

## When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of Yom Hashoah<sup>a</sup>

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### Introduction

As ordered by the Jewish calendar, time offers itself as an insuperable masterplan by which Jewish lives are lived, past history remembered and understood. For only time, when patterned after the circular movements of earth around the sun, and moon around the earth, can be trusted to repeat its forms perpetually. Grasped and then represented in the image of passing seasons, in the figures of planting and harvest, cycles of time have traditionally suggested themselves as less the constructions of human mind than the palpable manifestations of a natural order. As a result, both our apprehension of time and the meanings created in its charting seem as natural as the setting sun, the rising moon. By extension, when events are commemoratively linked to a day on the calendar, a day whose figure inevitably recurs, both memory of events and the meanings engendered in memory seem ordained by nothing less than time itself.

Of all ways to commemorate the destruction of European Jewry, perhaps none--save narrative--is more endemic to Jewish tradition than the day of remembrance. Neither monuments nor paintings, neither fiction nor reportage are anchored as firmly in the tradition as commemorative fast days, which have been part of normative Judaism since the sixth century B.C.E. Beginning with the prophet Zecharia's reference (8:19) to fasts of the tenth month (Tenth of Teveth), fourth month (17th of Tammuz), fifth month (Ninth of Av), and seventh month (Third of Tishri), through the geonic period when up to 36 commemorative fast days were observed, the ta'anit zibbur (public fast day) may be the most ancient of all traditional Jewish responses to national and communal catastrophe. That each of these fasts commemorates an event linked to the destruction of the First Temple suggests and affirms the centrality of this proto-catastrophe to the very measure of Jewish time itself (recall also the ultra-orthodox community's counting from the Second Hurban). Even the beginning of the Jewish festal year, Rosh Hashana (the first of Tishri) is described in Torah (Lev. 23:24) as "zikkaron teruah" (literally, remembrance of teruah, a shofar blast), traditionally called Day of Remembrance.

In Jewish tradition, time and memory, sacred texts and history are intricately

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<sup>a</sup> This essay appeared first in a slightly different version as "When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of Yom hashoah," History and Memory 2, Winter 1990: 54-75, and again as part of the author's full-length study, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

interwoven, whereby we know the precise date by the weekly portion of Torah, our place in the text by the date. In this sense, the year is refigured as narrative, albeit a repetitive one. As written narrative imposes the order of language onto historical events, creating in Genette's terms "narrative time," both the Gregorian solar and Jewish lunar calendars impose yet another order onto historical time, a temporal pattern by which a day's memorial significance will be understood.<sup>1</sup> Like historical incidents related in narrative, the Jewish holidays, festivals and fasts also acquire meaning according to their places on time's grid. As the placement of a monument in its city matrix generates meaning in it, the location of a commemorative day on the religious and national calendar will create meaning in remembrance, as well. When twinned with historical events, remembrance days assign specific significance to events themselves, depending on where these days are located on the Jewish calendar. The same event might carry several different kinds of significance depending on both the time of year it happened and the time of year it is remembered, which do not always coincide. Conversely, entirely disparate events acquire parallel meaning when commemorated on the same day.

Though it is not a public fast day, Yom Hashoah Vehagvurah (literally, Day of Holocaust and Heroism) owes its existence to the tradition, even as it was proposed in dialectical opposition to it. As such, Yom Hashoah simultaneously inscribes memory of events into the Jewish calendar even as it finally nationalizes and secularizes such memory. In addition to being shaped by its place on the calendar, Holocaust Remembrance Day also lends its own cast to other, already existing holy days. Passover and Hannuka, for example, are transformed and transvalued in Israel's remembrance of heroism during the Shoah. Their traditional significance as times when God actively interceded on behalf of the Jews is now colored by new readings emphasizing the Jews' own actions. In all cases, the calendar figures prominently in the contemporary grasp of realities and responses to them: its narrative continues to bear the consequences of both meaning and action.

By bringing different formal qualities to bear on memory, every "memorial text" generates different meaning in memory. Where the ghetto scribes recorded events on a day-to-day basis in the literary cloth of Yiddish and Hebrew, contemporary film and video testimony frame a survivor's recollections in the seemingly immediate images of the present moment. Memorials and museums constructed to recall the Shoah remember events according to the hue of national ideals, the cast of political dicta. Similarly, on the day in Israel and the Diaspora dedicated to Holocaust remembrance--Yom Hashoah Vehagvurah--memory is performed ritually as part of a national commemorative cycle. And beyond its place on the calendar, Holocaust remembrance is enacted by a variety of observances encompassed by the day-including commemorative ceremonies and speeches, moments of silence and mass-media programming. Even this cultural history of Yom Hashoah--itself a narrative "telling of time"--might be regarded as an extension of the remembrance day.

In this performative history of Holocaust Remembrance Day, I would like to bring into view a few of the ways in which memory and its meanings are generated on this day,

how Yom Hashoah turns time itself into memorial space. For as do most commemorative spaces, whether topographical or calendrical, this day has come to remember nearly everything but its own ambivalent genesis and evolution. Part of my aim, therefore, will be to reinvest this day of remembrance with the memory of its origins, of its own historical past.

### The Calendar Renewed

In Israel today, where the religious calendar is overlaid by the civil calendar, symbolic time serves both national and religious ends. But even though Israel's resulting "civil religion" is rooted in the Jews' traditional symbols and figures, it is by no means synonymous with these figures, as Liebman and Don-Yehiya have shown so well.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally, a traditional religious date will unobtrusively serve a civil need: for example, the 7th of Adar, which marks Moses' birth and death, is now designated as the day of mourning for Israeli soldiers whose final resting place is, like Moses', unknown. But in other cases, a vibrant tension is created between the two calendars, whereby ancient forms and symbols are used to legitimate civil ceremonies, and the state's remembrance days infuse traditional holy days with national significance.

In fact, perhaps nobody better recognized the potential consequences in a calendar's narrative than Israel's early state-makers. The New Jews were simply going to need a New Calendar, a new time-map by which to navigate the future. For the traditional calendar was as discredited in the Zionists' eyes as the self-destructive delusions it had seemed to foster in Jewish minds over the ages. It was not only a matter of rejecting 2000 years of decayed Jewish life in the Diaspora, but also of discarding the calendar that had perpetually recirculated the myths sustaining the misery of life in exile. Time would no longer be measured in the distance between the temple's destruction and the present moment. Instead, the re-drawn calendar would find its genesis, its anchor, in the birth of the State itself. All else, including memorial days, would now be regarded as either culminating in Independence Day or in issuing from it.<sup>3</sup>

Thus declared in 1949, Israel's first and most joyous public holiday marked the Fifth of Iyar as Yom Hatzma'ut, anniversary of the day in 5708 (14 May 1948), when Independence was proclaimed and the state established. One year later, the government dedicated the day preceding Independence Day to the memory of those who fell in the 1948 War. The choice of this date for Yom Hazikkaron initially rankled many of the bereaved families, who found such a solemn day violated by the unabashed revelry immediately following it. But the government was steadfast, its reasons for linking the state's war-dead with national independence clear. On the level of pure statist ideology, no better model would be found than dying for the state: as the sole reason for living, the state would now be the only reason for dying. By yoking the deaths of its soldiers together with the birth of the state in this way, the government in effect nationalized the oldest of all Jewish paradigms: destruction and redemption. A memorial day turning at sunset into Independence

Day would make explicit that the destruction of these men was redeemed in the birth of the State: mourning was to be relieved literally by the celebration of Independence.

The aim, however, was never merely to find a new world view for the New Jew, but to select which governing views to advance and which to abandon. For Ben-Gurion's statist, one of the least palatable aspects of the old calendar lay in the way its fast days had explained past disasters. Traditionally, the four minor fast days had been associated with different events from the siege and fall of ancient Jerusalem, each purportedly marking the actual anniversary of a disaster during the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E. Though in fact, none of them probably had any actual historical connection to the events being commemorated.<sup>4</sup> Nor did that matter. More important was the way that four historically independent fast days had come to be associated with the destruction of the Temple--the catastrophe--and that over time, these days accumulated the commemorative weight of later catastrophes as well.

For traditional dates seem to have attracted commemoration of other events and then organized them around a teleological locus, creating a single meaning in all events. Remembrance days of multiple disasters sprang not from the coincidental occurrence of events on the same day, but from the assuredly non-coincidental single meaning assigned by the tradition to all disasters, no matter how disparate. As a result, not only were entirely unrelated disasters reported to have occurred on exactly the same day, centuries apart (the destructions of the First and Second Temples, for example),<sup>5</sup> but all disasters were assigned the same meaning--Mipnei Hataeinu (because of our sins). According to the Rambam, the aim of the four fasts is to "stir the hearts, to open roads to repentance, and to remind us of our own evil deeds, and of our fathers' deeds which were like ours, as a consequence of which these tragic afflictions came upon them and upon us."<sup>6</sup>

