

RABBI'S MESSAGE

Remembering: Balancing "Never Again" with Creating a Strong Future

Every year, commemorating the Holocaust seems more and more important. Even our youngest Holocaust survivors are now in their eighties, limiting our opportunities to learn first-hand the important lessons. Second and third generation descendants are taking more prominent roles, but there is nothing like personal testimony. Additionally, antisemitism is increasing. While there are fewer people around who have witnessed the actual events of one of the most horrific times in world history, there seems to be more ignorance about what happened and the importance of preventing another attempt at Jewish genocide.

The United Nations established an International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27 to coincide with the 1945 liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and killing center. Israel set the Hebrew date of 27 Nisan as the Jewish date, honoring the anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, as this date represented resistance, strength, and heroism. This year, the Israeli Yom HaShoah is Sunday, May 5, and there is a city-wide observance at Congregation Beth Yeshurun in Houston. TBT will have our own service on Friday, May 10, with **Cantorial Soloist Anita Bonanno** (daughter of Holocaust survivors) providing the music and guest speaker, **Bob Ullman**, whose family fled Belgium to escape extermination.

So, as a time of remembrance, what is most important to remember? The first thing that comes to many of our minds is the astronomical number of six million, the number of Jews who were murdered by the Nazi regime. Many will also think about another six million murdered targets, Gypsies, black people, gay people, Hitler's political opponents, the disabled and the mentally challenged. Jewish tradition teaches that when an individual life is destroyed, an entire world is destroyed, including all the descendants who did not even have a chance to begin their lives. And we are also taught that when you save an individual life, you've also saved an entire world, with an infinite number of descendants.

We mourn the dead and celebrate the survivors. Those who were able to survive had a wide variety of methods. Some were helped and hidden by non-Jewish upstanders. Some used their intelligence and wit. Some had the physical strength and emotional fortitude to last when all odds were against them. However they did it, they saved worlds.

Because now, their children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren are here! I remember attending the funeral of a Holocaust survivor of several Nazi concentration camps, who was over 101 years old when she died. She had outlived her husband, her siblings, her children and all the rest of her contemporaries. Mourner's Kaddish is traditionally only said by direct relatives: children, spouses, siblings or parents. There were no "direct" relatives to say Kaddish, as the closest were grandchildren. Of course, the grandchildren said Kaddish for her. The sadness of this woman's death at 101 was tempered by the fact that she lived close to *seventy years* after Hitler and the Nazis tried to kill her. She suffered greatly throughout her life,

but ended up victorious against the most evil opponents imaginable. For me, as an observer, I thought: “This woman lived two lifetimes, and certainly outlived her oppressors.”

The funeral I referenced was for Riva Kremer, the grandmother of Hy Penn. As many of you know, Hy has been an integral part of the leadership of Temple Beth Torah for decades. He and his wife, Lynn Gordon, are docents at Holocaust Museum Houston, he is on their board of directors as well as the board of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston. He also entertains as a volunteer magician for countless groups, and was instrumental in the medical care of thousands of children in his decades as a pediatrician. Riva’s legacy also includes **great grandchildren** who are elementary school teachers, educating and caring for yet another generation. This is one of many examples of how the world has been enhanced because of the strength of Holocaust survivors.

Last week, at our Pesach seders, we mixed bitter herbs with sweet haroset as we celebrated freedom of the Exodus from Egypt. We celebrate freedom while mourning the years lost to slavery.

Regarding both slavery in Egypt and the Holocaust, we say, “NEVER AGAIN!” That motto is essential for the education of every generation to prevent another horrific time in the future. The victory comes when the next generations make the world a better place.

L’shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon