

# Yom Kippur *Musaf*

*Eleh Ezkerah* - Full Text



# RECONSTRUCTING JUDAISM

Deeply rooted. Boldly relevant.

In order to support this year's socially distanced High Holiday season, Reconstructing Judaism is making this excerpt from the *Mahzor Leyamim Nora'im: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe* available without cost. We hope that providing this excerpt will help make your at-home High Holidays observances uniquely meaningful.

We are grateful for the efforts of Rabbi Amy Loewenthal for producing this excerpt in tandem with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association under the leadership of Rabbi Elyse Wechterman.

If you are in a position to do so, please consider a gift to support Reconstructing Judaism's movement of accessible, inclusive Judaism. Your support will allow us to continue providing free resources like this one, in addition to training the next generation of rabbis, leading in Jewish innovation, and connecting our communities across the globe. To make a gift, [please visit our website](#).

MAKE A GIFT TODAY

If you would like to purchase a hardbound copy of this *Mahzor Leyamim Nora'im: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*, [please visit the Reconstructionist Press](#).

BUY MAHZOR

HAPPY NEW YEAR • SHANAH TOVAH • שנה טובה

## INTRODUCTION TO ELEH EZKERAH/ MARTYROLOGY

מָה חַיֵּינוּ אִם לֹא נִזְכֹּר אֶת יְמֵי־חַיֵּיהֶם:  
מָה חֲסִדְנוּ אִם לֹא תְהִיָּה לָנוּ דּוּגְמַת חֲסִדֵיהֶם:  
מָה צְדָקְנוּ לּוּלֵא צְדָקַת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם:  
מָה גְבוּרוֹתֵינוּ לְעוֹמַת מְסִירַת נַפְשָׁם עַל קְדוּשַׁת שְׁמֶךָ:  
וּמָה נֹאמֵר לְפָנֶיךָ אִם לֹא נִזְכֹּר אֶת כָּל קוּרוֹתֵיהֶם:  
הֲלֹא כּוֹלֵם הָיָה אֲנֹשִׁי שֵׁם וְחֻכְמַיִם וְצַדִּיקִים:  
וְכָל הַמְרָבָה לְסַפֵּר אִוְדוֹתֵיהֶם יִחְשְׁבוּ  
לְתַלְמִידֵי תַלְמִידֵיהֶם וְהָרִי זֶה מְשׁוּבָח:

What is our life without remembering the days of their lives?  
What is our piety without the example of their pious way?  
What is our righteousness without their righteous deeds?  
What is our courage in the face of their giving their lives to  
sanctify God's name?  
What can we say if we do not to remember their stories?  
They were people of renown, wise and righteous.  
All who elaborate in telling about them are called the students of  
their students and are praiseworthy.

Michael Strassfeld

COMMENTARY. The traditional readings in the *Eleh Ezkerah* section of the Yom Kippur liturgy focus on acts of voluntary martyrdom known as *kidush hashem*, sanctification of the divine name. *Kidush hashem* involves voluntarily giving up one's life rather than committing a serious transgression or forsaking Torah. In more recent history, many Jewish martyrs were of a radically different sort because they died not out of a heroic choice, but merely because they were Jews. While the Holocaust is the most striking and most horrible example, such was the lot of some of the Jews who died in the Crusades, pogroms, and in countless unspeakable acts that have occurred in the last millennium. These two kinds of martyrs—those who made brave choices and those who appear to have had none—are more alike than they first appear, for each generation of Jews rededicates itself to the covenant anew. We know this act contains a risk. Voluntarily continuing the covenant is thus potentially an act of *kidush hashem*.

D.A.T.

The Yom Kippur Martyrology, the *Eleh Ezkerah*, is an early poem based on various *midrashim* about ten talmudic sages living under Roman authority who refused to abandon Torah, and, consequently, were tortured to death. That there were several versions of the poem, which differed with regard to the list of martyrs, few of whom were contemporaries of one another, was of no concern to the worshipping Jew, for historical accuracy had nothing to do with the purpose of the text. In a world of Jewish persecution, the legend of the Ten Martyrs became popular because it set before the oppressed an example of the greatest Sages faced with the same challenges. Especially from the time of the First Crusade, the Ten served as a model for contemporary martyrs.

In the order of the traditional liturgy, the Martyrology is placed immediately after the *Avodah* service, which describes the rites of the High Priest on Yom Kippur day. That placement suggests that since we can no longer offer animal sacrifices for the expiation of our sins, we offer the lives of our martyrs instead. If *we* are not worthy of expiation, *they* certainly were, and so we may be forgiven on account of their merit. But that understanding of sin and atonement is inconsistent with our own. We believe that no matter how meritorious the lives of our ancestors were, they cannot serve to remove the taint of our sins; we alone are responsible. Still we acknowledge that our lives are built on the foundations laid by those who have come before us, that their lives well lived can inspire us to live lives that may be an inspiration to others in the future. We also recognize that while our history is replete with so many who died for the sake of their principles, there were others who chose to live out their principles, even when a cruel and unjust world negated them.

*Choose one of the following versions of Eleh Ezkerah: Martyrs through the Ages (beginning on page 899), Principles of Martyrs (beginning on page 919), The Martyrs of the Shoah (beginning on page 933).*

ELEH EZKERAH I/  
MARTYRS THROUGH THE AGES

מאחרי כל זה / *After All This*  
שֶׁהַר הַזְכָּרוֹן יִזְכֹּר בְּמִקְוָמִי,  
זֶה תִּפְקִידוֹ. שֶׁהַגֵּן לְזֵכֶר יִזְכֹּר,  
שֶׁהָרְחוֹב עַל שֵׁם יִזְכֹּר,  
שֶׁהַבִּנְיָן הַיְדוּעַ יִזְכֹּר,  
שֶׁבֵּית הַתְּפִלָּה עַל שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים יִזְכֹּר,  
שֶׁסֶפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַמִּתְגַּלְגֵּל יִזְכֹּר,  
שֶׁהַיִּזְכָּר יִזְכֹּר. שֶׁהַדְּגָלִים יִזְכְּרוּ,  
הַתְּכָרִיכִים הַצְּבָעוֹנִיִּים שֶׁל הַהִיסְטוֹרְיָה, אֲשֶׁר  
הַגּוֹפִים שֶׁעֲטָפוּ הִפְכוּ אֶבֶק. שֶׁהָאֶבֶק יִזְכֹּר.  
שֶׁהָאֲשָׁפָה תִזְכֹּר בְּשַׁעַר. שֶׁהַשְּׁלִיָּה תִזְכֹּר.  
שֶׁחַיִּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יֹאכְלוּ וַיִּזְכְּרוּ,  
שֶׁכֶּלֶם יִזְכְּרוּ. כִּדִּי שְׂאוּכַל לְנוּחַ.

Let the Mount of Memory remember in my place  
—that is its purpose.

Let the garden *in memoriam* remember.

Let the street named “in the name of” remember.

Let the building that is known remember.

Let the house of prayer in the name of God remember.

Let the rolled up Torah scroll remember.

Let the *Yizkor* prayer remember.

Let the banners of memorial remember.

Let the multicolored shrouds of history remember,  
draped with fallen bodies that have turned to dust.

Let the heap of dung remember in the gate.

Let the remaining flesh remember.

Let beasts of the field and birds of the sky devour and remember.

Yes, let all of them remember,

so that I might rest.

Yehuda Amichai

אֵלֶּה אֶזְכְּרָה וְנִפְשִׁי עָלַי אֲשַׁפֵּחַ:

Eleh ezkerah venafshi alay eshpehah.

These I remember and pour out my soul.

We walk the world of slaughter,  
stumbling and falling in wreckage,

surrounded by the fear of death,  
and eyes which gaze at us in silence,

the eyes of other martyred Jews,  
of hunted, harried, persecuted souls

who never had a choice,

who've huddled all together in a corner  
and press each other closer still and quake.

For here it was the sharpened axes found them  
and they have come to take another look

at the stark terror of their savage death.

Their staring eyes all ask the ancient question: **Why?**

Hayim Nahman Bialik (Adapted)

All the generations that preceded me contributed me  
in small amounts, so that I would be erected here in Jerusalem  
all at once, like a house of prayer or a charity institution.

That commits one. My name is the name of my contributors.

That commits one.

I am getting to be the age my father was when he died.

My last will shows many superscriptions.

I must change my life and my death  
daily, to fulfill all the predictions

concerning me. So they won't be lies.

That commits one.

I have passed my fortieth year.

There are posts they will not let me fill  
because of that. Were I in Auschwitz,

they wouldn't put me to work.

They'd burn me right away.

That commits one.