For the founders of modern Israel, such meaning created in the Shoah by the traditional calendar was repulsively unacceptable. The first movement toward a national Holocaust remembrance day, therefore, came in the movement away from traditional commemorative dates marking former disasters. This is also where the needs of the state and those of the rabbinate would come into direct conflict. On the one side, there was a pressing need among the religious community in and out of Israel for a rabbinical ruling to set a day on which *Jahrzeit* candles could be lighted and *kaddish* recited for those whose actual dates of death during the Shoah were unknown. For the rabbinate, which date to choose was relatively simple: after all, they were already in possession of at least four ready-made days of mourning. So in 1948, they adopted the Tenth of Teveth as *Yom Kaddish Klali* (Day of Communal *Kaddish*), for little better reason, according to some, than to reinvigorate an otherwise dormant fastday.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the obvious problem for the state and predominantly nonreligious population, was that according to the tradition, this day would not merely link the Shoah to the fall of Jerusalem. But in so doing, it would suggest as well the theological reasons for this fall--Mipnei Hataeinu--all as a justification for current exile. None of which

could be tolerated by a state dedicated to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Jews' mass return from exile. If there was a "meaning" for the Holocaust in the national view, it was the necessity for a Jewish state to protect Jews from just this sort of destruction--not a divine punishment for supposed sins committed. Though even here, the archaic religious paradigm is occasionally, if reflexively, re-invoked also as a Zionist explanation of events. As Liebman and Don-Yehiya have noted, the lead story in Davar on Yom Hashoah in 1960 concluded that the "function of Holocaust Day is to remind the Jewish people of its own sin in not unequivocally having chosen Zion" (p. 107).

In fact, once recast in the image of the statist themselves, this day would not commemorate mere destruction at all. In keeping with their vision of a new, fighting Jew and their rejection of the old, passive Jew as victim, the founders would prevent this day from entering the commemorative cycle of destruction altogether. Six years after the liberation of the concentration camps, three years after the state of Israel was founded, the Israeli parliament thus moved to adopt a national Holocaust and Ghetto Uprising Day. As proposed by Member of Knesset, Mordechai Nurock, on 12 April 1951, "The first kneset declares and determines that the 27th day of the month of Nissan every year shall be Holocaust and Ghetto Uprising Day [Yom Hashoah Umered Hageta'ot]-an eternal day of remembrance for the House of Israel."<sup>8</sup> It remains significant that Nurock, an orthodox Jew, would agree to sponsor this bill. In an impassioned floor speech bristling with allusions to the Book of Lamentations, he was able to validate such a bill at both the political and religious levels. Not Nebuchadnezer, or Titus, or the crusades or the pogroms could compare, he proclaimed. This was a third Hurban, greater than all the rest and so demanded its own day (p. 1656).

"We need to choose a date," he continued, "that coincides with most of the slaughter of European Jewry and with the ghetto uprisings that took place in the month of Nissan" (p. 1656). In the next sentence, Nurock added that the Knesset commission had chosen this day because "it was during the Sfirah, when the crusaders, ancestors [avot avotehem] of the Nazis destroyed so many 'holy' [i.e., Jewish] communities" (p. 1656). Since the Sfirah period (counting the omer) was already a traditional time of semi-mourning, during which marriages, haircuts, and music were forbidden to the religious, Nurock deemed it all the more appropriate. In addition, the only other secular date put forth until then, that of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (19 April 1943, the 15th of Nissan), would not have been allowed by the rabbinate in its overlap of Passover. In fact, the ultra-orthodox delegation to the Knesset requested that the entire month of Nissan be protected from the violation of an official day of mourning--a demand vociferously rejected by former ghetto fighters who wanted to place the day as close as possible to the anniversary of their uprising. In effect, this left only a few choice days during a period bordered on the one side by the 15th of Nissan (the first day of Pesach and Uprising) and on the other by the Fifth of Iyar, Israel's Independence Day. Forbidden to set a day of mourning during Hol Hamo'ed (the week of Passover) and not wanting to crowd Yom Hazikkaron and Yom Hatzma'ut, the committee

was left with only 12 days in which to place Yom Hashoah Umered Hageta'ot.

In the end, by placing the day on the 27th of Nissan (five days after the end of Hol Hamo'ed, seven days before Yom Hazikkaron), the committee dramatically emplotted the entire story of Israel's national re-birth, drawing on a potent combination of religious and national mythologies. Pulled from both the middle of the six week ghetto uprising and the seven-week Sfirah, this day retained links to both heroism and to mourning. In coming only five days after the end of Passover, Yom Hashoah Umered Hageta'ot extended the festival of freedom and then bridged it with the national Day of Independence. Beginning on Passover (also the day of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), continuing through Yom Hashoah, and ending in Yom Hatzma'ut, this period could be seen as commencing with God's deliverance of the Jews and concluding with the Jews' deliverance of themselves in Israel. In this sequence, biblical and modern returns to the land of Israel are recalled; God's deliverance of the Jews from the desert of exile is doubled by the Jews' attempted deliverance of themselves in Warsaw; the heroes and martyrs of the Shoah are remembered side-by-side (and implicitly equated with) the fighters who fell in Israel's modern war of liberation; and all lead inexorably to the birth of the State.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately for this resolution, it was passed at the height of statist influence in Israel and so, effusive parliamentary sentiments notwithstanding, was widely ignored. On the one hand, it could be argued that memory of the Shoah was not neglected so much as merely subsumed in the greater task of state-building during the early 1950s. But on the other hand, this was also a time in Israel when bare mention of the Shoah, or the fact that one had survived it, might have been met with surly contempt. It was a time when survivors were still being shamed into silence by those claiming the foresight to have left Europe before the onslaught. In the early statist's view, the Shoah was redeemable--hence, memorable--by little more than instances of heroism and the Jewish courage it evoked in some of its victims, the hopelessness of Jewish life in exile, and the proven need for a state to defend Jews everywhere.<sup>10</sup>

Though this resolution was passed by the Knesset in 1951, it generated little public notice until 1953, when as part of its mandate, Yad Vashem Memorial Authority was assigned control over how the day was to be observed. Though even then, and for the next several years, the day of remembrance itself was forgotten by all but survivors and partisans, it seemed. In response, Nurock and others decided in 1959 that only a law, not just another parliamentary resolution, could guarantee public observance. Some of the questions arising during the Knesset floor debate on the law's wording might now be reintroduced to the day of remembrance. First, the name: one member of Knesset found the notion of Ghetto Uprising too specific. After all, she asked, wasn't there also heroism in Kiddush Hashem, that is, in martyrdom itself?<sup>11</sup> She then proposed that since the main principle at hand was what the Uprising stood for--that is, heroism--this principle be included in the name as well: Yom Hashoah, Hagvurah, Uhamered (p. 1387). Others wondered whether we ought to remember only the killing, or only the uprising, or only heroism. Why a day to remember all

these? And what about the killers? How do we remember them? Or maybe this day should mark the inquisition as well. Or Chmielnicky. Or the Ukrainian pogroms.

Still others argued unsuccessfully for the day to be incorporated into *Tesha B'av* (the Ninth of Av), the most widely observed fast day recalling the destruction of the Temple. As Saul Friedlander and others have noted, years later Menachem Begin asked that *Yom Hashoah Vehagvurah* be divided between two already existing days. *Yom Hashoah* (Holocaust Day) would be observed on *Tesha B'av*, and *Yom Hagvurah* (Heroism Day) on Memorial Day for Israel's fallen soldiers.<sup>12</sup> Begin's proposal was primarily a reflection of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's own proposition that the religious community would give up the Tenth of Teveth if the State gave up the 27th of Nissan--and all would commemorate the Shoah on *Tesha B'av*. But such a compromise would have been no compromise at all, of course, since the meaning engendered on this fast day would have been basically the same as that created on the Tenth of Teveth.<sup>13</sup>

So the 27th of Nissan prevailed and was eventually generalized slightly in name and assigned concrete observances. As finally passed by the Knesset on 7 April 1959, the law for this Day of Remembrance of Holocaust and Heroism reads:

1. The 27th of Nissan is the Day of Remembrance of the Disaster and Heroism, dedicated every year to remembrance of the catastrophe of the Jewish people caused by Nazis and their aides, and of the acts of Jewish heroism and resistance in that period. Should the 27th of Nissan fall on a Friday, the Day of Remembrance shall be marked on the 26th of Nissan of that year.
2. On the Day of Remembrance there shall be observed Two Minutes Silence throughout the State of Israel, during which all traffic on the roads shall cease. Memorial services and meetings shall be held in Army camps and in educational institutions; flags on public buildings shall be flown at half mast; radio programmes shall express the special character of the day, and the programmes in places of amusement shall be in keeping with the spirit of the day.
3. The Minister authorized by the government shall draft, in consultation with the Yad Vashem Remembrance Authority, the necessary instructions for the observance of the Day of Remembrance as set forth in this Law.<sup>14</sup>

In 1961, a further amendment required that all places of entertainment be closed on the Eve of *Yom Hashoah VeHagvurah*. Yad Vashem also suggested that the siren for *Yom Hazikkaron* be sounded to enforce the two minutes of silence on *Yom Hashoah*, yet another move linking the martyrs of the Shoah to the heroes who fell for the State.

