

# **ISSUES IN TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST: A GUIDE**

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Edited by  
**Robert S. Hirt and Thomas Kessner**

A Project of  
Eli and Diana Zborowski Chair in Holocaust Studies  
Yeshiva University, New York

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NORMAN LAMM

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST

To the extent that history has any meaning for Judaism; to the extent that experience is relevant to thought; to the extent that no orientation to the future is imaginable without drawing upon the past - to that extent is knowledge of and reflection upon the Holocaust indispensable to the enterprise of Jewish education. There can be no understanding of Jewish character, of Jewish destiny, of the Jew's place in the world, and of the current unfolding of the Jewish drama, without study of the grisly and still incredible events of the World War II period. Moreover, there is also a simple and practical urgency to informing the next generations about what happened to the last one.

A Holocaust that happened once can happen again. Once breached, the walls of human restraint remain weakened. The demons know their way ... All the more reason for sending our children into the world forewarned and forearmed - and teach them the Holocaust. It is with this in mind that I address myself to the question of teaching the Holocaust - not as an historian and not as a philosopher, but as an educator. We must determine how best to go about transmitting to new generations of Jews what happened to our people that almost made it impossible for Jews ever to survive on this planet.

No effort must be spared in keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive for both Jew and non-Jew. Schools which omit the Holocaust from their curricula are guilty of an unforgivable act of moral blindness. Students are receptive to the study of the Holocaust because they know that in it they are testing the limits of human depravity. And yet very few of our Jewish schools, to my knowledge, do anything at all to teach the Holocaust.

The most illustrious exception is Flatbush Yeshiva in New York, where the high school department has established a separate Holocaust Documentation Center. Programs are available to others as they are being developed at the school. I am told that the Principals' Council of Torah U'mesorah is busy developing such a program. Thirty years after the Holocaust certainly should be enough time to have that program in effect. Still, other schools do nothing at all.



Yet, important as it is to teach the Holocaust to yeshiva students and Orthodox youth in general, it is even more important to do so for non-Orthodox youngsters. After all, a child raised in an Orthodox home and Orthodox synagogue is already aware, subliminally, of the possibility of Holocaust. An observant Jewish youngster who recites the daily prayers and observes the mourning and fasting of Tisha B'Av and is taught the Midrash of the Haggadah of Passover knows in his own bones the reality of destruction, the possibility of *churban*. He is already aware of the insecurity of the Jewish people, of the marginality of man as such, of the uncertainty of the future of the very planet, of the pervasive fragility that is part and parcel of our destiny. He is acquainted with the ubiquity and the nature of anti-Semitism. Teaching the Holocaust to such an Orthodox child is only teaching him the latest exemplification of what he already knows from his upbringing. For the non-Orthodox child, such teaching is doubly important because it adds a dimension of awareness that he might otherwise never attain.

Let us consider what such an undertaking should include. What, in sum, are the necessary elements in teaching about the Holocaust?

Like everything else about the Jewish people and Judaism, the Holocaust has both universal and particularist dimensions: features that it shares with other cataclysms, and unique aspects which are peculiar and non-transferable. Holocaust education must include a recognition of both elements. However, I should like to make it clear what I do *not* mean by "universalist." I do not intend that the destruction of European Jewry during World War II should be treated as just another part of the widespread massacres that took 18 million souls during this bloody period. Nor do I intend to subsume the Holocaust in the continuum of persecutions to which the Jewish people have been subject almost since its very inception. The 6 million who died alone, mostly ignored by the rest of the world, in an unprecedented spasm of agony and anguish, deserve that their story be told mostly by itself. Of course, one must not ignore what happened to other peoples. But the destruction of European Jewry was unique in many ways, and educators must never lose sight of those factors which make this historical event different from all others. It would be a distortion of historical truth and a crime against the memory of the Jewish martyrs to emphasize the universal aspects of the Holocaust out of all proportion. This inexorably leads to a semantic devaluation which has enormous axiological implications. We begin to apply the words "holocaust" and "genocide" to any kind of moral outrage, and not merely the most heinous. Reducing the Holocaust to a paradigm for all genocidal efforts, sooner or later results in bland equations in which all sense of proportion is lost:



In a world in which all evils are regarded uniformly, every evil is trivialized, for the demonic becomes banal and boring. Hence, the effort to universalize the Holocaust in order to share its lessons with others often turns counterproductive with few lessons to learn or to teach - whether to non-Jews or to succeeding generations of Jews.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to treat the Holocaust as a purely Jewish matter, of no interest to those outside the clan. To do this would be to rob the horrible events of World War II of their enormous didactic importance for the rest of humankind and effectively to abandon any real effort at interesting the non-Jewish world community (especially those gentiles who had no personal contact with the Holocaust and, therefore, harbor no guilt feelings) in the events so close to the heart of Jews. Moreover, the implied corollary - the effort to lay exclusive Jewish claim upon suffering, and thus to assume that persecution is the essential stuff of our history - seriously misinterprets the nature of the historic Jewish experience before the Holocaust.

A related problem is how we view the Holocaust in respect to other anti-Semitic cataclysms in Jewish history. Here, too, we must be careful to establish a balance between viewing the Nazi Holocaust as exclusively apocalyptic and absolutely different from other genocidal efforts against the Jewish people in its long history, and as seeing it as merely "another" brutal eruption of Jew-hatred, but the latest in a long string of such *churbanot*. The Holocaust must be presented as both a continuation of older anti-Semitism and as something horribly unique.

However, this uniqueness must not focus the outrage of the students on the Nazis only. I am not interested in teaching the Holocaust as a way of condemning Germans. After a while, it becomes difficult for Jewish youngsters to acquiesce in blaming the children and grandchildren and great grandchildren for the crimes of their ancestors. How many of us can feel personal animosity towards today's Spaniards because of the Inquisition's Torquemada of 400 years ago? With the passage of time, we have to broaden the scope of responsibility. We must teach our children that not only was one particular nation guilty of allowing itself to be caught up in murderous paranoia, but that there were two other parties that must share the guilt, though each does so in different measure. The world which witnessed such methodical sadism and kept its silence is guilty. The spectators to a crime who keep their peace must never be allowed to attain peace. And we of the Jewish community may never feel self-righteous. We must always remember that American Jews who were adults in the period of the Holocaust will never feel completely innocent. Nor should they!



Perhaps the best way to determine the right "mix" of the universal and the particularistic in the interpretation and teaching of the Holocaust is to work from the particular to the general, rather than the other way around.

Some of the universal aspects that must be stressed in Holocaust education are:

1. "Civilization" is sometimes only a veneer, often only an illusion. The Holocaust illustrates the demonic that lies covertly but ubiquitously in the human breast. It is a particularly brutal example of the sudden eruption of inhumanity in countries of culture and science.
2. The Holocaust teaches the danger of ignoring "minor" symptoms of hatred and racial-religious discrimination. It could not have come into being unless it was preceded by the slow, historic accumulation of bigotries, each of which apparently did not cross the threshold of "acceptable" cruelty, but which made such a long series of indentations in the psyche of the race that all sensitivity to human suffering and indignity was ultimately lost and a holocaust became possible.
3. The lesson of resistance: the remarkable emergence of spots of active and heroic resistance throughout the areas of victimization, despite the diabolically effective psychological preparation by the tormentors of the victims for their annihilation by bearing in upon them (unfortunately, completely accurate) the feeling of total isolation from the rest of the human community.
4. The moral turpitude of the spectators. The Holocaust exemplifies the guilt that must be borne by those who could have protested but remained silent.

The particularistic aspects of the Holocaust should include the following elements:

1. The peculiar role of Jews in the history of the Christian West. The political, social, and economic degradation of Jews in the Christian dispersion cannot be separated from the barbaric Christian theology which chose Jews, uniquely, as the victims of their religious enmity.
2. The appropriation of Jewish themes and their perversion by Nazi ideology - of which Professor Uriel Tal and others have written.

3. The particular Jewish religious forms of resistance and heroism. While religious martyrdom is a universal phenomenon, the Jewish victims of the Holocaust revealed a uniquely Jewish mode of resistance.

