



DEFIANCE IN FACE OF DESPAIR

Holocaust Memory Reflection Program

Written and Compiled by Dr. Elana Heideman

INTRODUCTION:

For years it was said that the “Jews walked to their death like sheep to slaughter,” but the diaries and memoirs of the victims and survivors prove that every day, they resisted the tyranny, fought for life, and struggled to keep their humanity, their dignity, and their hope alive under the most severe conditions.

Jewish resistance in the ghettos, camps and throughout the Holocaust is an integral part of the memory we inherit and must pass onward to the future. **This reflection program explores the myriad of ways that Jews responded to the extreme circumstances they faced during the Holocaust. Written and compiled by Holocaust scholar Dr. Elana Heideman, student and protege of Professor Elie Wiesel, the content is laid out as a ceremony, for those interested in running it with their school or community. It is also a wonderful resource for reading privately or with a small group.**

OPENING POEM - 4 READERS

Standing together at the front, reciting in turn.

1

The homelessness, the helplessness - of the individual, the family, the community, the entire people

It gave new meaning to the history of Jewish suffering.

Reality dictated a world turned inside out, where faith and hope were outlawed

and pain was ever-present.

Hatred, despair, death wafted through the streets around them, it encompassed every crevice.

How does one maintain faith under such circumstances?

To stand up to the bullies and the brutes?

How to remain sane...

1

To resist the deterioration of the mind, the suffering of the soul, and the weakening of the body and spirit

To remain human in a sea of inhumanity

Every act, every breath, was an act of courage

A willingness, a need, to live another day.

Every dream a protection of dignity.

Every song a plea and a prayer.

To live within a world of death

Was in itself

Defiance in the Face of Despair.

2

It is difficult for me to describe the religious Jews, who somehow got hold of a Bible. Every day, on their way to forced labor, they used to read quietly out of it... More than once I tried to explain to them the dangers in what they were doing...These people seemed happy to me. They know their days were numbered so they did not let the upheaval and the hunger uproot their human feelings."

3

"To be creative during the Holocaust was a protest.
Each man when standing face to face with cruel danger,
with death, reacts in his own way.
The artist reacts in an artistic way. This is his weapon..."

Alexander Bogen

4

We are on the brink of extinction. The people are being exterminated – trampled. Yet we are determined - this small group can still save it. Let us go out tomorrow into the streets, let us put fire to the ghetto and attack the Germans with knives. We will die. It is our duty to die. And Israel's honour will have been saved. Days will come and it will be told: this poor nation had youth which saved its honour as best it could. **Our slogan must be: 'All are ready to die as human beings!' and To have the honor of seeing Jewish men in battle.**

MC: Welcome

Shalom and welcome.

Each year on this day, we take a step back in time. Seeking a connection with the generation of the past, we come together to remember and to take a glimpse into a world unknown, hoping only that we can glean something new, something meaningful, something that we can carry in our hearts.

We come together to witness and to take with us into the future however small of a detail that can humanize the magnitude of persecutions imposed on our people.

We come to explore the confines of memory, to open our senses and empathize through another's pain and suffering in another reality entirely. To identify with the hopes and fears that mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, bubbes and zaides held within their hearts.

It is our challenge, each year, to try anew. To remember another fact, to learn another name, to experience another moment of survival or the tragedy of death.

Now, more than ever, as the rising tide of hate swells around us both in our homeland and around the world, as the echoes of the past grow increasingly distant and fewer survivors are among us to ensure that their truths be told, it is fitting for us to reach into the past and learn from the moments of defiance that perpetuated the hope for life.

Alone against a power, a hate so strong, it encompassed whole societies and nations. Alone in a nightmare, a hell, a chaos. As we come together tonight, let us hear the voices of the past and recount the expressions, actions, and intentions of the Jews who sought only to survive another day, to die with dignity, or to die in courageous battle as a final act of defiance against the tyranny of annihilation while a silent world looked on.

CANDLELIGHTING

Candlelighters stand in front of the table together and light their candle in turn.

READER:

Defiance of spirit.
Defiance of will.
Defiance of death.

We light these candles as a testament to their memory, to their legacy, to their honor, and to their humanity with the 7th candle representing the generation of survivors whose memory has contributed to our understanding of the risks, the obstacles, and the successes of defiance in the face of despair.

CANDLE 1 -

The moments that matter.
The fight to live
The perpetual dream

CANDLE 2 -

The comfort offered a friend, or a stranger
The smugglers and their selfless sacrifice for sustenance
The portrait that portrays only one's humanity

CANDLE 3 -

The forbidden prayers uttered alone or together
The kindling of the Shabbat candles
The observance of faith and practice even under the most severe circumstances

CANDLE 4 -

The symphonies, performances and games of body and mind
The Hebrew, Torah and history learned in secret
Each moment of life within the graveyard of the ghetto...

CANDLE 5 -

The willingness to give of oneself
The shared morsel of bread
The song that lifted the soul.

CANDLE 6 -

The search for meaning
The faith in Hashem.
The hope in man.