Yehuda Amichai

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked government (of Rome) issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practice the Torah. Pappos ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiba publicly bringing gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to him: "Akiba, are you not afraid of the Government?" He replied: "I will explain to you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside of a river, and he saw fishes going in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: 'From what are you fleeing?' They replied: 'From the nets cast for us by men.' He said to them: 'Would you like to come up on to the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors?' They replied: 'Are you the one that they call the cleverest of animals? You are not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!' So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written, *For that is your life and the length of your days* (Deuteronomy 30:20), if we go and neglect it, how much worse off shall we be!"

It is related that soon afterwards Rabbi Akiba was arrested and thrown into prison, and Pappos ben Yehudah was also arrested and imprisoned next to him. He said to him: "Pappos, who brought you here?" He replied: "Happy are you, Rabbi Akiba, that you have been seized for busying yourself with the Torah! Alas for Pappos, who has been seized for busying himself with idle things!"

It is related that when Rabbi Akiba was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the *Shema*, and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he directed his mind to accepting upon himself the sovereignty of heaven with love. His disciples said to him: "Our teacher, even to this point?" He said to them: "All my days I have been troubled by this verse, *And you must love the one your God with all your soul*, [which I interpret,] 'even if God takes your soul.' Now that I have the

opportunity shall I not fulfill it?" He prolonged the word *ehad* until he expired while saying it.

The ministering angels said before the blessed Holy One: "Such Torah, and such a reward? [He should have been] *from them that die by your hand, O God.*" God replied to them: "*Their portion is in life* (Psalms 17:14)."

A *bat kol* (voice from heaven) went forth and proclaimed, "Happy are you, Rabbi Akiba, that you are destined for the life of the world to come."

Talmud Beraḥot 61b

They wrapped him in the Torah he loved,  
and lived by, and taught with awe,  
in defiance of the Romans,  
craving the teaching  
as fish crave water.

Hanina was not the first Jew to be bound  
and burned by the Amalek—enemy—  
nor would he be the last—that was certain—  
there were still the Priests and Princes of Spain  
and Crusaders and Cossacks  
and the most mass-efficient of all,  
the Germans  
to come.

But his tortured vision-message  
was the first,  
and would somehow make the Death of History easier  
for his students and students-of-students  
down to the Last Generation of Jews  
who would have to suffer  
for whatever there is  
that calls for Jewish screams  
to lullaby the world to restful sleep. ↩



As the flames cracked  
and the body sizzled  
Ḥanina was heard to say:  
He Who will see this desecrated Torah  
avenged  
will make good, somehow, my dying.  
I see the parchment burn,  
but the Letters are soaring to their source.  
You may burn a Torah,  
but Torah will not be consumed.  
You may kill Jews,  
but the Jews will survive  
and serve witness  
to the Genesis—patterns of Creation  
and the Isaiah—prophecies of hope.

Danny Siegel

Who has heard or seen such a thing? Ask and see: has there ever been an *Akedah* such as this since the days of Adam? When were there ever a thousand and a hundred sacrifices in one day, each and every one of them like the *Akedah* of Isaac, son of Abraham? Yet for the one bound on Mount Moriah, God shook the world to its base, as it is stated, “Behold the angels cried out and the skies darkened.” What did they do now? Why did the skies not darken and the stars not dim...when in one day one thousand and one hundred pure souls were slain and slaughtered! Oh the spotless babes and sucklings, innocent of all sin, oh the innocent lives! Will You remain silent in the face of these things, O God?

Shelomoh bar Shimshon

I heard from aged exiles of Spain that a certain ship was struck with plague and that the ship's owner cast the passengers off onto uninhabited terrain. Most died there of hunger; only a few found the strength to proceed on foot in search of civilization.

Among these was a certain Jew who struggled on with his wife and two sons. The wife, whose feet were untried, fainted and perished, leaving her husband, who was carrying the boys. He and his sons also fainted from hunger; when he awoke he found the two dead. In agony, he rose to his feet and cried, "Master of the Universe! You go to great lengths to force me to desert my faith. Know for a certainty that in the face of the dwellers of heaven, a Jew I am and a Jew I shall remain; all that You have brought upon me or will bring upon me shall be of no avail!" Then he gathered dirt and grasses, covered the boys, and went off in search of a settlement.

Those who went to Fez suffered God's judgments, particularly keen hunger. Denied entry to the cities by their inhabitants, who feared that food prices would soar, they pitched their tents in the fields and there sought out wild plants, praying that they might find some—for drought had destroyed all the vegetation, leaving only roots. Many died in the field with none to bury them, so weakened were the survivors by hunger. On Shabbat they would forage only with their mouths, taking comfort in the fact that they plucked nothing with their hands.

There, too, a poor woman saw her son faint away. Having no means of subsistence and seeing that his death was certain, she lifted a stone and hurled it upon his head, and the boy died. Then she struck herself until she, too, expired.

Solomon ibn Verga

Cossacks approached the city of Nemirow. When the Jews saw the troops from afar, their hearts trembled from fright, though they were not certain, as yet, whether they were Polish or Cossack. Nevertheless all the Jews went with their wives and infants, with their silver and gold, into the fortress, and locked and barred the doors, prepared to fight them. What did those evil-doers, the Cossacks do? They devised flags like those of the Poles, for there is no other way to distinguish between the Polish and the Cossack forces except through their banners. The [non-Jewish] people of the city were fully aware of this trickery, and nevertheless called to the Jews in the fortress: "Open the gate. This is a Polish army which has come to save you from the hands of your enemies, should they come." The Jews who were standing guard on the wall, seeing that the flags were like those of Poland, believed that the people of the city spoke the truth. Immediately they opened the gate. No sooner had the gate been opened than the Cossacks entered with drawn swords, and the townspeople too, armed with swords, spears and scythes, and some only with clubs, and they killed the Jews in large numbers. Women and young girls were ravished, but some of the women and maidens jumped into the moat surrounding the fortress in order that the uncircumcised should not defile them. They drowned in the waters. Many of them who were able to swim, jumped into water, believing they would escape the slaughter, but the Ukrainians swam after them with their swords and their scythes, and killed them in the water. Some of the enemy shot with their guns into the water, and killed them till the water became red with the blood of the slain.

It happened there that a beautiful maiden, of a renowned and wealthy family, had been captured by a certain Cossack who forced her to be his wife. But, before they lived together she told him with cunning that she possessed a certain magic and that no weapon could harm her. She said to him: "If you do not believe me, just test me. Shoot at me with a gun, and you will see that

I will not be harmed.” The Cossack, her husband, in his simplicity, thought she was telling the truth. He shot at her with his gun and she fell and died for the Sanctification of the Name, to avoid being defiled by him, may God avenge her blood.

Another event occurred when a beautiful girl, about to be married to a Cossack, insisted that their marriage take place in a church which stood across the bridge. He granted her request, and with timbrels and flutes, attired in festive garb, led her to the marriage. As soon as they came to the bridge she jumped into the water and was drowned for the Sanctification of the Name. May God avenge her blood. These, and many similar events took place, far too numerous to be recorded. The number of the slain and drowned in the holy community of Nemirow was about six thousand.

Nathan Nata Hanover

An old Jew was running down the street chased by a young Russian, about sixteen years old, with an ax in his hand. The boy caught up with the old man and, with one stroke, he split his skull. As the old man fell, the boy pushed the split head together with his boot.

Instantly, gun in hand, a young Jew darted up, a pale young man, with a gaunt face and glasses. They ran, and I ran after them. The young Jew shot, but missed. The Russian left the broad, open street and ran into a courtyard. My foot got caught in something, and I fell.

By the time I ran into the courtyard, the Russian was standing in a corner, his back to a fence. His childlike face was green, his gray eyes gaped and bulged, his teeth chattered in a rapid rhythm. The young Jew stood right in front of him, with the gun in his raised hand, but his face was even paler than before. He stared at the wild terror of young flesh and blood, stared for some time. Then he put the gun to his own head, and fired. ↪

The last light of reason vanished from the Russian's eyes. He sat down beside the body twitching at his feet, rose. Then, with an insane shriek, he leaped over the corpse and ran out of the courtyard.

A wild laugh erupted from inside my throat. My foot rose, of its own accord, and kicked the bloody carcass, lying twisted on the ground like a trampled worm.

Lamed Shapiro

They say the woman with the black hair  
shivered as she turned  
that the soldier called out to her in German  
told her to wait, while the others lined up in front of the ditch,  
took off their clothes.

Body after body was shot then,  
one on top of the other into the ditch.  
That by the time it took him to walk to the woman  
(a matter of minutes)  
her hair had turned completely white  
and when she was finally shot  
the bullets only wounded her  
and she was buried like that,  
still breathing, an old lady not quite twenty.

This happened thirty-nine years ago  
and every woman that knows about her  
had gone to sleep, one time or another  
hugging her shadow.

Because what substance do we have?  
And if we are not this woman, or her mother, or her daughter,  
then, who are we? Who are we?