I am sorry to say that in most writings on the Holocaust, the role of religious Jews is sorely neglected. It is an elemental act of historic justice that we immediately redress the balance. This means that in order properly to understand the Holocaust, the extent of its horrors and the reactions of its victims, we must impart to our students a knowledge of the full, vibrant, rich complex religious life of European Jewry. We must know how religious Jews lived - and then we will understand how they died.

This raises a tangential issue of considerable importance. The religious element has been prominent in holocaust writing almost exclusively in the agonizing challenge that is hurled at God, attempting to pierce His silence. It may be uncomfortable to read it or, alternatively, it may afford the reader a great deal of psychological satisfaction to hear someone else put it that way. Be that as it may, I consider it an authentic Jewish, religious reaction to such unprecedented suffering. These are merely new ways of rephrasing the old questions that were asked by Abraham and Moses and Jeremiah and Job all through Jewish history.

But Jewish religious experience is hardly so uncomplicated and monolithic as to permit only one response to such an overwhelmingly significant experience as deep suffering. There are, indeed, a number of legitimate Jewish reactions. One of them is the challenge by man to God, which we have mentioned. But there is another route that Jewish piety can take in the face of great grief and suffering: the reaction of piety and devotion and acceptance. This second form of religious response must not ever be despised and dismissed as mere submissiveness. In a way, by denying Jews the right to physical heroic gestures, this reaction pattern commits them to more serious and more demanding heroism, to acts of incredible courage and spiritual-psychological fortitude in the face of death itself.

4. The role of the Holocaust in the founding of the State of Israel, and the consequent moral duty to strengthen and protect the State.



5. The particular obligation that the Holocaust lays upon the remnants of the Jewish people to survive, to nurture their Jewishness, and to cause it to flourish.

The last point is of the utmost importance and, to my mind, transcends all the others in ultimate significance. It rests upon the simple perception of the fact that today, more than thirty years after the Holocaust, we are experiencing a voluntary and painless cultural genocide. A recent study by Dr. Bergman, for Harvard's Institute of Population Studies, documents this frightening fact. As a result of assimilation, intermarriage, and demographic diminution, he estimated that America's 5.5 million Jews will, in the year 2076, be reduced to either 950,000, 450,000, or 10,548. What Hitler could not do to us, we will allow affluence and freedom to achieve. Clearly, holocaust education must be directed to preventing this cultural cataclysm from coming to pass.

Paradoxically, it seems to me that the best way to effectively teach the Holocaust is - not to overdo it ... I would not make the teaching of the Holocaust one unrelieved tale of horror after horror, accusation after accusation. For the Holocaust to be grasped, we may have to reduce some of its awesomeness to credible proportions, lest the lesson be lost entirely. The Holocaust may, in truth, call for one long elegy, but if future generations are to have any knowledge at all of the Holocaust, the truth may have to be diminished and diluted for instructional purposes. Hence, instead of teaching the Holocaust in a "lachrymose" fashion, there should also be an attempt to highlight the elements of hope and creativity. For indeed, it is true that Jews managed to find hope in the very vale of hopelessness, and to discover creativity whilst in the hell of destructiveness.

In going through the responsa of the Holocaust period, I chanced upon more than one instance of Jews who believed, despite all. The most memorable is that of an anonymous Jew from Oberland (Hungary) who posed a question to the late Rabbi Meisels of Chicago. They were then in Auschwitz. This must have been in 1941 or 1942. The Nazi S.S. decided that all Jewish boys under 14 who were not fit to be slave laborers were to be sent to their death. They determined this by building a scaffold, a horizontal pole attached to a vertical column, and they passed the boys under it. All those too short for their heads to touch the horizontal bar were sent to special barracks, and there kept without food and water, to be sent to the crematoria that night. When the youngsters, with the instinct of the hunted, instantly recognized what was happening, the shorter ones tried to walk tiptoe past the scaffold, and when they did so, they were immediately bludgeoned to death. In this way, several hundred youngsters were gathered. After being counted by the S.S., they were guarded by the Kapos, the Jewish police, who were



usually unscrupulous people. Parents panicked, and many of them who had some money or small jewelry on their persons or elsewhere, immediately ran to the Kapos hoping to bribe them to release their children. The Kapos could not release any of the children because the S.S. had a record of the total number and would kill those Kapos responsible for escapes. Nonetheless, the Kapos did take the bribes and replaced those they freed by capturing some other Jewish children who had heretofore been spared, putting them into the condemned group in place of the Jewish children who were ransomed.