#### The Memorial Performance of a Day

How then is the remembrance day publicly performed? What do people remember in its ceremonies and moments of silence? To what extent do the forms of observance shape remembrance itself? Rather than cutting across all locations and communities, answers to these questions depend very much on the specific site. Outside of Israel, *Yom*

Hashoah increasingly assumes the trappings of a "holy day" and so is often observed in and around the synagogue. When conducted at civic centers or at public memorial sites, "services" are as likely as not to be led by a rabbi or member of the religious community. In America, where the main organizing ideology is pluralism, ecumenical ceremonies bring together clergymen from diverse faiths and ethnic groups, Jewish survivors and Christian liberators. Each commemoration reflects the ethos and tradition, the piety or politics of a given community. In fact, the first national Days of Holocaust Remembrance in America proposed by Senator John Danforth (18-29 April 1979) were to commemorate the 34th anniversary of Dachau's liberation by American troops--an explicit reflection of America's Holocaust experience. Only later were these days moved to coincide more closely with the 27th of Nissan. In New York, the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization gathers thousands of people into the Felt Forum to light candles to heroism and martyrdom. In Brooklyn, a minyan at a small shul holds an all-night vigil--Leyl Shmurim--to study all that was lost. In Tennessee, a Catholic priest has set aside parallel days on the Christian liturgical calendar, during which he leads his congregation in a "Feast of Atonement." Scholars, writers, and religious leaders across the religious spectrum continue to fashion new commemorative liturgies for this day.<sup>15</sup>

While all of these ceremonies and liturgies comprise a total text of this day, for the purposes of this inquiry, I shall concentrate on the performance of this day in Israel. Like all Jewish commemorative and holy days, Yom Hashoah begins at sundown the night before. In the years immediately following the law's passage, there was little perceptible change in the streets on this evening: it was not so different from other nights. At first, Yad Vashem asked the Prime Minister's office to enforce the clause in the Remembrance Law closing places of entertainment and amusement. When the office replied that it could not without an impossibly strict reading of the law, Yad Vashem resorted to sending notices to movie-houses and theatres requesting that they show only films or plays appropriate to Holocaust remembrance. Over the years, this has achieved a partial compliance, with many cinemas continuing to show their regularly scheduled films.

The state-controlled mass media are another story. For days before and after Yom Hashoah, Israel television airs along with its regular programming a variety of documentary and fiction films on the Shoah, specially produced shows on resistance and destruction, histories of antisemitism, interviews with survivors and partisans, and panel discussions featuring scholars of the Holocaust. On the day itself, all programs are devoted to the Holocaust, beginning with a live broadcast of the State memorial ceremonies at Yad Vashem. Between 1986 and 1989, the first evening's programs also included--incredibly--a Holocaust quiz show, "The International Quiz on Jewish Heroism during World War II." Taped in front of a live audience, panels of students would take questions from the State's president on names, dates, places, and events of the Shoah period highlighting instances of resistance and heroism. Correct answers would elicit respectful applause from the audience, wrong answers finding only silence.

In the days leading to Yom Hashoah on the four state-run radio stations, music composed in the ghettos and camps is interspersed with interviews, roundtable discussions, readings of diaries and poetry from the era, and dramatic presentations. On the 27th of Nissan, somber music mixes with liturgical melodies drawn from the days of awe--except on Abby Nathan's independent radio station, "The Voice of Peace," which broadcasts a full schedule of popular anti-war and protest songs from the sixties and seventies.

In the state's early years, hundreds of members of ghetto fighters organizations would march through Tel Aviv on the eve of remembrance. Setting out from Malkei Yisrael Square, carrying placards and banners identifying themselves as partisans, ghetto fighter and anti-Nazi war veterans, these men and women would wend their way from Rehov Frishman and Rehov Dizengoff through Dizengoff Square and then arrive at the Mann Auditorium to hold their own annual memorial meeting. Similar gatherings convened at Lohamei Hageta'ot, Yad Mordechai, Ma'ale Hahamisha, and the Martyrs' Forest outside Jerusalem. The content of these meetings still varies from year to year, group to group. But generally they include addresses by survivors and former partisans, the singing of partisan songs, a recitation of kaddish, and end with the national anthem.