Carole Glasser

In the city of Warsaw such a long time ago  
Two hundred children stand lined row on row  
With their freshly washed faces and freshly washed clothes  
The children of Poland who never grow old

In the orphanage yard not a child remains  
The soldiers have herded them down to the trains  
Carrying small flasks of water and bags of dry bread  
To march in the ranks of the unquiet dead

With their small Jewish faces and pale haunted eyes  
They march hand in hand down the street—no one cries,  
No one laughs, no one looks, no one turns, no one talks  
As they walk down the streets where my grandparents walked

Had my grandparents stayed in that dark bloody land  
My own children too would have marched hand in hand  
To the beat of the soldiers, the jackbooted stamp  
That would measure their lives till they died in those camps

The cries of my children at night take me back  
To those pale hollow faces in stark white and black  
Only the blood of the children remains  
It runs in the street—and it runs in our veins

Si Kahn

For a long time we have been promising each other to recite *Kol Nidrey* this year. A Jewish block elder has allowed us to pray in his block. Someone has brought a *tallis* from the clothing warehouse. The seriousness of the moment is felt in camp. It seems that the entire world is preparing for *Kol Nidrey*.

From every block, people assemble at the barracks of the Jewish block elder. People stand pressed next to one another. Everyone who feels a Jewish heart beating inside has come, even the other block elders and kapos. Always the grand aristocrats, now they stand among the ordinary “prisoners.” Even the German block elders and kapos, those terrible murderers, are silent. They avoid the barracks, moving in a large semicircle around it. Today, they have somehow grown afraid of the Jews.

The rabbi prays. Wrapped in the *tallis*, he recites the *mahzor’s* Prayer of Purification. Everything is frozen as the rabbi intones: “As if our bodies are placed on top of the altar to be accepted by the Almighty, as a sacrifice dedicated completely to God.” Through the boards of the barracks I look at the crematorium, from which smoke reaches into the gray heavens.

I hear the voice of the rabbi, as though it no longer came from his heart, but as if his heart itself had opened and wept: “And a portion of our fat and our blood.”

He wraps himself more tightly, and repeats the words; but now his heart bleeds, and he omits “and a portion”; “our fat and our blood.” The congregation repeats: “our fat and our blood.” As if under a spell, everyone stops at these words. The rabbi cannot go on. Louder and louder the congregation repeats: “our fat and our blood.” Someone shouts: “The blood and fat of our parents, children, and relatives.”

Tears pour from everyone’s eyes. The weeping flows together like a river. Hearts of stone have given way.

I do not weep. I cannot tear my eyes away from the clear smoke of the crematorium. I feel a terrible weariness in my bones. It is unbearably hot in the barracks.

When the rabbi says, "With the permission of the Almighty," I am transported to another world. It seems to me that I am sitting somewhere in a catacomb in Spain. I see the bonfires and the grim Torquemada, the unfortunate Jews who burn for the Sanctification of God's Name, who burn as martyrs. The smoke of the burned is carried straight into heaven. I hear the *shema yisra'el* carried by the smoke and, later, people wrapped in black, who come into the catacombs with their faces covered.

"We pray together with the sinners!" cry the figures in black. A terrible cry ascends from the images. I hear the rabbi saying: "From this Yom Kippur until the next."

And suddenly everything is silent. A dead stillness prevails in the barracks; no one prays, no one weeps on. It is as if all of our tongues were bound.

Only from outside do we hear the terrible wailing. On the road, the women are being led to the ovens. The sound of the trucks' motors are drowned out by the naked women's cries. There are many in the barracks whose dear ones are being led away. Everyone is still, as if trying to discern the voice of a loved one among the screams. Through the open gates, we see the victims lift up their hands toward the sky and plead for mercy. The women see the men in the barracks. Their shouts grow louder. Everyone inside is petrified.

The rabbi is the first to arouse himself. He interrupts *Kol Nidrey* and begins the morning service: "Now we proclaim the sacred power of this day." ↪



In the silence of the barracks his voice is heard, as if responding to the women's cries. His voice resounds, and when he comes to the words of the *Unetaneh Tókef*—"And who by fire"—a lament tears out from every throat: "And who by fire!" The phrase, "who by fire," comes as if from the other world.

The rabbi continues, but his voice is drowned out by the tragic cries, "who by fire," as if the Jews wanted to quench the terrible fire with their words. But the motors don't stop rumbling. More and more victims are led off to be burned.

"Who by fire!" the congregation does not stop shouting. The voices of the condemned mix with the men's prayer. As if hypnotized, everyone shouts: "Who by fire!" as if praying to be burned in the fire as well.

In the midst of the prayer, the sound of the shofar interrupts: *tekiyah, shevarim, teruah, tekiyah gedolah*.

The shofar awakens the men as if from a dream. At first it is quiet in the barracks. I hear my heart bang. Soon the whole crowd weeps. The voices of the naked women reach heaven. The crowd weeps softly.

In the block where we prayed, next to the oven which has been turned into a podium, the rabbi lies wrapped in the *tallis*. The shepherd's soul has departed.

Fires burn in the woods by the crematorium all night; the ovens are not big enough.

Yoysef Vaynberg (Adapted)

My approach to life was formulated through a small window of a dark cellar, under the kindergarten at Dolna Volnaka, a cellar in which papa, mama, my sister Milka, my eldest brother, my aunt, cousin, Mr. Bachmann and I spent 700 days. In the autumn of 1944, on Rosh Hashanah of the year 5705, I observed the vanguard of the Red Army entering the town to liberate it.

In August we had heard the thunderous sounds of explosions from the approaching front. Later on we were to find out that this was the sound of Soviet artillery guns. For us, who had dwelt in the muddy cellar, hidden deep in the greasy Ukrainian soil, those were the sounds of salvation.

Around us there was a roar of excitement, and we, eight shadows of human beings, with our bones sticking out and swarming with lice, crawled through the hidden window, the size of a shrunken human being, out of the muddy cellar and into the yard.

For 700 days and nights we had grown moldy in that cellar by the river.

There in the yard a crowd of embarrassed and perplexed Poles and Ukrainians gathered. They did not know where we had come from and how we had remained alive. Among them were former neighbors, one of them a Ukrainian boy who had accompanied the Germans around our houses seeking to help them find their prey—a small collaborator, a 12-year-old quisling.

Some time later, in the days of repentance between the New Year and Yom Kippur, the boy played with an unsuspecting object, and the sound of a blast was heard. When we stepped out of the house we found him dead, in a puddle of blood, with his hand torn off. I had hated him vehemently, but I did not rejoice in his death. A boy, even a collaborator, lying dead with his hand torn off, is a horrifying sight. ↪

In the days of repentance in September 1944, Mr. Bachmann, “a survivor of the Holocaust,” climbed up to the attic of his house, mounted a chair, tied a thin adhesive packing wire around his neck and hung himself. Mr. Bachmann, who had joined us in the cellar during the last “action” before the ghetto was liquidated, found out upon leaving the cellar that his wife and two small children had been slaughtered.

I found him hanging in the attic on the eve of Yom Kippur when I went to visit him. Whoever coined the term “survivors of the Holocaust” didn’t know what he was talking about: no one survived the Holocaust, even if he remained alive.

Unending columns of the Red Army moved through the main street of the town. From the columns, a Jewish-looking Soviet officer stepped out, and turned to us—filthy and thin, extinguished skeletons—and asked: “*am̄ha?*” (the code word by which Jews identified each other in the Diaspora of Ashkenaz). We answered “yes” and the tall, good-looking officer wept. We wept with him. The officer gave us some of his battle rations, returned to the head of the column, and continued the chase after the German troops.

In the days of repentance in 5705, we counted the victims of the slaughter and found that of over 14,000 Jews of Borislav in Eastern Galicia, only several hundred remained alive.

There in the forests of Poland my people died. And we, my father and mother, my eldest brother and sister, and I, the small one, stood at the dawn of 5705, a heap of bones, all of us together weighing 200 kilos, watching the long columns of the Red Army and listening to the bells of salvation.

Only several miles away, though the sun was shining, the butcher continued his despicable job.

Sheva Weiss (Adapted)

Links of fear slowly become a chain,  
binding my hands and feet.  
My father never wanted  
to lead me to the sacrifice.  
He was bound as I was.  
But he led me.  
Now I lie on the altar,  
my father inside me, my grandfather inside me.  
There is no escape—no escape. Moshe Youngman (Contemporary Yiddish Poet)

Choose another people.  
We are tired of death, tired of corpses,  
We have no more prayers.  
For the time being  
Choose another people.  
We have run out of blood for victims,  
Our houses have been turned into desert,  
The earth lacks space for tombstones,  
There are no more lamentations  
Nor songs of woe  
In the ancient texts.  
God of mercy  
Sanctify another land  
Another Sinai.  
We have covered every field and stone  
With ashes and holiness.  
With our crones  
With our young  
With our infants  
We have paid for each letter in your Commandments.  
God of Mercy  
Lift up your fiery brow, Look on the peoples of the world,  
Let them have the prophecies and Holy Days...  
And O God of mercy  
Grant us one more blessing—  
Take back the divine glory of our genius.

Kadya Molodowsky

Fresh and pervasive  
is the weeping of our lost communities.  
The phrases of our prayers are vivified.  
Contemporary are the laments  
of our *el maley raḥamims*.  
Unnecessary and absurd  
is the death of individuals.  
Legendary is the martyr-death of millions.

After so many deaths we stand reborn.  
They gave us life.  
In death they flung open the ghetto gates.  
In exaltation they escaped from slavery.  
By their deaths they gave us faith.

Were it not for their unequalled sacrifice  
we should all have died disgraced,  
without revenge or consolation,  
without a breath of hope.  
The blinded Samsons shook the pillars  
in the halls of their tormentors,  
and went forth to mete out punishment  
for the unprecedented crime.

Not in secretive clandestine warfare,  
nor lurking in a hidden ambush,  
but on a sunlit canvas  
they openly gave the signal for revolt.  
The timid had grown bold—  
And the torturer paid.

Brothers and sisters,  
let us inscribe them in a new prayerbook.  
Their deeds canceled out our entire martyr-history.  
In all our prayers let us remember them.  
In all our *yizkors* let us mourn them.  
In all our *yitgadals* memorialize them.

Jacob Glatshstein

Now, as always, Jews are intimately linked one to another. Shout here and you will be heard in Kiev. Shout in Jerusalem, Jews everywhere reflect their sadness. An assault on Jews anywhere means an attempt to humiliate Jews everywhere. Thus a Jew lives in more than one place, in more than one era, on more than one level. To be Jewish is to be possessed of a historical consciousness that transcends individual consciousness....

All we want as Jews is to live and uphold the sanctity of life, all we want is to create peace and create in peace, to bear witness that people are not necessarily one another's enemies, that every war is senseless, that the solution lies in compassion and that compassion is possible.

All we want is peace. And yet...there is upheaval.

So how can one not be sad today? How can one be in this world of ours and not despair?

One day Ḥasidim came to inform the great Rebbe Naḥman of Bratzlav of renewed persecutions of Jews in the Ukraine. The Master listened and said nothing. Then they told him of pogroms in certain villages. Again the Master listened and said nothing. Then they told of slaughtered families, of desecrated cemeteries, of children burned alive. The Master listened, listened and shook his head. "I know," he whispered. "I know what you want. I know. You want me to shout with pain, weep in despair. I know, I know. But I will not, you hear me, I will not." Then, after a long silence, he did begin to shout, louder and louder, "*Gevalt, Yidden...!* Jews, for heaven's sake, do not despair...*Gevalt, Yidden*, Jews do not despair."

Elie Wiesel

זְכוֹר אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם אֶת גְּדוּלָתָם וְאֶת צְדָקָתָם  
 בְּזִכְרוֹת חַיֵּי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ  
 נִרְאָה אֵיךְ לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שְׁדֵי  
 וּלְבָנוֹת בֵּית נְאֻמָּן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל  
 בֵּית שֶׁל אֱהָבַת חֶסֶד לַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה  
 וְכַבוֹד לְכָל מָה שֶׁבָרָאתָ שְׁנֹאמַר  
 וּמָה יְהוּה דוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ כִּי אִם עֲשׂוֹת מְשֻׁפֵּט  
 וְאֱהָבַת חֶסֶד וְהִצָּנַע לָכֶת עִם־אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

Remember their deeds, their greatness, their righteousness.

In the light of the lives of our ancestors, we can see how to perfect God's world.

To build a faithful house in Israel, a house with love of piety, of the study of Torah, and of honor to all these you have created, as it is written, "What does God ask of you: only to do justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Written and translated by Michael Strassfeld

---

ומה...אלהיך / What...God (Micah 6:8).

Out of the strong, sweetness;  
and out of the dead body of the lion of Judah,  
the prophecies and psalms;  
out of the slaves in Egypt,  
out of the wandering tribesmen of the deserts  
and the peasants of Palestine,  
out of the slaves of Babylon and Rome,  
out of the ghettos of Spain and Portugal, Germany and Poland,  
the Torah and the prophecies,  
the Talmud and the sacred studies, the hymns and songs of the  
Jews;  
and out of the Jewish dead  
of Belgium and Holland, of Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria,  
of France and Italy and Yugoslavia,  
of Lithuania and Latvia, White Russia and Ukrainia,  
of Czechoslovakia and Austria,  
Poland and Germany,  
out of the greatly wronged  
a people teaching and doing justice;  
out of the plundered  
a generous people;  
out of the wounded a people of physicians;  
and out of those who met only with hate,  
a people of love, a compassionate people.

Charles Reznikoff



## ELEH EZKERAH II / PRINCIPLES OF MARTYRS

אֵלֶּה אֶזְכְּרָה וְנִפְשִׁי עָלַי אֲשַׁפֵּחָה :

Eleh ezkerah venafshi alay eshpeḥah.

These I remember and pour out my soul.

*Rabbi Akiba ben Yosef, the foremost scholar of his age, exercised a decisive and radical influence on the development of the early Jewish legal system. Unlearned in his youth, Akiba was employed as a shepherd by Bar Kalba Shavu'a, one of the wealthiest men in Jerusalem. Bar Kalba's opposition to his daughter Rachel's marriage to Akiba led him to disinherit her. Unaffected, Rachel made her marriage to Akiba conditional upon his commitment to study Torah. Akiba agreed and courageously began to fulfill his commitment, though he was well beyond the age when one normally begins such pursuits.*

*Although he became a greatly respected teacher raising up thousands of students, Akiba remained remarkably self-effacing and modest. He also took an intimate interest in the plight of the poor, becoming an overseer for them, and collecting tzedakah on their behalf. His legal rulings, in addition to their profundity, reflect his breadth of outlook and magnanimity of spirit. Akiba taught, "Whatever God does is for the best." Indeed Akiba was possessed of a rare optimism by which he was able to comfort his people in spite of the sad state of affairs in his time. His death was premature and tragic, but his life was complete in his constant devotion to the teaching and living of Torah.*

The Roman government decreed that Jews should no longer occupy themselves with Torah. Shortly after, Pappos ben Yehudah found Rabbi Akiba holding great assemblies and studying Torah. Pappos said to him, "Akiba, aren't you afraid of the wicked government?" He answered, "I reply by way of a parable. To what is the matter like? To a fox who was walking along the bank of the stream, and saw some fishes gathering

together to move from one place to another. He said to them, 'From what are you fleeing?' They answered, 'From nets which men are bringing to catch us.' He said to them, 'Come up on the dry land, and let us, me and you, dwell together, even as my forebears dwelt with yours.' They replied, 'And they call you the shrewdest of animals? You are not clever, but foolish! For if we are afraid in the place that is our life-element, the water, how much more so in a place that is our death-element, the dry land.' So also is it with us," Akiba continued. "If now, while we sit and study Torah, in which it is written, 'For that is your life, and the length of your days' (Deuteronomy 30:20), we are in such a plight, how much more so, if we would neglect it."



A tale is told that Rabbi Akiba was once walking through a graveyard when he met a charcoal-burner who was carrying wood on his shoulders, and running about like a horse. Akiba ordered him to halt. He said to him, "My son, why are you engaged in such heavy toil? If you are a bondsman, and your master imposes such a yoke upon you, I will redeem you and set you free. If you are poor, I myself will enrich you." The man replied, "Sir, let me be, for I cannot stay." Akiba asked, "Are you a human being or a demon?" He said, "I am of the dead. Day after day I am fated to gather wood to be burnt." Akiba asked, "What was your trade when you were living on earth?" He replied, "I was a tax-collector who favored the rich and burdened the poor." Akiba said, "My son, is there no remedy for your situation?" The man answered, "Do not hinder me, lest those set in charge of my punishment grow angry with me. For me there is no remedy. Yet I did hear them say that my punishment would be relaxed if I had a son who could stand up in the congregation and proclaim publicly, 'Bless ADONAY, the blessed one.' But I had no son. On my death I left my wife with child, but whether she bore a boy or a girl I do not know. And if she did bear a son, who will teach him Torah?" Akiba asked,

“What is your name?” He told him. “And your wife’s name?” He said, “Susmida.” “And your city?” “Alduka.” Akiba, troubled on account of the charcoal-burner, traveled from city to city until he came to the one where the man lived. He asked after the man and for his household. People answered, “May his bones be ground in hell.” Then he asked for the wife, and they said “May her name and remembrance be blotted out of the world.” Then he asked for his son. “He has not even been brought into the covenant of Abraham.” At once Akiba took the boy, and began to teach him Torah, but first he fasted on his behalf for forty days. A heavenly voice went forth, saying, “Because of this boy do you fast?” Akiba said, “Yes.” He taught the boy the alphabet, then the *Motzi*, the *Shema* and the *Amidah*. Then he made the boy stand up in the synagogue, and recite, “Blessed ADONAY, the blessed One, now and ever!” The charcoal-burner’s punishment was annulled, and he came to Akiba in a dream and said, “May you repose in Paradise, even as you have rescued me from hell.”



When Akiba was being tortured for teaching Torah, the hour for reciting the *Shema* arrived. He said it and smiled. The Roman officer called out, “Old man, are you a sorcerer or a fool, that you smile while in pain?” “Neither,” replied Akiba, “but all my life, when I said the words, ‘You shall love ADONAY your God with all your heart and soul and might,’ I was saddened, for I thought, when shall I be able to fulfill this commandment completely? I have loved God with all my heart and with all my possessions [might], but how to love God with all my soul—that

---

NOTE. Rather than focus on the tragic deaths of Jews in critical periods of our people’s history, in this *Eleh Ezkerah*, we study the teachings of four who chose life. Their words should elevate us to live as they lived, with dedication to the Torah, to justice, to righteousness and love for their fellow beings.

is, with all my life—was not assured to me. Now that I am giving my life at the hour for saying the *Shema*, and my resolution remains firm, should I not smile, even rejoice?” And as he spoke, his soul departed.

Talmud Beraḥot 61b (Adapted)



עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד:  
עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים:

Al sheloshah devarim ha'olam omed.

Al hatorah ve'al ha'avodah ve'al gemilut ḥasadamim.

On three things the world stands—

on Torah, on worship, and on caring deeds.

Pirkey Avot 1.2

*The Inquisition's racks and fires and the period's forced conversions were more than legendary. Thousands of Jews died martyrs' deaths, and thousands more became converts, albeit in name only. Still others chose exile. Together with massive displacement and the loss of life was a culture destroyed, the result of religious fanaticism. The cosmopolitanism of Spanish and Portuguese Jewry was arrested and remained dormant until the dawn of European Enlightenment.*

*Yehudah Abrabanel was a poet, physician, and the most prominent philosopher of his day. Expelled from Portugal in 1483 along with his father, he fled again from Spain less than a decade later. He was fortunate to settle in Italy where he found an intellectual home among the circle of scholars of the Platonic Academy of Florence. Abrabanel continued to practice his profession, teaching medicine at the university in Naples and serving as personal physician to the Spanish viceroy. The scope of his written work was wide and deep including poetry, biblical commentary, and general and social philosophy, as well as medical treatises. Rather than mourning the loss of his homeland, Abrabanel celebrated his internationalism, celebrating the possibilities even in his and his people's exile.*



God created Adam in God's intellectual image by which Adam was prompted to strive to perfect his soul in the acknowledgment of the Creator and imitation of God's wisdom. God also made available all the things necessary for human existence in the Garden—food, drink and shelter. All this was in its natural state, requiring no human exertion. All was at Adam's disposal, so that he was not forced to burden himself to satisfy his bodily needs, but could concentrate on the perfection of his soul, for which purpose Adam was created. On this account, God commanded Adam to be content with the natural things with which God had furnished him and not be attracted to luxuries that require resorting to human artifice and worldly things, so that his intellect should not be diverted to the assuring of physical comforts, which is the reverse of spiritual perfection, ideally the ultimate aim of all humans. The meaning of the command, "Of all the trees of the Garden you may certainly eat" was: "I do not forbid you the things essential for your physical sustenance from the trees of the Garden and the tree of life. But you may not actually *eat* of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," by which is meant the indulgence in and study of worldly things.



Some have suggested that God chose to scatter Israel to the corners of the earth in order to destroy them. I disagree. When Israel is concentrated in one spot, the enemy can easily destroy them, as Haman tried when the Jews were in Persia. But where they are scattered in many kingdoms, they have always a place to flee. Indeed, our sages believed that God showed special kindness to Israel by scattering them among the peoples. The Trojans, a mighty nation, were totally destroyed by the Greeks because there they were in one place. But the Jews, however decimated, have always managed to survive and find refuge. The king of England wiped out the Jews in his kingdom as has the king of France in our own time. Had the Jews been in any one

place alone, not one Jew would have survived. But the Almighty promised us, “When they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, or spurn them so as to destroy them utterly (Leviticus 26:44).” Dispersion was thus a great kindness ensuring our survival and deliverance.

Yehudah Abrabanel



כָּל הָעוֹלָם כֵּלּוֹ      Kol ha'olam kulo  
 גֶּשֶׁר צָר מְאֹד      geshher tzar me'od  
 וְהֵעָקָר לֹא לִפְחָד כֵּלָל:      vеха'ikar lo lefahed kelal.

The entire world is a very narrow bridge.  
 The essential thing is to have no fear at all.

Attributed to Nahman of Bratzlav



*Raised in a distinguished, acculturated Jewish family in Hungary, Hannah Szenes spent her early years attending a Protestant girls' school that had opened its doors to Jews and Catholics. Although on graduation her teachers “positively assured” her mother that Hannah would be admitted to university even though she was Jewish, Hannah had already decided to emigrate to Palestine and to study at the agricultural school in Nahalal. As she told her mother, “Perhaps I ought to be impressed that in view of graduating summa cum laude, and with a plethora of recommendations from teachers and friends, I can get into the university, while a Gentile who just barely squeezed through the exams can sail in! Besides, are they really incapable of understanding that I don't want to be just a student, that I have plans, dreams, ambitions, and that the road to their fulfillment would only be barred to me here?”*

*Her dreams included helping provide a haven and a revitalized homeland for the Jewish people. When her mother questioned her decision to attend an agricultural school instead of a university, Szenes replied, “There are already far too many intellectuals in Palestine; the great need is for workers who can help build the country.” Setting out for Palestine in*

*1939, Szenes returned to Hungary in 1944 as part of a mission of thirty-two Jews from the land of Israel who had volunteered to parachute into Europe to try to save the remaining Jewish population. She was last seen on 9 June 1944, at the Hungarian border. She was captured, tortured, and shot as a prisoner of war in Budapest. After burial in the Martyr's Corner of a Budapest cemetery, her remains were moved to Israel, where, with full military honors, they were interred in a cemetery in the Judean Hills. Her tombstone, with its engraving of a parachute, is in a special section of the cemetery where six others who died on that mission are also buried. Szenes's spirituality was rooted in a love for the land of Israel and the Jewish people and in a continual struggle to "believe and trust in God."*

When anyone in Hungary spoke of Zionism even two years ago, Jewish public opinion condemned him as a traitor to Hungary or considered him a mad visionary. But today, due perhaps to the recent blows suffered, Hungarian Jews are beginning to concern themselves with Zionism. At least so it seems when they ask, "How big is Palestine? How many people can it accommodate?" and "Is there room for me in the expanding country?" But the question least frequently voiced is "What is the purpose of Zionism, its basic aim?" It is with this seldom-voiced question I would like to deal, because I believe it to be the most important of all questions. When one understands this and applies it to oneself, one will become a Zionist, regardless of how many can emigrate to Palestine today or tomorrow, whether conditions here will improve or deteriorate, whether or not there are possibilities of emigrating to other countries.

If we had to define Zionism briefly perhaps we could best do so in the following words: Zionism is the movement of the Jewish people for its revival.

Perhaps many are at this very moment mentally vetoing this with the thought that Jews do not constitute a people. But how is a nation created out of a community? From a common origin, a common past, present and future, common laws, a common language and a native land.

In ancient Palestine these motives were united and formed a complete background. Then the native land ceased to exist, and gradually the language link to the ancient land weakened. But the consciousness of the people was saved by the Torah, that invisible but all-powerful mobile State.

It is, however, inconceivable that in the stateless world of the Middle Ages, when religion was the focal point of life, the self-assurance of the ghetto-bound Jew could have become so strengthened that he could have expressed his longing for a nation, or the restoration of his own way of life, or that he would have thought of rebuilding his own country. Yet the yearning expressed in the holiday greeting, "Next Year in Jerusalem," is absolute proof that the hope of regaining the homeland never died within the Jew.

Then came the human rights laws of the nineteenth century and with them new ideas and concepts of national values. From the peoples of the great countries to those in the smallest enclaves, all attempted to find themselves and their rights. It was the time of decision. Did a Jewish people still exist, and if so, would it be influenced by the strength of the spirit of the new movement?

The greater part of Jewry asked only for human rights, happily accepting the goodwill of the people among whom it lived, and in exchange casting off individuality and ancient characteristics. But a few hundred inspired zealots started off toward Zion. Thousands upon thousands endorsed the concepts and ideals of Zionism, and suddenly there was a Jewish nation. If you feel there is not, speak for yourself, but don't forget those to whom Jewishness means more than the data on a birth certificate.



