

Reflection and Conversation

Texts to facilitate engagement and dialogue





The age of Holocaust survivors is drawing to a close. Before long no one will be left to say, "I was there, I saw, I remember what happened."

Massive documentation shall remain: research, lessons, pictures and films, and copious testimonies. This will be a new era. The dark inheritance of the Shoah that was so indelibly stamped in the survivors' souls and hearts will become a sacred mission incumbent upon humanity.

Today, we, for whom the memory is burned in our hearts and on our flesh, gather to pass the torch to the next generation.

We pass on to you as well the message that remembrance must lead to ethical action.

This must be the foundation and the source of energy for the building of a better world.

● From: The Survivors' Declaration, 2002



"The Jewish people have ten commandments – But since Auschwitz, there is an eleventh commandment: Remember!"

● Elie Wiesel

The ark of Torah, of faith, of learning, stands empty and bereft. We have come here to remember those who cannot be forgotten. We have come to speak of that which cannot be spoken but must not be left unsaid. We have come to remind, not others but ourselves, of what was done and what was not done. We have come to ask questions that cannot be answered, but cannot be left unasked. We know how to remember the dead we have known. We know how to commemorate the death of one person. But all of us are mourners; all of us recall not one but six million ones. Not only those we have known, but those no one can know, the names that are forever lost.

● **Rabbi Reuven Hammer, The Shoah Scroll**

Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies
2004, page 23



Out of the Depths

THE LAST *SEDER*

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach Z"L

The last *seder* in the Warsaw ghetto...
There was one Moishele,
the last Moishele in the Warsaw ghetto,
asking his father Ma Nishtana,
"מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?"
Why is this night so much longer and more
terrible than any previous nights?
While Moishele is asking all the questions,
heaven and earth
stand still.
The angels fall silent in trembling and awe,
and his father... his father wants to answer
עבדים היינו
(We were slaves in Egypt).

Moishele says,

"Tatte ziseh, I have one more question of my
own, and this is my question:

I want to know, *Tatte ziseh*,

will I still be alive next year

to ask you the *Ma Nishtana*?

Will there be a Jewish child left to ask the

Ma Nishtana?

Will there be a Jewish father left to answer
עבדים
היינו?

And the father answers:

I don't know, I don't know if I'll be alive,

I don't know, I don't know if you'll be alive.

But I know that there will always be one

Moishele somewhere, somewhere, asking the

Ma Nishtana. I don't know if we'll be alive, but I
know one thing...

כי בשם קדשך נשבעת לו שלא יכבה נרו לעולם ועד
("For in Your holy name You swore to him
that his lamp would never be extinguished
forever and ever.")

Midrash Tehillim, Psalm 18

Oh, who will bewail us?

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WHO BEARS THE
RESPONSIBILITY FOR
COMMEMORATING THE
HOLOCAUST?

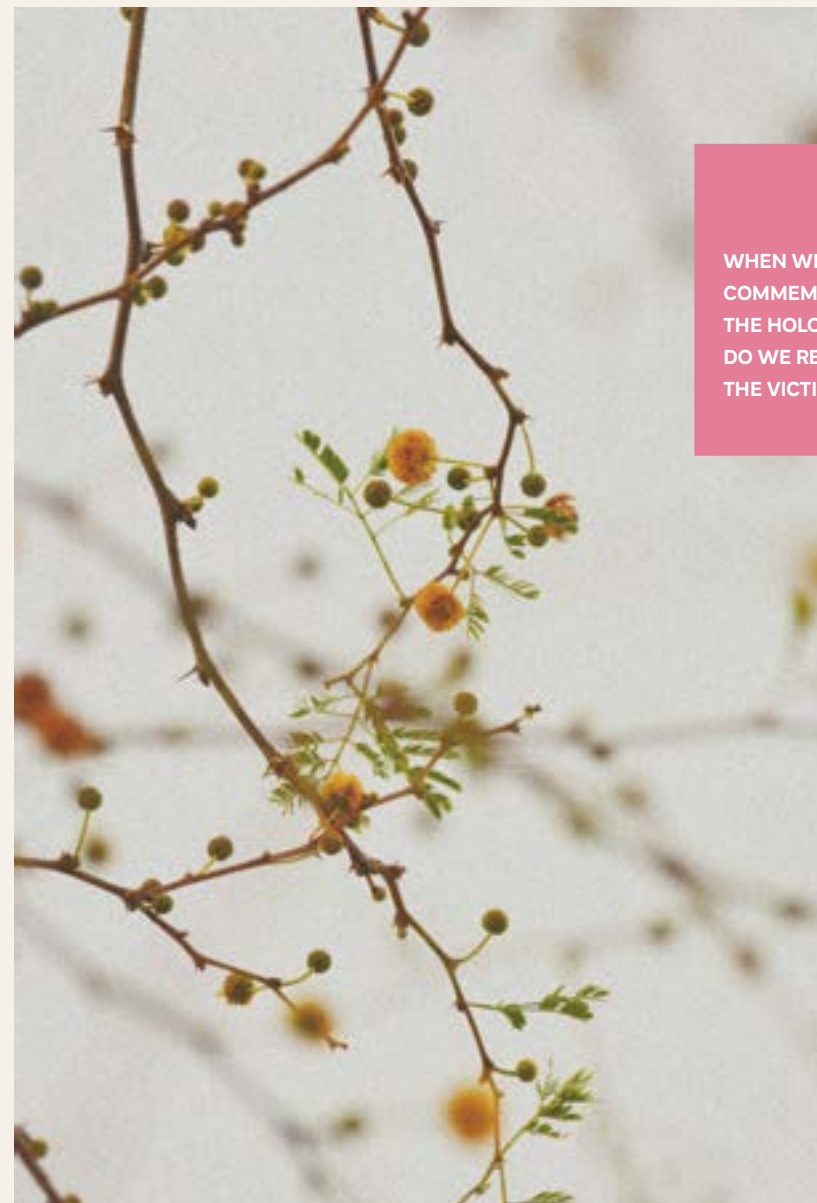
Oh, who will bewail us? Who will erect a memorial for us? Who will recount to the world the full story of our great people, the Levites of the Nations, sons of the prophets. A people who bore to them their God on Earth, yet whom they murdered!

And now not a child, not even a babe in the womb remains. Upwards of six million done to death in the course of a few days! Who will write the Jewish "Musa Dagh"? When the Armenians were murdered a Jew shed tears for them, but now that the Jewish nation has been murdered who will weep for it? Oh, who will shed tears?"

● **Itzhak Katzenelson**, murdered in May 1944 in Auschwitz. From *Ketuvim Aharonim* (Final Writings), HaKibbutz HaMeuhad Publishing, Ghetto Fighters' House Archive, 1955–56, page 211.

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WHEN WE
COMMEMORATE
THE HOLOCAUST,
DO WE REMEMBER
THE VICTIMS?



“There was a woman there,
Klari Kahana.
She prayed all day and night.
I listened to her prayers.



● Prayer book written by Dita Kurschner while imprisoned. Dita phonetically transcribed the Hebrew prayers into Latin characters. The prayers, dictated to her by a religious girl, a fellow inmate, were written on pages Dita secreted from the ammunition factory in which she worked. From the Yad Vashem Collections, gift of Dita (Kurschner) Segal, Tiberias, Israel

I thought I'd write them
down so that if we'd die
they would know that
Jewish women had
been there.

I sat next to her all night, writing.
She prayed in archaic Hebrew
and I recorded the prayers in
Latin characters.”

● Source: Yad Vashem — Spots of Light
Testimony of Dita (Kurschner) Segal, 2006

IN THE BONFIRES OF WAR

Hannah Senesh

In the bonfires of war, in the flames, in the fire
Amongst stormy days of blood
I pass my small lamp
To search, to search for a human being

The flames of the fire are extinguishing my lamp
The light of the fire is dazzling my eyes;
How will I look, how will I see, how will I know,
how will I be aware
When He stands before me?

Give me a sign Lord, give me a sign on his forehead
That in the fire, and the flames and the blood
I will know the pure, eternal spark
That which I searched for, a human being

● Hannah Senesh, "In the Fires of War", from 'Her Life and Diary',
Jewish Lights Publishing, p.109



So much have I seen and so
much have I yet to see,
but what was revealed to me
there I never could see again.
All of the words in the world,
created and yet to be created,
in every single language,
will never be able to describe
even a small part of what was
displayed before my eyes.
And this too do I know: Never
will I be able to forget, and
never will I have the power to
understand."

● Professor Avigdor Shinan, The Shoah Scroll
Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies
2004, page 31



On my left forearm I
bear the Auschwitz
number; it reads
more briefly than
the Pentateuch or
the Talmud and
yet provides more
thorough information.

"[F]or me, being a Jew means feeling
the tragedy of yesterday as an inner
oppression. On my left forearm I
bear the Auschwitz number; it reads
more briefly than the Pentateuch or
the Talmud and yet provides more
thorough information. It is also more
binding than basic formulas of Jewish
existence. If to myself and the world,
including the religious and nationally
minded Jews, who do not regard me
as one of their own, I say: I am a Jew,
then I mean by that those realities
and possibilities that are summed up
in the Auschwitz number."

