YOM HASHOAH MEMORIAL CEREMONY PROGRAM

Final Steps, Last Hopes: The Untold Stories

In memory of the victims of the Nazi death marches

Written and compiled by Elana Yael Heideman, PhD

THE IsraelForever™ FOUNDATION

LINKS IN THE CHAIN

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Our memorial programs are uniquely designed to ensure a powerful and meaningful experience for everyone. They are fitting for all ages and can be altered to suit the needs of any audience or time frame. They also make for wonderful private reading for Yom HaShoah or any Holocaust memorial learning opportunity. Some selections can also be shared through artistic representation.

HOW TO UTILIZE THE PROGRAM:

- Narrow down selections based on your desired program length
- Assign readings
- Prepare table and candles
- Ensure set up of audio/visual logistics for sharing of the accompanying presentation that runs simultaneous as a background to the ceremony

For more ideas or information on how you can personalize the memorial for your community, please contact us at info@israelforever.org

Final Steps, Last Hopes:

The Untold Stories of the Nazi Death Marches

MEMORIAL PROGRAM

MC:
Shalom, and welcome.

Today we come together to remember. To learn. To inherit. Today, we pay tribute to the memory of the deceased, to the dignity of life destroyed, and to the legacy that we shall pass on to future generations.

Every year, communities gather to recount the experiences of suffering, the moments of hope, and the memories of victims and survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. Every year, we face new challenges, we uncover more stories, we learn new facts that shed light on this dark chapter of human history that we, the heirs of memory, must pass on.

From the Nuremburg Laws to the ghettos, from the cattle cars to the gas chambers, there is no end to the horrors of the Holocaust. The Death Marches are one facet whose reality is too often left untold.

The name alone defines its purpose: Death. March. The name most commonly refers to the procession of prisoners of the Nazi concentration, labor and death camps in Poland headed towards Germany in the final year of the war, a name bestowed by the victims of the marches themselves to refer to the agonizing journey by foot, in the freezing cold, for hundreds of kilometers during which hundreds of thousands met their death. Some know the term; few comprehend its meaning.

Not the first of their kind in history, the Nazi death march was the culmination of anxiety, pain, and confusion, after years of torture to their already beaten down bodies and souls. A final stage of the Final Solution.

And yet, our memory of the death marches must also recount the other marches throughout the duration of the Holocaust: Those who were marched into the forests and to their death by the Einsatzgruppen firing squads into mass graves. Those who were marched to the riverbanks and forced to march into the water amid gunfire. Even those who marched unknowingly towards their death by gas. With every step, their strength waned. With every crack of the whip or blare of a bullet, their fears grew. With every agonizing moment, their hopes of surviving became harder to cling on to.

Despite their significance as yet another method of Nazi torture, until recently there has been surprisingly little research on the death marches. Today, we take a moment to remember.

READING 1

It was already beginning to get light. An unending column of people, guarded by armed policemen, was passing by. Young women, women with infants in their arms, old women, handicapped, helped by their neighbors, young boys and girls -- all marching, marching.

Suddenly, in front of our window, a German SS man started firing with an automatic gun point-blank into the crowd. People were mowed down by the shots, and fell on the cobblestones.

There was confusion in the column. People were trampling over those who had fallen, they were pushing forward, away from the wildly shooting SS man. Some were throwing away their packs so they could run faster. The Latvian policemen were shouting 'Faster, faster' and lashing whips over the heads of the crowd.

The columns of people were moving on and on, sometimes at a half run, marching, trotting, without end. There one, there another, would fall and they would walk right over them, constantly being urged on by the policemen, 'Faster, faster', with their whips and rifle butts.

I stood by the window and watched until about midday when the horror of the march ended... Now the street was quiet, nothing moved. Corpses were scattered all over, rivulets of blood still oozing from the lifeless bodies. They were mostly old people, pregnant women, children, handicapped -- all those who could not keep up with the inhuman tempo of the march

-Frida Michelson

READING 2

Families and whole communities
Organized into columns, driven by foot from their homes towards the unknown.
The Jews could not keep up the pace demanded by the guards
The column kept stretching out.
Anyone who fell out of line or stopped to rest was shot.
The march ends. Their fate awaits.
Babi Yar, Ponary, Lupochowa, Rombuli, Tarnow, Vinnitsia, Rovno, Kishinev,
countless marches towards awaiting mass graves.

Stripped of their clothing, valuables confiscated.
Forced to run, barefoot, then naked, in front of family, friends, strangers.
Handicapped and elderly people were helped along the way.
This march of death was a march of humiliation to the killing grounds.

Some wept, others prayed
The living forced to stand on top of those already shot inside the pits
One bullet at a time - so as not to be wasteful.
Gunfire rained down all around them.
Their final steps had led them to this fate.
Their last hopes had been destroyed.

