

Will We Remember?

Herbert Belkin

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Can there be a question of whether the greatest crime against the Jewish people, the Holocaust, will be remembered? Most people would say the Holocaust will always be remembered. But will it?

Holocaust remembrance is at an historic crossroad. Until now we have had Holocaust survivors to give personal testimony to their years of torment in German death camps. When you met a survivor most people sensed an aura of suffering that gave mute testimony to the great evil of the Holocaust. However, 60 years after their liberation the voices of the survivors are slowly growing quiet.. Their absence and the passage of time open the question as to whether Holocaust remembrance will endure not just for years or decades, but for centuries to come.

There can be no question about the importance of the lessons of the Holocaust. Barry Shrage, President of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, says that the lessons are of great value, not just to Jews but to all nations if any standards of human rights and social justice are to be maintained. Unfortunately the world has disregarded those lessons when the genocides of Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia are considered. Perhaps this is changing. The strong protest in this country and abroad against the current tragedy in Darfur signals an awakening to the lesson of the Holocaust that people of all nations must make a stand when the massacre of innocents is taking place.

What, then, can be done to preserve the lessons of the Holocaust? Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, will continue to be commemorated as an annual event and courses on the Holocaust will continue to be taught in our schools; but is that enough? Rabbi Yehudah Prero of Project Genesis calls for inclusion of Yom HaShoah in the observance of Tisha B'Av, the day of mourning when the destruction of the two Temples is observed. The Holocaust certainly is comparable to the tragedy of the destroyed Temples.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles is very concerned about the future of Holocaust remembrance. Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Associate Dean of the Center, says that for Holocaust remembrance to be successful, it must be intergenerational. The tragic lessons of the Holocaust have become part of our Jewish heritage; and, like the rest of our heritage, must be passed down from parent to child. Rabbi Cooper warns, however, that the Holocaust must be taught in a life-affirming manner. To young children the dark images of the Holocaust can be very frightening. The fact that the Jewish people survived and went on to establish the state of Israel must be part of what parents teach their children.

Rabbi Cooper does add a note of hope about Holocaust remembrance. The story of the American Civil War that took place over 140 years ago is still fresh in the minds of Americans. He maintains that through the ensuing years the Holocaust will also be part of our collective memory.

Holocaust remembrance, like so much of Jewish tradition, starts in the home. It begins when your child learns about the Holocaust in school and asks about it at dinner. The answer you give will largely determine whether the Holocaust will be remembered.

Herb Belkin is a writer and speaker on the Holocaust. He can be reached at beachbluff@comcast.net.