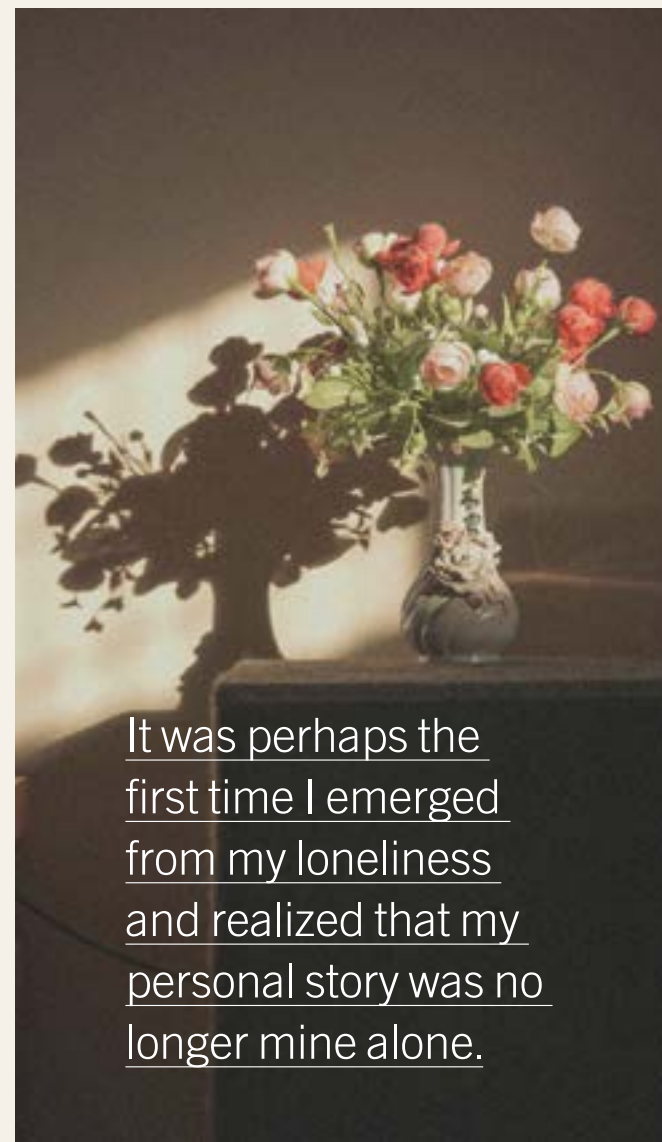
Jean Améry *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne*
("Beyond Guilt and Atonement"),
Indiana University Press

"On the first Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day observed in the State of Israel (1959), I traveled to Tel Aviv. Then, at eight o'clock, the long, piercing sound of a siren suddenly rang out. Cars came to a stop, and people hurriedly got out and stood motionless beside their vehicles, their heads bowed... I was stunned. The whole world had come to a standstill! With tears in my eyes, I looked around, and a question flashed through my mind: 'What?! Are all these people standing in memory of my mother?!' I was all choked up. It was perhaps the first time I emerged from my loneliness and realized that my personal story was no longer mine alone.

To this day, I have not been able to share my personal story from there. You have known me as a friend, a builder and creator, an incurable optimist, and a happy man — but you did not know the shadow trailing behind me."

● Shmulik Shilo, from *Personal Story?*
Tse'elim Publishing, Miki and Berale
Shulman Library, 2007. [Hebrew]

ON HOLOCAUST
MARTYRS' AND HEROES'
REMEMBRANCE DAY, WHAT
DO YOU THINK ABOUT
DURING A ZIKARON BASALON
GATHERING, THE OFFICIAL
STATE CEREMONY, AND THE
MEMORIAL SIREN?



It was perhaps the
first time I emerged
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Will they Ever Come?

Leah Goldberg



The poem "Ha-Omnam" ("Will they Ever Come?") by Leah Goldberg was written in 1943, during World War II, when news of the horrors of the Holocaust began to reach the Land of Israel.

And will they ever come, days of forgiveness and grace,
when you'll walk in the fields, simple wanderer,
and your bare soles will be caressed by the clover,
or the wheat-stubble will sting your feet, and its sting will be sweet?

Or the rainfall will catch you, its downpour pounding
on your shoulders, your breast, your neck, your head.
And you'll walk in the wet fields, quiet widening within
like light on the cloud's rim.

And you'll breath in the scent of the furrow, full and calm,
and you'll see the sun in the rain-pool's golden mirror,
and all things are simple and alive, you may touch them,
and you are allowed, you are allowed to love.

