

Torah at the Center

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Ever since God created light by saying, "Let there be light and there was light" (Genesis 1:3), words have shaped our world. Consider the implications of the words "Tanach," "Old Testament," "Torah," or in a different context "black," "Negro" and "African-American," or the name change from the "Union of American Hebrew Congregations" to the "Union for Reform Judaism." Each of these carries enormous weight and reflects a cultural perspective.

We have no neutral, impartial or dispassionate word to describe the topic we address in this issue of Torah at the Center. The etymology of the word Holocaust is Greek and means "a sacrifice wholly consumed by fire." It is also the word most commonly associated with that mass murder perpetrated by the Nazis during World War II.

Not surprising, some Jews take offense at this nomenclature—arguing that Jews were not a sacrifice wholly consumed by fire and that the word Holocaust is not only inaccurate, it sanitizes, even raises to the level of the holy the inhumane, wanton destruction of human life on a scale that indicts the entire world. Others respond that this attitude is hypersensitive and parochial.

Another option is to use the Hebrew word, Shoah, which refers to a catastrophe. By invoking a definite article, "The Catastrophe," we can ascribe singular meaning to the destruction of European Jewry.

We will not attempt to resolve the semantic tension in this modest journal. Instead, we will use both terms, perhaps as a reminder that even after wrestling with the angel, the same person is referred to as both Jacob and Israel. We will continue to struggle with these terms. But, we will acknowledge the limitations of language and insist upon teaching the unteachable to ourselves, our teachers and our students.

Every Jew, and certainly every learning Jew, must acquire a conscious awareness of and exposure to the history and literature of the Shoah in the context of Jewish education. It is significant that, as North Americans, we have access to adolescent and adult education opportunities that address the Holocaust. We have movie and television documentaries and commentaries on the subject. None of these, however, absolve the Jewish educational system in all of its settings from the responsibility of helping to form the identity and character of the Jewish community and in particular from teaching Jews about the Holocaust.

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Director's Message, *Continued from page 1*

Despite a profound ambivalence a decade ago, I agreed to lead a group of high school students on the *March of the Living*. My own misgivings were grounded educationally. I was concerned about being a cog in a wheel, an instrument used to teach a message that I believed was reductionistic and dangerously simplistic, namely that the Shoah was the inevitable result of Exile and that the only viable Jewish solution was to make aliyah. I returned somewhat less ambivalent after the experience, in part because the actual educational message was much more nuanced and complex. In greater part, the adolescents I had the privilege of meeting were, themselves, quite sophisticated.

For the last several years, especially but not exclusively in CHAI, we have endeavored to develop curricular resources around a core concept, termed an “enduring understanding.” With respect to the Holocaust, there are several plausible candidates for this distinction—the 614th commandment, never again, the sanctity of tolerance, do not stand idly by. This issue of *Torah at the Center* departs from the enduring understanding pattern. Other than the axiom that learning about the Shoah is an indispensable element of a Jewish education, we offer a range of alternative voices rather than advocate for a particular perspective. While we are not endorsing one “right” way to teach the Shoah, we believe that you will be able to discern the “best” way for you to teach the Shoah to your students.

Personally, I still do not know how to teach the Holocaust, even to my own children. Despite that ignorance, they seem to have internalized the message that as Jews they must engage the Shoah as part of their identity. My older daughter, Sarit, has written poetry about the Holocaust, and as colleagues, I suspect you can imagine how I felt when I visited a synagogue on Yom HaShoah to find that one of her poems was part of the liturgy. My younger daughter, Cara, recently returned from what proved to be the finest Jewish educational experience of her life as part of a group of 66 Eisendrath

International Exchange (EIE) students in Israel this past spring. The group went to Czechoslovakia and Poland for a week, and even though she has retold the story on numerous occasions, she still expresses palpable passion when she describes the alienation and anger she felt as a witness to destruction as well as the unbridled sense of joy she felt when the plane landed at Ben Gurion Airport.

While there is definitely the risk of relativizing, universalizing, simplifying and even rationalizing the Holocaust, I think it is a risk we need to take. There is no honor in silence and no meaning in indifference. The Talmud teaches that in actuality no one and no subject are truly unteachable. With the resources at our disposal—actual and virtual, material and human—we have the tools to learn about the Shoah along with our students. As long as we feel we do not own the truth, that we do not ourselves fully understand, and therefore cannot fully transmit that understanding, we can marshal the courage to teach an admittedly imperfect, incomplete, yet honest and meaningful approach to the Holocaust.

I had the privilege of studying as a Wesleyan undergraduate with Michael Berenbaum, a renowned Holocaust scholar who served as the founding director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Thirty years later I remember some of his teaching about the Shoah, but most of all I remember his passion for learning. Let our students say the same about us—that they learned something from us, but it was in learning about us and what motivated us that they learned about themselves as human beings and particularly as Jews.

Shanah Tovah (Yoteir),
Wishes for a better year,

Rabbi Jan Katzew, Ph.D.
Director, URJ Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning

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Teaching the Holocaust at EIE: Education as *Da'at*

By Baruch Kraus, Principal, NFTY-EIE High School in Israel

Eisendrath International Exchange (EIE) blends formal and informal learning, classroom and in the field settings, and cognitive and affective experiences. Jewish history is the main component of the program. Our Holocaust unit comprises about 20 percent of our Jewish history curriculum, which totals roughly 500 hours. The unit emphasizes Jewish life in Europe during the last several centuries, where 75 percent of World Jewry lived before the mass migrations. Europe was the capital of what we can call *Yiddishkeit*, a concept beyond religion that encompasses being Jewish, both in the Jewish community and in the way Jews interacted with the general society.

First we focus on centuries of life, culture, religion and scholarship. Next we look at the catastrophic elements of the Holocaust, the process leading from identification to extermination, the death of six million individuals, as well as the tragic loss of historic pasts and potential futures.

The field trip component of this unit is a six-day visit to Prague, Terezín, Krakow, Auschwitz and Warsaw. Prague and Krakow tell the story of Jewish life in Europe from the Middle Ages through modern times. They illustrate the depth and intensity of Jewish communal life and the creativity, commitment and scholarship of the Jews for 1,000 years in Europe. They also teach about the evolution of Judaism in both religious and nonreligious spheres. Terezín and Podgorze (the Krakow ghetto during World War II) tell the story of identification, loss of rights, concentration and transport to death. Auschwitz is the ultimate illustration of the Final Solution, whereas Warsaw reveals the struggle for human dignity and armed resistance, *Kiddush Hachayim* (passive resistance), and civil disobedience as proposed by Shmuel Zygelbojm, leader of the Bund.

Our objective is to build a memory of the Holocaust that is based not only on individual, communal and national catastrophe but primarily on a memory that has at its core a deep understanding of the spiritual and cultural loss to the Jewish people. The aim of this memory-

building process is to affect students' future Jewish lives within the context of our overall program, which nurtures Jewish identity development.

The EIE program is built around Eric Erikson's theory of identity resolution and Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Erikson describes the period of identity formation and resolution in which the teenager achieves a sense of identity in occupational, sexual, political and religious spheres. During this process, the adolescent moves from abstract concerns about the future to identity resolution, which allows him or her to plan for the future.

Piaget, in turn, maintains that adolescents must invent their own understanding in order to truly learn. This can be compared to the kabbalistic triangle of *chochmah* (knowledge), *binah* (understanding) and *da'at* (intimate experience), with *da'at* at the apex, the synthesis of knowledge and understanding that becomes a personal possession. The EIE program empowers students to move from learning to integrating knowledge and building identity, helping each one to build a personal, active and creative Jewish lifestyle that will endure into his or her future.

Therefore, upon returning to Israel, discussion and reaction focus on coming to grips with the questions, "What do we do now, after the Holocaust?" and "In view of what I have learned about the Holocaust, how will I function in the future in political, religious and community contexts?" Back in the classroom, students go through the final phase in the process of synthesizing the cognitive and affective into action. They often come to the realization that being leaders in the Reform Jewish community, emulating the vibrant richness of Jewish life that was lost, is a meaningful answer to these questions.

For more information about NFTY-EIE, go to www.nfty.org/eie/.



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Guidelines for Teaching the Shoah in Jewish Schools

By Danny Wool, Museum Educator for Jewish Schools, Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York

With no standard curriculum in place for teaching the *Shoah* in Jewish schools, teachers use hundreds of ways to teach the topic. These include in-depth analysis of primary sources, the use of graphic images to shock students into “understanding” Auschwitz, simulations of various dilemmas, and even building a model of the Warsaw Ghetto out of LEGO. Are all of these methods equally legitimate? Are all of these methods Torah?

In order to help teachers think about and decide what is a legitimate method of teaching the Holocaust, the Museum of Jewish Heritage has developed a set of guidelines for teaching the *Shoah* in Jewish schools. We are guided by the words of Proverbs 22:6, *Chanoch lana’ar al pi darko*, “Teach the child according to his or her way.” This verse and our understanding of it are explained below.

Chanoch (educate): Set clear objectives for any class or curriculum that deals with the Shoah. What do we want our students to learn? How does this new knowledge build on what they previously learned? Is the focus of the activity really the Shoah? Does the curriculum follow sound educational theory, as it would be applied in other subject areas? Are our students participating in a genuine learning experience or some form of emotional manipulation?

Lana’ar (the child): Remembering that our students are children, or youths, we build our curriculum accordingly. What is appropriate for children at their particular level of development, and what exceeds their abilities, whether emotional or intellectual?

Al pi (according to): Two of the most frequent questions we are asked at the museum are, “Why didn’t Jews leave?” and “Why didn’t they fight back?” Both questions imply a value judgment—if Jews had responded differently, they might have been saved. The problem is that from our modern vantage point, we cannot possibly comprehend all of the considerations that went into the

choices that Jews in Europe made. Rather than impose our own opinions on the actions and responses of the victims, we can describe the different ways that people responded to the changing circumstances and the considerations that may have led to their decisions. Students should learn about the lack of choices that Jews faced, about who made what choices and why, rather than be expected to make choices on behalf of the victims through simulation games and other similar activities.

Darko (his or her way): It is all too easy for teachers to provide their students with a Nazi-driven narrative—1933, Hitler comes to power; 1935, the Nuremberg Laws; 1938, *Kristallnacht*; 1939, World War II begins; 1941, *Einsatzgruppen*; 1942, Wannsee; 1945, Liberation. This timeline leaves out the stories of Leo Baeck, Janusz Korczak, Mordechai Anielewicz and millions of others who stood up to adversity and maintained their Jewish and human dignity. These stories are a crucial dimension of the narrative that our Jewish students should learn—one that presents a Jewish counterpoint to the story told from the perspective of the perpetrators.

