

## **Beit Ha'am**

Z-Talks בית העם

שיג ושיח ציוני

# Between Memory and Forgetting

An Anthology for Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day





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The "Beit Ha'am" program was developed by the Department for Diaspora Activities at the World Zionist Organization, and its aim is to foster discourse about issues related to the meaning of Zionism in the 21st century. Has the Zionist vision been fulfilled? What role does the State of Israel play in the eyes of those who live outside the country? What does the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora look like in this day and age? And more.

The program contains a diverse selection of materials, including traditional and contemporary texts, video clips, works of art, games, etc. Using these materials, we seek to create a spirited, critical and current dialog.

This is an opportunity for each and every one anywhere around the world, regardless of their previous knowledge, to reflect, question and discuss the significance of Zionism in the 21st

century, as well as the degree of its relevance to our lives.

This booklet – part of the broad and dynamic range of activities we are engaged in - proposes an activity for Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, which is one of the most important and meaningful memorial days in the State of Israel. The collection of texts found in the booklet are a suggested means for creating an exchange of views about the memory of the Holocaust, the significance of collective memory in shaping the awareness of the Jewish people in Israel and in the Diaspora, and the extent to which it affects who we are today.

We invite you to make use of the booklet in your activity by enriching its content with questions and themes for reflection and discussion that emerge from them.

"Beit Ha'am" materials are available in Hebrew, English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and German and, if needed, can be translated into additional languages. The materials can be utilized in different frameworks and for diverse audiences. We invite you to make use of them and contact us if you have any request or query regarding them: beithaam@wzo.org.il.

Gusti Yehoshua-Braverman, Head of the Department for Diaspora Activities



"There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth though they have long been extinct. There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world even though they are no longer among the living.

These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark.

They light the way for humankind..." (Hannah Senesh)

### Introduction

Memory is one of the most vital and critical foundations of our awareness as a people and as individuals. We consider the development and preservation of memory – a dictate of the highest order.

This collection of materials - "Between Memory and Forgetting" - An Anthology for Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day, contains twelve diverse texts, all of which deal with memory, in general, and with the memory of the Holocaust, in particular. We invite you to read them, and hope they will offer new perspectives and generate an interesting and spirited dialog. Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day is one of the most important and meaningful memorial days in the State of Israel. This edited collection of materials is presented to you as a means for creating an exchange of views about the memory of the Holocaust, the significance of collective memory in shaping the awareness of the Jewish people in Israel and in the Diaspora, and the extent to which it affects who we are today.

To further enrich the suggested activity, here are links to four video clips of testimonies provided by Holocaust survivors. You are invited to show one or more of them to the participants in your activity. After watching them, you can discuss some questions they arouse:

(What did watching the clip evoke in you: emotions/thoughts/question marks/something unpredicted? We would appreciate your sharing it with the group).

Testimony of Asher Aud from Poland: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MNc-s\_yluY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MNc-s\_yluY</a>

Testimonies of Holocaust survivors describing the moment of their liberation: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6ptSNgun4s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6ptSNgun4s</a> Testimony describing the DP camps after the war and the slow return to life which, ultimately, is stronger than anything else: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urSGFm57rzM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urSGFm57rzM</a>

Testimony of Artemis Miron from Greece: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f00Zb1dklZA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f00Zb1dklZA</a>

#### To My Beloved Dead - Malka Rosenthal

As long as I am among the living

You, my brother Kopale and my mother Fanny, are less dead.

As long as my name is uttered on the lips of my daughters and grandchildren,

You, my childhood friends

Leibush, Paula, Lucia and all the others,

Continue to "play" all the games with me.

Together we share the crumbs,

Together, between the walls,

we play hide and seek with the killers.

Forgive me, my beloved dead

As long as I am among the living You, my brothers, are less dead.

- We are approaching the day when Malka and others like her the, Holocaust survivors, will no longer be with us. And what will happen than to the memory of her dead beloved?
- How will we remember them? What is the most fitting way to remember and commemorate them when they no longer have any living acquaintance?