We don't want charity. We want only our lawful property and rights, and our freedom, for which we have struggled with our own labors. We want to create a homeland for the Jewish spirit and the Jewish people. The solution seems so very clear: we need a Jewish State. Jews have proved their will to live, their love of work, their ability to establish a state; and they have shown that the name of Palestine is so powerful that it is capable of gathering in Jews from any and all parts of the world. This tiny piece of land on the shores of the Mediterranean which, after 2,000 years, Jews can again feel to be their own, is big enough to enable the new Jewish life and modern Jewish culture to be attached to its ancient, fundamental ways, and flourish. Even today, in its mutilated form, Palestine is big enough to be an island in the sea of seemingly hopeless Jewish destiny, an island upon which we can peacefully build a lighthouse to beam its light into the darkness, a light of everlasting human values, the light of the one God.

Hannah Szenes



אֵלֵי שְׁלֹא יִגְמַר לְעוֹלָם	Eli shelo yigamer le'olam
הַחֹל וְהַיָּם	haḥol vehayam
רִשְׁרוּשׁ שֶׁל הַיָּמִים	rishrush shel hamayim
בְּרַק הַשָּׁמַיִם	berak hashamayim
תְּפִילַת הָאָדָם.	tefilat ha'adam.

*This translation can be sung to the same melody as the Hebrew.*

My God, my God, I pray that these things never end.  
 The sand and the sea, the rush of the waters,  
 The crash of the heavens, the prayer of the heart.  
 The sand and the sea, the rush of the waters.  
 The crash of the heavens, the prayer of the heart.

Hannah Szenes



*Six million Jews murdered, among them more than 1,500,000 children, and with them the destruction of Eastern and Western European Jewish life. Scientists, philosophers, composers, poets, scholars, all dead and all the millions upon millions of the unborn generations after. And the inhumanity witnessed, the reduction of human beings to less than animals, and the consequent hopelessness and loss of faith.*

*Leo Baeck was born into a religiously enlightened Jewish home and educated at the leading liberal seminaries that flourished in Germany at the beginning of this century. Shortly before World War II, Baeck settled in Berlin where he served as rabbi while lecturing at a liberal Jewish school for adults. After declaring that the "thousand-year" history of the German Jews had come to an end in 1933, Baeck devoted himself to defending the rights remaining for Jews under the Nazis. He refused all invitations to serve as rabbi or professor abroad, declaring that he would remain with the last minyan of Jews in Germany for as long as possible. He continued his work of encouraging his people even after his deportation to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1943, serving there as a "witness of faith," to use his own words. He survived the war and lived out his years in London and Cincinnati.*

*Baeck's positive view of humanity and of hope is notable in all of his writings, even and especially in those written after the war. Nothing of what he experienced dimmed his faith in the future.*

The respect we owe to our neighbor is not an isolated commandment but represents the whole content of morality, the quintessence of our duty. For in Judaism the content of all religiousness is that we serve God and love God. The Talmud teaches: "Love God in the human beings whom God has created"—that is the way in which we can freely give to God. When we seek the welfare of others, we find a way to God. The comprehensiveness of this demand was stressed by Hillel, who declared this teaching to be the "essence of the Torah." The same idea is implied in the admonition of the rabbis to walk in the ways of God by doing good, and by striving to be as just,

compassionate and merciful as is the Eternal. In what we do to our neighbor, we serve God.

Our relation to others is thereby lifted out of the sphere of good will, affection or even love; it is exalted into the sphere of the established relationship with God, which is common and equal to all and therefore unites all. Each person has an unconditional claim on us. Even our enemy may and must demand the fulfillment of our duty, for though he is our enemy, he does not cease to be our fellow. "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (Proverbs 25:21). Whoever bears a human face is our neighbor and is entitled to our help and our compassion. What we owe to another and what we do for that person is not based on the uncertain foundation of good will, or on any transitory emotional impulse, but on the positive and social commandment of justice, solely because every person is a human being.

Leo Baeck



אָשָׂא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהָרִים	Esa eynay el heharim
מֵאֵין יָבֹא עֲזָרִי:	me'ayin yavo ezri.
עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה	ezri me'im adonay
עוֹשֶׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:	oseh shamayim va'aretz.

I lift my eyes up to the hills:  
from where does my help come?  
My help is from THE UNSEEN ONE,  
the maker of the heavens and the earth.

Psalms 121:1-2



Attempts have been made to find the decisive difference between humans and beasts. It has been found that humans are beings who fashion tools and know grandparents and grandchildren. It could also be said that humans are beings of hope. Wherever

humans believe and love, they hope. The motif of hope is the wish, clear or cloudy, that sustains itself with actual or imagined appearances. The spiritual foundation of religious hope is the deep assurance in which the finite comes to experience something of the power of infinity, the certainty that the goal endures, and that there is a way that leads to it. That is the expectation that rises out of the strength of a people's belief. It is the hope above all hopes, the one that includes and unites all human beings within it.

We humans wander through wishes. They begin in us and then gain their own existence in what they reveal. But they still remain part of our existence, part of our self; in effect, they are our life as it projects itself in the distant reaches. Hopes, manifold as the days, always unite these two existences anew, so that they—distant and close life—always come to be one. Without the hopes, the self would split itself and life would finally break in two. Humans are beings who hope and since there are many days, there are many hopes.

Indeed our people of the great expectation always remained a people of many and changing hopes. Our people always understood both moving away to follow hopes, and remaining to wait for them. Above all, an expectation lived in us everywhere, for the children and the children's children. The spiritual history of our people, from generation to generation, is a history of suffering and renunciation, a giving up for the sake of children and grandchildren, that the hopes might fulfill themselves in them. We learned to live in what was coming; we became accustomed to live this way, to prepare in our own narrow and short existence a breadth of space and an extension of days. Under all oppressions, patience preserved a viable strength. It even became active, indeed, gaining something of the messianic dynamism of the great expectation—"searching out with the soul" the land of the children.

## KADDISH DERABANAN / THE SAGES' KADDISH

*Reader:* Let God's name be made great and holy in the world that was created as God willed. May God complete the holy realm in your own lifetime, in your days, and in the days of all the house of Israel, quickly and soon. And say: Amen.

*Congregation:* May God's great name be blessed, forever and as long as worlds endure.

*Reader:* May it be blessed, and praised, and glorified, and held in honor, viewed with awe, embellished and revered; and may the blessed name of holiness be hailed, though it be higher by far than all the blessings, songs, praises, and consolations that we utter in this world. And say: Amen.

For Israel and her sages, for their pupils and all pupils of their pupils, and for all who occupy themselves with Torah, whether in this place or any other place, may God grant them and you abundant peace, and grace, and love, and mercy, and long life, and ample sustenance, and saving acts, all flowing from divine abundance in the worlds beyond. And say: Amen.

May heaven grant a universal peace and life for us and for all Israel. And say: Amen.

May the one who creates harmony above make peace for us, and for all Israel, and for all who dwell on earth. And say: Amen.



For our teachers and their students  
And the students of their students:  
We ask for peace and loving kindness  
And let us say Amen.  
And for those who study Torah  
Here and everywhere may they be blessed  
With all they need and let us say Amen.  
We ask for peace and loving kindness  
And let us say Amen.

Debbie Friedman

## KADDISH DERABANAN/THE SAGES' KADDISH

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ וְיִמְלִיף  
מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיִּיכוּן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוּן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזִמְן  
קָרִיב וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמָא וְלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא:

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה  
וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקָדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא  
לְעֵלְא לְעֵלְא מְכַל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא דְאִמְרִין  
בְּעֵלְמָא וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל רַבְּנָן וְעַל תַּלְמִידֵיהוֹן וְעַל כָּל תַּלְמִידֵי תַלְמִידֵיהוֹן  
וְעַל כָּל מָאן דְּעֵסְקִין בְּאוּרֵיתָא דִּי בְּאַתְרָא הָדִין וְדִי בְּכָל אַתְר  
וְאַתְר יְהֵא לְהוֹן וּלְכוּן שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא חֲנָא וְחֲסָדָא וְרַחֲמִין וְחַיִּין  
אַרְיִכִין וּמְזוּנֵי רוּחֵי וּפְרָקְנָא מִן קָדָם אָבוּהוֹן דְּבִשְׁמַיָּא וְאַרְעָא  
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִמְרוּ  
אָמֵן: עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל  
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תְּבֵל וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

---

NOTE. This martyrology was compiled by Lee Friedlander.

ELEH EZKERAH III:  
THE MARTYRS OF THE SHOAH

אֱלֹהֵי אֶזְכְּרָהּ וְנִפְשִׁי עָלַי אֶשְׁפָּכָה:

Eleh ezkerah venafshi alay eshpehah.

These I remember and pour out my soul.

It is told that when the great Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezrich had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say, "Master of the Universe, I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer." And again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say, "I do not know how to light the fire. I do not know the prayer, but I know the place, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient and the miracle was

---

NOTE. The lives of the martyrs whom we remember are intertwined with our own lives. Communities can emphasize this connection by asking three members to briefly speak about their own experience of one of the themes: Torah, Devotion, and Caring Deeds. J.A.S.

