

2/27/68

## ADDITION TO LECTURE ON HESTER PANIM

When I write about "meaning," add the point that the statement I make that Hester Panim is a period of meaninglessness, does not automatically nullify all meaning to Jewish history. I am not of the Ben Gurion school which denies any significance or value to Diaspora history. Rather, what I mean is that the totality of Jewish history, from the beginning to the end point, is the highest form of meaning, in that it represents the engagement of man with God; and by "meaning", I intend just that -- the redemptive design of history. However, within this process of meaning there exists a hiatus, a blank, an empty space in which meaninglessness pervades. In this period, which is the epoch of Hester Panim, the history of the people as such makes no sense; by which I mean that this period taken by itself, other than the sheer survival of Israel, shows no specific responsiveness to a divine plan. It is thus, in a manner of speaking, a period of "meaningful meaninglessness."

This does not, however, mean that in the period of Hester Panim individuals can find no meaning in their lives. There is a mysterious economy of meaning, whereby individuals may find meaning in their engagement with God, whereas the people as a whole suffers meaninglessness -- even as it is quite conceivable that individuals should be lost in a Hester Panim of meaninglessness while the people as a whole rises to new levels of meaningfulness.



With regard to the present, one of the reasons I refuse to recognize contemporary history as Nesiat Panim is not only because we have obviously not reached the desired level of religious conviction and experience, but also because, even in the time of the glory of Israel's triumphs, we must remember the agony of Russian Jewry.