



Holocaust & Yom HaShoah Educational Resources

What is Yom HaShoah?

Yom HaShoah, Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, is a somber day in the Jewish calendar. The first of four Israeli national holidays, Yom HaShoah, traditionally commemorates the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. This is an opportunity to remember those that perished in the Holocaust and their stories of triumph, sadness, or valor and the horrible atrocities they experienced. Though this is an official Israeli holiday, this day is observed by Jews around the world. In Israel, flags are flown at half-mast and there is no public entertainment, concerts or major sporting events and many public venues are closed. At Yad Vashem, the Israeli National Holocaust Museum, a national ceremony is held to mourn the six million Jews along with the five million other victims that perished during the Holocaust. At 10:00 a.m. Israelis observe a two-minute moment of silence, during which drivers step out of their cars and sirens are sounded across the country. Click [here](#) to watch a video of the siren sounding in Tel Aviv.

To learn more about Yom HaShoah and other great resources, check out the resources page on the AZA BBG website by visiting bbyo.org/azabbg/resources.

POETRY & READINGS

BLESS IS THE MATCH

Blessed is the match that burns out in lighting the flame.
Blessed is the flame that flares in the heart's hidden chambers.
Blessed are the hearts that know when to leave off with honor.
Blessed is the match that burns out in lighting the flame.

-Hannah Shenesh

THE BUTTERFLY

The last, the very last
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing against a white stone...
Such, such a yellow
is carried lightly way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to kiss the world good-bye.
For seven weeks I've live in here.
Penned up against this ghetto.
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me and the white chestnut candles in the court...only I never saw another butterfly.
That butterfly was the last one...butterflies don't live in here....In the Ghetto

-Pavel Friedmann



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When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven he would go to the same place in the forest and say: Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire but I am still able to say the prayer. And again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire but I am still able to say the prayer. And again the miracle would be accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.

-Excerpt from Gates of the Forest, Elie Weisel

A SMALL STATION OF TREBLINKA

Here is the small station of Treblinka
Here is the small station of Treblinka
On the line between Tluszcz and Warszawa From the railway station Warsaw - East You get out of the station and travel straight
The journey lasts
five hours and 45 minutes more
And sometimes the same journey lasts A whole life until your death
And the station is very small
Three fir trees grow there
And a regular signboard saying
Here is the small station of Treblinka... Here is the small station of Treblinka...
And no cashier even
Gone is the cargo man
And for a million zloty
You will not get a return ticket
And nobody waits for you in the station
And nobody waves a handkerchief towards you Only silence hung there in the air
To welcome you in the blind wilderness
And silent is the pillar of the station
And silent are the three fir trees
And silent is the black board
Because here is the small station of Treblinka...
Here is the small station of Treblinka... And only a commercial board stands still: "Cook only by gas"
Here is the small station of Treblinka... Here is the small station of Treblinka...

-Władysław Szlengel



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FLIGHT

On the train
you had left me
a message scrawled across brown paper wrapping hung like an empty garment
bag hooked in the baggage net
overhead it all
seemed upside down
no safety from
that direction
I could not reach
anyway
having inch by inch shrunken into
myself pacing
the moving compartment swaying
upside down
no safety in
any direction

-Gertrude Halstead

A FUNERAL

The coffin – a crematorium furnace,
Lid – transparent, made of air,
Human body turned into smoke,
Blown through the smokestack of history.
How shall I honor your passing,
Walk in your funeral procession?
You, homeless handful of ashes
Between the earth and heaven.
How to cast a green garland
On the grave dug high in the air –
An ark of the world's four corners
Under the invader's fire.
Your coffin, which is not,
Will not slide from roaring cannons,
And only the column of air
Illumines your death with sunrays.
And here is such a great silence
On earth, like a trampled banner,
In the mourning smoke of corpses,
In the crucified outcry.

-M.J., a Warsaw ghetto poet



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CLOTHING: AUSCHWITZ CHANGING ROOM

Strength and honor are her clothing. —Proverbs 31

She slipped off the cradle of her shoe and her foot evaporated rose
like candle smoke into her leg
and the memory
the felt memory of this foot flowed like river clay into the mold of air her foot left behind she
I balance
on this new pedestal that looks as if it were my foot and this shoe its patient love how it absorbs
my foot taking me as ever with itself
I unroll this stocking
and my bared leg fades like mist
into the glove of my other leg to murmur gratitude for a lifetime of symmetries
with this other stocking my legs vanish
both into my belly my skirt my blouse pool warm in a circle on the floor no body is where a body
seems to be thighs
triangle of hair
pale breasts
are only mirrors
only magic
no arms need hide what needs no hiding
from the black boots rising
into creased
uniforms into stark
masks staring out from
their emptiness

-Susanna Rich

1980

And when I go up as a pilgrim in winter, to recover
the place I was born, and the twin to self I am in my mind,
then I'll go in black snow as a pilgrim to find
the grave of my savior, Yanova.
She'll hear what I whisper, under my breath:
Thank you. You saved my tears from the flame.
Thank you. Children and grandchildren you rescued from death. I planted a sapling (it doesn't
suffice) in your name.
Time in its gyre spins back down the flue
faster than nightmares of nooses can ride,
quicker than nails. And you, my savior, in your cellar you'll hide me, ascending in dreams as a
pilgrim to you.
You'll come from the yard in your slippers, crunching the snow so I'll know. Again I'm there in
the cellar, degraded and low,
you're bringing me milk and bread sliced thick at the edge.
You're making the sign of the cross, I'm making my pencil its pledge.