MC:

Columns of Jews were marched, countless times. Toward the ghettos, toward the cattlecars, toward the gas. Each march held within it moments of despair, moments of hope, moments of survival, and, inevitably, final moments of life. Each march was a form of a prison - unable to choose one's path or deter the awaiting fate, whatever it might be.

The first recorded death march took place in Poland in mid-January 1940, when more than 800 Jewish prisoners of war, servicemen in the Polish army, were sent on a march of almost 100 kilometers (62 miles) in freezing temperatures, guarded by mounted SS men. Only a few dozen survived.

After Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, whole communities were decamated in hidden mass graves of the forest of Lithuania, Russia, Eastern Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, BieloRussia, Macedonia.
Nearly 2 million Jews took their final steps and uttered their final prayers amidst trees that would be their final witnesses. Some graves are still being discovered only today. But these were not the last of the marches to death.

The marches from the camps to the West began in 1944, one year before the end of the war, with the first evacuation of prisoners from the Majdanek concentration camp whose gas chambers and last handful of barracks still stand today. They weren't told where they were going. Many wondered were they going out to a field to be shot? Would it be better to try to escape now? How far would they be marching? It was the uncertainty of that destination that increased the horror for some. Once again forced towards the unknown, the end of the war was their only hope.

READING 3

Sometime in mid April 1944, we were ordered to leave the work camp and go on a forced march — to nowhere.

We marched endlessly and aimlessly — another special torture of the Nazis. There was absolutely no provision for us. Neither food, water, nor shelter, only two guards with their guns.

We marched back and forth on the highways of Nazi Germany, parallel to the Death Commandoes of the SS in their black uniforms. They were hunting and shooting prisoners at random throughout the days and nights. We lived in constant fear for our miserable lives.

The march lasted 12 days, or was it weeks? We had no calendar, and after a while we stopped counting. We only knew that each day we were fewer and fewer. Some died of hunger, some of disease, some of total exhaustion and some by not wanting to live any more. They just fell by the wayside. I hoped some might have even managed to escape.

My two camp sisters — Sari and Edith — and I were inseparable on this "journey". To have friends who cared about each other made all the misery a little bit more bearable. We encouraged each other. We dragged or held each other up . Above all, we shared every little scrap of food, or anything that looked like food — rotten little potatoes or carrots dug up in the fields. We raided the garbage cans when marching through towns. Occasionally we dared to beg. Most of the times we were chased away but on a rare occasion German women would have pity on us. I remember once I was given a large slice of bread with marmalade on it, which the three of us scrupulously shared. Was that a feast!

We slept outdoors, in ditches or in small forests. Lice attached themselves to our bodies and in the seams of our clothes. Lice were our constant companions. We must have been an awful sight to the ordinary observer. My "shoes" consisted of wooden soles with canvas tops that were in tatters. While we worked in the factory I could tie the top and bottom together with wire, like a muzzle on a dog. But on the road, my "contraption" was coming apart and my feet were a mass of bleeding flesh.

Was it April or was it already May? We didn't know or care. By now, we were excruciatingly hungry, exhausted, dirty and utterly hopeless.

Our numbers dwindled to approximately 200 women at various stages of disintegration. We were the pitiful remnant of the nearly 1000 women who started out. Our forced march turned into a death march.

- Judy Weissenberg Cohen

READING 4

I have a curious, unreal feeling.
One of almost being part of the grayish dusk of the town.
Of course, you will not find a single German who will admit they ever saw a single one of us.
Still, we were there, hungry, in rags, our eyes screaming for food.
And no one heard us.
We ate the smell of smoked meats reaching our nostrils,
blowing our way from the various shops.
Please, our eyes screamed,
give us the bone your dog has finished gnawing.
Help us live.
You wear coats and gloves just like human beings do.
Aren't you human beings? What is underneath your coats?

- Isabella Leitner

READING 5

The Crimson Lake, Sol Teichman, 17 years old.

I was terrified at each and every step. My body convulsed with excruciating muscle spasms. Everywhere was the sharp crack of rifle fire as the Germans picked off one Jew after another. If a prisoner tried to step aside to relieve himself, he was shot, bayoneted or beaten to death with the heavy butt of a rifle. Was I going to be murdered next? I had no idea where we were going or for how long we were going to march. Would we be on this road for one day, two days, a week, a month, or did the Germans plan on marching us until we were all dead? Not knowing was torture, just as the Germans planned.

On the first night of the march my brother Steve lost heart.
"I don't want to go on. I don't want to live," he said.
I looked at my brother and I knew in the depths of my soul that there was no choice. And so, though Steve was bigger and heavier than me, I leaned over, draped him over my back and carried my brother.
All I could do was place one foot in front of the other, one breath and then another.
We marched for days and nights without food or water. Guards deliberately dropped bread in the road, anyone bending down to pick it up, were shot in the head.
My bones felt crushed, pulverized. Every breath was torture, my lungs felt as if they were exploding from unbearable pressure. But I knew that if I stopped, if I collapsed, the Germans would shoot us, beat us to death, or let their attack dogs rip us from limb to limb. And so I staggered onward.