Many different ways exist to teach this difficult topic to students, through history, literature, art, religion. No matter what the approach, we constantly must rethink our goals and ensure that the curriculum is based on sound educational techniques. We believe that the underlying principles of our guidelines, summarized above, will help to achieve that.

Torah at the Center

Creativity and Survival: The Music of Terezín

By Cantor Diane Yomtov, Temple Congregation Shomer Emunim, Sylvania, Ohio

History shows us that despite tremendous stresses—war, prejudice, discrimination, anti-Semitism and oppression—creativity will not be stifled. An exemplary illustration of this is the music that came out of the Czechoslovakian concentration camp called “Theresienstadt,” located in the town of Terezín.

From its establishment on Nov. 24, 1941, Theresienstadt was used as a vehicle for Nazi propaganda. It was never referred to as a “concentration camp”; for propaganda purposes, it was referred to as a ghetto. In January 1942, the Germans promoted Theresienstadt as a spa for the old and privileged Jews who still remained in Germany. This “potemkin” or “luxury camp” proved to be no more special than the other camps—people died there from hunger, torture, beatings and disease, just as they did in the other concentration camps. Chaim Potok explained it as such: “Auschwitz was the Kingdom of Death. Theresienstadt was the Kingdom of Deceit.”¹ Still, despite the Nazi perfidy, the people lived with hope, and out of this hope they were moved to create.

From the years 1941 to 1945, some of the finest musicians in Europe were assembled at Theresienstadt while Hitler and the Nazis committed the most heinous crimes in history. In the ghetto of Terezín, these musicians forged a cultural life, composing and performing music, not only for themselves but also for their fellow Jews. That these men and women felt compelled to create despite their circumstances—including illness, death and transports to the East—is a testimony to the extraordinary power of music.

The cultural activities in the camp occurred without the knowledge of the Germans, or more accurately, with their silent consent. For the culture-starved prisoners of Terezín, music was a way to creatively express their defiance. The Nazis knew how important these cultural events were to the inmates, and several times during the history of the camp, German headquarters banned all performing activities as punishment for individual infractions. Sometimes the artists would question the

suitability of putting on a comedy or cabaret performance the day after a transport had left, when the atmosphere in the camp was one of such tangible grief and loss. But they always reached the same decision: Life had to go on.²

Creativity enabled the prisoners to find meaning in their life and their suffering. Viktor Frankl stressed the importance of finding meaning in suffering, stating, “If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering death, human life cannot be complete.”³

In addition to helping to build up and enrich the prisoners’ world, creativity served as a form of evasion. It allowed them to take on the role of “observer” and detach from what was going on in the camp. Terezín survivor Paul Sandfort explained, “In music there is freedom, too. We were behind barbed wire and our lives were in danger, and when you are playing music there is freedom—the freedom of feelings, the freedom of spirit, the freedom of culture... it can live even though you are locked up.”⁴ In the face of genocide and dehumanization that sought their ultimate destruction, artistic creativity allowed the prisoners a measure of control over their destiny. They refused to let Hitler and the Nazis triumph over them.

Death is a fact of life; none of us will survive forever. The artists of Terezín teach us that more than physical survival, our task is to make a contribution to the world that will endure, an expression of our souls that gives meaning to our lives and the lives of others, a legacy that leaves the world changed because we were in it.

¹ Volavkova, editor, *...I Never Saw Another Butterfly...*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. xvii.

² Bondy, p. 292.

³ Frankl, p. 88.

⁴ From interview with Paul Sandfort. Received documentation from David Bloch, Tel Aviv. Date of interview unknown.



Torah at the Center

Remember Us

By Gesher Calmenson, Project Director, Remember Us: The Holocaust B'nei Mitzvah Project

Contact between Holocaust survivors and children has been a principle educational tool in putting a human face on an otherwise unfathomable history. Soon, however, the survivor generation will be lost to us as living witnesses and educators.

Remember Us: The Holocaust B'nei Mitzvah Project was created in 2003 in response to the changing needs in Holocaust education and in collective Jewish life. By inviting a child who is preparing to become a bar or bat mitzvah to remember a child who was lost in the Holocaust before being called to the Torah, this program makes the history real and tangible for our children. Our hope is that in this way we are helping develop the next generation of Jews who will take up the mitzvah of remembering.

Holocaust education creates indelible experiences, whether in the classroom or through visits to museums and memorials. The next step is to provide our children with a context for making personal meaning from the barbed wire and concrete bunkers. Our goal is to augment Holocaust education so that students can move from Jewish experience to Jewish commitment. In this way, Holocaust history becomes history about which they can do something. Rabbi Nachman taught: Forgetting is exile, remembrance is redemption. The Remember Us project helps make this a tangible reality for students. They can learn that they have the capacity, just as they are, to be agents of redemption.

The child-to-child connection has a special resonance with students. Hannah, age 12, was one of the first children to participate in Remember Us. This is what she said at her bat mitzvah in June 2004:

My Torah portion talks about not leaving anyone behind. I was given the opportunity to be part of a program that remembers children that died in the Holocaust. The child that I was assigned to was named Sorela Goldsobel. When she turned five, both she and her family were sent to live in a run-down area of a city in Poland where [more than] 275,000 people were forced

to live in apartments on 73 streets. Food was very scarce, and many died of starvation. After two years of living in the ghetto, Sorela and her family were sent to a death camp in Treblinka. Sorela will be in my thoughts throughout my bat mitzvah, which will help her soul be at peace, and in that way, she will not be left behind.

