

Weekly Teaching

April 13, 2018

This past Wednesday evening, our community shared in our annual observance of *Yom HaShoah*.

The full name of the day commemorating the victims of the Holocaust is “*Yom Hashoah Ve-Hagevurah*,” which literally translates to mean “Day of (remembrance of) the Holocaust and the Heroism.”

We observe *Yom HaShoah* one week after the 7th day of Passover, and also a week before *Yom Hazikaron* (Memorial Day for Israel’s fallen soldiers).

The date for the observance of *Yom HaShoah* was legislated by the Israeli Parliament in 1953.

Although established as an Israeli national commemoration day, the worldwide Jewish community quickly adapted *Yom HaShoah* within their collective Jewish calendar.

Yom HaShoah remembers both the suffering of our people, and also our fierce determination to survive, and once again thrive.

The Holocaust challenges our Jewish beliefs:

- How can we be a believing Jew after the Holocaust?
- Where was God?
- How can we have faith in humanity?

There are no simple answers to the theological struggle that we undergo in the shadow of death and horror that was the Holocaust.

Simon Wiesenthal Z’L was a Jewish man known to us as committing his life in search of justice in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

His efforts helped to bring to trial many Nazi war criminals, but more importantly, he helped to teach the Jewish People, and the entire world: “Never Again!!”

One story that Simon Wiesenthal shared from his life becomes an entry point for us all, when discussing theology and practice in the aftermath of the nightmare of the six million Jews murdered; one-third of our People.

After the war, Simon was amongst the displaced persons housed in DP camps.

In his particular case his DP camp was located at the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen.

While at the camp, Simon had become one of the strong leaders within the DP community.

It came to pass that an American Rabbi came to visit the camp.

He brought with him food, clothing and money.

He also brought with him sacred Jewish objects: siddurim (prayer books), tallises (prayer shawls), t’fillin (phylacteries) and a Torah.

In order to celebrate the arrival of a new Torah, a special ceremony was planned amidst the DP community.

Most of the survivors were excited to have this event in their midst, but Simon objected, and announced his refusal to attend the ceremony.

The American Rabbi heard of Simon’s objection, and sought him out.

The Rabbi kindly said to Simon: “I understand that you are angry with God, and do not wish to attend the Torah ceremony.”

Simon responded to the Rabbi: “Your information is wrong. I am not angry with God at all. I am angry with his servants. It is the treachery of God’s servants that I never expected, and can never forgive.”

Simon then told the Rabbi: “In the concentration camp, one of my bunkmates had somehow concealed a small prayer book in his clothing. Often he took out the prayer book and spoke out loud to God. I admired that man’s

faith. Then one day I noticed other men begging to borrow his prayer book. He allowed them to use it only on condition that they share their soup rations with him. Can you imagine, Rabbi? Using his prayer book as a means of taking food from his fellow starving Jews?! This I will never forgive.”

The Rabbi had listened to Simon’s story quietly and respectfully.

After a few moments, he gently asked: “Did men actually share their meager amount of food so as to pray from that prayer book?”

Simon acknowledged that this in fact happened all the time.

The Rabbi, again pausing, finally and with compassion asked: “Why do you focus on the faith of the man who possessed the prayer book? Why not consider the faith of the other men? What was God’s presence in them that they would be willing to give up their food, just to have a chance to pray to God?”

Simon thought about this Rabbi’s words, and he changed his mind and joined in the special ceremony marking the arrival of a new Torah.

We need to hear and feel Simon’s story, and the stories of all those who survived, and all those who did not.

The Holocaust was the attempt of evil men and women to dispel God’s light from the world.

God’s light was diminished greatly, but it was not extinguished.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, we are permitted to challenge God, but not forsake Him.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, we are permitted our anger and hurt, but not our moral paralysis in fighting the evils that exist today.

Let us mourn for the six million of our people brutally murdered.

May their blood cry out to God, and to all of humanity.

Let us never forget the blood of the innocent.

Let us vow to remember and to ensure: “Never Again!!”

And, let us further bring God’s light into the dark recesses of the world, where evil still exists.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

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P.S. UJA-JCC Greenwich recently shared a communal notice about an important bill pertaining to Holocaust education coming before the CT state legislature, the bill SB 452: Holocaust/Genocide Education. We wish to encourage our Connecticut State Senator to vote YEA for this bill. Below is the information for contact information and a suggested script for your use. For additional information you can also contact either [Pamela Ehrenkranz](#) or [Michael Bloom](#) at JFACT.

The bill includes:

- Local and regional board of education shall include Holocaust and Genocide education as part of the social studies curriculum. (Adding Holocaust and Genocide education to the social studies curriculum will compel school districts to teach this subject.)
- A local or regional board of education may accept gifts, grants and donations. (Individuals may now underwrite a teacher training or a webinar to help teach this subject.)
- Including Holocaust and Genocide Education can be done with existing resources, materials and personnel. (There is a plethora of free resources for schools in Connecticut, including ADL, Voices of Hope, Yale, Dodd Center at UConn, therefore, will not cost schools much, if anything, to teach this.)

The bill will now move to the Office of Legislative Research and the Office of Fiscal Analysis to determine its cost and impact, before it is voted on by the larger assembly. JFACT (Jewish Federation Association of Connecticut) is leading the charge on passing this bill. Michael Bloom, the Executive Director, is lobbying legislators to support this bill and has lobbied every single member of the Education Committee. He is now lobbying every single senator in the hope that they will support SB 452.

We are asking you to contact the CT State Senator to ask him to support the final vote:

[Senator L. Scott Frantz](#)

(860) 240-8800

When you contact your representative, you may want to consider conveying the following message or something similar:

Please Support Legislation SB 452 to include Holocaust/Genocide Education in our schools. We know that education is the greatest force in combating prejudice and hate and learning about the Holocaust and genocide can teach the next generation how to build a better world.

Soon there will be no survivors to provide eye-witness testimony and this critical material should be part of our education system. I ask you to vote in support of SB 452: Holocaust/Genocide Education.

Thank you for your support and advocacy on this important issue!