One day, in the distance, we spied a lake. Many of the men on the march started running towards the water, desperate to get a drink of water. As I staggered closer to the lake I saw that the water was a strange color.
And then I realized that the lake was red.

The Germans were shooting hundreds of Jews by the shores of the lake--and the water turned to blood.
We stood and stared at the crimson lake.
I could not, would not, drink the bloody water.
We lay down, tried to sleep, and then in the middle of the night a tremendous thunderstorm exploded. Rain poured from the sky.
I stood in the middle of the field, opened my mouth and savored the sharp needles of rain dripping down my throat. The thunderstorm was miraculous and provided just enough water to relieve my overwhelming thirst.
Shivering in the rain and mud, I snatched bits of fitful sleep.
In the middle of the night I awoke and watched in dismay as starved prisoners, crazed by empty bellies, shoved tufts of grass--black dirt clinging to the roots--into their mouths, chewed and swallowed.
I was dizzy from exhaustion, hunger and fear. Every bone in my body was throbbing. I felt like a marching skeleton. Thousands were murdered along that road. My fellow Jewish prisoners were beaten to death with wooden clubs and iron bars. Some Jews welcomed death for life had become endless torture, unendurable.
Four uncles and several cousins died on this death march.
When we started the march we were about 6,000 Jews, arriving at Dachau there were only about 600 survivors.

MC:

In the final months of the Third Reich, as the Red Army pushed through Poland, SS chief Heinrich Himmler ordered gassing operations to cease. The crematoria at Auschwitz were dismantled, prisoners' records were destroyed, buildings demolished, and the Sonderkommando – special units of Jewish prisoners forced to complete the final processes of the death machine – were ordered to remove any other evidence of the killings, including the mass graves. But what could they do with the thousands of inmates and witnesses?
Himmler demanded that not a single prisoner from the concentration camps would be left alive to fall into the hands of the enemy, determined that the dying Third Reich would dictate the fortunes of both its prisoners and its enemies. They even believed that the Jews could be used as hostages in negotiations for a continued survival of the Nazi regime.

As the Allied armies approached, the regime began to evacuate 755,000 prisoners of those still alive in concentration camps. Prisoners were moved westward in the dead of winter, forced to march toward the heartland of Germany, where their presence would be less incriminating.
On the 8th of November 1944, 76,000 Hungarian Jews were sent on a month-long march to Dachau and Mauthausen.

From the 17th to the 21st of January 1945, just days before the arrival of the Soviet Army, the evacuations of the prisoners of Auschwitz-Birkenau began. 66,000 prisoners were evacuated.

66,000 prisoners were marched to Wodzislaw, where they were put on freight trains to the Gross-Rosen, *Buchenwald , *Dachau , and *Mauthausen concentration camps. Almost one in four died en route. On January 20, 7,000 Jews, 6,000 of them women, were marched from Stutthof 's satellite camps in the Danzig region. In the course of a 10-day march, 700 were murdered. Those who remained alive when the marchers reached the shores of the Baltic Sea were driven into the sea and shot. There were only 13 known survivors.

Over 1000 female Jewish prisoners were evacuated from the Schlesiersee camp in western Poland. Forced on a death march in a southwesterly direction, the prisoners passed through other camps along the way and more women were added to the march. On 5 May 1945, after covering a distance of over 800 km, the march ended in the town of Volary in Czechoslovakia, not far from the border with Germany and Austria.
106 days of rigorous marching through snow.
106 days of gnawing hunger and sickness, humiliation and murder. Some taking place in the public streets, before the eyes of the German population who, more often than not, did nothing.
Of the approximately 1,300 women, some 350 survived.

READING 6

Long columns of walking dead
Dragging their pain in rows of 5.
Days, weeks, months,
the distance growing, yet going nowhere.

One piece of bread, one can of food between four, and a blanket.
And then, nothing.
Cold clogs, wet rags, dry tongues.
Starved, weak, and ill
Their freezing skin barely able to contain the bones within.

Forced to march - often at a run.
An hour would go by. They kept on marching. Another hour would go by. The marching continued.
In their tens of thousands, the masses were dragged day and night, night and day, with no rest or break... the German guards encased their path with hate and gunfire.
Exhaustion, dysentery, despair
Handfuls of snow to ease hunger.
All who fell behind were shot — often entire columns at once.
Many just froze to death.
Bodies left alongside the roads. Discarded like trash, like animals.
The snow engulfed their skeletal corpses
who wanted only to touch the edge of freedom.

READING 7

Elie Wiesel and his father were marched from Buna-Monowitz, a subcamp of Auschwitz Birkenau, to Gleiwitz to be put on a freight train to the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, 350 miles (563 km) away.