#### Between Memory and Forgetting - Berl Katznelson, Revolution and Tradition

We have been endowed with two faculties: memory and forgetting. We cannot live without both. If only memory were to exist, then what would be our fate? We would be crushed beneath the yoke of the memories. We would become slaves to our memories, to our ancestors. Our countenance would then be a mere copy of earlier generations. And if we were ruled entirely by forgetting – would there be any room for culture, science, self-awareness, and spiritual existence? Arch-conservatism would like to strip us of our faculty of forgetting, whereas pseudo-revolutionism regards any remembrance of the past as the 'enemy.' If humanity had not preserved the memory of its most highly valued assets, noble tendencies, periods of prosperity, and efforts to achieve liberty and heroism, no revolutionary movement could have been possible. We would have languished in our meagerness and in our ignorance, slaves to the world.

- Where are you, as an individual, found on the spectrum between memory and forgetting? And you as a people?
- What significance do memories have in the consciousness of a people? Its narrative? What role do the memories of the Jewish people play in Jewish peoplehood?





#### The Turn of the Century – Wislawa Szymborska

It was supposed to be better than the others, our 20th century,

But it won't have time to prove it. Its years are numbered, its step unsteady, its breath short.

Already too much has happened that was not supposed to happen. What was to come about has not.

Spring was to be on its way, and happiness, among other things.

Fear was to leave the mountains and valleys. The truth was supposed to finish before the lie.

Certain misfortunes were never to happen again such as war and hunger and so forth.

These were to be respected: the defenselessness of the defenseless, trust and the like.

Whoever wanted to enjoy the world faces an impossible task.

Stupidity is not funny. Wisdom isn't jolly.

Hope Is no longer the same young girl et cetera. Alas.



God was at last to believe in man: good and strong, but good and strong are still two different people.

How to live--someone asked me this in a letter, someone I had wanted to ask that very thing.

Again and as always, and as seen above there are no questions more urgent than the naive ones.

- Choose one line from Szymborska's poem that you liked. Share it with the rest of the group.
- In your opinion, what was Szymborska trying to convey in the poem? What was your mood after reading the poem?
- "There are no questions more urgent than naïve ones." What's your question?



#### **Everything is Illuminated - Jonathan Safran Foer**

Jews have six senses - touch, taste, sight, smell, hearing ... memory. While Gentiles experience and process the world through the traditional senses, and use memory only as a second-order means of interpreting events, for Jews memory is no less primary than the prick of a pin, or its silver glimmer, or the taste of the blood it pulls from the finger.

The Jew is pricked by a pin and remembers other pins. It is only by tracing the pinprick back to other pinpricks – when his mother tried to fix his sleeve while his arm was still in it, when his grandfather's fingers fell asleep from stroking his great-grandfather's damp forehead, when Abraham tested the knife point to be sure Isaac would feel no pain – that the Jew is able to know why it hurts. When a Jew encounters a pin, he asks: What does it remember like?"



• In what way is the memory of the Jewish people different than the memory of other nations?



#### Excerpts from Donya Rosen's Diary - June 23, 1943

"I have no words, but I must write, I must! I beg of you not to forget those who are no longer living.

You must avenge their deaths! I plead with you to erect a monument that will reach the heavens, so the entire world will see it. Not a statue of marble or stone, but a tower of good deeds, for I strongly believe that only such a memorial can guarantee a better future for you and your children."

- In view of what is happening in the world today, do you agree with Donya Rosen that a monument made of good deeds can guarantee a better future? Isn't it naïve to think that?
- How would you build the monument?
   Out of which materials? Where would you put it?



#### **Biblical Sources**

At a Jewish wedding, the groom breaks the glass and says: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."

The Book of Deuteronomy stresses the importance of preserving memories and the dangers of forgetting:

"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life;" The technique used to convey the memories to the next generations is by memorizing them and passing them on orally: "make them known unto thy children and thy children's children" (4:9).

- Why are Jews commanded to remember the exodus from Egypt and recount the story every year? Do other nations also have formative historic events that are remembered in a similar manner every year?
- If it were up to you, would you keep up the seder tradition and read the Haggadah? Why?
- Why does Judaism place so much emphasis on memory? What do you know about the place of memory in other religions? Is it an exclusive Jewish trait or not at all?

In Deuteronomy - Chapter 25, we are commanded to: "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt... Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget."

And in the Book of Exodus – Chapter 13, we are commanded to remember the exodus from Egypt: 3 "And Moses said unto the people: 'Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place; there shall no leavened bread be eaten... 8 And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt. 9 And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in thy mouth; for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt. 10 Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.



#### To Forget – Arye Palgi

I would like to wake up one morning and discover that there was no Holocaust. That it was only a fable. A passing nightmare.

I would like not to remember anything. Not to tell, not to pass on, not to gather any more testimonies, not to build any more monuments, not to explain again and again what lambs are and what slaughter is, what pain is and what courage is.

I would like memorial days to be canceled, along with their stifled tears, bewildered sorrow and pity, and their sterile catharsis.

I would like a life free of the Holocaust, clean of Holocaust. Without trains, without camps, without death marches, without furnaces, without this repeated, debilitating fear.

I would waive the gestures of respect for the survivors, the looks of awe and pity at the sight of the numbers tattooed on arms. I would like there to be no explanations, no movies, no plays, no Holocaust culture, and none of the mockery surrounding the Holocaust industry and Holocaust festivals.

I would like not to defend the uniqueness of the Holocaust, its Jewish exclusivity, its worldwide, historical distinctiveness.

I would like to separate the images from there, which arise at times of existential danger to us and to other nations. I would like to cut the associative connections when we offend against others.

It would be easier for me without all of this. I would be liberated. Free. As if I was born anew. Without complexes and without compensation. But the Holocaust is not a weight tied to my feet. It is a burden lying on my soul. There is no letting go, no throwing away, no getting rid of it. We need to learn to live with it, to pretend that we are used to it. To groan in secret.

So to feel the relief of fulfilling a duty, I will go, this year too, in a few more days, to yet another annual memorial ceremony, to remember what I would have liked to forget, to meet what I would have so liked to pass by.

- Do you identify with Arye Palgi's wish to forget?
- For Palgi, the Holocaust is a "burden lying on the soul"...that there's "no getting rid of." What is it for you? Also a burden that lies on the soul? Or perhaps "a weight tied" to your feet? Find the image that best suits you.
- What role does the Holocaust play in our consciousness as individuals who belong to the Jewish people?
- How would you define the Holocaust: as an element in the Jewish narrative, as a unifying/decisive/ change-generating/stifling/restrictive/formative/ other factor?



#### Benjamin Fondane, 1942 (Murdered at Auschwitz in 1944)

"Remember only that I was innocent and like you, mortals, on that day, I, too, had a face marked by rage, joy and pity, quite simply, a human face!"

- Fondane chose "rage, joy and pity" to describe a human face. Which three emotions would you choose?
- What does Fondane mean when he says: "like you, mortals....quite simply, a human face?"
- What effect does the direct appeal in the poem – "like you" – have on you?
   What purpose does it fill?



#### The Book of Laughter and Forgetting – Milan Kundera

"'To liquidate a people,' said Hübl, you need to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster."

- In the history of mankind, do you know of any nations that were erased in such a manner? Who erased their memory? Why did they do it? Did they succeed?
- In what other ways can a people disappear? And the Jewish people?

# Excerpts from a speech delivered by the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, to the Israeli Knesset, 2008

"It would be just as fatal to ignore the question of how to keep the memory of the Shoah alive when all those who experienced it first-hand have passed away. It is true that places of remembrance are important, places such as the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin or Yad Vashem. They keep memories alive. But it is also true that places alone are not enough once memories become part of the past. Memories must constantly be recalled. Thoughts must become words, and words deeds."