There is only one official Opening Ceremony of Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day that evening, however, and it takes place at Yad Vashem on Har Hazikkaron (Remembrance Hill) in Jerusalem. In front of thousands of guests, all monitored carefully by security forces, the State's President and Prime Minister lead the national remembrance service. An Israel Defense Forces Honor Guard opens the ceremony with a presentation of arms, followed by a lowering of the flag to half-mast. Then the President lights a flame of remembrance, and addresses are delivered by the chairmen of the Yad Vashem Directorate and Council, as well as by the Chairman of the Council of Organisations of Former Partisans, Fighters and Nazi Prisoners. After "Eli, Eli" is sung by the chief cantor of the Israel Defense Forces, the Prime Minister reads his keynote speech. This is followed by the Partisans' Hymn and the lighting of six memorial torches, each by a new immigrant from a different land--formerly Jews of the diaspora remembering those who died in exile. The ceremony ends with a powerful reading of Psalm 79 by the Chief Rabbi of the Army, a recitation of Kaddish, "Ani Ma'amin" and "Hatikva," the national anthem.

The entire ceremony is conducted at the foot of "The Wall of Remembrance" at Yad Vashem, a reproduction of Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument, opened up book-like. As a figurative backdrop, this site frames the proceedings in especially significant ways: the ghetto fighters tower heroically overhead the dais and speakers; the martyrs are on their last march, barely visible behind a row of Honor Guards. Illuminated from below by colored floodlights, the hulking figures of the fighters glow spectacularly before the seated audience, though somewhat grotesquely when viewed on television. The adjacent bas-relief depicting the last march is seemingly guarded by Germans from behind (their helmets and bayonets just visible) and by Israeli soldiers from the front. The wall itself is draped not in black memorial bunting, but in the national colors, blue and white. On this

evening, Yad Vashem's exhibition hall remains open to the public until midnight to accommodate thousands of extra visitors. Early the next morning, an honor guard composed of former partisans and current soldiers takes its position inside the great Memorial Hall. They stand at attention amidst the names of death camps inscribed on the floor, while the eternal flame flickers silently nearby. Even as these soldiers symbolically guard memory of the martyrs, they more literally embody--and thereby remind us of--the heroic fighters. In fact, after being twinned with heroism for so many years, the Shoah itself no longer signifies defeat in many of the young soldiers' eyes, but actually emerges as an era of heroism, of triumph over past passivity. Through its explicit coupling of Shoah and Gvurah (heroism) this day encourages rememberers to find heroism wherever it may be: from active resistance to the spiritual resistance of artists and writers; from the self-sacrifice of parents for their children to the quiet dignity of Jews bravely facing certain death.

In fact, how Yom Hashoah will remember the Holocaust to these young soldiers is made explicit in a bulletin especially prepared for army commanders on Yom Hashoah, Informational Guidelines to the Commander:

1. The Zionist solution establishing the State of Israel was intended to provide an answer to the problem of the existence of the Jewish people, in view of the fact that all other solutions had failed. The Holocaust proved, in all its horror, that in the twentieth century, the survival of Jews is not assured as long as they are not masters of their fate and as long as they do not have the power to defend their survival. (Emphasis added)

2. A strong State of Israel means a state possessed of military, diplomatic, social, and economic strength, and moral character which can respond properly to every threat from outside and provide assistance to every persecuted Jew wherever he is. The consciousness of the Holocaust is one of the central forces which stand behind our constant striving to reach this strength and behind the solidarity and deep tie with Diaspora Jewry.<sup>16</sup>

This conception further was elaborated in Chief-of-Staff Mordechai Gur's address at the base of Yad Vashem's Wall of Remembrance in 1976, in which he made clear the current generation's debt to the Holocaust: "If you wish to know the source from which the Israeli army draws its power and strength, go to the holy martyrs of the Holocaust and the heroes of the revolt. . . . The Holocaust [ ] is the root and legitimation of our enterprise."<sup>17</sup> The vocabulary of both the guidelines and the Chief-of-Staff is aimed at young soldiers, whose identity with the victims depends almost entirely on the martyrs being presented now as heroes. The martyrs are not forgotten here but are recollected heroically as the first to fall in defense of the State itself.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to its codification in the "informational guidelines," this unity created in the memory of the Holocaust is reiterated every year in the speeches on this day--all of which constitute part of the remembrance day's text. "Today, the 27th of Nissan, the people of Israel unites with the memory of its sons and daughters, the fighters of the heroism and the victims of the Holocaust," declared Joseph Burg in 1989. "In their heroic deaths, they commanded us to live." A few minutes later, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir echoed this

refrain, "Every year, the House of Israel unites with the memory of our people who were destroyed during the Holocaust years by the Nazi beast . . . And those who were swept away commanded us to live . . . The people of Israel unites in the strength of memory commanded us in the Torah, 'Remember what Amalek did unto you, do not forget it.'"<sup>19</sup> As we will see, however, there is a difference between uniting in "the memory of our people" and uniting in the meaning of this memory.