Pitch darkness. Every now and then, an explosion in the night. They had orders to fire on any who could not keep up. Their fingers on the triggers, they did not deprive themselves of this pleasure. If one of us had stopped for a second, a sharp shot finished him off. Near me, men were collapsing in the dirty snow. Shots.

Resting in a shed after marching 50 miles (80 km), Rabbi Eliyahu asks if anyone has seen his son. They had stuck together for three years, "always near each other, for suffering, for blows, for the ration of bread, for prayer," but the rabbi had lost sight of him in the crowd and was now scratching through the snow looking for his son's corpse. "I hadn't any strength left for running. And my son didn't notice. That's all I know."
I don't tell the man that his son had indeed noticed his father limping, and had run faster, letting the distance between them grow.

And, in spite of myself, a prayer rose in my heart, to that God in whom I no longer believed. My God, Lord of the Universe, give me strength never to do what Rabbi Eliyahu's son has done.

The days were like nights, and the nights left the dregs of their darkness in our souls. We were no more than frozen bodies. I was putting one foot in front of the other mechanically. I was dragging with me this skeletal body which weighed so much. If only I could have got rid of it! In spite of my efforts not to think about it, I could feel myself as two entities - my body and me. I hated it.

We spent two days and nights in Gleiwitz locked inside cramped barracks without food, water or heat, sleeping on top of one another, so that each morning the living wake with the dead underneath them. There is more marching to the train station and onto a cattle wagon with no roof. We travel for ten days and nights, with only the snow falling on them for water. Of the 100 in our wagon, 12 survive the journey. The living make space by throwing the dead onto the tracks.

Our eyes closed, we waited merely for the next stop, so that we could count our dead.
I woke from my apathy just at the moment when two men came up to my father. I threw myself on top of his body. He was cold. I slapped him. I rubbed his hand, crying:
Father! Father! Wake up. They're trying to throw you out of the carriage ...
His body remained inert ...
I set to work to slap him as hard as I could. After a moment, my father's eyelids moved slightly over his glazed eyes. He was breathing weakly.
The two men moved away. I cried.

-Elie Wiesel

MC:

On January 27, we commemorated 70 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. But as we know, the Holocaust did not end on that day. While more than a 1.3 million Jews and other victims died in the infamous Nazi death camp, only a few thousand sick and injured inmates remained at one of most poignant symbols of Nazi cruelty. A joyous occasion for those who were saved by the Allied forces, it was unfortunately still not the end for hundreds of thousands still in captivity.

In the 3 remaining months before the liberation of the camps in Germany, the death marches constituted a final act of genocide by the Nazi regime. With relatively rare exceptions, the guards made no distinctions of category among the prisoners. The religious composition of the columns was heterogeneous and comprised all the victims that had been terrorized by the Nazis. There was no organized plan to exterminate these prisoners. Massacres and shootings were decided on at a local, even on an individual, basis. The SS guards killed for what they conceived of as practical reasons: The prisoners of the death marches were regarded collectively as a threat to the future of German civilization. The genocidal mentality guided their every decision, even when their own lives were at stake from the pending attack by the Allies.

As the Reich descended into chaos, the evacuations gathered pace, continuing right up to the eve of the surrender on May 8, 1945. The guards sometimes had to halt the marches and double back, their way blocked by enemy troops; Often lacking clear instructions, they frequently had little idea of where they were going. Some columns of prisoners stretched back for miles, competing for space on the clogged roads with fleeing Germans, retreating army supply convoys, and army and police units redeploying to new locations behind the front.

There were 59 different marches from Nazi concentration camps during the final winter of German domination, some covering hundreds of miles. Some had a specific destination; others were continued until liberation or death.The exact number of people killed on the death marches is unknown. It is estimated that of the prisoners sent out on death marches in the war's final weeks alone, between nearly 375,000 were murdered or died along the way.

READING 8

The prisoners' feet were kissed by winter frost,
their hunger ached. Some gave up hope,
unwilling to stumble on with pride
and will run out.

We deemed a small delay a meagre prize,
fell gently and remained there calm and solemn,
unless one were to shout at us to rise,
awaiting death behind the marching column.

Collapsed exhausted, only a fool would rise again
to drag his knees and ankles once more like marching pain
yet press on as though wings were to lift him on his way,
invited by the ditch but in vain, he'd dare not stay...
Ask him, why not? maintaining his pace, he might reply:
he longs to meet the wife and a gentler death. That's why.
But he's insane, that poor man, because above the homes,
since we have left them, only a scorching whirlwind roams.

Oh, if I could believe that all things for which I yearn
to exist beyond my heart, that there's still home and return...
return! the old veranda, the peaceful hum of bees
attracted by the cooling fresh plum jam in the breeze,
the still, late summer sunshine, the garden drowsing mute,
among the leaves the swaying voluptuous naked fruit,
and Fanni waiting for me, blonde by the russet hedge,
while languidly the morning re-draws the shadow's edge...

