don't see the character-building benefits of suffering within their earthly lives, it's not clear that this is a logically necessary truth—perhaps there are possible worlds in which all suffering builds the character of the sufferer on this side of the grave. Secondly, there are certain theodicies which look very much like divine intimacy theodicies but which

postpone some of the focal goods until the afterlife. Marilyn Adams' theodicy, for instance, develops an idea of Julian Norwich's according to which victims of horrendous suffering are greeted with a "heavenly welcome" in which "God will say 'Thank you for all your suffering, the suffering of your youth' ... the creature's experience of divine gratitude will bring such full and unending joy as could not be merited by the whole sea of human pain and suffering through the ages."<sup>1</sup> The idea that one of the compensating goods is the experience of reaching heaven and receiving God's gratitude for one's sufferings seems very naturally categorised as a divine intimacy theodicy, but the good in question is not this-worldly. As for the C-D distinction, Harris rightly recognises that this is not the place to draw the distinction between soul-making and divine intimacy theodicies, noting that "YSA might facilitate greater closeness between God and the sufferer either because 1) it is suffering which *results in* such closeness or, more radically, 2) it is suffering which is *itself* God's love, His embrace, as it were" (p. 81). My leaning would be to distinguish between soul-making and divine intimacy theodicies in terms of the E-F distinction. This preserves Harris's judgment that non-punitive YSA-based theodicies are divine intimacy theodicies as well as preserving the judgment that Hick's is a soul-making theodicy. It would seem that most of the YSA-based theodicies which Harris canvasses fall on the left-hand side of all three of the above distinctions (A, C, E), but for the aforementioned reasons, it would seem best not to insist that divine intimacy theodicies as such fall on the left-hand side of the first two distinctions.

Another issue for further exploration is that of God's right to inflict suffering upon individuals and the relation between this and the question of God's foreknowledge of future free human actions. There is controversy among philosophers of religion over the question of whether God has moral obligations, but it would be preferable if a YSA-based theodicy could be employed without relying on the assumption that God lacks moral obligations. Accordingly, let's suppose for the moment that He does have some obligations. Plausibly, one such obligation is that God be good to His creatures. Is God then morally permitted to inflict suffering upon a person for the purpose of bringing about greater closeness with her? Notably C. S. Lewis offered a theodicy according to which God sometimes inflicts suffering upon a person in an attempt to wear down her rebellious will and thus bring her to repentance.<sup>2</sup> Now, the idea here, roughly, is that God is justified in inflicting suffering upon a person if it is aimed at keeping her from a worse fate. For an analogy, it might well be permissible and appropriate for someone to incapacitate his friend with a punch to the gut if it is the only way to stop the friend from drinking a vial of poison. But can God permissibly bring suffering upon someone for the purpose not of saving her from a worse fate but rather of trying to foster closer intimacy? Many people, I suspect, will have the intuition that deliberately inflicting a harm in order to bring about a benefit is less morally acceptable than inflicting a harm in order to avert a worse harm.

I wonder whether there may in fact be some connection here with the issue of God's foreknowledge. Specifically, if God has granted humans libertarian freedom but doesn't know for certain how they'll use it, then it seems dubious for God to inflict YSA upon a person whilst being less than certain how the person will respond. She may respond with hostility to God, in which case it would be better for God not to have inflicted the suffering. For that reason, a YSA-based theodicy would seem to fit ill with an open theist view of God's foreknowledge. The Molinist view, on the other hand, claims that God has "middle knowledge" of how a human creature would freely act in any given possible situation. It follows that, on this view, God could know with full certainty how a creature would respond were He to inflict suffering upon her, and so God could be sure to inflict YSA only upon those individuals whom He knows will respond by casting themselves upon God's care and thus entering into greater intimacy with Him.

In conclusion, Harris's excellent paper provides many rich insights and further avenues for potential research, a couple of which I hope to have identified here.

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God", in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001).

Prof T.M. Rudavsky

The Ohio State University

Comments on: Michael J. Harris 'But Now My Eye Has Seen You': *Yissurin Shel Ahavah* as Divine Intimacy Theodicy"<sup>1</sup>

### **I. Introduction: M.M. Adams and 'divine intimacy theology'**

At the end of his article, Harris reminds us that *Hazal* "generally eschewed systematic theological discussion," (Harris 29) and reminds us that this avoidance may in fact be a strength when discussing the problem of suffering. Is it inappropriate to expect that the problem of suffering can be resolved "in a series of neat analytic propositions?" If so, Harris suggests that the non-systematic nature of *Hazal*, and the YSA sugya in *Berakhot*, may turn out to be preferable to analytic analysis.

In my comments, I shall review briefly Harris's overall argument, and then weigh in on his conclusion. In the course of my review, I will star\* those pieces that are discussed further in the comments section below. I should like to start however, with brief discussion of a recent article by (the late) Marilyn McCord Adams, who was originally scheduled to comment upon the Harris paper as well. I think that Adams' paper is relevant to the Harris piece, and I offer it in memory of a wonderful intellect.

In a recent volume entitled *Ethics and the Problem of Evil* (2017, Indiana Univ Press), James Sterba challenges philosophers working on the problem of evil, broadly construed, to consider resources from ethical theory that might theoretically advance discussion of the problem. He notes that the doctrine of double effect, 'hypothetical trolley cases', or even the Pauline Principle "never do evil that good may come of it", have been ignored by contemporary philosophers of religion. Sterba believes that attending to these examples and discussions will advance our ability to actually find a solution to the problem of evil.

It is in the context of this desideratum that M.M. Adams offers her discussion of 'horrendous evils,' along with her reminder that contemporary moral theory avoids discussion of these evils altogether.<sup>2</sup> She suggests that in light of these evils, our relationship with God should be one of a developing friendship – "Godhead is agency enabling but headed toward friendship" (Adams, 18); the question then is how a trustworthy friend could allow the inflicting of evil on us for our own good.

Is God above reproach? Adams argues that our choice is forced: if we say that God is above reproach, we imply that divine behavior needs no justification; that it is inappropriate to offer morally justifying reasons for God's permitting/causing evil;

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the OSU Melton Center "Text-Study Group" for helpful conversation and discussion of this article.

<sup>2</sup> M.M. Adams, "A Modest Proposal? *Caveat Emptor!* Moral Theory and Problems of Evil," in James P. Sterba *Ethics and the Problem of Evil*, (2017: Indiana Univ Press).

but if we claim that God's policies are morally justified [that God has morally justifying reasons for permitting evil], then we are claiming that God has "satisfied the conditions for moral justification." (Adams, 23) It is morally dangerous, she warns us, to try to have it both ways. One way out of the choice is simply to recognize that God does not have obligations to creatures: "where personal capacities are concerned, an infinite gulf yawns between the human and the divine." (Adams, 24)

In his own conclusion to the volume, Sterba argues that Adams does not deal adequately with the question of how an all-good Deity could have allowed the horrendous evils to be inflicted on innocent victims in the first place, thus violating the Pauline principle never to do evil that good may come out of it. I actually think that Adams is quite aware of this line of argument; she anticipates it by suggesting that ultimately what's at stake is whether such a deity is 'trustworthy'; as Adams puts it, "whether God's track record in putting us in harm's way and not rescuing us takes God out of the category of people to whom it is reasonable to entrust oneself as to a parent or intimate friend." (Adams, 25) The question is ultimately one of "intimate relationships," the very issue addressed by Harris. Let us turn then to the Harris piece.

## **II. Overview of Harris**

1. The Problem of Evil broadly construed has been examined in both Scripture and in philosophy. This article attempts to bridge the two, asking (Harris 1) "how approaches in Jewish thought and tradition to the problem of evil compare with the positions adopted in contemporary philosophy of religion." Obviously this is a large area to cover, but Harris has chosen to focus upon two set of texts: The rabbinic concept discussed in the Talmud Bavli *Berakhot* 5a-b, known as "*yissurin shel ahavah*", the sufferings of love (YSA); and the 'divine intimacy theodicy model' that has been developed by a number of contemporary philosophers.\*<sup>1</sup>

2. In parts one and two, Harris unpacks different ways of understanding YSA; in particular he addresses whether or not YSA should be interpreted as a punitive doctrine. If so, then it can be folded into other 'punitive doctrines'; if not, then we need to determine what to make of it. Sections 3,4 and 5 examine these alternative interpretations. Harris distinguishes between 'soul-making theodicy' and 'divine intimacy' models, and will ultimately argue that YSA "is most compellingly construed as a 'divine intimacy' theodicy." (Harris 4)

3. Harris very carefully circumscribes his treatment of YSA, claiming that it is "worth considering" (Harris p. 3) in light of divine intimacy models; that his study is not comprehensive; and that YSA is "most compellingly construed as a 'divine intimacy' theodicy." (Harris p. 4) \*<sup>2</sup>

## **III. Different ways of reading YSA**

1. Let us start out with the actual proof-text from *Berakhot* 5a, quoted by Harris (p 4). Rava says, If an individual is visited by painful sufferings, and determines that they are not warranted by his conduct, **“let him be sure that these are sufferings of love (*yissurin shel ahavah*). For it is said: ‘For whom the Lord loves He corrects.’”** There exists a tradition of reading YSA as non-punitive: e.g. Rashi clearly interprets the passage as ‘non-punitive’; So too Saadyah Gaon in his commentary upon Job, suggests that God inflicts upon Job suffering as a trial and testing, knowing that Job will hold steadfast in his righteousness. Others (Me’iri, Abarbanel, etc insist that all suffering is punitive. R. Falk (in *Penei Yehoshua*) goes so far to suggest that the innocent righteous person is being punished for the sins of others: “it is just that God inflicts the punishment on the righteous individual rather than the non-righteous, because the non-righteous would rebel were punishment inflicted upon them.” (Harris 7,8)\*<sup>3</sup>

In the next sections, Harris will introduce soul-making theodicies, distinguish them from divine intimacy theodicies, and argue that YSA is an example of the latter. Soul making theodicies, associated primarily with John Hick, claim that God’s justification for inflicting suffering is that it facilitates the building and development of moral and spiritual character. This notion of character development is clearly related to the biblical notion of a divine test or trial (*nissayon*), best exemplified in Genesis 22. Numerous philosophers have read the Akedah as a test; so too have Job’s trials been read as a test.

Correlated to soul-strengthening is the ancillary notion of “soul-purging” or cleansing. *Penei Yehoshua* raises the obvious counter-argument to YSA: if God is omnipotent, surely God can reward the righteous person in the afterlife without his undergoing suffering. He responds that the human soul is too attached to the material world, and that suffering purges the soul enabling it to be saved. [note also the hint of original sin] A similar trope is found in Albo, who argues that YSA serves to purge the soul of its impurity or uncleanness; these impurities, in the case of a righteous person, may be the result of very minor sins that require atonement [if not outright punishment]. Both these readings depend upon a distinction between ‘punishment and atonement.’ (Harris, 11) “Suffering can be inflicted by God to atone for sin without that suffering constituting a punishment for sin. Its goal is rather the essential cleansing of the soul from the stain left by the sin.” (Harris 11-12)\*<sup>4</sup>

#### IV. YSA as Divine Intimacy

1. Harris then turns to the distinction between soul-making and divine intimacy theodicies. I take this to be the heart of the article. He uses the characterization of Ekstrom, according to which God sometimes permits personal suffering in order that we might perceive, understand or even meet God. (Harris 13) This intimacy is achieved in this world, rather than in the after-life [thus ruling out Hick’s more Christian imbued emphasis upon the after-life]. This notion of intimacy with God achieved through suffering is exemplified by Stump, Shatz and others in their interpretations of Job 42:5 “I had previously only heard of you, but now my eye has seen you.” As Shatz notes, through, and as a result of his sufferings, Job has grown spiritually, and achieved a relationship with God he could not have achieved otherwise. See also Maimonides’ reading of Job, according to which Job has

achieved wisdom that he did not have at the outset of his trials. Harris seems to accept this characterization of suffering as leading to “relationship with and closeness to God.” \*5

2. Harris summarizes some standard criticisms of this ‘intimacy’ model including Ekstrom’s ‘objection from cruelty’: “Permitting suffering seems to be a cruel way of fostering intimacy; it is implausible to hold that a wholly beneficent God would operate in this way.” (Harris 23) Harris’s response, again quoting Ekstrom, is that YSA is limited to “quite rare cases and perhaps to quite rare individuals.” (Harris 23) He notes as well the objection from ‘lunacy’ or ‘masochism’ – namely that one might welcome any suffering that comes one’s way, and take delight in it because of its ‘supposed spiritual benefits.’ (Harris 23)\*6

Harris concludes his article by noting that (1) “divine intimacy theodicy is the option in contemporary philosophy of religion that is most fruitful to consider in connection with YSA.” (Harris 28) (2) that “the idea that suffering can be productive of intimacy with God is...found in Jewish sources even independently of YSA.” (Harris 28) and (3) that divine intimacy theodicy is...worthy of consideration as part of a traditional Jewish theological approach to the problem of suffering...” (Harris 29) \*7

#### **V. Questions and comments:**

\*1. At the beginning of the article, Harris elides both ‘evil’ and ‘suffering’, pointing to the point made by Eleanore Stump. I do think that more needs to be said here, however, in drawing the distinction between evil broadly construed and the more narrowly focused personal suffering.

\*2. Harris does not actually accept divine intimacy as a solution to the problem of suffering; perhaps we need more clarification as to how the exercise of identifying YSA with divine intimacy model will help us understand suffering of the righteous?

\*3. Harris notes that clearly a number of key thinkers (both medieval and modern) regard YSA in the context of punishment theodicy. He does not actually reject this reading, and moves on to non-punishment models. I would like to see the punishment model put to rest more clearly; I am not convinced that ultimately YSA does not function as a form of punishment, even if for the ‘sin’ of participating in the metaphysical act of materiality or physical existence. Perhaps we can discuss further this point.

Further, Harris mentions in several contexts the distinction between God’s allowing and causing suffering. I would like to hear more about how, for an omnipotent and omniscient deity, “allowing” is qualitatively different from “causing”. Adams herself notes the difference and dismisses the distinction when talking about the Deity.

\*4. I realize that Harris is not ultimately interested in ‘soul-making’ theodicy; nonetheless, he needs to distinguish more sharply between ‘purging’ the soul of materiality, and punishing it for succumbing to material urges. This is the distinction

urged by Albo between 'punishment' and atonement.' The irony here, of course, is that the soul must 'atone' for the very metaphysical composition that God created. And of course God could have, in a more perfect world, created humans without materiality at all. And so perhaps we can discuss the ramifications of "purging" the soul in the context of YSA.

\*5. The section on Job raises the question of how divine intimacy model has gone beyond the standard reading of the Job's suffering. The medieval philosophers suggested that as a result of his suffering, Job has acquired wisdom; but has he in fact acquired the sort of intimacy with God that YSA and divine intimacy model suggest? I imagine that Job might have, as a result of new knowledge, come to understand that he will never achieve intimacy with this deity.

\*6. Ekstrom's 'objection from cruelty' remains unanswered to my mind. Does it matter whether YSA is limited to 'quite rare cases' or 'quite rare individuals'? Furthermore, does YSA/Divine Intimacy reinforce the deliberate infliction of suffering in order to attain closeness to God? Consider, for example, Socrates' dilemma, posed in the *Phaedo*, namely that if philosophers practice the art of dying, and are half-dead already, why not simply commit suicide in order to hasten ones death. Harris rejects this reading of YSA on good textual grounds, but this point is worthy of more discussion.

\*7. I am willing to entertain the hypothesis that YSA is reflective of, or can be understood in terms of, divine intimacy theodicy. But does it ultimately constitute an appropriate response to the suffering of righteous individuals? Consider the objection raised (p. 9) by *Penei Yehoshua* – namely that God could just as easily have created a world order in which the righteous achieve the closeness/intimacy with God without experiencing suffering. Echoing Adams, why should we enter into a 'trusting' relationship with such a deity in the first place? Adams draws ultimately upon a skeptical response – ultimately we cannot understand the ways of the deity, the position reached by Job as well. I would be curious to know whether Harris ultimately endorses a skeptical theistic position, or whether he believes that the divine intimacy theodicy is sufficient to explain the suffering of the righteous.