In addition, we were very surprised by the strong emotional response of the parents, which is almost always positive. On reflection we realized that the parent generation carries a hidden wound connected with the Holocaust experience in its own family, in Judaism and in humanity. The realization that their own children can have a redemptive role in this drama is helping parents face and heal this pain.

The Remember Us project is designed to be a small but significant adjunct to bar and bat mitzvah preparation. We provide a guide for the student's teacher or mentor, a written explanation for parents, and an invitation to the student. When a family accepts the invitation, we provide the name and available information about one of the lost children.

The archives of children lost in the Holocaust have provided us with tens of thousands of names but very little in the way of biographical information. This relative anonymity is a poignant reminder of how little these lives were valued and how important it is to redeem their existence. To make the biography more accessible to our students, we are developing more generic cultural information to accompany the name of the lost child.

Once a name is accepted, all subsequent activities are left to the child, with encouragement from the teacher and the family. We recommend the following ways to remember:

- Keeping the child's name in mind during preparation for bar or bat mitzvah
- Doing *mitzvot b'shem*, in the name of the remembered child

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Understanding Auschwitz

By Rabbi Harvey J. Fields, Rabbi Emeritus, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles

In 1965, Elie Wiesel, survivor of the Nazi concentration and death camp Auschwitz and future Nobel Prize recipient, wrote an essay I will never forget. The language singed the soul, brought tears to the eyes and challenged the human mind to face the truth about human history so drenched in human blood.

"All questions pertaining to Auschwitz," Wiesel commented, "lead to anguish.... Auschwitz defies the novelist's language, the historian's analysis, the vision of the prophet.... Will there ever be a day when we will know what was the reality of Auschwitz?" (*One Generation After*, page 43)

Through the years, whenever my congregation or schools prepared to mark Yom HaShoah or to host special educational programs dealing with the Holocaust, we made certain not to suggest that we possessed all rational explanations. Mystery always has triumphed and brought us to humility.

That is what first drew me to be involved in the forthcoming six-hour television series: *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State*. Premiering on PBS stations nationwide during primetime in January 2005 and co-produced by KCET/Hollywood and the BBC, it commemorates the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and presents a chronological portrait of the detailed state planning of the most ghastly mass murder in history.

According to Executive Producer Lawrence Rees, the series will help teenage and adult viewers grapple with "how on earth it was possible for people actually to sit down and make key decisions that ended up killing six million men, women and children." Mare Mazur, KCET executive vice president of programming and production, adds, "The importance of this series lies in its ultimate message: Unless we understand why people thought this was the right thing to do at the time, we're helpless on the face of it happening again."

Note that the series has one-year, off-air recording rights for educators. In addition, writers and producers are working with consulting scholars and educators to create study materials for classroom and family discussion. A poster resource guide, including discussion prompts, will be available in December 2004 upon e-mail request to Poster@tobylevine.com. A more comprehensive teaching guide correlated to national standards in high school social studies and English, along with considerable background information and interactive features, will be available for downloading from the Internet in December 2004 at www.pbs.org/auschwitz.

The series dramatically illuminates the evolution of Auschwitz, which began as a place to terrorize the local Polish population and lock away Russian prisoners of war. Because of its location and natural resources, the Nazis turned it into an industrial and financial center run by slave labor, then into a brutal death camp.

Through interviews with perpetrators and survivors, computer-generated presentations of architectural plans recovered from previously unavailable Russian archives, and dramatizations of key meetings—made possible by the recovery of minutes, memoirs and testimonies—the series casts new light on Nazi plans and intentions. It also can be used to stimulate many discussion points:

- What choices did you see people make? (Nazi leaders, victims, SS guards, bystanders, Capos)
- What was the basis for their choices?
- What other choices were possible, and what might have been the result of these alternatives?
- What small, incremental choices led to more major repercussions (for example, taking away specific freedoms, moving Jews into ghettos, increasing the ghetto population, transporting the ghetto population to concentration camps, sending them to death camps)?

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Is There an Enduring Message?

By Julie Lambert, RJE, Senior Educational Consultant, Center for the Advancement of Jewish Education, Miami

Three years ago, I spent a week in the summer in Atlanta with my colleague Wendy Rapport (now editor of this journal) writing a Holocaust curriculum for our seventh grade classes. The consultant to our project was a veteran English teacher from Georgia, Jeanna Collins. She had been teaching the topic for years to public school students (although never a Jewish one), and her depth and breadth of knowledge about Holocaust poetry and literature in particular was invaluable to us. Before we began structuring the unit, which would last nine weeks during the seventh grade, we outlined several “big ideas” that we felt were appropriate and meaningful within this context. We also identified a few misunderstandings we wanted to make sure were not communicated to students. It was important to us that these were articulated clearly for our teachers and ourselves.

Overarching “Big Ideas”:

- The Holocaust was a product of a specific set of conditions and a specific historical time.
- Human beings have a surprising potential for evil and a surprising potential for good in the face of evil.
- The spirit of the Jewish people endures throughout and in spite of difficult times.
- “Regular” people were the perpetrators, victims and heroes of the Holocaust.
- We can identify with individuals and their stories because people like us lived during the Holocaust, although we recognize that their stories are only a small part of a bigger and more complex picture.
- Remembering the Holocaust is an active way of participating in my people’s history and honoring the memory of my people who died and suffered.

Misunderstandings we wanted to be sure were not communicated through the lessons:

- It is dangerous to be a Jewish person because people hate Jews and are out to get the Jewish people.
- The Jewish people are always victims.
- I have to be a Jew because six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.