It may come true again -- the moon shines so round -- be wise!
Don't leave me, friend, shout at me, shout! and I will arise!

- Miklos Radnati

READING 9

Leah Kaufman was but a young girl when she endured the Holocaust. This poem reflects her struggles on the death march with her mother as well as her source of courage to live, which mainly comes from her mother's words telling her that she needs to tell the world the story of the horrid tortures they faced.

Deep and sunken eyes, hiding stories deep within
Callused feet are ablaze, they push through snow and wind
no provender for young or old
bread more precious than gold
Hatred fuels the world, fallen bodies are merely hurled... away... away

Bullets brush past my face, hairless arms capture cool breezes
Bullets meet with dirty flesh, stranger falls down in pain and weezes
Hard faced Kapos push us on
we march and run- night till dawn
I pray,my friends, please don't stop to rest
this,my people, is God's test

But I wonder, will I be remembered?
And I wonder- Will I be missed?
Once my words and laughter are gone from this earth
Will someone say the Kaddish for my lost soul, and give it worth
My mother's words still ring in my ears

You must be strong, you must be cunning, you must be compassionate my dear
Du muzt lebn, du muzt gedenken, du muzt dertzeiln der velt
[You must live, you must remember, you must tell the world...our story]
We wish for the truth to be told, not glory

Death is like a welcome end to our misery.
Yet my yearning to live is a mystery
40 miles on foot is no small task
Sisters are shot if they lag or fall in last
Frigid temperatures have reached my heart; I feel no love, I feel no grief.
My mother falls, in half- relief for the time between her and the Lord's is brief

So I tell myself to be strong
thinking of my sister's lullaby song
Despite the suffering, through God I still believe
I will go on- it will be my legacy

But I wonder, will she be remembered?
And I wonder- Will she be missed?
Once her words and laughter are gone from this earth
Will someone say the Kaddish for her lost soul, and give it worth
my mother's words still ring in my ears

You must be strong, you must be cunning, you must be compassionate my dear
Du muzt lebn, du muzt gedenken, du muzt dertzeiln der velt
[You must live, you must remember, you must tell the world...our story]
We wish for the truth to be told, not glory

READING 10

Even in the midst of the ongoing torture of the march, there were acts of kindness. A gesture, an expression, a gift of encouragement that , for some, meant the distinction between life and death.

We were driven on and on, and beaten mercilessly. The police confiscated our shoes, because they could be sold, and forced us to walk barefoot on the frozen ground from one place to another. With each bare footstep, we sank further and further into hopelessness and despair. Death seemed like a welcome end to our misery. Nevertheless, somehow I was always looking for a way to survive. The gendarmes walked on one side of the unpaved road, while we trudged on the other side. The dirt roads were mired in mud, with ridges of frozen earth that had been formed from the wheels of the army wagons. My red, swollen feet were frostbitten, numb, and bruised.

Early in the march my mother very much wanted us to have a chicken for Shabbos and she had an idea how we could get one. All four of us girls had pierced ears from the time we were young, and with my mother's, we had five pairs of gold earrings among us. As we were marching, the Romanians stood on the sidelines watching us and trading things. My mother traded all our earrings for a chicken. She sent me with it to a shochet, a ritual slaughterer who was on the march. Even on the Death March, my mother wanted to try to create a feeling of Shabbos. This would be a reminder of our identity and purpose in the world. Perhaps this would infuse our hearts with hope and the strength to continue.

- Leila

MC:

Upon arrival to the camps, they reached only further death and destruction. The prisoner count quadrupled. Without water, supplies or sanitation, and plagued by a virulent outbreak of typhus, the prisoners were dying like flies. Thousands who managed to survive the marches, which continued until the very last day of the war, met their demise in the horrific conditions of their final destination. Even their liberation would not be the end of their suffering

READING 11

Amid columns of retreating German soldiers and fleeing civilians, we marched, or rather straggled along. Even in defeat, they continued killing us. To avoid the shooting from allied planes, we often had to throw ourselves off the road, hugging our heads, as we flattened ourselves to the ground, hoping not to get a bullet in our back. One night in this total chaos, the Nazi guards disappeared, casting off their uniforms to blend in with the hordes of civilian war-zone refugees.

Even when the war was over, we were not really liberated, nor were our troubles over. We were left stranded on the road, to fend for ourselves. A couple of us women slept exhausted in a roadside barn. We started to walk "home." It was not easy. The roads were littered with bloated dead people. The locals avoided us; the Russian soldiers raped us. For sustenance, we pulled vegetables, such as potatoes, beets—whatever we could find—straight out of roadside fields, and ate them raw. For hope, we looked to each other and prayed for the future.