## APJ SYMPOSIUM RESPONSES – JUNE 2017

**Michael J. Harris**

My sincere thanks to Max Baker-Hytch, Michelle Panchuk, Tamar Rudavsky and Gabriel Citron for their stimulating and insightful responses to my paper. I was very sorry to learn of the passing of Professor Marilyn McCord Adams who was also due to participate in this symposium. Sadly I never had the privilege of meeting her, but like countless others learned a great deal from the writings of this internationally renowned leader in the field of philosophy of religion, some of which are referenced in the paper under discussion here.

The comments below are intended by way of initial replies to a rich set of responses to my paper. I look forward to the continuation of the conversation during the symposium.

### I

Max Baker-Hytch focuses on the issue raised in my paper of the relationship between divine intimacy theodicies and soul-making theodicies. He introduces a distinction between ultimate goals and subordinate goals and provides the interesting example of the bank robber. The bank robber breaks open the bank's safe in order to take the money from it. Taking the money, Baker-Hytch suggests, is subordinate to the bank robber's ultimate goal of acquiring wealth. One way of paraphrasing Baker-Hytch's view is:

- 1) Breaking open the safe is a necessary condition of taking the money from the safe
- 2) Taking the money from the safe is a subordinate goal en route to the ultimate goal of acquiring wealth.

But in fact taking the money from the safe is not really a subordinate goal but is itself a partial achievement of the ultimate goal of the acquisition of wealth.

Hick's soul-making theodicy as I summarise it, based on Daniel Speak, in Section 4 of the article (p.77) can be paraphrased thus:

- 1) Suffering is a necessary condition of morally improving soul-making
- 2) Morally improving soul-making is a necessary condition of intimacy with God

But somewhat in parallel with Baker-Hytch's bank robber example, one might construe morally improving soul-making as not merely a necessary condition of intimacy with God but as an integral part of it. As I mention on p. 90 of the article when discussing Maharal's view, "one could argue that greater closeness to God is itself an improvement of the soul", and one could also argue that, conversely, improvement of the soul is itself one possible realisation of greater closeness to God. As I argue on pp. 89-91, Maharal repeatedly emphasises the theme of closeness to God rather than improvement of the soul, and it is the former for Maharal rather than the latter that does the work of theodicy. But while Maharal therefore, in my view, certainly presents a divine intimacy rather than a soul-making theodicy, and, as I argue on p.90, views the improvement of the soul achieved by YSA only as a means to intimacy with God, one could conceptually run the ideas of improvement of the soul and intimacy with God closer together than Maharal in fact does and not construe them as standing merely in a means-end relationship. It is for this reason that I prefer to emphasise, as Baker-Hytch correctly points out that I do, the distinction

- (A) the ultimate goal at which suffering aims is achieved within this lifetime *versus*
- (B) the ultimate goal at which suffering aims is (often) not achieved until the afterlife

in order in general to distinguish divine intimacy from soul-making theodicies, rather than the distinction Baker-Hytch prefers which is

- (E) intimacy with God is the ultimate goal of suffering *versus*
- (F) perfection of character is the ultimate goal of suffering

though, as just discussed, Maharal opts for the E/F distinction as well as emphasising that intimacy with God, on his interpretation of YSA, is achieved within this lifetime. So because the E/F distinction is in principle collapsible, it might be preferable to stay with the A/B distinction as the optimum way of drawing the distinction between divine intimacy and soul-making theodicies.

Baker-Hytch offers two reasons for preferring E/F to A/B as the key distinction between divine intimacy and soul-making theodicies. First, while in the actual world many sufferers don't see the character-building benefits of suffering within their earthly lives, this is not a logically necessary truth. But is logical necessity the appropriate criterion here? For a soul-making-in-this-world to be a plausible theodicy, soul-making this side of the grave as a consequence of suffering would have to happen often enough in this actual world for it to do the work of theodicy. Whether or not it does is at the least a moot point. Secondly, Baker-Hytch argues that a type of theodicy suggested by Marilyn Adams, according to which victims of horrendous suffering are greeted in heaven by God and thanked for their suffering, is naturally construed as a divine intimacy theodicy. I would argue that this is only the case if the A/B distinction has *already* been rejected. I believe that it is perfectly reasonable to restrict the category of divine intimacy theodicies to those which focus on the experience of suffering bringing the sufferer into a closer relationship with God in the here-and-now. The theodicy referred to by Baker-Hytch, to which in fact I too refer on p.65 of my paper, is, as I suggest there, comparable to Talmudic theodicies which appeal to life and reward in the next world to justify suffering undergone in this world. There is a clear difference between theodicies of this latter kind and divine intimacy theodicies as I understand them.

Regarding the issue of God's foreknowledge raised by Baker-Hytch, I certainly prefer to construe YSA as in harmony with the mainstream Jewish theological position that God indeed knows how a human creature will freely act in any given possible situation. However, the Talmudic stories discussed on pp. 86-87 of my paper, if my reading of them is correct, suggest that God may visit YSA even on those who will ask for the suffering to be removed and who reject the opportunity for greater intimacy. This prompts the question of the purpose of God visiting the suffering. Perhaps one could suggest that God merely providing the opportunity for greater intimacy through YSA, and the knowledge that God has offered that opportunity is a spiritual fillip to the sufferer of YSA even if the sufferer rejects the opportunity. In any event, Baker-Hytch has raised some intriguing and important issues and I am very grateful for his contribution.

## II

Michelle Panchuk's important response to my paper focuses on the kind of YSA in which God's love for the sufferer is experienced in the suffering itself. She worries that this is

uncomfortably close to the human analogue of the relationship between an abuse victim and his or her abusive partner. There can be intimacy even here, and indeed even intimacy that is fostered by the abuse itself, but, as Panchuk notes, it is not “the right kind of intimacy”. Notwithstanding God’s perfect nature, Panchuk argues, the sufferer in instances of YSA may nevertheless identify violence with love, something which is likely to cause moral and spiritual damage.

I should amplify a point I make on p. 66 of the paper. My primary aim in the paper as a whole is to try to consider YSA and divine intimacy theodicy alongside each other in order to allow them to shed light one upon the other. I believe that this is in itself a very worthwhile exercise, as I suggest on p. 66 and as Gabriel Citron kindly elaborates in his comments. While I try to indicate how one might respond to strong objections to these theodicies, I am not claiming that they are without difficulty or that their defence would not require significant further elaboration. In a word, the aim of the paper is to explore the relationship between YSA as a response to the problem of evil and divine intimacy theodicy, not to advocate them. Nevertheless, let me make a couple of points in the direction of attempting to respond to Panchuk’s important critique of divine intimacy theodicy and the “God’s-love-in-the suffering-itself” version of YSA.

It seems to me that Panchuk’s use of the term ‘violence’ somewhat stacks the deck in favour of her objection. Cases of “God’s-love-in-the suffering-itself” YSA need not necessarily involve what we would normally term ‘violence’, such as physical or significant psychological assault. The forms of suffering involved in YSA may often be much more subtle. Perhaps a deep and longstanding personal or professional ambition of Smith’s is thwarted. Perhaps an important relationship or friendship of Smith’s undergoes a crisis. God imposing this kind of suffering on Smith would not usually be described as an instance of violence. I also wonder whether the term ‘abuse’ is fair in the context of a divine-human relationship. This is not because of the perfect character of God but because of simpler considerations. If human beings are, as Aquinas believes and many traditional Jews would endorse, God’s property, God’s taking of human life itself is not murder. Certainly God’s imposition of suffering would not count as abuse. Or even on a more moderate view of life, health, sustenance and other goods as gifts from God to us, one could not characterise the withdrawal of any of these gifts as abuse (or violence). Moreover, as discussed on p. 87 of the paper when dealing with what I call the objection from masochism, in cases of YSA, unlike in cases of abuse from a human partner, one has the option of rejecting the suffering and any intimacy that may come with it.

Panchuk objects further that it would be rational a devout Jewish woman who accepted “Harris’s account of YSA” to remain with an abusive human partner because the abuse she is undergoing may be an instance of YSA and hence an opportunity for greater intimacy with God. I stress again that my elaboration of YSA in the paper is not intended as a full defence of it – the purpose of the paper is not to offer my exposition of YSA as a fully satisfactory theodicy. But more importantly, I cannot stress enough that I believe that an abused partner who responded in the way Panchuk is concerned about would be deeply mistaken for the simple reason that there is blatant, massive and malign human agency involved here. A rabbi or other Jewish religious counsellor who responded with a Jewish equivalent of the response of the Christian priest in the passage from Brock and Parker’s book cited by Panchuk, advising an abused wife to rejoice in the beatings she is receiving because they are or may be YSA and may foster greater intimacy with God, would be doing something utterly outrageous and beyond the pale. It would be totally perverse for a Jewish religious counsellor to suggest that such suffering is a possible instance of YSA or indeed anything other than a