This list guided us as we chose learning materials and activities. For example, we chose learning activities that allowed students to explore some of the more baffling questions, such as “How could this have happened?” and “Who stood up to resist?,” as well as significant ones such as “What does this mean for me?” and “What can I do?” We wanted students to preserve the memory of a few individuals by studying the “texts” they left behind, rather than dehumanize the victims by reducing them to a mass number or an individual number on their arms. This is not to say we didn’t believe that the six million number is important—just that it is less important than allowing a seventh grade student to get to know a few people, their history, their lives and

We attempted to create a curricular unit that enabled the students to use varying learning modalities to respond, interact, react and digest this critical moment and experience the life of the Jewish people. Writing different types of poetry in response to pictures, videos and poems from the children of Theresienstadt; interacting with Shoah survivors; and attending local Holocaust exhibits and memorials were all integrated into the lessons. Each student kept a journal with his or her responsive poetry. In addition, as the directors of education, we sent home weekly letters to the parents with an overview of what the students were studying and a poem for the adults to read that was related to the various themes. As a culminating project at Temple Judea, the seventh grade students lead and wrote the Yom HaShoah school remembrance service, which included poetry they had written throughout the unit.

Through this unit, we hoped to give students some of the tools to understand this painful time in history, as well as to empower them to learn and remember. We hope that the messages they took away will continue to serve them as they face life’s injustices and inspire them to know that goodness can indeed endure.

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Remember Us

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- Speaking the child's name and history from the bimah
- Becoming the life-long Kaddish-sayer after bar or bat mitzvah

Similar to breaking a glass under the chuppah, this practice can become a loving act of remembrance. When the Jewish community comes together to celebrate an important simchah in one Jewish person's life, that person can take a moment to remember a Jewish person on whose shoulders he or she stands.

To learn more about Remember Us: The Holocaust B'nei Mitzvah Project, call the project office at (707) 528-4213 or send an e-mail to remember@sonic.net.

Understanding Auschwitz

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- Do you think there was any point at which the Holocaust might have been stopped? If yes, when, how and by whom? If not, why not?

And, so continues Eli Wiesel's haunting question, "Will there be a day when we will know what was the reality of Auschwitz?" It urges us to know more and to widen our human sensibilities to ever be on alert that such inhumanity and chaos may never again be permitted. *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State* promises to move us further toward that critical human goal.

Read the selections below from Rabbi Katzew's 2004 Educational State of the Union:

"Educating American Jews to be authentic, as Americans and as Jews, represents an enduring challenge. Indeed, our ability to accomplish this task will significantly define our future."

"It should not be possible to grow out of Reform Judaism, especially for our most literate, competent and caring members. Our inclusiveness as a movement should embrace all of the children who come to the seder, from the child who is wise to the child who does not even know what questions to ask."

"We do ourselves a disservice to pretend as though there are quick fixes to systemic problems. I realize we live in a culture that craves instant solutions to physical, mental, emotional, political, economic, ethical and spiritual concerns. But those cravings for messiahs are false and dangerous."

"It costs too much to live a rich Jewish life in North America—to join a synagogue; to send a child to day school, or camp, or Israel, or a Jewish early childhood center; to send an adult to a kallah. Where is the *tzedek*?"

To read the full text, go to urj.org/educate/ under "What's New."



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Is There a Place for Holocaust Education in an Informal Setting?

By Dr. Ron Polster, Director, URJ Camp George, Parry Sound, Ontario, Canada

I am an informal Jewish educator. Specifically, I work in the field of Jewish camping. Currently I am the director of URJ Camp George, located in beautiful Parry Sound, Ontario. This is important background information because my understanding of whether or not there is a place for Holocaust education in an informal setting is informed by my sense of the word “camp” and its relationship to Jewish identity formation.

Years ago, I was fortunate enough to participate in the *March of the Living* program, where, along with thousands of teens, I marched from Auschwitz to Birkenau and, consequently, became more intimate with two different types of camps: a concentration camp and a death camp.

I also lived in Israel for a few years and made some good friends who served in the military. When they were called up for reserve duty, I met up with a few of them and became more familiar with the notion of a military “boot” camp.

These types of “camps” continue to shape Jewish consciousness in the most fundamental way. During their formative years, thousands of teens find their participation on the *March* and travel to Israel to be transformative Jewish identity-shaping experiences. “Never again!” they shout with vigor. Through the experience of visiting the concentration camps and death camps, they feel the great loss that the Jewish people suffered between 1935 and 1945, and they come to understand and appreciate the value of gaining a Jewish homeland in 1948 and having these military “boot” camps in defense of the Jewish nation.

For those of us who are in the business of offering transformative Jewish identity-shaping experiences, however, the question arises of the efficacy of this “Never again!” message. While perhaps a powerful message on the surface, does it offer the kind of enduring understanding that we informal educators seek for our children? I would argue that while powerful and

transformative in its own right, “Never again!” by itself cannot withstand the test of time.

“Never Again!” is why these teens claim a need to maintain Jewish practice, Jewish values and Jewish identity—a notion perhaps captured best by the late Emil Fackenheim’s concept of a “614th commandment”: Never hand Hitler a posthumous victory. Why be Jewish? So that we as a people will never face annihilation, so that we’ll never face concentration camps or death camps or have the need for army boot camps.