CANDLE 7 -

Surviving survival
Sharing the pain
Passing on the stories.

May every act of defiance live on in our collective memories for future generations to learn from.

MC: "Every day - Defiance!"

From the beginning of Hitler's ascent in Germany and all through the war, Jews actively voiced their resistance against the Nazi regime with rallies, uprisings and eventually rebellions and escapes. But under the unique circumstances, resistance could not be defined just by dramatic, militant events.

Resistance, defiance, the struggle for survival or death with dignity, took the shape of whatever possibility arose to combat the effects of dehumanization, isolation, abuse, hunger, loss, pain, anxiety, agony, and the pervasive threat of death.

For some, the struggle was expressed in their determination to write; others, to smuggle food; and for some others, the perpetuation of the unshakeable faith for which the Jews have been known throughout history, for even under the punishment of death, Jews refused to renounce their religion and celebrated their holidays in secret, improvising essential ritual objects.

3 READERS - *Standing together at the front, reciting in turn.*

1 READER - Everything is forbidden

The wonder is that despite all this we go on living. Our life may be one of scorn and debasement as it is seen from outside, but our human emotions have become so numb that we no longer feel, and the awareness of insult that is concealed within every human being no longer rises up in protest against even the most barbarous and cruel of such insults.

To what can this matter be compared? To a vicious dog who does not treat you with respect; would you, then, be insulted? Is not that why he is a dog?

Everything is forbidden to us; and yet we do everything! We make our "living" in ways that are forbidden, and not by permission...secret minyanim in their hundreds all over Warsaw hold prayers together and do not leave out even the most difficult hymns. Neither preachers nor sermons are missing; everything is in accordance with the ancient traditions of Israel. Where there is no informer the enemy does not know what is going on. And surely no member of the Community of Israel, even if he was born in Poland, will go to lay information against Jews standing before their Maker...Their hearts are poured out to the God of Israel in whispered supplications. This time it is without cantors and without choirs; there are only whispered prayers, but the prayer comes from the heart; even tears may be wept secretly, and the gates of the tears cannot be locked...

2 READER - The Little Smuggler

Over the wall, through holes, and past the guard
Through the wires, ruins, and fences.
Plucky, hungry, and determined
I sneak through, dart like a cat.

At noon, at night, at dawn,
In snowstorm, cold or heat.
A hundred times I risk my life
And put my head on the line.

Under my arm a gunny sack,
Tatters on my back,
On nimble young feet,
With endless fear in my heart.

But one must endure it all.
One must bear it all,
So that tomorrow morning
The fine folk can eat their fill.

Over the wall, through holes and bricks,
At night, at dawn, at noon,
Plucky, hungry, artful,
I move silently like a shadow.

And if the hand of destiny
Should seize me in the game,
That's a common trick of life,
You, mother, do not wait up for me.

I will return no more to you,
My voice will not be heard from afar.
The dust of the street will bury
The lost fate of a child.

And only one request
Will stiffen on my lips:
Who, mother mine, who
Will bring your bread tomorrow?

MC Spirit, Culture, Life

Chaim Kaplan writes from within the Warsaw Ghetto, where 450,000 Jews of all backgrounds, levels of observance, cities of origin were crammed together in a 1.3 mile radius.

*Never before was there a government so evil that it would forbid an entire people to pray.
Yet what did the Jews of Europe do under such a circumstance? They prayed, they learned Torah, and found a
spiritual outlet for their need to resist the tortures they were forced to endure.*

Just as we learn from each of the 1200 ghettos throughout Eastern Europe, perseverance means not giving in - physically, mentally or spiritually.

Even the smallest act that opposed the conditions of life in the shadow of death undermined Nazi power and inspired Jewish hope.

Cultural life continued - Secretive, held at the initiative of underground organizations, events included literary evenings, gatherings to mark the anniversary of a Jewish artist, concerts. Jewish authors, directors, and poets produced new works, and there were secret libraries.

As Herman Kruk of the Vilna Ghetto wrote in his diary: "Life is stronger than anything. In the Vilna ghetto, life begins to pulse again. Under the overcoat of Ponar, a life creeps out that strives for a better morning. The boycotted concerts prevail. The halls are full. The literary evenings burst their seams, and the local hall cannot hold the large number that comes there."

To be with people, distracted from reality, and able to relish another small moment of joy in the face of despair.

Film Clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=du47gpx39mM>

MC: Momentary Survival

Resistance of any kind during the Holocaust required great courage. Creating schools hidden away in basements; printing and distributing underground newspapers; maintaining religious customs; drawing, painting, or secretly keeping records of ghetto life and burying them in the hope that they would be discovered after the war. In such a reality, certain behaviors are a mere act of physical existence, whereas others are an expression of humanity - wherein every word is a fight against the inhumanity surrounding them.

Every day Jews were faced with countless scenarios in which their lives were threatened. Every day they were put into compromising positions, unsure of their ability to outlast this next onslaught of abuse, violence, murder. Every day was measured solely by momentary survival.