straightforward case of human evil, violence being inflicted by one human being upon another. The only theodicy that should even remotely occur to a responsible Jewish counsellor in such an instance is the free will defence, laying the blame for the abuse squarely on the abuser rather than on God. But for a Jewish counsellor who understands anything about Judaism and the demands it makes to aid those in distress, theodicy of any sort would be the last thing on his or her mind in such a case.

### III

Tamar Rudavsky raises several interesting questions concerning my paper. I cannot do justice to them all here but will make some remarks which I hope will begin to address at least some of Rudavsky's points, and I look forward to pursuing more detailed discussion during the symposium. In her questions 2 and 7, Rudavsky wonders whether I accept divine intimacy theodicy as a solution to the problem of suffering. The honest answer is that I see difficulties with all the solutions to the problem of suffering of which I am aware. For many people there is no fully satisfactory solution, and this is no doubt a large part of the reason why the problem of suffering has been for millennia, and remains, one of the great philosophical conundrums. I do believe however, as argued in my paper, that some of the standard objections to divine intimacy theodicy can be countered, particularly when YSA is understood as a version of it, and that it is deserving of further exploration. I also find the sceptical theist position mentioned by Rudavsky both intuitively appealing and resonant from a Jewish perspective. But I don't have a final view on the matter. Let me reiterate as far as the paper itself is concerned that its purpose is not to offer my exposition of YSA as a fully satisfactory theodicy but to consider YSA and divine intimacy theodicy in light of each other, an exercise which hopefully has some of the advantages so helpfully elaborated by Gabriel Citron.

One worry that Rudavsky raises in her question 3 is that perhaps YSA ultimately collapses into a punishment theodicy, "even if for the 'sin' of participating in the metaphysical act of materiality or physical existence", and the interpretation of YSA as a non-punishment theodicy is not tenable. But it seems to me that participating in material existence, even if the soul requires a measure of purging from it as Penei Yehoshua suggests, is clearly distinguishable from sin or even the quasi-sin. Purging that involves pain is not necessarily punishment for wrongdoing. Painful medical treatment would be an obvious example. Further, of course, such treatment is an expression of deep concern for the patient, punishment of the patient being the last thing on the doctor's mind. It is not clear why in the spiritual realm a similar distinction between non-punitive purging and punishment cannot be made. Of course, as Rudavsky points out, one could ask why God created human beings with materiality at all – without materiality no purging would be required. (One could perhaps also ask why, alternatively, God did not create human beings with materiality but not the kind of materiality that requires purging). But one could push the question further back in this way regarding any theodicy. For any response to the problem of suffering of the form "God allowed suffering because it is necessary for achieving *x*", one could ask why God did not fashion things such that *x* could be achieved without the suffering. In further response to Rudavsky's concern about YSA collapsing into punishment theodicy, I described in the paper an additional way in which YSA might be interpreted as a kind of soul-making theodicy (pp. 71-72), namely the 'Actualizing Potential' approach of Albo. YSA in this approach is certainly not punitive, and indeed, as mentioned in my discussion, Albo focuses on facilitating *reward* as well as on soul-making in this context.

Rudavsky also queries in her question 3 the tenability of the distinction between God's allowing and God's causing suffering. As she points out, when referring to an omnipotent and omniscient Deity this distinction seems problematic. I don't think that anything in my paper rests on the soundness of this distinction, but in general the distinction does seem to make sense in some important ways. In cases of humanly-perpetrated evil which inflicts suffering on others, the free will defence, which many find a plausible line of response, views God as having allowed rather than caused the suffering. Indeed, this distinction is why many find natural evil a more intractable philosophical problem than human evil.

At the time of writing I have not yet received the final version of Gabriel Citron's response, so I look forward to replying to him in the course of the symposium. Once again my sincere thanks to all the symposium participants and to the APJ for organising and hosting the discussion.