Instead, gather together a couple hundred 8- to 15-year-olds, match them up with a group of caring and committed 17- to 20-year-olds who are themselves exploring and refining their own identity, and place them in a 24/7 environment that allows for a complete immersion into Jewish living, where counselors affect children not only by what they say but also by who they are. This is a camp where Jewish learning and Jewish values permeate daily life. This integrative approach provides campers and staff with positive associations with “things Jewish” that serve to enhance Jewish identity, create a lifelong love of Judaism and generate a strong commitment to the Jewish community.

Does Holocaust education have a place in an informal setting? No, at least not in my informal setting. The way to “never hand Hitler a posthumous victory” is not to approach Jewish identity defensively but to go on the offensive. Frankly, I find it rather cathartic to walk into a cabin at my camp and join in a discussion of campers who are exploring their Jewish values, and I get great satisfaction out of witnessing kids who come out of my camp with a better understanding of who they are.

I prefer the enduring understanding provided by the experience of a Jewish summer camp to that of a death camp, a concentration camp or even a military boot camp. The path toward a Jewish future is paved by celebrating Jewish life.

Torah at the Center

A New Reform Jewish Approach to Holocaust Education

By Racelle R. Weiman, Ph.D., Director, HUC-JIR Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education, Cincinnati

I am aware that Reform leaders in America often are ambivalent about Holocaust education. Many feel that it has a disproportionate emphasis, is taught improperly and affects negative Jewish identity.¹ Often these were the reasons offered to justify forfeiting the responsibility to teach about the Holocaust and relinquishing it to secular institutions.

Research on the presentation of these institutions' Holocaust narratives, however, demonstrates that their often universalistic approach consumes the Jewish story and identity.² Questions then arise about what should be the freely and openly expressed Jewish story of this experience: How do we transmit its lessons and meanings? How do we seek transformation and growth in the human spirit and the renewal of commitment to *tikkun olam*, inside a world so plundered of its morality, compassion and *menschlichkeit*? Who are the audiences, the supporters and the critics who must be considered?

One solution has been the creation of the HUC-JIR Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education—an enterprise propelled into motion by Holocaust survivors who are members of the group Combined Generations of the Holocaust in the Greater Cincinnati region. Creation of such a center within a Jewish institution of higher learning, a rabbinical college, was not just unusual, it was unique—the first in the world. And, by locating it at a theological institution, one that trains religious leaders of tomorrow, such a center would compel serious questions to be addressed. At the core of its uniqueness would be its potential to transform and create a Reform Jewish approach to lessons from the Holocaust for the 21st century.

The Holocaust survivors were quite specific in their vision: They did not want a museum or a monument. Rather, the center must be dedicated to teacher training for religious and secular education—providing outreach, research and courses in the tri-state region of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky.

Helping to make the case for such an undertaking was the high popularity among educators of a semester graduate course on the Holocaust already being run successfully at HUC-JIR.³ The recommendation by the Senate of

the state of Ohio⁴ to implement widespread Holocaust education further encouraged the college to consider creating the center. This, in turn, has created a climate of cooperation and hopefulness in a community that often was polarized. The center also has changed the face of the campus, bringing in thousands of students, gentiles and Jews of all ages, backgrounds and affiliations.

In *Mapping Our Tears*, an exhibit of testimonies and artifacts from local survivors, the survivors became the central focal point. Their perseverance and survival demonstrate optimism and hope, faith and determination, courage and resistance, as they love and learn and live again, affirming humanity. As the center researches and brings to life the experiences of five young rabbinical students rescued by HUC, or American Jews saving 1,200 Jewish refugees in the Philippines, or the relationships between African-American liberators and concentration camp survivors, we find true-life inspirations daily.

Center staff actively participates at the RAC, NATE, Union for Reform Judaism and NFTY retreats; we lecture at Women of Reform Judaism, congregations and at synagogues and Hebrew schools across the country. We produce film documentaries and traveling exhibits on core values that include: "Facing Prejudice" (Tolerance); "Women and the Holocaust" (Valor); "Shouldering the Responsibility" (Integrity); and "Finding Family" (Humankindness). We were created to serve you, to respond to your needs, to fill the voids and to develop our own unique and authentically Jewish voices.

For more information, visit the center's Web site at www.holocaustandhumanity.org.

¹ *Witness the UAHC Biennial speech by Rabbi Eric Yoffie in Boston, Dec. 5-9, 2001.*

² *Original research, 1994, at the opening of the USHMM in Washington, D.C. Most interviewees could not remember a single Jewish face or name.*

³ *This was made possible through a multiyear grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which included a final day trip to the USHMM.*

⁴ *Six states now mandate Holocaust education (California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York), and 10 states (Ohio among them) recommend it. The 1999 Congressional bill, H.R. 3105, Holocaust Education Assistance Act, failed nationally.*

⁵ *The largest is the National Library at Hebrew University, Jerusalem.*



Torah at the Center

A Lesson for All Students

By Yonni Wattenmaker, RJE, Director of Education, Temple Shaaray Tefila, Bedford Corners, N.Y.

As the director of education at a congregation in Westchester, New York, each year I am faced with the challenge of teaching my students about the Holocaust. How old should students be when they first learn of the Holocaust? What educational tools should I employ? What is my ultimate message to my students and to my teachers?

It has been my approach to commemorate Yom HaShoah in my school each year with all of my students, kindergarten through confirmation. Certainly the approach and the tools must be different for each, and the younger you teach, the more controversial the topic becomes. However, all students can learn that Jews remember their history and mourn their losses as a community.