The next morning, at the base of the Western Wall--the ultimate iconographic symbol of destruction in Judaism--survivors take turns reciting the names of victims from a list of 300,000 provided by Yad Vashem. Ultra-religious Jews in black come and go, oblivious to the recitation of names. Their remembrance is not the State's remembrance, after all, but still Yom Kaddish, the Tenth of Teveth: they virtually ignore this and other ceremonies on the 27th of Nissan. As the names drone on, tourists gather nearby for a group photograph; two soldiers in combat gear pause and listen intently, as if for specific names, before moving on. Then a woman interrupts the readers with a list of her own, which she is permitted to read in quavering voice. On this day, even the holiest of religious spaces takes on statist meaning, another side to the Western Wall: one commemorates the destruction of Jerusalem and the resulting dispersion; the other recalls ancient Jewish statehood and the rebellion against the Romans. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir begins a parallel recitation in front of the Knesset by reading the names of his family killed by the Nazis.

Since only a small part of Israel's population actually attends any of the official ceremonies, many Israelis find this day's most powerful moment in the two-minute siren that sounds across Israel at 8 A.M on Yom Hashoah. For most Israelis, this siren is their only direct experience of the remembrance day. Commemoration, which might otherwise be avoided, is inescapable during this moment. Instead of the clarion call of the Shofar relayed from hill to hill, as in ancient times, an unwavering air-raid siren--a terrible *tekiah gedolah*--now transfixes an entire country. Its wartime shades of danger and warning meld with the Shofar's traditional echoes denoting God's memory of all events, past and future, and the call to penitence: secular and religious Jews alike pause before its memorial significance.<sup>20</sup> Because this moment of silence is the one ritual text shared by all in Israel, we might consider what literally occurs over these two minutes--both on the street and in the minds of those, like the author, who "observe" this moment.

Just before the hour, some people in the street begin to hesitate and wait. Then the siren begins, low and deep and rises until it reaches scream pitch, an open-mouthed wail. Depending on where one stands, the siren can be unbearably loud or is muffled by buildings and trees. All in the street stop in their tracks: taxis, buses, trucks, pedestrians. Drivers get out of their cars, some look up at the sky, then at their watches, and then down at the ground. Most stand with heads bowed, shoulders hunched. At the corner of King George and Ben Yehuda Streets in Jerusalem, where I stand, an old man shakes uncontrollably. A young mother clenches the hand of her child, who looks up wondrously at the suddenly still

streets. A soldier shifts impatiently from foot to foot, seemingly embarrassed. An elderly couple sets down their shopping bags, full of groceries. An Arab construction worker laying paving stones stands up and looks straight ahead into space, at no one. Tourists caught unaware pause uncertainly, some fingering their cameras but too ashamed by the awful solemnity to snap photos. Then a professional photographer, laden with equipment, begins to scuttle from corner to corner, shooting everything in sight. How will he convey this moment? He risks turning into still-life what is already and significantly still. How will he capture the sense of Israel's frenetic motion stopped so suddenly by a sound?<sup>21</sup>

Then I wonder: what do the Sephardic immigrants remember? Their own former misery in Islamic countries? The stereotype images of Ashkenazim going like sheep? What do Arab-Israelis make of this day, of these two minutes? What do they remember of Jewish experience? Their Jewish neighbors' past lives, or the intifada of their West Bank cousins? What do I remember? I remember watching a tired looking woman in a kibbutz kitchen, years ago, as she turned off the water, squeezed out a rag, wiped her hands on a smudged apron, and leaned against the counter. I remember her telling me that every year, she recalls the same image during this siren: leaving her parents' Hamburg home in 1938, a nine year old girl on her way to Palestine, her last moments in Germany. Born in America after the Shoah, I remember only what I have heard from others on past remembrance days.

For two minutes, the siren turns all moving things and people into standing monuments. For two minutes the siren encircles us with sound, gathering all into one great space of time, turning the very ground we share into public memorial space. The moment stretches on, the wail growing tighter and thinner, like a taut thread, binding all together, until it unwinds. A half-hour later, I look into strangers' eyes and wonder where they were, and if they remember that moment we shared. When we share this memorial moment--or day--with others, however, framed by the same ritual instant, what are we sharing? The survivor remembers her experiences in Auschwitz, her lost family and friends, her lost past life. At the same time, she remembers why she is in Israel, why her sons are in the Army. Am I to remember her life as well, as she has told it to me? And if so, do we indeed share memory, her memory, even if I know it only vicariously? Or must I concentrate on my own experience of this period, which amounts to nothing more than its effects on me, my felt rage and desolation?