- Does the fact that the remarks were made by a German chancellor in the Israeli Knesset give them added meaning? Make them doubly important? And what is their significance to you when they come from such a source?
- How much longer will the German people wear the badge of shame? Shouldn't the younger generation in Germany be left in peace?
- "Thoughts must become words, and words deeds." What kind of deeds in this context would vou choose to do?



#### Studies in Janusz Korczak's Legacy

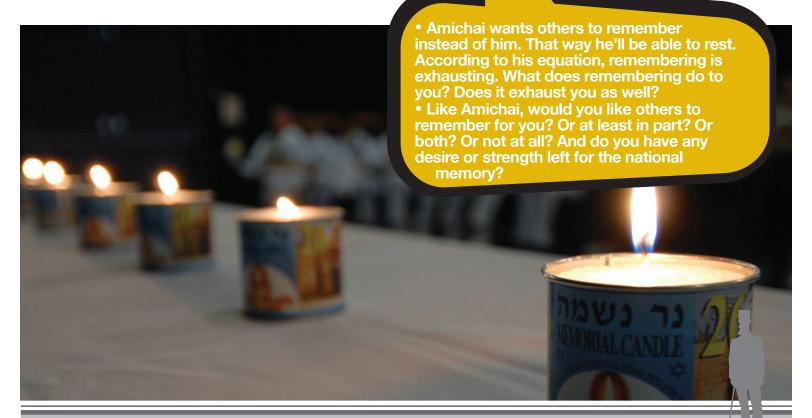
"Don't discard letters! They don't take up much room. A faded photograph, withering flower, pink ribbon, dried leaf. Mementos that evoke thoughts and memories, varied memories: soothing, painful – or also detestable ones, which emerge and stay float from the depths of the past."

- What kind of person are you, someone who saves small mementos? Or throws everything away?
   Have you ever thought about the way that reflects on who you are?
- It seems that nowadays, in our virtual world, there are no more letters, photographs or dried leaves. Everything is stored on virtual cloud servers. What will happen to us if everything will be erased? What will happen to our memories? Our consciousness? Who we are?



#### Let the Memorial Hill Remember - Yehuda Amichai

Let the memorial hill remember instead of me, that's what it's here for. Let the park in-memory-of remember, let the street that's named-for remember, let the well-known building remember, let the synagogue that's named after God remember let the rolling Torah scroll remember, let the prayer for the memory of the dead remember. Let the flags remember those multicolored shrouds of history: the bodies they wrapped have long since turned to dust. Let the dust remember. Let the dung remember at the gate. Let the afterbirth remember. Let the beasts of the field and birds of the heavens eat and remember. Let all of them remember so that I can rest.





**And More Questions for Discussion** 

- What do personal memory and the memory of a people share? Is one more important than the other? Can one exist without the other?
- What do we choose to remember in the context of the Holocaust? Why are they our choices?
- What responsibility do we have in addition to remembering and commemorating? Are the memories just a voice that commemorates those who are no longer among the living, or do we have an added responsibility, such as drawing lessons? How is that responsibility articulated in practice?
- Do you agree that memory shapes consciousness? If you do, what are the dangers of losing memory or of it being rewritten by interested parties?
- Over the years, Israelis have developed a 'collective memory' that is articulated at memorial day ceremonies and includes familiar texts, the same songs that are heard on the radio, etc. Do you have a similar memory from the community you belong to? What does it entail?
- Do you have a certain personal memory that impacted you in a way that changed your life? How? Who would you be without it? In retrospect, would you have done without it? Changed it?
- When people talk about national memory, is there a difference between the memory of Jews who live in the State of Israel and those who live in the Diaspora? Which memories would Diaspora Jews prefer to forget and what would be important to them to remember?
- What's the advantage of forgetting national events?
- Try and imagine how Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day will look in another 50 years. What will the mood be? Which things will be emphasized?
- Which of the texts in the booklet did you especially like? Can you share your choice with the group? How did that particular text affect you? What did it do to you?
- In your view, what's the appropriate way to remember? How much? When? How is memory shaped? What do you choose out of history, which is so stacked and neverending?