When we gather together to mark the occasion, I teach that there was a tragic period of our somewhat recent history in which a man who hated those different from him wished for the Jewish people to be destroyed. We light a yellow candle, and even the youngest children are given the opportunity to listen to the *Kaddish* being recited. They understand at a variety of developmental levels, but all share the messages of unity and remembrance.

Teachers often bewail the fact that our students cannot understand the horrors of the Holocaust. Many teachers are discouraged by the students' lack of ability to relate—seeing it as a lack of empathy—but I disagree. For me, I do not want to scare children into remembering their history. As a young child, I remember being overwhelmed, even traumatized by my own Holocaust education, which relied on graphic documentary footage. As a Jewish educator, I am in fact thankful that the experience of our students is so removed from this reality that they have difficulty relating. Therefore, in each grade, we try to put the Holocaust into a meaningful, age-appropriate context for our students.

In third grade, we liken Hitler to Haman, as the children are so familiar with the Purim story. Both men were

power hungry and therefore perceived the Jewish population as a threat. Young children can learn that, instead, we want to live in a world that celebrates differences.

We explore this concept in more depth as the students grow, delving into bullying vs. tolerance in our fourth grade program. In fifth grade, we begin to put it into more of a historical context using a game I modeled after one I saw at the Museum of Jewish Heritage. The goal of this board game is to kick all of the Jews out of Germany. We then talk about the Nuremberg Laws, as well as tattooing and ghettoization as methods of dehumanization.

Sixth graders study the history more thoroughly, using excerpts from fictional and non-fictional works like *Night*, *Maus*, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* and *Devil's Arithmetic*. It is from this age on that we invite survivors to our school to share first-person accounts.

Ultimately, the message I try to convey to my students and teachers, the lesson I believe they can learn and relate to their lives, is that of necessity for tolerance, understanding and appreciation of differences among people.

Torah at the Center

Holocaust Education for Adult Learners

By Stacey Frishman Delcau, RJE, Assistant Director of Education, Wise Temple, Cincinnati, Ohio

In previous stages of Reform Jewish education in America, we focused our energies on youth education, consistent with our inherent belief that the way to a secure Jewish future was to educate the next generation. This vision of creating meaningful and effective education for our youth had caused us to overlook the importance of adult education for too many years. In recent years, we have taken note of this gap and have made great progress in bringing Jewish learning opportunities to all ages. However, one major component has been neglected. Holocaust education receives a great deal of attention for youth but surprisingly little at the adult level.

At an influential stage in adolescent development, our Holocaust education programs for youth are relevant and multitextured. But, as our youth continue to grow into their adult Jewish identity, these lessons leave our children with knowledge of the Holocaust solely from an adolescent perspective. We have not yet moved to the next step. I believe that we prematurely end Holocaust education in our institutions. The Holocaust is one subject in which we still continue to leave our adults with a pediatric and underdeveloped level of Jewish knowledge.

Adults depend on religious institutions to provide a forum to discuss the moral and ethical dilemmas they face in their lives. In an age of ethical ambiguity, the dividing line between those that will take action upon their principles and those who will cower in the face of adversity is unclear. The Holocaust serves as an unparalleled case study for what makes people adhere to their ethical principles in spite of potentially tragic consequences. It is therefore important that we examine human nature under difficult situations to better understand the power and results of ethical decision making. In this way, we take the lessons learned about human nature during the Holocaust and apply them to our adult lives.

The Jewish educational world must take on the challenge to assist adults in providing an opportunity to develop their own ethical and moral code. Many settings exist in which these personal explorations are valuable. For

example, the Holocaust can be a powerful topic for an interfaith families class, bringing couples from different backgrounds together to discuss moral and ethical dilemmas. This would present an opportunity to look at approaches from a Jewish perspective and give the learners a chance to begin integrating these lessons into their everyday lives. In an interfaith setting, the Holocaust also can help us explore our texts and how they speak to the Jewish view of the “other.” How does a view of the “other” relate to the Holocaust? How do we see the “other” in our texts? When does it become dangerous to view those in our lives and our communities as the “other”?

Adult education classes on ethics could include philosophers such as Levinas, Buber and Frankl to help learners formulate a personal, Jewish, ethical philosophy with a Jewish foundation. Talmud texts can be studied to create a sense of personal responsibility. We also can study ethical decision making through examples in recent American history such as: What unique characteristics in human nature are attributed to those who risked their lives for others during the civil rights movement? At the expense of loss of our livelihood or reputation, what would our decision be when faced with such an ethical dilemma?

While the Holocaust was a unique tragedy, it can be taught in the context of personal responsibility and ethical choices. It is important to create a forum in which it is acceptable to grapple and struggle with these issues within a Jewish context. Adult education classes can assist the learners both personally and professionally in creating ethical wills, personal ethical stances and professional codes of ethics.

History of the Holocaust can be studied through books and documentaries, but adult education classes in our institutions can help our learners grapple with the tough ethical questions the Holocaust raises. In fact, adults are better able to explore many of these issues. We should not focus all of our attention on Holocaust education for our adolescent students.



Torah at the Center

Challenges of Holocaust Education: Teacher Dilemmas

By Jan Darsa, Director of Jewish Education, Facing History and Ourselves, Brookline, Mass.

Holocaust education can be a dangerous subject to explore, and if not approached appropriately and at a time in a child's life when he or she is ready to hear about it, it becomes a topic that turns a well-intentioned teacher's goal on its head.

Why teach the Holocaust? At what age do I begin the study with my students? What context is necessary? How do I frame the history? Where do I begin, and how do I end a course, especially given the time constraints of a supplementary school setting? How do I avoid traumatizing students and thus paralyzing them rather than empowering them? These are all questions I am asked by teachers daily.