NOTE. This Martyrology is based on one composed by Reconstructionist Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz.

accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God, “I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story and this must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

We post-emancipation, post-Holocaust Jews long ago removed ourselves or were removed from the Lithuanian and Polish forests of these Ḥasidic masters. Culturally assimilated, we have forgotten their languages, and, as religious liberals, we question the efficacy of their prayers. Their fires were extinguished in the Death Camps and their stories, so lovingly told, did not save them.

Few died the deaths of martyrs in the Holocaust. Like unknowing sheep led to the slaughter, most were victims. But still, being Jews, we are driven to find meaning in meaninglessness, sparks of divinity in utter degradation, and truths that inform our lives and give us hope. This is the goal of this Martyrology: to understand a Jewish teaching in the example of three of our people who were martyrs of the Holocaust in death or for life. The teaching is ascribed to Shimon the *Tzadik*, one of the early sages of the Mishnah.

עַל שְׁלוֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד :  
עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת הַחַסְדִּים :

Al sheloshah devarim ha'olam omed.

Al hatorah ve'al ha'avodah ve'al gemilut ḥasadim.

The world stands on three things—on Torah, and on devotion, and on caring deeds.

Pirkey Avot 1.2



A principal injunction of the Torah is the honoring of father and mother, for observance of which we are promised length of days. Though the theologically unsophisticated understood this literally and personally, our sages knew that the promised long life would not necessarily be experienced by the one who observed the Torah injunction. Length of days, they taught, might be credited to a life beyond our own, most particularly to our children who live after us, to our children who honor us as parents and who teach their children to honor them as parents, thereby ensuring the stability of the world through Torah.

The days before Rosh Hashanah 1942 were particularly difficult for the Koczicki family in the ghetto of Slotwina Brzesko. It was clear that they would soon be taken on their last journey.

Bronia, Rabbi Israel Koczicki's wife, had false papers, but her husband and mother-in-law did not. After much deliberation, a painful decision was made. The family would split up. Bronia would leave the ghetto and try to obtain Aryan papers for her husband and mother-in-law.

The parting was a painful one. Bronia took little Yitzhak with her while the older son, Zvi, age six, remained with his father and grandmother.

Bronia and her son boarded a passenger train filled with German officers. Her blond hair, blue eyes and Berlin-accented German were a perfect cover, but she was fearful because of little Yitzhak. Since the family had lived in Berlin, they all spoke German, but

---

NOTE. During the Holocaust, six million Jews were slaughtered intentionally and millions of other Jews victimized. Some were martyrs, but many others were swept up against their will. The details are less important than the memory of their lives—six million worlds. L.F. / D.A.T.

Yitzhak's German was intermingled with Yiddish words because he had been born and raised in Poland. Bronia held the child in her lap, displaying his beautiful blond curls. Yitzhak was asleep, and Bronia prayed that he would stay asleep until they arrived at Bochnia, their destination.

The German officers seated next to Bronia struck up a conversation with her. Before long, they were discussing the Germans' favorite topic—the Jews. Their remarks were brutal and vulgar, although they apologized to Bronia for using the vile language in the presence of a lady. Soon one officer was recalling how, on a similar journey, he had discovered a Jew who was travelling on Aryan papers, “I sniffed him out; I have a special talent for it. I made him pull down his trousers. The poor devil never made it to the next station.” He told his story gleefully, trying to amuse beautiful Bronia.

Little Yitzhak turned his head in his sleep. The fact that he was circumcised made Bronia's heart pound louder than the locomotive's puffings. But she managed to smile her calm smile. She pointed to the sleeping child and said, “Gentlemen, you don't want to wake up a future soldier.” The conversation continued in hushed voices.

When the train stopped in Bochnia, Bronia, without giving any sign that it was her stop, remained in her seat. Just as the train was about to pull out of the station, she swiftly stepped down to the platform. The train pulled out of the station, and Bronia waved to the German officers from below. They responded warmly as the train sped on its way. Bronia breathed a sigh of relief. Moments later, she was already planning the next step, the rescue of the other members of her family.

After a few days, Bronia was able to obtain Aryan papers for her husband and mother-in-law. With a reliable messenger and for a substantial sum of money, Bronia sent the papers to her husband in Slotwina Brzesko. Daily, Bronia went to the train station, ↪

hoping that her husband, older son, and mother-in-law would be among the passengers. But days passed and they did not arrive. Bronia began to worry. Maybe the documents had never reached her husband and were intercepted by the Germans; maybe her husband and mother-in-law had been recognized and betrayed on the train by a Polish acquaintance; maybe the papers had arrived too late. Desperate, Bronia decided to return to Slotwina Brzesko.

On the very day she planned to leave, Bronia received a letter from her husband. The Aryan papers had arrived safely, but his mother was afraid to use them. She claimed that her looks and accent would betray her and, consequently, all of them. Since the command to “Honor your mother” is a principal command in the Torah, he could not leave his mother alone. He hoped that Bronia would agree, and would understand and forgive him.

A few days later, Bronia received a second letter from her husband. He wrote that their fears had begun to materialize. They had all been taken in a transport to Tarnow. There the men were separated from the women, and he was separated from his mother. Though he feared the worst, their son, Zvi, was well and was with him. He continued his letter, reminding her that Yitzhak would be three years old on Rosh Hashanah, so she should make sure that he wore a *tallit katan* and always remembered that he was a Jew. Israel begged her forgiveness if he had ever offended her during their married years, and thanked her for the wonderful years they had been given together to build a family. A substantial sum of money was enclosed in the letter. After reading it, Bronia rushed to a man in the Bochnia ghetto who was known as an expert smuggler, one who was able to transport people from ghetto to ghetto.

“To Tarnow I do not travel,” the man declared, shaking his head. “It is entering the lion’s den without any possible exit.” Bronia offered to pay double. Still he refused. “A person is responsible

first for himself,” he said, “and this mission is just too dangerous.”

A few days later, Rabbi Israel was sent to the gas chamber. On his last journey from Tarnow to Belzec, he managed to break one of the iron bars of the cattle car’s only window and squeeze his six-year-old son through the space. Thus he tossed Zvi to freedom from the speeding train, certain that somehow, Bronia would find him.

Bronia, in the Bochnia ghetto, sensed that her son would be found along the Tarnow-Belzec tracks. She hired a Polish peasant for a handsome sum of money and posted him day and night along the death road. The peasant pretended that he was gathering mushrooms in the forest along the tracks leading from Tarnow to the death camp of Belzec.

The tracks were strewn with pictures of Jewish families, smiling faces of young and old. On the backs were scribbled frantic messages in shaky handwriting, asking for help. Then, at the edge of the tracks, the peasant noticed a pair of small shoes on top of a bush. The shoes were on the feet of a little boy who was more dead than alive. The peasant picked up the boy and rushed to Bochnia, reuniting Bronia with her beloved son.

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד :  
עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים :

Al sheloshah devarim ha’olam omed.

Al hatorah ve’al ha’avodah ve’al gemilut hasadim.

The world stands on three things—on Torah, and on devotion, and on caring deeds.

A well-known piece of the Yom Kippur liturgy declares of those who serve God, “All of them are beloved, pure and mighty, and all of them in dread and awe do the will of their Master; and ↪

all of them open their mouths in holiness and purity, with song and psalm, while they glorify and ascribe sovereignty to the name of the Divine Ruler.” We commonly identify those so devoted to the Deity as the religiously pious, but such devotion can be found in the most unlikely people, even in those who oppose God and God’s devotees in principle. Their devotion, so differently motivated, is no less world sustaining.

In the Janowska Road Camp, there was a brigade foreman from Lvov by the name of Schneeweiss, one of those people one stays away from if one values one’s life. Schneeweiss had known Rabbi Israel Spira in Lvov, but was not aware that the latter was a camp inmate. Only a handful of Ḥasidim who were close to the rabbi knew the rabbi’s identity, and they kept it a secret.

It was the eve of Yom Kippur. Tensions and fears were at their height. A few Ḥasidim came to Rabbi Spira and asked him to approach Schneeweiss and request that on Yom Kippur his group not be assigned to any of the thirty-nine main categories of work, so that their transgression of the law by working on Yom Kippur would not be a major one. The rabbi was very moved by the request of his Ḥasidim and despite his fears, for he would have to disclose his identity, went to Schneeweiss. He knew quite well that Schneeweiss did not have much respect for Jewish tradition. Even prior to the outbreak of World War II, he had publicly violated the Jewish holidays and transgressed against Jewish law. Here in Janowska, he was a cruel man who knew no mercy.