And so, this Jew from Oberland came to Rabbi Meisels and said, "My only son, who is dear to me as life itself, has been taken to the barracks. I have enough to be able to give to the Kapos so as to ransom him and let him live. But I know that in order to save him, some other Jewish child must die in his place. What is the law according to the Torah: may I save my only son, or must I let him die?" Rabbi Meisels tried his best to dodge the question. He could not possibly answer him. He said to him, "My dear Jew, the Sanhedrin itself would ponder such a question deeply for weeks. Here I am in Auschwitz, without any other rabbis to consult, without books, without texts - how can I possibly give you an answer to your question?" But the Jew was persistent, and did not let him go. Finally, the Jew turned to Rabbi Meisels and said to him, "If you do not answer me, it means that you are afraid to tell me the answer you really know, namely, that it is forbidden for me to do so. Therefore, I want you to know that I accept the decision of the Torah and the halakhah fully and with joy. My son shall go to his death, but I shall not violate the law. As this is Rosh Hashanah (when the story of the *Akedah* is read in the Torah), so am I to follow in the footsteps of our Father Abraham, and this day I shall offer my child as my *Akedah*." So did he speak, and for the remainder of that day he was in a state of euphoria.

Does the memory of this kind of religious courage not deserve to be perpetuated? Must this not elicit our undying admiration, at least in the same measure as the dramatic debates with God that were characteristic of others?

This, too, must be memorialized when teaching the Holocaust. The Jews who stole a piece of *matzah*, knowing that if they were discovered they would be killed; the Jew who asked a rabbi in the Kovno ghetto what blessing to make when he is killed; the Jews who wanted to know if they should recite the blessing in the morning praising the Lord "who hath not made me a slave," and accepted the decision that slavery was not a matter of external status but internal resolve and awareness - these, too, were acts of undaunted heroism. Must we silence their faith with our rage, their confidence with our confusion? Shall we not celebrate their strength, read their *divrei Torah*, study their responsa, recount their spiritual greatness?



Having said all this, I must add that we must be careful not to transmit the Holocaust in a biased form. We must never allow the situation to develop whereby socialist schools teach the Holocaust as if only socialists were killed, and Zionist schools teach the Holocaust as if that were the brunt of the whole experience, and religious schools give the impression that only religious Jews were persecuted, or only religious Jews were heroes. The works of Moshe Prager, for instance, are exceedingly important in redressing the balance about which we spoke. They are excellent in affording the student an opportunity to learn of the religious contribution and the religious dimension of the Holocaust. Yet, never must we restrict the Holocaust to only one group. To do so would be a falsification of the fact, and a betrayal of those who died. The Holocaust victims were not all socialists, not all secularists, not all Zionists, not all Agudists, not all Mizrachists, not all believers, and not all agnostics - they were *Kelal Yisrael*, the totality of our people.

In teaching the Holocaust, we must respond to one of its glaringly unique features. Millions of people were killed during World War II - more non-Jews than Jews. But Jews were the only ones who were killed solely because of *who* they were, not because of what they did or what they believed. Religious and atheists, Hasidim and Maskilim, observant and non-observant - all went to their deaths, and the Nazis did not care what their individual commitments were. This made the Holocaust a singular and unprecedented event: just being a Jew was a *death-warrant*.

Hence, we must teach the Holocaust so as to inculcate the students with this awareness: just being a Jew is a *life-warrant*, a summons to survive, a challenge to continue. It is a life-warrant for every Jew, no matter what his opinion or ideology.

Holocaust teaching must result in a broadened and deepened *Ahavat Yisrael* (love for Israel). If nothing else, learning about the Holocaust must make the student love Jews; if for no other reason, then because no one else does. This love of Jews is not the kind of exclusive love which will alienate him from other humans. It is merely the first step towards love of mankind.

