

**Holocaust Survivors Come Home 1945-1962.**

Park Ave Synagogue. Wednesday July 15 2020

**Dalia Ofer, "We Israelis Remember, But How? The Memory of the Holocaust and the Israeli Experience", Israel Studies, 18, 2 Summer 2013.**

1) In the early years of statehood Israeli leaders were concerned that the experience of the Holocaust would loom large in Israeli society and might drive Israelis' perspective on the non-Jewish world towards negativity, as expressed in the saying "the entire world is against us." On the other hand, leaders were also concerned lest the memory of the Holocaust and its lessons would fade away in one generation.

2) On Holocaust Remembrance Day in 1956, **Abba Kovner** expressed this dilemma in the following manner: *"He who says: forget nothing—in the end will remember nothing, for remembering everything leads to a state of madness; but to forget everything is in effect a betrayal of life."*

3 Israel's ideological and political goal was to become a "normal nation" and a normal state. In the international sphere, the vision of the political leadership was to become part of "the family of nations." They hoped that Israel's politics would be determined according to "normal" guiding principles and interests, and that traumatic memories of the helpless state of the Jews during World War II would give way to rational considerations. However, a strong sense of the singular experience of the war years and of the establishment of the state hindered the feeling of "normality."

4) The short time that had elapsed between destruction and rebirth created among many Jews, religious and non-religious alike, a sense of living in an age of disasters and miracles that defied "normality." The destruction was almost immediately followed by the heavy toll paid by Israel during its War of Independence in the lives of its young people, among them many Holocaust survivors.

5) Memories were often at odds—in one breath the terminology related to heroism and weakness, resistance and helplessness. Testimonies narrated great sacrifice alongside selfishness and disregard of the community. Could a master narrative of the Holocaust be conceived

under such circumstances? Were the commemorative institutions able to establish a unified, structured master narrative of the Holocaust? Would such a master narrative put to rest the disturbing questions of Jewish helplessness, loneliness, and the inability of the Jews to defend themselves during Nazi rule? Would it solve the tension between viewing the Holocaust as a singular and particularly Jewish event on the one hand, and as an expression of the universal evil of genocide on the other?

6) Already in 1953, during the Knesset debate when the Yad Vashem Bill was first tabled, these differences came to light. **Minister of Education and Culture Ben-Zion Dinur** pointed out that he was presenting a unique law that deviated from the normal procedure of legislation. It dealt with remembrance, even commanding one to remember, whereas a law normally deals with actions. **Yad Vashem** would assemble documentation, formal and personal, and would collect testimonies and documentation on all aspects of the Holocaust. These materials would then serve the authors and historians who would labor to reconstruct the historical narrative.

7) Soldiers visiting Yad Vashem often expressed great confusion as to how they themselves had confronted the Holocaust prior to the 1967 war. In one of these talks, a soldier reflected on the enforced idleness during the period of waiting, while his family and home were in danger, making associations with the Jews during the Holocaust

8) It was only in 1985 that the Holocaust became a mandatory subject in Israeli high schools.

**9) Conclusion** On the other hand, there is an institutionalized effort to establish a “meta memory” of the Holocaust. We have seen that all these voices—the individual, the group, and the national—are speaking to each other and thus create a dialogue of different voices. This dialogue is taking place in a specific social and cultural context, which is constantly evolving and changing... Beyond the historical fact of the Holocaust, its central meaning lies in the ongoing dialogue between the individual, the community, society, and the events of the past as reflected by those who write, study, and think about it, or present it in artistic form. This dialogue represents an endless effort to understand

the meaning of the Holocaust, and a permanent search for ways to incorporate its lessons into the collective memory.

## **Bibliography**

Edmund Goldenberg, You Must Live. A Physician Remembers the Holocaust, 1998 - *an easy read about memory and coping.*

Baruch Goldstein, For Decades I Was Silent. A Holocaust Survivor's Journey Back to Faith, 2008- *a personal recollection.*

Francoise Ouzan, How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt their Lives: France, the United States and Israel, 2018- *an excellent analysis.*

Myra Giberovitch, Recovering From Genocidal Trauma, 2013- *a fascinating psychological perspective.*

Idith Zertal, Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood, 2011- *a revisionist historian who is highly critical of Israel for "appropriating and using the memory of the Holocaust".*

Joshua Zimmerman (Ed), Contested Memories. Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath, 2003- *an ongoing debate.*

## **YouTube**

"Israel's Unreported Holocaust Survivors", Unreported World, Channel 4, July 2018, 24 minutes –*a painful and disturbing presentation on the poverty and loneliness of Holocaust survivors.*