With a heavy heart, the rabbi went before Schneeweiss. “You probably remember me. I am the Rabbi of Pruchnik, Rabbi Israel Spira.” Schneeweiss did not respond. “You are a Jew like myself,” the rabbi continued. “Tonight is *Kol Nidrey* night. There is a small group of young Jews who do not want to transgress any of the thirty-nine main categories of work. It means everything to them. It is the essence of their existence. Can you do something about it? Can you help?”

“Tonight I can’t do a thing,” said Schneeweiss. “I have no jurisdiction over the night brigade. But tomorrow, on Yom Kippur, I will do for you whatever I can.” The rabbi shook Schneeweiss’s hand in gratitude and left.

In the morning, the rabbi and a small group of young Hasidim were summoned to Schneeweiss’s cottage. “I heard that you prayed last night. I don’t believe in prayers,” Schneeweiss told them. “On principle, I even oppose them. But I admire your courage. For you all know well that the penalty for prayer in Janowska is death.” With that, he motioned them to follow him.

He took them to the S.S. quarters in the camp, to a large wooden house. “You fellows will shine the floor without any polish or wax. And you, rabbi, will clean the windows with dry rags so that you will not transgress any of the thirty-nine major categories of work.” He left the room abruptly without saying another word.

The rabbi was standing on a ladder with rags in his hand, cleaning the huge windows while chanting prayers, and his companions were on the floor polishing the wood and praying with him. “All of them are beloved, pure and mighty, and all of them in dread and awe do the will of their Master; and all of them open their mouths in holiness and purity, with song and psalm, while they glorify and ascribe sovereignty to the name of the Divine Ruler.” The floor was wet with their tears.

At noon, the door opened wide and into the room stormed two S.S. men in their black uniforms. They were followed by a food cart filled to capacity. “Noontime, time to eat bread, soup, and meat,” announced one of the two. The room was filled with an aroma of freshly cooked food, such food as they had not seen since the German occupation: white bread, steaming vegetable soup, and huge portions of meat. ↪

The tall S.S. man commanded, "You must eat immediately, otherwise you will be shot on the spot!" None of them moved. The rabbi remained on the ladder, the Ḥasidim on the floor. The German repeated the orders. The rabbi and the Ḥasidim remained glued to their places. The S.S. men called in Schneeweiss. "Schneeweiss, if the dirty dogs refuse to eat, I will kill you along with them." Schneeweiss pulled himself to attention, looked the German directly in the eyes, and said in a very quiet tone, "We Jews do not eat today. Today is Yom Kippur, our most holy day, the Day of Atonement."

"You don't understand, Jewish dog," roared the taller of the two. "I command you in the name of the Führer and the Third Reich, *eat!*"

Schneeweiss, composed, his head high, repeated the same answer. "We Jews obey the law of our tradition. Today is Yom Kippur, a day of fasting."

The German took out his revolver from its holster and pointed it at Schneeweiss's temple. Schneeweiss remained calm. He stood still, at attention, his head held high. A shot pierced the room. Schneeweiss fell. On the freshly polished floor, a puddle of blood was growing bigger and bigger.

The rabbi and the Ḥasidim stood as if frozen in their places. They could not believe what their eyes had just witnessed. Schneeweiss, the man who in the past had publicly transgressed against the Jewish tradition, had sanctified God's name publicly and died a martyr's death for the sake of Jewish honor.

"Only then, on that Yom Kippur day in Janowska," said the rabbi to his Ḥasidim later, "did I understand the meaning of the statement in the Talmud: 'Even the transgressors in Israel are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds.'"

עַל שְׁלוֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד :  
עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים :

Al sheloshah devarim ha'olam omed.

Al hatorah ve'al ha'avodah ve'al gemilut ḥasadim.

The world stands on three things—on Torah, and on devotion, and on caring deeds.

Our tradition teaches that each person is a microcosm of the world, an entire world in himself. One who saves the life of another, therefore, preserves the world. A single act of *gemilut ḥesed*, one caring deed, can be the vehicle of such preservation.

In Bergen-Belsen, Bronia's dedication to the education of her two small sons, Zvi and Yitzhak, was viewed by some as an obsession bordering on insanity. She would deny herself food, bartering it for her children's education. For a piece of bread and a potato, Mr. Rappaport taught her children Jewish law and tradition. She herself taught the children the weekly Torah portion. At times the children were so hungry that they could neither hear nor see. Words became muffled, distant sounds, and the letters seemed like a colony of busy ants rushing in all directions.

When Pesah approached, Bronia's program became more rigid. She insisted that the children learn all the laws and customs pertinent to the holiday, while she herself supervised their studies and hustled for food. A kind old German who worked at the showers gave her some beets and potatoes. These she saved for the holiday so she and the children would be able to manage without bread.

Bronia did not rest until she had disposed of her leavened food as required by law. She sold it for the duration of Pesah to a non-Jewish woman from Prague, the wife of a famous Jewish lawyer, neither of whom were inmates of Bergen-Belsen. Bronia's sale of *ḥametz* became a source of mockery. People ↪



taunted her and asked if the sale of *ḥametz* was her only concern at this particular time and place.

“I learned the Jewish tradition in my father’s home when I was a child. Now it is my duty as a Jewish mother to teach it to my children in my home.”

“Some home, a Nazi concentration camp!” someone said, while glancing at the two children with pity for their sad lot, being children to a mother who had lost her mind in these troubled times.

On their way back to the barracks, Bronia and the children stopped at the infirmary. A long line of people were standing and waiting for treatment that would offer relief from their pain and discomfort. Two German doctors in white coats passed by. One casually pointed to the people in the line and said to his companion, “I don’t know why God has punished me so severely by forcing me to witness daily such ugliness as these Jews.”

Bronia glanced at the line. All around her were skeletons disfigured by disease and starvation, covered with boils, blotches, and sores. “Mama, did you hear what the German doctor said?” asked Zvi of his mother. “Yes, I heard,” Bronia responded. “Just study and be good, for a time will come when we will once more be a great and wise nation.”

Pesaḥ came and went, but the Jews of Bergen-Belsen were still slaves behind barbed wire. On the evening when Pesaḥ ended, a woman named Mindel Heller came running. “Bronia, it is a matter of life and death. The Rabbi of Pruchnik is almost dead. He hardly ate during Pesaḥ, and now he refuses to eat *ḥametz* that was not sold prior to the holiday as required by law. I heard that you are the only person in camp who sold your *ḥametz*.”

Bronia did not hesitate for a moment. She took out a loaf of white bread, her most precious possession, and gave it for the Rabbi of Pruchnik.

The people around her shook their heads in disbelief. “Woe to a woman who gives away her children’s last bite to a stranger.”

“What I learned and saw at my father’s home, I want my children to see and learn in my home. I could not choose the home, but I can preserve its spirit,” said Bronia as she handed the bread to Mindel.

In time the Rabbi of Pruchnik improved. Bronia’s bread had saved his life.

Years later, when Bronia Koczicki finished her story, she asked a listener, “Do you know the value of the loaf of bread I gave Mindel Heller? Today a skyscraper in Times Square is less valuable than a loaf of white bread in Bergen-Belsen.”

עַל שְׁלוֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד:  
עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים:

Al sheloshah devarim ha’olam omed.

Al hatorah ve’al ha’avodah ve’al gemilut hasadim.

The world stands on three things—on Torah, and on devotion, and on caring deeds.

Upon Israel and upon the rabbis, and upon their disciples and upon all the disciples of their disciples, and upon all who engage in the study of the Torah in this place and in every place, to them and to you—abundant peace, grace, lovingkindness, mercy, long life, ample sustenance and salvation.

Upon Israel and upon the rabbis

and upon the disciples and upon all the disciples of their disciples

and upon all who study Torah in this place and in every place, ↪

to them and to you  
peace;  
upon Israel and upon all who meet with unfriendly glances,  
sticks and stones and names—  
on posters, in newspapers, or in books to last,  
chalked on asphalt or in acid on glass,  
shouted from a thousand thousand windows by radio;  
who are pushed out of classrooms and rushing trains,  
whom the hundred hands of a mob strike,  
and whom jailers strike with bunches of keys, with revolver  
butts;  
to them and to you  
in this place and in every place  
safety;

upon Israel and upon all who live  
as the sparrows of the streets  
under the cornices of the houses of others,  
and as rabbits  
in the fields of strangers  
on the grace of the seasons  
and what the gleaners leave in the corners;  
you children of the wind—  
birds  
that feed on the tree of knowledge  
in this place and in every place  
to them and to you  
a living;

upon Israel  
and upon their children and upon all the children of their  
children  
in this place and in every place,  
to them and to you  
life.

Charles Reznikoff

For our teachers and their students  
And the students of their students:  
We ask for peace and loving kindness  
And let us say Amen.  
And for those who study Torah  
Here and everywhere may they be blessed  
with all they need and let us say Amen.  
We ask for peace and loving kindness  
And let us say Amen.

Debbie Friedman