The Holocaust is probably one of the most frequently taught subjects in Jewish day and supplementary schools and one of the most poorly taught areas in a Jewish child's education. Teachers believe that this is an instantly engaging topic that fascinates students and, thus, are often deceived by what seems to be active engagement. What many really are creating is a misunderstanding about a watershed event in the history of our people. Simulation games, graphic films and questions such as "What would you do in this situation?" are some of the ways teachers misuse the teaching of this history.

It is true that students initially are curious about the Holocaust. After all, it touches on so many adolescent issues (and this is a subject that should not be delved into deeply until adolescence). It is a history about "in" groups and "out" groups. It raises questions of how people get pushed off their moral center, a challenge many young people face in their own lives, albeit on a very different level. Students are fascinated by power—how people get it and how they use and abuse it. It is a history that begs questions of how is it possible for neighbor to turn against neighbor, what fractures a society and a community, and what brings it together? How is it possible that people, who we think of as moral barometers in society, become instruments in a process of mass murder?

Doctors, judges, teachers, lawyers and religious leaders all became part and parcel of death machinery that lasted 12 years.

These stunning realizations for young people can tap the moral philosopher in each of them as they explore the history if it is taught to them with thoughtfulness and consideration for where they are in their lives and what questions we as educators want to raise. It demands that teachers shift from asking questions or providing answers to allowing students to ask the questions, for their questions are often more significant than our answers.

So, where do we begin? Starting with questions like "Who am I?," "How does my identity get formed?" and "How do I make decisions and choices in my own life?" will help them understand that this is not just a history about Germans and Jews 60 years ago in some far away place, but it is indeed a history about human beings and human behavior that affects all of us.

Facing History and Ourselves is a national educational and professional development organization, based in Brookline, Mass., whose mission is to engage teachers and students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice and anti-Semitism to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By studying the historical development and lessons of the Holocaust and other examples of collective violence, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. Facing History and Ourselves reaches an estimated one million students each year nationally and internationally.

Facing History's extensive Web site, www.facinghistory.org, features:

- News and information on upcoming events
- Publications and resources for teachers, students and parents
- Online discussion forums for students and teachers
- Video clips for classroom use

Torah at the Center

Partial List of Holocaust Resources for Use in Religious Schools

For Younger Children

The Number on My Grandfather's Arm by David A. Adler, Photographs by Rose Eichenbaum

The moving story of a young girl who learns of her grandfather's experience in Auschwitz and who then helps him overcome his sensitivity about the number on his arm.

The Tattooed Torah by Marvell Ginsburg, Illustrated by Martin Lemelman

This true story of the rescue and restoration of a small Torah from Brno, Czechoslovakia, teaches the Holocaust not only as a period of destruction but also as an opportunity for redemption.

Terrible Things: An Allegory of the Holocaust by Eve Bunting, Illustrated by Stephen Gammel

This storybook begins to introduce this difficult topic through an allegory of animals in the forest being taken away by terrible things.

For Fifth Through Eighth Grade Students

The Camera of My Family (Video)

Available from the Anti-Defamation League, this movie is narrated by a woman whose family left Germany in 1938. She discovers her family's past through pictures and explores what life was like leading up to the war.

The Devil's Arithmetic by Jane Yolen

Twelve-year-old Hannah is transported back to a 1940s Polish village, where she experiences the Holocaust as her family did. (Video also available.)

Escape From the Holocaust by Kenneth Roseman

This do-it-yourself Jewish adventure takes place in Berlin in the 1930s. An online discussion guide also is available.

Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis and the Children of Terezín by Susan Goldman Rubin

Dense with information, this book also includes pictures by children who were Friedl Dicker-Brandeis' students.

Tell Them We Remember: The Story of the Holocaust by Susan D. Bachrach

A classroom text produced in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

For more book recommendations, go to urj.org/educate/adolescents/ and click on the annotated bibliography, or go to urjpress.com and browse the category "Holocaust." For books recommended by the Union and accompanying study guides, search Significant Jewish Books at urj.org/books/.

Resource Books

Atlas of the Holocaust by Martin Gilbert

More than 300 black-and-white maps in chronological order, showing the progression of the Holocaust.

A Holocaust Reader by Lucy S. Dawidowicz

This collection is a good source for original source documents.

Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature edited by Albert Friedlander, Illustrated by Jacob Landau
An anthology of literature from the Holocaust, including more than 40 accounts that stand as testimony to the broad range of experiences of the Holocaust.

Web Sites

Cybrary of the Holocaust remember.org
Continuously updated, this is one of the largest Holocaust-related Web sites for teachers and students.

Jewish Virtual Library, Holocaust Wing www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/holo.html
Site features easy-to-access information on many topics

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
www.ushmm.org.

From the national museum, this site includes resources for teachers and students, including online exhibitions.

Yad Vashem www.yad-vashem.org.il/

Highlighting information from Israel's national Holocaust museum, also with access to documents and other artifacts from the museum's collection.



Torah at the Center

Use Reform Judaism magazine as a resource in your classroom. *Reform Judaism* now offers a discussion guide for every edition, focusing on a major topic of that issue.

Find the following companion guides online at urj.net/rjmag/.

- Navigating Anti-Semitic Encounters (Fall 2004)
- Jewish Diversity (Spring 2004)
- Israel's Fence: Fortification or Folly? (Summer 2004)

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