You'll walk in the field. Alone, unscorched by the blaze
of the fires, along roads stiffened with blood and terror.
And true to your heart you'll be again humble and softened,
as one of the grass, as one of humankind.

Leah Goldberg, "Will They Ever Come", fro 'Selected Poetry and Drama' by Rachel Tzvia Black, The Toby Press, 2005

In Every Generation

"...The multidimensional void left by the European Jews who were annihilated continues to permeate the national and universal consciousness. The Holocaust was a watershed event, on the scale of the Exodus from Egypt. An iron wall separates Jewish existence before and after the Holocaust. We are new Jews. Our national and human identity has been recast by the horrific events that befell our people during World War II.

The Holocaust is still so close to us, and the lives of so many of us remain so deeply marked by its imprint, that our national consciousness has not yet fully absorbed the radically different character of the Jew born after it. We, the Jews born after the Holocaust, have no ability to comprehend the nature of the Jewish collective that existed before Auschwitz.

For us, the Holocaust is a central and significant element of Jewish identity...

Seventy years after the outbreak of World War II, we are beginning to be able to look into the void the Holocaust left in our lives and to grasp that we are a burned tree.

Even if we are once again covered with foliage, the layer of ash will remain with us, demanding an answer, again and again and again. Until the end of time."

● Bambi Sheleg, from "From within the Multidimensional Void," *Eretz Acheret*, Issue 50, Introduction, 2009. [Hebrew]

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A QUESTION MARK
OR AN
EXCLAMATION MARK?



Ever since my mother died, Holocaust Remembrance Day has become my day. It was never my day when she was still alive, because it was hers. But she's dead.

Almost all of them are dead now... and so we remained, those who have them in their blood and, because she's in my blood, Holocaust Remembrance Day is now my day.

Sooner or later, or sooner rather than later, the state will have to decide what to do about this day after they all die.

Who's going to take it on after they all die, that's what I'm asking...

And Who Will Remember the Rememberers?

Yehuda Amichai

What is the correct way to stand at a memorial ceremony? Erect or stooped, pulled taut as a tent or in the slumped posture of mourning, head bowed like the guilty or held high in a collective protest against death, eyes gaping frozen like the eyes of the dead or shut tight, to see stars inside? And what is the best time for remembering? At noon when shadows are hidden beneath our feet, or at twilight when shadows lengthen like longings that have no beginning, no end, like God?

● Yehuda Amichai, *Open Closed Open*, Schocken Publishing House. Jerusalem & Tel Aviv, 1998. Page 174 (Hebrew).



Why is it, in fact, so important to remember and to mention the suffering of Jews who were not European among those who endured this suffering? And what difference does it make whether the Holocaust is called the “European Holocaust” or “the Holocaust of the Jewish people”?

[...] The Holocaust is part of our national biography, and a biography must tell the story in its entirety. Any cutting away of an integral part damages its historical foundation, the integrity of the culture, and consequently, the unity of the people. Viewing the Holocaust as “the Holocaust of the Jewish people” means recognizing a shared Jewish fate.

The long years of exile left scars upon our people, and with our return to our homeland we are divided, as if against our will, into two streams: “Sephardim” and “Ashkenazim.” Yet the Nazis did not make

distinctions of this kind and did not distinguish between one Jew and another. The terrible truth teaches us that the Nazis planned to annihilate the Jewish people everywhere, and their sole criterion was ethnic origin.

The importance of learning these things lies in reminding us that, ultimately, we are one people, and Jewish destiny is one. Indeed, it is painful that we should need such “reminders.”



Prof. Haim Saadon, “The Holocaust Did Not Spare the Sephardim: The Story of the Mizrahi Holocaust,” *Yom LaYom*, no. 1225, May 12, 2011, pp. 6–12. [Hebrew]

Anne Frank and I

Amnon Shamosh

We were born
in the same year
Anne Frank and I
the discovery slapped my face
in the house on the Canal
and my daughter beside me
her age
shivering
(my hand held hers)
imprisoned we were
together
Anne Frank and I
trembling with Jewish fear...

Amnon Shamosh, "Anne Frank and I"
from *Anne Frank and I: a poem in 3
versions and 18 translations*, Even Hoshen
2010. Translated by Ada Aharoni.



Reviewing this history, it is clear that antisemitism is not a unitary phenomenon, a coherent belief or ideology. Jews have been hated because they were rich and because they were poor; because they were capitalists and because they were communists; because they believed in tradition and because they were rootless cosmopolitans; because they kept to themselves and because they penetrated everywhere. Antisemitism is not a belief but a virus. The human body has an immensely sophisticated immune system that develops defenses against viruses. It is penetrated, however, because viruses mutate. Antisemitism mutates.