-Avrom Sutzkever



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AFTER AUSHWITZ

After Auschwitz, no theology:

From the chimneys of the Vatican, white smoke rises— a sign the cardinals have chosen themselves a pope. From the crematoria of Auschwitz, black smoke rises— a sign the conclave of Gods has not yet chosen the chosen people.

After Auschwitz, no theology:

the numbers on the forearms of the inmates of extermination are the telephone numbers of God, numbers that do not answer and now are disconnected, one by one.

After Auschwitz, a new theology:

the Jews who died in the Shoah have now come to be like their God, who has no likeness of a body and has no body.

They have no likeness of a body and they have no body.

-Yehuda Amichai

WHO AM I TO SPEAK OF A TIME?

Who am I to speak of a time

of families crushed, of crimes of mankind, of children in hiding and living in fear, of mothers trying to hide all their tears, of fathers praying to an empty heaven, of people dying again and again?

Who am I to know what it was like

to be persecuted by day and trapped by the night, to be surrounded by a world turned upside down, to be starved and tortured and beaten to the ground, to witness a nation of hate marching past, to see all their dreams broken and shattered like glass?

Who am I to mention their suffering and pain, the ghettos, the camps, life and death inhumane?

I wasn't even born, I wasn't even there, it happened long ago, it could never happen here.

Who am I to know what God had in mind when the virtues of man were buried alive,

when good lost to evil and hope turned to despair, when hell upon earth seemed everywhere?

Who am I to let their memories be forgotten, to say and do nothing as if it never happened, to forsake the loss of our Jewish family, to live in a world of complacency?



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AT MY BAR MITZVAH AND HIS

When I was 13, I became Bar Mitzvah
When he was 13, he became Bar Mitzvah
When I was 13, my teachers taught me to put tefillin on my arm
When he was 13, his teachers taught him to throw a hand grenade with his arm
When I was 13, I studied the pathways of the Bible and roadways of the Talmud
When he was 13, he studied the canals of Warsaw in the sewers of the Ghetto
At my Bar Mitzvah, I took an oath to live as a Jew
At his Bar Mitzvah, he took an oath to die as a Jew
At my Bar Mitzvah, I blessed God
At his Bar Mitzvah, he questioned God
At my Bar Mitzvah, I lifted up my voice and sang
At his Bar Mitzvah, he lifted up his fists and fought
At my Bar Mitzvah, I read from the scroll of the Torah
At his Bar Mitzvah, he wrote a scroll of fire
At my Bar Mitzvah, I wore a new Tallit over my suit
At his Bar Mitzvah, he wore a rifle and bullets, over his suit of rags
At my Bar Mitzvah, I started my road of life
At his Bar Mitzvah, he began his road to martyrdom
At my Bar Mitzvah, family and friends came to say L'Chaim
At his Bar Mitzvah, Rabbi Akiba and Trumfeldor, Hannah and her seven sons came to escort him to Heaven
At my Bar Mitzvah, they praised my voice, my song, my melody
At his Bar Mitzvah, they praised his strength, his courage, his fearlessness
When I was 13, I was called up to the Torah, I went up to the Bimah
When he was 13, his body went up in smoke, his soul rose to God
When I was 13, I became a Bar Mitzvah and lived
When he was 13, he became a Bar Mitzvah and lives now within each of us.

SMOKE

From the crematory flue
A Jew aspires to the Holy One.
And when the smoke of him is gone, His wife and children filter through.
Above us, in the height of sky, Sainly billows weep and wait. God, wherever you may be,
There all of us are also not.

-Jacob Glatstein



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SONGS & VIDEOS

ELI ELI

Hannah Senesh was born in Hungary and moved to the British Mandate of Palestine in 1939 to learn about agriculture, but still loved to write plays and poetry. In 1942, she wrote *Halikha LeKesariya* ("A Walk to Caesarea"), which we more affectionately call, *Eili, Eili*. One year later during World War II, she enlisted in the British Army and trained as a paratrooper. Senesh parachuted in Yugoslavia and joined a partisan group. She journeyed on to Hungary, but was caught by the Hungarian police and was tortured for several months. She remained steadfast in her courage even up until the day of her execution.

Click [here](#) to hear *Eli Eli* on YouTube.

TO KNOW IS TO REMEMBER

In 1934, Bulgaria had a population of more than six million people. In that year, Jews constituted 0.8 percent of the total population, or roughly 50,000 individuals. Beginning in July 1940, Bulgarian authorities instituted anti-Jewish legislation that excluded Jews from public service, restricted their choice of places of residence, and restricted their participation in many occupations. In 1945, the Jewish population of Bulgaria was still about 50,000, its prewar level. By 1948, however, more than 35,000 Bulgarian Jews had emigrated to the British Mandate in Palestine. Click [here](#) to watch the movie *To Know is to Remember* on YouTube. This movie was created by BBYO Bulgaria in 2006 and tells the fascinating and not well-known story of the Holocaust in Bulgaria.

ANI MA'AMIN

Ani Ma'amin, meaning I believe, finds origins in Mishna commentary on Tractate Sanhedrin of the Talmud. The original composer of the author is unknown, though one version is attributed to Azriel David, a Hasidic Jew who reportedly composed a tune while en route to Treblinka.

Others sang *Ani Ma'amin* as they were being herded to gas chambers. Click [here](#) to listen to one version on *Ani Ma'amin* on YouTube.

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