- Alice Kornfeld Bodner, 22 years old

"You were praying all those months to be liberated and then it hits you all of a sudden - here you are free. But after it sank in, the freedom - I am speaking for myself - I realized that I was hoping the whole time that I would see my father and maybe, hope beyond hope, my mother, although I knew that this was not a realistic hope. I realized that I had to start thinking about the fact of what would happen if I would not... Freedom is relative. Very much so. The thought of the future weighed very heavily on me. How would we make a future for ourselves?"

- Eva Braun, 18 years old:

Now we began to realize the enormity of the loss, we began to understand that Grandfather and Grandmother and hardly any of our relatives had returned, only that one cousin, and his father also returned later on. People said we shouldn't wait for them, but the truth is that we waited all the time for my father. I often look around, as though I am still searching... not for Father, it is my brother for whom I am still looking all the time. I know it is completely unrealistic, but my heart seems unable to give up that last hope.

-Miriam Steiner, 21 years old

READING 12

I have absolutely no idea how I, along with the few others, survived. Our minds were clouded from starvation and hopelessness. At night we collapsed from exhaustion. Suddenly we were awakened from our fretful sleep. In a loud but not unpleasant voice a man addressed us as "Freuleinen."
We looked at each other in disbelief. "Freuleinen"? Ladies and not "verfluchte Juden - Damned Jewess?"
You are all free to go"
Free? Did he really say free? You mean this nightmare is truly over?
We kissed and hugged each other with our parched lips and weak, skeletal arms. I remember very clearly, even today, that as we were walking very slowly, we became filled with renewed hope. Hope was a marvelous elixir.

Thus our physical and mental rehabilitation began: Not to be hungry or terrified any more; To sleep on a bed with clean crisp bed linen; To have a decent dress on our skinny bodies; To have shoes that really fit with no more bloody toes or heels. Mundane things to others but, to us then, utter luxury.

The war and the Holocaust was over, but for us survivors it never really ended. My emotional recovery started somewhat later and lasted for decades. That process was slow and painful as the enormity of my losses unfolded. The memories of a once wholesome but brutally shattered life will never fade.

As a warning, someone said: "We have neither the moral right to forgive nor the historical right to forget." On the other hand I am no longer a victim. I was given a chance to build a new, productive and happy life. I married and have two children, however, the struggle to keep this world safe, just, equitable and peaceful for all, is never ending. In my own, small way I am too trying to work for Tikkun Olam. Won't you do the same?