Prayer, poetry, song, art, theatre, good will. Laughter, mitzvot, culture, kindness. In the Holocaust universe, even the smallest detail could make a difference between hope and despair. Through cultural and spiritual resistance, Jews managed to create a personal-albeit tenuous-world in which small, day-to-day decision-making mattered, as a way of preserving internal meaning. Every expression of dignity was an act of defiance against a world determined to see them destroyed.

4 READERS:

1 READER

Music and poetry contributed to the mystical atmosphere of the Ghetto. The dignity of hundreds-year old traditions remained unshakeable within. Artistic expression helped the Jews share their suffering with one another, offering a therapeutic release from the darkened reality of the ghetto streets. Mordekhai Gebertig, Herman Glick and wrote songs that touched upon the open wounds of the Jews, a twisted encouragement of an unknown future.

Jews, let us be cheerful! It won't be long, I hope-
The war will soon be over,
And soon their end will come
Be cheerful and don't worry
Don't carry on in grief

Have patience and have confidence
 Take hard times in your stride
 Remember: patience, confidence
 Don't let slip away
 Those ancient weapons that unite
 Our people to this day!
 Revel, dance, you hangmen!
 It won't be long, I hope
 Once there was a Haman
 His fate awaits you, too
 Revel, dance, you hangmen
 Jews know what suffering means
 The most demanding labor
 Won't tire us in the least
 "Sweep!" you tell us? So we'll sweep
 But as long as you remain,
 There is no point to sweeping
 This place will not come clean!
 "Wash" you tell us? So we'll wash
 But the blood from Abel's heart
 Cannot be washed away
 Drive us from our homes
 Cut away our beards!
 Jews, let us be cheerful-
 We'll see them go to hell!

2 READER - At All Cost

From the DIARY OF AVRAHAM LEVIN

June 5, 1942

...One of the most surprising side-effects of this war is clinging to life, the almost total absence of suicides. People die in great numbers of starvation, the typhus epidemic or dysentery, they are tortured and murdered by the Germans in great numbers, but they do not escape from life by their own desire. On the contrary, they are tied to life by all their senses; they want to live at any price and to survive the war. The tensions of this historic world conflict are so great that all wish to see the outcome of the gigantic struggle and the new regime in the world, the small and the great, old men and boys. The old have just one wish: the privilege of seeing the end and surviving Hitler.

I know a Jew who is all old age. He is certainly about 80. Last winter, a great tragedy befell the old man. He had an only son who was about 52. The son died of typhus. He has no other children. And the son died. He did not marry a second time and lived with his son. A few days ago I visited the old man. When I left - his mind still entirely clear - he burst out crying and said: "I want to see the end of the war, even if I only live another half hour!" Why should the old man wish so much to stay alive? There it is: even he wants to live, "if only half an hour" after the last shot is fired. This is the burning desire of all the Jews.

3 READER - The Commandment to Live

It is our good fortune that the conquerors failed to understand the nature and strength of Polish Jewry. Logically, we are obliged to die. According to the laws of nature, our end is destruction and total annihilation. How can an entire community feed itself when it has no grip on life? For there is no occupation, no trade which is not limited and circumscribed for us.

But even this time we did not comply with the laws of nature. There is within us some hidden power, mysterious and secret, which keeps us going, keeps us alive, despite the natural law. If we cannot live on what is permitted, we live on what is forbidden. That is no disgrace for us...

...The Jews of Poland – oppressed and broken, shamed and debased, still love life, and do not wish to leave this world before their time.

Say what you like, the will to live amidst terrible suffering is the manifestation of some hidden power whose nature we do not yet know. It is a marvelous, life-preserving power that only the most firmly established and strongest of the communities of our people have received as a blessing.

We have remained naked. But as long as that secret power is concealed within us, we shall not yield to despair. The strength of this power lies in the very nature of the Jew, which is rooted in our eternal tradition that commands us to live...
Chaim Kaplan

4 READER: Youth

The Nazi aim included turning Jew against Jew in the struggle to preserve life. Although they often succeeded in achieving such divisions, writings from within the ghetto indicate an increased connection of Jews with their Jewish self, and therefore, a reconnection with the people with whom they suffered.

Demonstrating a commitment to the ideals of Jewish life and perseverance, the youth of the ghetto channeled their energies into meaningful activities, putting to use their minds, bodies and all faculties possible. By doing so, their spirit remained alive, dedicated to a greater cause that sends a message to future generations of their faithfulness as Jews, finding an outlet for their despair in their devotion to a possible better tomorrow.

From the underground newspaper of the *Fighting Organization of the Jewish Pioneer Youth (Akiva) in Krakow, HeHalutz haLohem "Fighting Pioneer", August 13, 1943*

We have paid the highest possible price because we were lulled asleep by the prosperity of Europe, or guided by false hopes of rescue that would come from outside. We lost our sense of reality and instead of planning our dependence we scattered invaluable forces in alien fields. Who knows what would have been the future of the Jewish people if there were a Yishuv of half a million in Palestine, that built its foundations before the war broke out and which would have by now reached a million souls? Only this nucleus of a Jewish State now offers assurance for the survival of the people.

