

Contending with the question of suffering:
A comparative study of R. Hayyim Sabato's *From the Four
Winds* and Avigdor Dagan's *The Court Jesters* through the
prism of R. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik's thought

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Using foundational concepts from the religious thought of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, complementary psychological insights, and post-modern theory, this paper sets out a comparative study of the varied ways that characters in two central novels contend with the existential and theological question of suffering in the context of the Holocaust. The important and unique contribution of this interdisciplinary approach lies in its ability to utilize the literary field of prose to create a virtual dialogue between psychology and Jewish thought on the crucial issues of human suffering in general and in the context of the Holocaust in particular. Among the numerous literary works dealing with these subjects, we chose these two novels, Rabbi Hayyim Sabato's *From the Four Winds* and Avigdor Dagan's *The Court Jesters* due to the intense public interest both have generated. This article took form through our own teaching experience and the methods we developed over the years to aid in making these literary works meaningful for our students and relevant to their own lives.

The discussion opens with a presentation of R. Soloveitchik's understanding of suffering, along with attention to similar psychological approaches, particularly those of Victor Frankel and Steven Covey; these elements are then applied in our readings of the two novels. Although this paper focuses on literary works, it offers an extensive comparative analysis of questions as a predominant motif. In that sense, we seek to present an encompassing perspective deeply informed by Jewish thought that can be effectively used as a hermeneutical tool to draw meaning from texts. Central to our analysis are R. Soloveitchik's notions of the covenants of fate and of destiny; the reality of existential loneliness; and fundamental ethical, religious, and humanistic values such as mutual responsibility.