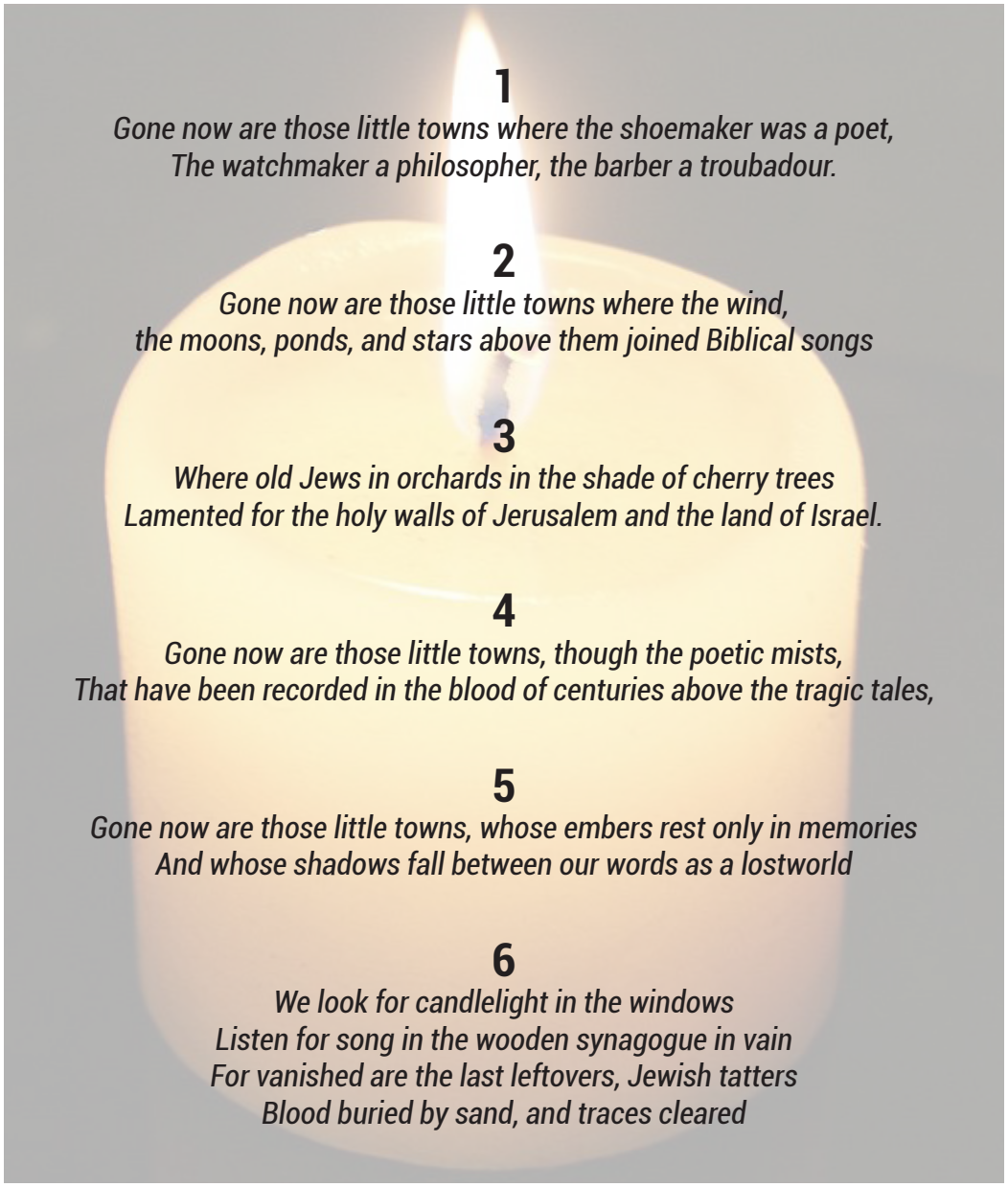
- Judy Weissenberg Cohen

MC:

Each life, and each death was its own separate, distinct tragedy that together has caused indelible trauma to the Jewish people. By personalizing the individual tragedies of the Jewish victims of Nazi Germany and their collaborators, we come together to resist the persistent efforts by enemies of Israel and the Jewish people who deny the reality of the Holocaust or those who cast it aside as insignificant.

Our collective efforts defy attempts to universalize the Holocaust, to shed the truth of its principal characteristic as a unique calamity of the Jewish people, while building appreciation of its tragic impact on the Jewish identity until this very day. As we inherit the stories, the fear, the strength of the Holocaust victims, we light these candles of memory to bring light to the past and to our hearts.

CANDLE LIGHTING



1

Gone now are those little towns where the shoemaker was a poet,
The watchmaker a philosopher, the barber a troubadour.

2

Gone now are those little towns where the wind,
the moons, ponds, and stars above them joined Biblical songs

3

Where old Jews in orchards in the shade of cherry trees
Lamented for the holy walls of Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

4

Gone now are those little towns, though the poetic mists,
That have been recorded in the blood of centuries above the tragic tales,

5

Gone now are those little towns, whose embers rest only in memories
And whose shadows fall between our words as a lostworld

6

We look for candlelight in the windows
Listen for song in the wooden synagogue in vain
For vanished are the last leftovers, Jewish tatters
Blood buried by sand, and traces cleared

MC:

As the years pass, and the generation of survivors inevitably dwindles, we the next generation must do everything possible to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust's victims. By sharing their stories, by learning their legacy, we keep their memory alive, and remind ourselves that each man, woman and child was, and is, an entire world.

Please join us in reciting the Mourner's Kaddish in memory of all victims of the Holocaust, and the survivors who have left this world.

Kaddish

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di-v'ra
chirutei, v'yamlich malchutei b'chayeichon
uvyomeichon uvchayei d'chol beit yisrael, ba'agala
uvizman kariv, v'im'ru: "amen."
Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam ul'almei almaya.
Yitbarach v'yishtabach, v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam
v'yitnaseh, v'yithadar v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal sh'mei
d'kud'sha, b'rich hu,
l'eila min-kol-birchata v'shirata, tushb'chata
v'nechemata da'amiran b'alma, v'im'ru: "amen."
Y'hei shlama raba min-sh'maya v'chayim aleinu
v'al-kol-yisrael, v'im'ru: "amen."
Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu
v'al kol-yisrael, v'imru: "amen."

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.
בְּעָלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵהּ,
וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן
וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,
בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא.
יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם
וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדַּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלַּל
שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא,
לְעֵלָּא מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא
וְשִׁירָתָא תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא,
דַּאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.
יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא,
וְחַיִּים טוֹבִים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.
עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן.

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world
which He has created according to His will.
May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days,
and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon;
and say, Amen.
May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.
Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored,
adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He,
beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that
are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.
May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us
and for all Israel; and say, Amen.
He who creates peace in His celestial heights,
may He create peace for us and for all Israel;
and say, Amen.

MC:
Today we have come together to remember. To learn. To inherit. To pay tribute to the memory of the deceased, to the dignity of life destroyed, and to the legacy that we shall pass on to future generations.

The systematic murder of six million innocent Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators for the sole reason that they were born Jewish bears heavy upon our shoulders. We, the next generation, carry with us the obligation of memory, of the legacy of life amidst death, and dignity in spite of it. We have unearthed the untold stories of the Death Marches which we will carry that memory in our hearts forever.