It makes us believe that an independent Jewish nation will rise again, a well-spring of profound spiritual values, as always. It is easier to die, therefore, in the knowledge that a genuine Jewish life still throbs there, that in that one small corner of the wide world we were not undesirables, lonely victims. There would be no sense in our death but for the feeling that, after we have gone, they will be the only ones who will think about us with genuine emotion.

Therefore, despite certain death, we join them in their struggle for the future. Every one of our deeds paved the way for freedom and furthers the building of an independent homeland. Our revolt is a protest against the evil that is engulfing the world. To counter the terror that has crushed our people we shall stand prepared for the struggle for justice and freedom that should light up the life of humanity as a whole.

We are willing to die in order that the shame of death in slavery shall not burden the future of the Jews, and that these Jews shall not have to recall the Jews of Europe with shame because they allowed themselves to be led unresisting to slaughter, and they had not the spirit and courage to defend themselves against destruction. As we had not been allowed to make our contribution to the creative work of building, we shall at least fulfill our historic duty here: it is we who must raise up the name of the lost people, to wipe away the mark of shame of slavery, and to place it among the ranks of people free in spirit...

TO DIE WITH DIGNITY: ACTIVE RESISTANCE AND THE DEFIANCE OF WILL

MC:

Nazi power, ideology, and hate infiltrating every crevice of society, transforming humanity, reason, logic, and truth. Finding solace in practices and ideals understandable under the severe circumstances where every act of resistance was punishable by death.

Collective physical resistance was a near impossibility - little access to weapons, almost no ability to move about freely, and grave consequences. An act of resistance by one person would mean the death of many others, and the majority of the populations both Jewish and non that for various reasons were uninterested in taking action against the Nazis. Yet the youth leaders continued to dream.

In the face of assured death, uprisings took root. Underground units of young fighters - men and women, ranging from 14 to 40, took aim at the Nazi enemy and sought to strike back with every last ounce of their being. The majority of the members came from the Zionist groups who transferred their desire for emigration to Palestine into a pioneering effort of physical resistance. The fighters of the ghetto were determined to avenge the murder of their fellow Jews.

There was little prospect of being saved, and victory was unlikely. The ghetto underground was the only organization of its kind in recorded history to call for an uprising whose primary purpose was to offer resistance for its own sake as they pleaded with the communities to join them in their fight for one last act of dignity in the face of death.

2 READERS - Standing together at the front, reciting in turn.

READER 1 Call to Uprising

On January 22, 1943, six months will have passed since the deportations from Warsaw began. We all remember well the days of terror during which 300,000 of our brothers and sisters were cruelly put to death in the death camp of Treblinka. Six months have passed of life in constant fear of death, not knowing what the next day may bring. We have received information from all sides about the destruction of the Jews in the Government-General in Germany, in the occupied territories. When we listen to this bitter news we wait for our own hour to come, every day and every moment. Today we must understand that the Nazi murderers have let us live only because they want to make use of our capacity to work to our lost drop of blood and sweat, to our lost breath. We are slaves. And when the slaves are no longer profitable, they are killed. Every one among us must understand that, and every one among us must remember it always.

During the past few weeks certain people have spread stories about letters that were said to have been received from Jews deported from Warsaw, who were said to be in labor camps near Minsk or Bobruisk. Jews in your masses, do not believe these tales. They are spread by the Gestapo.

The blood-stained murderers have a particular aim in doing this: to reassure the Jewish population in order that later the next deportation can be carried out without difficulty, with a minimum of force and without losses to the Germans. They want the Jews not to prepare hiding-places and not to resist. Jews, do not repeat these lying tales.

Do not help the [Nazi] agents. The Gestapo's dastardly people will get their just desserts. Jews in your masses, the hour is near. You must be prepared to resist, not to give yourselves up. Not even one Jew must go to the train. People who cannot resist actively must offer passive resistance, that is, by hiding. We have now received information from Lvov that the Jewish Police there itself carried out the deportation of 3,000 Jews. Such things will not happen again in Warsaw. Now our slogan must be: **Let everyone be ready to die like a man!**

January, 1943

READER 2

On Mila Street the first bullet fell –
A guard wobbled in the door –
Looked astonished...
- incredible –
- something isn't right here
On Mila Street BLOOD????
He backed away from the doorway
And swore. I'm bleeding...
And meanwhile Brownings barked
On Niska
On Dzika
On Pawia
On twisting stairs where a mother
Was dragged down by the hair
Lies SS – man Hantke...
Strangely tensed as though
He found death indigestible
This revolt like a bone in his throat...
Like purple blossoms of blood From Niska and Mila and Muranowska
Flames from our gun barrels flower
This is our spring, this is our counterattack
This wine of battle pounds in our heads
These alleys of Dzika and Ostrowska
Are like the partisan's forests –
Block numbers on our chests,
Our medals in the Jewish War
The shriek of six letters flashes with red
Like a battering ram it beats: REVOLT...
--Władysław Szlengel

FILM CLIP 2: Uprising - To Live and Die With Honor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhlwy6d8vBk> 4:45

READER

In response to the Uprising, the Great Tlomackie Synagogue was blown up and Jew hunts began in the Aryan side, seeking out Jews in hiding. With few weapons and limited ammunition, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the largest act of active resistance against the Nazis and the first armed revolt in occupied Europe, although not the sole uprising of its kind. In Bialystok, Vilna, Mir, Czesłokowa, Lenin, Lachwa, Kremenetz, Nesvizh, Sosnowiec, and Tarnow, among others, resisted with force when the Germans began to deport ghetto populations

Emanuel Ringelblum's last letter was written on March 1st, 1944, intended to be read by Jewish cultural figures in the free world.