Now, let us turn to the next question: What are the chief values, or purposes and goals, in the teaching of the Holocaust? - For one thing, the student must emerge from all of this with a new awareness about himself and about human beings. The Holocaust was the end of innocence in a century which began with a naive belief in progress and human perfectibility. The Holocaust was the exclamation point which cruelly brought to a permanent end that ingenuous faith.



The Holocaust was a "negative" revelation, the counterpoint of Sinai. It was the great anti-Sinai apocalypse. Sinai disclosed publicly how far man can go in rising to God, and how far God was willing to come in descending to man. The Holocaust revealed, for all the world and all time, the depths to which man had sunk and the degree to which God turned away from him. Sinai revealed the mutual compatibility of man and God, and the Holocaust - their reciprocal alienation. Sinai thus became the dream of the ages, the Holocaust the nightmare. The two stretched the limits of man's capacity, each in an opposite direction.

So, holocaust teaching must, in part, explore the demonic nature of man.

It is in this connection that I always recall a memorable short story by Isaac Bashevis Singer entitled, "The Last Demon." It begins in something of the following fashion: "I am the last of the demons. Who needs demons any more now that man does his work...."

When we were young, in the pre-holocaust days, how naively rationalistic we were! How troubled we were by the occasional Talmudic reference to demons. As we grew up, we tried every which way to allegorize such references. But then came World War II, and we learned something very terrible: the ancients were right all along. There are devils. Demons do exist. They dog our every step. But we learned one thing that perhaps they did not know as well. That is, that the demons, all of them, are visible. And they come in a special form - dressed in the body of man and speaking his language.

A second purpose of Holocaust teaching is: *teshuvah*, repentance. By repentance I mean, in the first instance, the classical idea of *teshuvah*, that of returning to God.

However, I should like to make it clear beyond the shadow of a doubt: I do not at all recommend teaching the Holocaust in the classical mold of "on account of our sins" that the suffering of Israel was a punishment for its sins. We may say that about our exile of two thousand years ago. It was perhaps true of the destructions of the Temple. But I cannot imagine any sins so great as to deserve such enormous punishment as the Holocaust. Even if such could be imagined, it is blasphemous for us, only a little more than thirty years away from the event, to dare to utter such words. No one who survived has a right to articulate or even think such justification of unparalleled anguish. Those who might have had such a right - perished.

When theological questions are asked, students must be told that the greatest questions in the world simply have no answers. Maybe they will discover them when they grow up. Likely as not, the questions will remain suspended between heaven and earth for all eternity. We are only human, we are not divine.



We cannot answer all questions. Job taught us that. What we can do is take the suffering and the grief and the anguish and the agony and try to use them to lead us a step beyond where we are now. That is what I mean by *teshuvah*. Studying what happened must not get us "hung up" on the question of "why," but propel us into responding to the question, "what then?" It must lead us to affirm our allegiance to Israel, our commitment to studying the Torah, our devotion to the Almighty.

But I also mean *teshuvah* in a second, somewhat different sense. I refer to the assumption of personal responsibility for the reconstruction and the reinvigoration of Jewish life.

Allow me to illustrate with a story that I heard personally from the individual to whom it happened. Some years ago, the faculty and student body of the Erna Michael College of Yeshiva University assembled to hear a lecture by Professor Dov Sadan of the Hebrew University. It was my privilege to introduce the guest, who is now retired, to my colleagues and students. I read a digest of his record, and was overwhelmed by the fact that this little man - so unassuming in demeanor and unprepossessing in appearance - was the author of over 40 scholarly books and hundreds of scientific articles! I stopped the introduction, turned to the guest, and asked him how it was possible for one man in so short a time to accomplish so much. When he rose to speak, he answered that question. And this is the story that he told.

Shortly after she was married, his mother became pregnant and took ill. The doctor informed her and her husband that they had a cruel choice: either to give up the child so that the mother might live, or else to allow the pregnancy to come to full term and deliver the baby, with a clear risk to the mother's survival. The mother would listen to no advice. She was stubborn: the child must live. And so when the nine months were up, the child was delivered as a healthy baby - and the mother succumbed.

Throughout his entire youth, Dov Sadan's father reminded him: "Dov, I want you to remember that your mother gave her life for you. You have got to study and achieve, not only for yourself, but for her as well. Furthermore, had she given you up, she might have had countless other sons and daughters. Because she preferred that you live, not only did she die, but who knows how many brothers and sisters did not come into the world because of you. Therefore, you must study and work and achieve and create and contribute, not only for yourself, but for your brothers and your sisters who never came into this world!"

It is that awareness which I intend by the second form of *teshuvah*. Youngsters of this generation and the next generation and untold generations to come must be made aware of the fact that their contribution to Jewish life must not only be for



themselves, but for the six million who perished, and not only for them, but for the millions of children and grandchildren and great grandchildren that they might have had. The little handful of Jews has got to be vigorous and creative for an enormous population that might have been but never was. That is the kind of charge, of creative ferment, that holocaust teaching must lead to.

Let me underscore some caveats that must be considered alongside the admonition to study the Holocaust. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust cannot be narrowly conceived. The more exclusively we focus on the Holocaust in our pedagogical efforts, the less effective will these efforts be in securing the end that we seek. I am dismayed by the over-emphasis in so many colleges and universities on "Holocaust Studies," and the attempt to approach this area *in vacuo*. There are three areas where I find this over-emphasis to be counter-productive.

One of these is the academic sphere (here I speak, of course, of university-level education). In too many colleges throughout the United States, "Holocaust Studies" simply do not have adequate academic strength. It is too often a hodgepodge of unrelated facts, undigested theory, and snatches of literature from here and there. Instead of growing out of a study of modern Jewish history, or world history, and being treated as an interdisciplinary subject with all the academic rigor that is required, it has assumed a kind of mystical significance in parts of academia. One too often approaches Holocaust courses with the sense of misplaced piety, and acts as if they have an elemental significance along with physics, philosophy, mathematics. That this is academically muddleheaded need not be reiterated. If Holocaust Studies are to be meaningful in the university, they must be approached with the proper intellectual discipline. To teach the Holocaust without its background is to indulge in incantations, not research.

Ideologically, too, we have suffered from over-exposure of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is in danger of vulgarization when it is manipulated by publicists on the lecture circuit and by propagandists who want to serve their own ideological ends. I have always felt that one should be exceedingly careful in invoking the Holocaust for any but its own purposes. When we go out of the academic and into the ideological sphere, there is indeed something numinous about this event, and one should not take it in vain by lightly using it to serve other purposes.

Most important, we must be careful about what one might call the existential aspects of overdoing the Holocaust. It is well known that many young people are "turned on" by the Holocaust to investigate and affirm their own Jewish identities. There is nothing wrong, and everything right, about teaching the Holocaust in order that Jewish youngsters, who might other-



wise be lost to us, discover their own Jewish identities. However, it is tragic if by means of Holocaust education, their search for their Jewish identities ends where it begins. There are two dangers of which we must be aware in this area. First is what might be called the "cathartic fallacy." Reading about the Holocaust often gives the student the illusion that shedding a tear and experiencing revulsion and a shudder is sufficient as a token of piety towards his own Jewish identity. With this he has fulfilled his moral obligations, both to himself and to his martyred people, and he may now go off and forget about them.

Second, there is a psychological risk involved. This goes two ways. On the one hand, we must be aware of the possibility that some young people are drawn to Holocaust Studies because of the "kick" that one gets from reading or viewing any horror story. The same sado-masochistic mentality that allows so many of our young people to revel in the blood and violence of television or cinema can well lead them to this perverse enjoyment of a course on the Holocaust. On the other hand, focusing on the martyrdom of six million Jews to the exclusion of anything else of real interest in Jewish life leads to what Professor Baron has called a "lachrymose" interpretation of Jewish history. A normal young person with a certain *joie de vivre* might well sympathize with his own people, but experience an aversion to identifying with a history bathed in tears and with little to support his own search for meaning and fulfillment.

What I am trying to say is that holocaust education, in order to fulfill the pedagogical and didactic goals of education, must be taught in context. The goal must be to create in the student not only sentimentality, but a determined moral response to the challenge to carry on what has been destroyed and live Jewishly for those who were massacred. Holocaust Studies alone will inform our next generation what they are fighting *against*, but they need to know as well what it is they are striving *for*. Therefore, no holocaust course can be either academically or existentially valuable and valid unless it is included in a major teaching of the history and culture of European Jewry. What happened in the 1930's and 1940's cannot possibly be understood unless it is seen against the background of 2,000 years of European Jewish history. The dry data of the destruction of European Jewry assume meaning only when viewed against the richness of the culture which the victims built, developed, and perpetuated - until Hitler.

Finally, we must teach the Holocaust simply because it will never, never go away. It can never, must never, be forgotten.

One opinion in the Mishnah (quoted in the Passover Haggadah) is that we must mention and remember the day that we left Egypt "all the days of thy life," interpreted as meaning not only in the here and now, but also in the days after the Messiah comes.



Apparently, there is some opinion that in the days of the Messiah, the Exodus will be surpassed by the greater redemption of the Messiah. The Prophet Zechariah tells us that *Tisha B'Av* and the other three fast days will not only be obsolete after the Redemption, but they will be converted into "days of joy and gladness."

Let that be as it is. Other cataclysms can be covered by consolation, other disasters may be forgotten. But the Holocaust, never. It is an eternally ineradicable fact of Jewish history. There are wounds which will never heal. Even when the Messiah comes and we feast on the Ninth of Av, the scars of the Holocaust will be there. Forever.

In order to understand this, let us consider a classic instance in which a Jew confronted an anti-Semite. The wrestling of Jacob with an unknown and mysterious assailant, whom tradition identifies as the patron angel of Esau, is the first archetypal encounter between a Jew and a Jew-hater. (Gen.32:25-33) As a result of that battle, Jacob was wounded in his sciatic nerve. Then, when the sun rose, he was limping. That is why, the Torah tells us, in a parenthetical remark, the Children of Israel must not eat that particular sinew, "until this day."

Later, after Jacob "built himself a house," and after he "made booths for his cattle," we read that Jacob came "whole" to the city of Shechem. What does it mean that Jacob came whole or perfect? The Talmud, and a Midrash as well, quoted by Rashi, tell us that it refers to wholeness in three different areas: he was whole physically, whole financially, and whole spiritually. Rashi adds explicitly: his physical wholeness indicates that he was healed from the limp which resulted from the injury caused by the assailant on that mysterious night.

But, if the wound healed that quickly, why were Jews forbidden to eat the comparable part of the sinew of an animal in memory of Jacob's wound? Why should we be forbidden to eat "to this very day," an organ which symbolizes only a temporary wound? Must we commemorate every cold that Jacob had - every cough, every sneeze, every scratch?

However, I submit another answer to that question. Yes, Jacob was considered whole in his body. But he was not healed from his limp! On the contrary, Jacob remained wounded; he never healed. All his life he limped, and that limp was a perpetual reminder of his encounter with Esau's angel. That fact, that sacred scar, was a holy memento of his fateful battle and his survival. That wound in itself is a token of Jacob's perfection!

Even after Jacob made peace with Esau, even after he "built himself a house," and after he made "booths for his cattle," he was perfect by virtue of that memory, of the pain which he did not forget, of the wounds which he did not bind, of the scars which never went away.

So it is with us. The day will come when, despite everything, there will be no wars in the Middle East, hatred of Jews will disappear, Jacob and Esau will live in peace. But there shall be no perfection without the memory and the consciousness of the Holocaust. We can attain perfection only when we remember the nightmare of the Holocaust, only if we are conscious that it is an ever-running sore.

Hence, the main goal of holocaust education must be Jewish continuity, survival, and flourishing, by teaching what it is that was destroyed, and what it is the Jews are trying to continue today in the State of Israel and the Diaspora.

That is why we must insist upon teaching the Holocaust until *this very day* - until every day into the indefinite and endless future.