The Holocaust,of course, is not only about remembrance but also about a promise to the future. Unfortunately, humankind again is witness to large-scale killings and genocides, and a rise of Antisemitism and chants of Jews to the gas. The ghosts of the past are making another appearance. Once again, hatred has returned and the potential for evil is unmasking itself even among the common man.

Hatikvah (The Hope)

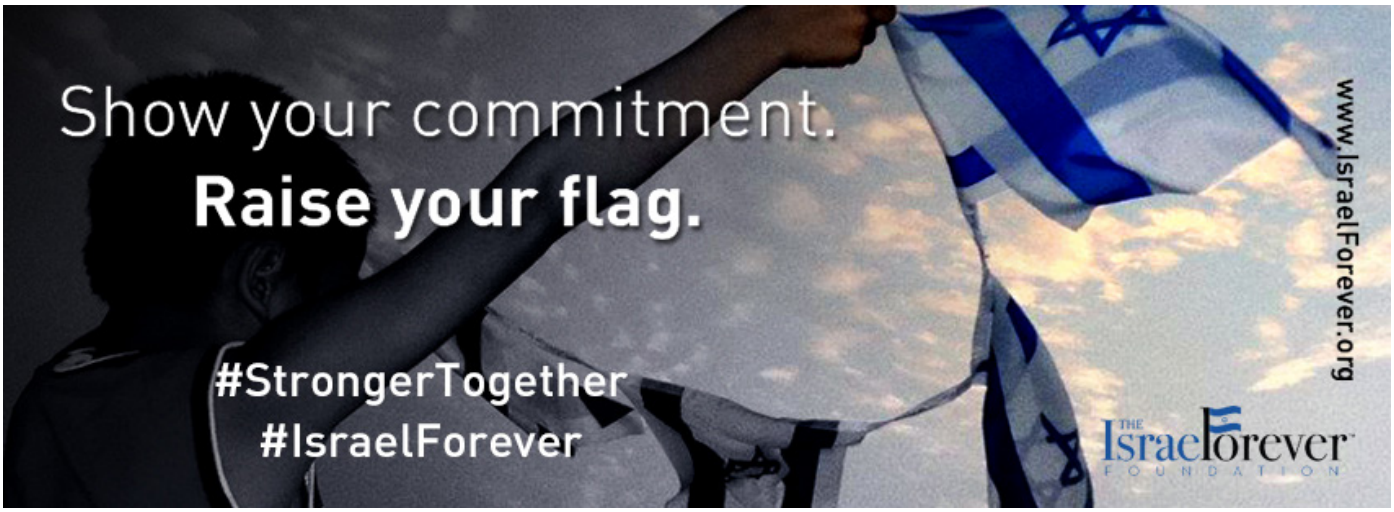
Kol od ba'le'vav p'nima,
Nefesh yehudi ho'miyah.
U'lefa-atei mizrach kadimah,
Ayin le'Tziyyon tzofiyah.
Od lo avda tikva-teinu,
Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim
Lih-yot am chofshi b'ar-tzeinu
Eretz Tziyyon v'Yerushalayim.

כָּל עוֹד בַּלֵּבָב פְּנִימָה
נֶפֶשׁ יְהוּדִי הוֹמִיָּה,
וּלְפַאֲתֵי מִזְרָח קָדִימָה
עַיִן לְצִיּוֹן צוֹפִיָּה,
עוֹד לֹא אָבְדָה תִּקְוָתֵנוּ,
הַתִּקְוָה בַּת שְׁנוֹת אַלְפַּיִם
לִהְיוֹת עַם חָפְשִׁי בְּאַרְצֵנוּ,
אֶרֶץ צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלָיִם.

As long as deep in the heart
The soul of a Jew yearns
And forward, to the East,
to Zion, the eye looks
Our hope will not be lost
The Hope of 2000 years
To be a free nation in our land
The Land of Zion and Jerusalem


THE
Holocaust and Hatikvah
Honor the Past, Celebrate the Future


"We cannot erase the evil. But we can create good. We can transform the world through goodness by living as Jews and acting as Jews, with our Torah and mitzvot. Let us demonstrate to the world that "the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied" (Exodus 1:12), and that the very Jewish soul that our enemies so wish to destroy, is alive and vibrant as ever." ADIN STEINSALTZ
THE IsraelForever FOUNDATION
www.IsraelForever.org


Show your commitment.
Raise your flag.
#StrongerTogether
#IsraelForever
www.IsraelForever.org
THE IsraelForever FOUNDATION


THE IsraelForever FOUNDATION
"This tradition of passing anti-Semitism from generation to generation, has no response other than a strong and steadfast Jewish state which is uncompromising and will always be a safe haven for the world's Jews."
Noah Klieger, Holocaust survivor