.....When those murderous deportation actions started, the idea of putting up a fight took the place of self-help. Our heroic youth, of all [political] persuasions headed the struggle, with those faithful to Eretz Israel at the forefront. The glorious period of armed Jewish resistance in Poland began: the heroic resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto, the magnificent fight in Bialystok, the destruction wrought by Jews in the slaughterhouses of Treblinka and Sobibor, the battles at Tarnow, Bedzin, Czestochowa and other places. Jews demonstrated to the world their ability to engage in an armed struggle, and to die with dignity in battle with the mortal enemy of the Jewish people and of all humanity.....It is doubtful that we will meet again. Give our warm greetings to all Jewish cultural workers, writers, journalists, musicians, sculptors, all builders of present-day Jewish culture and fighters for our national redemption, and that of humanity as a whole.

MC: Forest fighters

The stories have become legend; their legacy one of bold courage and bravery. The legacy of the partisans is one that will live on in Jewish memory for generations to come. From Abba Kovner's Avengers to the Bielski Brothers, and countless, nameless other clandestine groups of Jewish partisans, they risked their lives organizing secret resistance to Nazi control. They attacked German-held railroads, bridges, and military installations. They organized efforts to assassinate Nazi collaborators and took retribution on the murderers of their communities. This was not revenge but justice, and some 20,000– 30,000 Jews took part in daring raids and rescue operations living deep in the forests of Poland, Belorussia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, France, Italy.

MC:

Faye Schulman's entire family was massacred in Poland, and she fled into the forest where she joined a group of resistance fighters. She vowed to use her skills as a photographer to help the fight. Faye participated in a daring raid to rescue her photography equipment. Then she took a series of incredible photographs that captured the truth of those brave men and women who fought the Nazis.

As the only Jewish woman in the group, Schulman kept her identity secret throughout much of the war, all while documenting the bravery and sacrifice of her cohort. "I want people to know that there was resistance," she said in an interview after the war. "Jews did not go like sheep to the slaughter. I was a photographer. I have pictures. I have proof."

It was this resolve that the partisans stood for, and their anthem shouted it out to the world.

Zog Nit Keyn Mol! Say It isn't the last road for you! *Mir Zaynen Da!* We Are Here!

The words of the infamous Partisan Song continue to echo in the trees of their hiding places and in the hearts of their survivors and descendants. It remains today a legacy to their determination, their will, and their pride.

SONG - HYMN OF THE PARTISANS - film clip

Partisan's Song - Original Yiddish by Hirsch Glick

Zog nit keyn mol az du geyst dem letstn veg,
Khotsh himeln blayene farshtein bloye teg.
Kumen vet nokh undzer oysgebenkte sho -
S'vet a poyk ton undzer trot - mir zaynen do!



Fun grinem palmenland biz vaysn land fun shney,
Mir kumen on mit undzer payn, mit undzer vey,
Un vu gefain s'iz a shprits fun undzer blut,
Shprotsn vet dort undzer gvure, undzer mut.

S'vet di morgnzun bagildn undz dem haynt,
Un der nekhtn vet farshvindn mitn faynd,
Nor oyb farzamen vet di zun in dem kayor -
Vi a parol zol geyn dos lid fun dor tsu dor.

Dos lid geshribn iz mit blut un nit mit blay,
S'iz not keyn lidl fun a foygl af der fray,
Dos hot a fold tsvishn faindike vent
Dos lid gezungen mit naganes in di hent!

To zog nit keyn mol az du geyst dem letstn veg,
Khotsh kimlen blayene farshtein bloye teg,
Kumen vet nokh undzer oysgebenkte sho -
S'vet a poyk ton undzer trot - mir zaynen do!

We must resolve to live and fight another day
Through all the pain and hurt we must not lose our way
The dawn we've waited for will surely soon appear
And then the world will hear us shout that we are here
The dawn we've waited for will surely soon appear
And our marching feet will thunder we are here.