Viruses are effective when they persuade the body's immune system that they are part of the body itself. Viruses mutate so as to appear to host cells not as enemies but as friends. So great was the impact of the Holocaust that it rendered certain evils taboo: racism, "ethnic cleansing," crimes against humanity, and attempted genocide. The only way antisemitism could penetrate such defenses was to turn them against Jews.

Rabbi Prof. Jonathan Sacks,
Essay 6, in *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada, Collected Essays on Pesah*, pages 43–56. Maggid Books, an imprint of Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd. 2nd edition, 2016.

During my first week in Israel, I stood near the Western Wall. My late mother left me no last wishes; for we did not part. I stood about a pace away from the Wall, from the stones. I felt like I did not belong. I felt rooted in a different existence. I didn't take another step. But somebody tugged at my sleeve and asked me to join in a minyan. I put on a hat, and I joined the minyan. I said the Mincha prayer, and I arrived.

This is something Jewish, something most particular to Judaism – to be one of a minyan. To know that the nine need a tenth, and that the one needs the nine. Perhaps this is the most meaningful thing in Judaism, and there is nothing more uniquely Jewish [than this idea] within this [youth] movement in which I was raised.

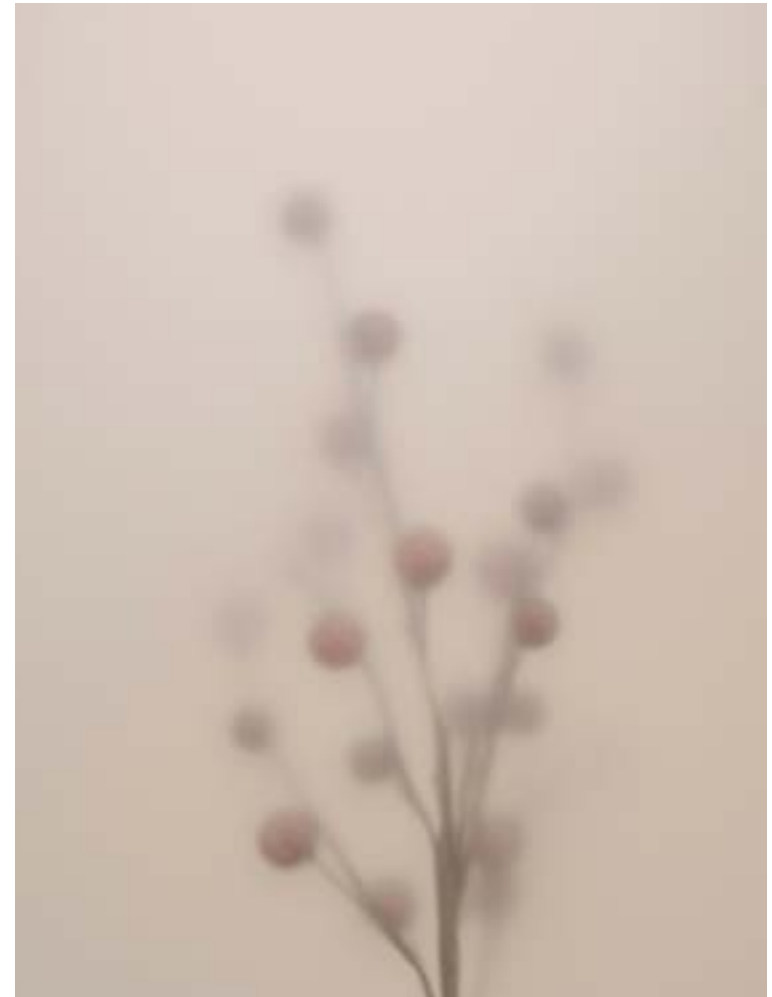
Abba Kovner, "One of the Minyan", *Al Hagesher Hatzar*, Sifriyat Poalim, 1981. [Hebrew]

"Now is the time
that the silence
wishes
us to
speak
in"

● Israel Eliraz, "Now the Hour is Silence," from *Urgent Matters: Selected Poems 1980–2010*, p. 73, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing, 2010. [Hebrew]

“Forgetfulness,
the death of memory,
is the true death.
‘I remember, therefore I
exist’ is not enough.
Rather, ‘I remember
therefore I sustain (the
lives of others).’”

● Prof. Haim Maor, *Forgetting*
Evening in honor of Amnon Shamosh's book
Past Revisited: Memoirs, 2007



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