From shtetls in the east and ghettos in the west
They burned our people in their hate filled evil quest
We smell the ash of fellow Jews who died with pain
And their ashes in our memory will remain
This land is soaked with blood of Jews the world forgot
And the world will surely know that we have not

The morning sun will cast dark shadows on our foe
And he will suffer as we suffered pain and woe
But should this ray of hope not ever come to light
Then this song will live to symbolize our fight
But should this ray of hope not ever come to light
Then this song will live to symbolize our fight

This song was written with our blood and not with lead
We wrote this song so that the world won't be misled
We sing of Jewish heroes who refused to die
And whose deeds of courage lit the darkened sky
We sing of Jewish heroes who refused to die
And whose deeds of courage lit the darkened sky

So...Don't ever say that we have walked our final mile
The pain we feel will always ache beneath our smile
The day of victory we know will soon arrive
And as we wait in pain we shout we must survive
The day we've waited for today it will appear
And you will hear us as we thunder "we are here"

DEFIANCE THROUGH LIFE - IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

MC:

Despair was overwhelming in the concentration and extermination camps. Separated from family after three or more days on a train with no food or water, stripped of clothes, shaved of hair with numbers tattooed on their arms, the first night was often spent outdoors in a forest with the smell of the crematoria in the air.

Only one in ten made it to this point. Eventually, the prisoners had to adapt to the food, the living conditions and the labor. If one survived to this point, it was then possible to attempt to shape your survival chances by taking risks and using your wits. Survival was a matter of chance, and despair was an ever present reality of the slow death that defined life.

Many tried to sabotage goods they were manufacturing in their forced labor assignments. By making defective products to be used by the Nazis, these small acts of bravery attained personal satisfaction through the belief that they were stunting the German war effort. Though the actual effects of this sabotage on the Nazi war effort cannot be measured, its effect on the Jewish morale was strong.

Every moment was a moment of survival or death; there was little in between. And the smallest of acts could be interpreted as despairing, immoral, inhuman, or defiance - yet it is not our place to judge. Only to grasp the essence of their act, their intention, and their hopes.

3 READERS - STANDING TOGETHER AT THE FRONT, RECITING IN TURN.

1 READER - Live at any price

When death is inevitable, is there any point in fighting for life? Is there really such a thing as a meaningful death? Is it better for a human being to face death knowing that he is about to die, or is it better when death comes upon him suddenly, snuffing him out before he realized what is happening? In Auschwitz...where the air was filled with death groans...the way you answer these questions determined the way you behaved toward other people. "I want to live at any price"..The real challenge was to overcome the animal instinct of survival at all cost, as reflected in the cynical Auschwitz proverb, "Better a living dog than a dead lion."

2 READER - Levi: To Not Begin To Die

I must confess it: after only one week of life in this prison, the instinct for cleanliness disappeared in me. I wander aimlessly around the washroom when I suddenly see Steinlauf, my friend aged almost fifty, with nude torso, scrub his neck and shoulders with little success (he has no soap) but great energy. Steinlauf sees me and greets me, and without preamble asks me severely why I do not wash.

Why should I wash? Would I be better off than I am? Would I please someone more? Would I live a day longer? I would probably live a shorter time, because to wash is an effort, a waste of time energy and warmth. Does Steinlauf not know that after half an hour with the coal sacks every difference between him and me will have disappeared?

The more I think about it, the more washing one's face in our condition seems a stupid feat, even frivolous; a mechanical habit, or worse, a dismal repetition of an extinct rite. We will all die, we are all about to die; if they give me ten minutes between the reveille and work, I want to dedicate them to something else, to draw into myself, to weigh up things, or merely to look at the sky and think that I am looking at it perhaps for the last time; or even to let myself live, to indulge myself in the luxury of an idle moment.

But Steinlauf interrupts me. He has finished washing and is now drying himself with his cloth jacket which he was holding before he wrapped it up between his knees and which he will soon put on. And without interrupting the operation he administers me a complete lesson.

Precisely because the Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts; that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive we must force ourselves to save at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilization.

We are slaves, deprived of every right, exposed to every insult, condemned to certain death, but we still possess one power, and we must defend it with all our strength, for it is the last – the power to refuse our consent. So we must certainly wash our faces without soap in dirty water and dry ourselves on our jackets. We must polish our shoes, not because the regulation states it, but for dignity and propriety. We must walk erect, without dragging our feet, not in homage to Prussian discipline but to remain alive, not to begin to die.

Primo Levi, in "Survival in Auschwitz", First Collier Books 1961

3 READER - Frankl: Freedom of Choice

He who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of yourself, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate.

Viktor Frankl

MC:

Countless individual experience, singular moments, that deserve to be recounted and remembered. Countless names of victims of despair who, once, maybe took a step toward defiance simply by defying their captors - a talk with a friend, giving an extra morsel or bread of potato skin in the soup, distracting themselves from reality and allowing themselves a moment of good amidst the evil. Countless moments of defying fate.

READER - Sonderkommando: Defiance In the Gray Zone.

The Sonderkommando - special units of Jews selected for their physical prowess - were placed in charge of caretaking the bodies of their Jewish brethren. Exposed to the most extreme realities of the extermination process, their lungs were filled with the last breath of air of the burned women, children, fathers, friends.

Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau - as the chambers churned, it fueled the fire of revenge within their hearts. As their last expression of their last freedoms, they rose up and initiated uprisings that destroyed gas chambers, enabled some fellow Jews to escape, and gave a vestige of dignity to those prisoners who remained locked within the jaws of the Nazi death machine.

The revolt in Auschwitz-Birkenau attempted to put an end to the murder by disrupting the operation of the crematoria, and also to create a memory and a testimony to the tragedy of the lives and deaths of the hundreds of thousands of people who were killed there. After writing down and documenting the events, one of the organizers of the Auschwitz-Birkenau revolt buried them near the ruins.

**“Dear finder, search every part of the ground. Buried in it are dozens of documents of others, and mine, which shed light on everything that happened here... As for us, we have already lost all hope...
...The future will judge us on the basis of this evidence. May the world understand some small part of the tragic world in which we lived.” – Zalman Gradowski, September 6, 1944**

The Jewish-initiated uprisings in the camps were the only organized acts of armed resistance carried out against the Nazis in the entire concentration and extermination camp network.

MC:

It was once said that “the biggest resistance we could have done to the Germans was to have survived.” Given the circumstances under which they lived, it was amazing that any act of defiance occurred at all. Every act of resistance demonstrated the resolve of the Jewish people to triumph against all odds. And just as we pay tribute to the courage and daring of defying their inevitable fate, we recite together Kaddish in their memory and that of all victims of the Holocaust whose memory shall live on within us for eternity.

EL MALEH - KADDISH

יְתַגְדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. (אָמֵן)

Yeetgadal v' yeetkadash sh'mey rabbah. (Amen.)

May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified. (Amen.)

בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ

B'almah dee v'rah kheer'utey

in the world that He created as He willed.

וְיַמְלִיךָ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ

v' yamleekh malkhutei, b'chahyeykhohn, uv' yohmeykhohn,

May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days,

וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

uv'chahyei d'chohl beyt yisrael,

and in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel,

בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְו קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

ba'agalah u'veez'man kareev, v'emru: Amein.

swiftly and soon. And say: Amen.

(קהל: אָמֵן. יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵיָא)

(Cong: Amein. Y'hey sh'met rabbah m'varach l'alam u'lalmey almahyah)

(Cong: Amen. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.)

יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵיָא

Y'hey sh'met rabbah m'varach l'alam u'lalmey almahyah.

May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.

יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא
Yeet'barakh, v' yeesh'tabach, v' yeetpa'ar, v' yeetrohmam, v' yeet'nasei,
Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled,

וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא, בְּרִיךְ הוּא.
v' yeet'hadar, v' yeet'aleh, v' yeet'halal sh'mey d'kudshah, b'reekh hoo.
mighty, upraised, and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He.

(קהל: בְּרִיךְ הוּא.)
(Cong.: B'reekh hoo.)
(Cong.: Blessed is He.)

לְעֵלָּא מִן כּוֹל בְּרַכָּתָא וְשִׁירָתָא
L'eylah meen kohl beerkhatah v'sheeratah,
beyond any blessing and song,

תְּשֻׁבַּחַתָּא וְנַחֲמָתָא דְאַמְרֵינוּ בְּעֵלְמָא. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
toosh'b'chatah v'nechematah, da'ameeran b'al'mah, v'eemru: Amein.
praise and consolation that are uttered in the world. And say: Amen.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים
Y'hei shlamah rabbah meen sh'mahyah, v'chahyeem
May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life

עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
aleynu v'al kohl yisrael, v'eemru: Amein.
upon us and upon all Israel. And say: Amen.

עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרְוֵמֵי הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם
Oseh shalom beem'roh'mahv, hoo ya'aseh shalom,
He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace,

עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.
aleynu v'al kohl yisrael v'eemru: Amein.
upon us and upon all Israel. And say: Amen.

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמַרְוֵמִים, הַמַּצֵּא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה עַל כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה, בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוּשִׁים וְטְהוּרִים כְּזוֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ מְזִהִירִים אֶת כָּל
הַנְּשָׁמוֹת שֶׁל יְשׁוּת מִיְלִיּוֹנֵי הַיְהוּדִים, חֲלָלֵי הַשׁוֹאָה בְּאִירוֹפָּה, שְׁנֵהָרְגוּ, שְׁנֵשְׁחָטוּ, שְׁנֵשְׁרָפוּ וְשֵׁשְׁכָפוּ עַל קְדוּשַׁת הַשֵּׁם, בְּיַד הַמְּרַצְחִים
הַגֵּרְמָנִים הַנָּאֲצִים וְעוֹזְרֵיהֶם מְשָׂאֵר הָעַמִּים. לָכֵן בְּעַל הַרְחָמִים יִסְתַּיֵּר בְּסִתְרֵנוּ לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצְרֹר בְּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נְשָׁמוֹתֵיהֶם, הֵן
הוּא נִחְלָתָם, בְּגוֹן עֵדוֹ תְּהֵא מְנוּחָתָם, וְיַעֲמְדוּ לְגוֹרְלָם לְקֶץ הַיָּמִין, וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

O G-d, full of mercy, who dwells on high, grant proper rest on the wings of the Divine Presence in the lofty levels of the holy and pure, who shine like the glow of the firmament.

For the souls of the Six Million Jews, victims of the European Holocaust, who were killed, slaughtered, burned and wiped out for the Sanctification of the Name, by the murderous German Nazis and their allies from other nations. Therefore, may the Master of mercy shelter them in the shelter of His wings for eternity; And may He bind their souls in the Bond of Life.

The L-rd is their heritage. And may their resting-place be in the Garden of Eden, And may they reach their destiny at the end of days. And let us say Amen.

CLOSING

For years, Holocaust memory in Israel was dominated by that of the ghetto fighters and partisans. Their actions stood out against the negative stereotype of the ghetto Jew walking silently, aimlessly, unresisting towards their death. We know now that nothing could have been further from the truth. And each one of these actions serves as an example of what we mean when we say, Never Again.

Yitzhak Zuckerman survived the Uprising to make Aliyah to Israel, starting with his fellow Partisan survivors Kibbutz Lochamei HaGettaot. When asked if there was value to be learned from the acts of armed resistance, he responded:

“This was a war of less than a thousand people against a mighty army, and no one doubted how it was likely to turn out. This isn't a subject for study in a military school. Not the weapons, not the operations, not the tactics. If there's a school to study the human spirit, there it should be a major subject. The really important things were inherent in the force shown by Jewish youths, after years of degradation, to rise up against their destroyers and determine what death they would choose: Treblinka or Uprising. I don't know if there's a standard to measure that.”

Many of those who struggled to maintain and preserve Jewish life did not survive the horrors of the Holocaust, but their deeds and actions are a reminder to future generations of the stamina and the nobility of the Jewish soul, the power of faith, identity and pride, and the resilience of the human condition to overcome the challenges of momentary survival by finding any and every possible means of fighting the deterioration of the body and spirit. And just as we remember their defiance, we, the nation of Israel, continue to defy fate - to persevere in spite of ongoing terror and a new wave of hatred and a desire to destroy our people. We, too, shall outlast and we shall carry their memory with us to increase our strength and our resolve. Mir Zaynen Da!!!

To defy despair was to live, and we shall carry their memories on within us in our lives here in Eretz Yisrael. In the dream of the fighters, the visions of the faithful and the imagination of the artists, our lives of freedom here in our homeland shall never be taken for granted. And we shall never give up our hope that we will no longer see war, no longer experience suffering, and that all of Israel shall see peace speedily in our days.

HATIKVAH

Kol od balevav penimah,
Nefesh yehudi homiyah,
Ulefa-atei mizrach, kadimah,
Ayin letziyon tsofiyah.

As long as in the heart within,
The Jewish soul yearns,
And toward the eastern edges, onward,
An eye gazes toward Zion.

כל עוד בלבב פנימה
נפש יהודי הומיה,
ולפאתי מזרח, קדימה,
עין לציון צופיה.

Od lo avdah tikvateinu
Hatikva bat shnot alpayim,
Lihyot am chofshi be-artzeinu,
Eretz tzion, virushalayim.

Our hope is not yet lost,
The hope that is two-thousand years old,
To be a free nation in our land,
The Land of Zion, Jerusalem.

עוד לא אבדה תקותנו,
התקוה בת שנות אלפים,
להיות עם חפשי בארצנו,
ארץ ציון וירושלים.

Reflection Questions:

- What do you know about different types of resistance during the Holocaust?
- Why did organized physical resistance arouse fears among the Jewish community and its leaders?
- How did spiritual resistance help Jews living under the severe reality of the ghettos, camps and even in hiding?
- What kind of mental strength could a person gain through unique forms of resistance - such as writing poetry, drawing, music and other artistic expression?
- What other acts might have helped someone face the effects of momentary survival?
- How was resistance during the Holocaust unique?
- How does an awareness of the different types of defiance help you understand the Holocaust better?

Our reflection 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 THIS PROGRAM:

- **Narrow down selections based on your desired program length**
- **Assign readings. During the ceremony, the MC should call up each reader by name.**
- **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

About Links in the Chain

Links in the Chain™ is an educational initiative for reflective encounters with the Holocaust. An initiative of long-time Holocaust educator Elana Heideman, every Links in the Chain educational endeavor shares an emphasis on Jewish identity, tradition, family and community while encouraging critical thinking skills on the forces that influence the growth of Antisemitism, implementation of Nazi ideology, causes of local collaboration and the overwhelming indifference of the world which allowed the Holocaust to take place. For more information, contact elanayael@israelforever.org

ABOUT THE ISRAEL FOREVER FOUNDATION

The Israel Forever Foundation is an Israel Engagement Organization that develops and promotes experiential learning resources that celebrate and strengthen the personal connection to Israel as an integral part of Jewish life and identity. israelforever.org

Your feedback matters as we aim to provide the best resources possible for your experiential and reflective learning experience. Please let us know if you use our program, and consider taking a minute to fill out our [evaluation form](#). And please contact us for more information or for unique resources for your learning audience.