### Conclusion

As reflected in Yad Vashem's explicit mandate "to foster a unified form of commemoration of the heroes and martyrs of the Jewish people,"<sup>22</sup> many feared from the outset that without standard forms of observance, national meaning in the Holocaust might also be lost. As the meaning of former catastrophes had been unified in ritual texts, national meaning of the Shoah would require a unified memorial text. "We have not devised as yet adequate rites so as to install the 27th of Nissan among our days of mourning," Arye Kubovy wrote in 1957. "The Lamentations which should be read from year to year and in

which our people will bewail its dead has not yet been written."<sup>23</sup> Ten years later, this call was repeated by Benjamin West, who proposed a scroll of the Holocaust: "We need an 'Aicha' [Lamentations] of the Holocaust, something short and strong that will have an effect on believers and non-believers alike."<sup>24</sup> Since then, many other--mostly religious--leaders have bemoaned the plurality of observance, what they perceive as a splintering of memory and its meanings. David Golinkin has not only argued passionately for a more unified public commemoration of the Shoah, based on the elements of Jewish religious tradition, but has also proposed a detailed plan for commemorating Yom Hashoah in our homes.<sup>25</sup>

At this point, however, we might distinguish between unified forms of commemoration and the unification of memory itself, between unified meanings and unified responses to memory. For despite unified forms of commemoration, memory in these shared moments is not necessarily shared, but in fact, varies distinctly from person to person. This is not a day of shared memory, but rather a shared time of disparate remembrance. Taken together, these discrete memories constitute the collected, not collective, memory evoked on Yom Hashoah. In this light, we might see Yom Hashoah not as a day of national memory so much as a nationalization of many competing memories.

In its conception, Yom Hashoah was intended as neither a fast nor a holy day. It was pulled out of the religious continuum precisely to be observed as a national day of remembrance. As such, this day would mirror one of the nation's own functions: to bind into one polity a diverse people. Nations traditionally accomplish this unification in a number of ways, including the propagation of common laws, ideals, and language. As it turns out, generating a national memory is yet another way to unify a nation. For the very act of commemoration provides a common experience for a population otherwise divided by innumerable disparate lives. This is not a unity of Holocaust experience, however, or even the unification of memory itself. Rather, it is only the unity of shared ceremony, which creates the sense of a shared past.

This is the painful necessity and impossibility of a public remembrance day, its blessing and its curse. On the one hand, the creation of common memorial experience can indeed unify plural segments of a population, even if it is only during a brief "memorial moment." This is both the right of the state and, many would argue, its obligation. On the other hand, in heeding the traditional call to "remember events as if they happened to us," we risk confusing the shared moment for a shared memory. We are invited to mistake our common memorial experience for a common Holocaust experience--thereby literalizing the metaphorical command to remember as if it happened to us. In this sense, the nation always asks for more than common commemoration: remembering one's national history is not merely to learn about the experiences of others, but to make these experiences one's own. It is to adopt a nation's past as if it were one's own past, and then to respond to the current world in light of this vicariously gained legacy. By creating the myth of a common past, a national remembrance day like Yom Hashoah creates the conditions for recognizing a common future, as well. While recognizing this tendency in remembrance days to unify

both memory and responses to it, however, we must also guard against it. We need to distinguish between the beauty in a day that unites a people in common moments of remembrance and the danger in a day that creates a single meaning in such memory. In this way, we might encourage Yom Hashoah to encompass a multiplicity of memories, without allowing the day to subjugate memory to univocal meaning. For the life of memory and its commemorative day depend on their capacity to adapt to new times, on the evolution of their meanings in new historical contexts. Unlike monuments in the landscape, in whose rigid forms memory is too often ossified, the remembrance day can reinvigorate itself and the forms it takes every year. By virtue of its place on the calendar, certain meanings will also be renewed. But if we encourage the day to encompass multiple memories and meanings on this day, we ensure that Yom Hashoah remains more the perennial guardian of memory, less its constant tyrant.

**Notes**

1. For elaboration of this distinction, see Gerard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 33-5.
2. For the best existing discussion and definition of Israel's civil religion, see Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).
3. For keen insight into Israel's "counter-tradition," see Yael Zerubavel, "Invented Tradition and Counter-tradition: The Social Construction of the Past in Israeli Culture," a paper presented at the Association for Jewish Studies annual meeting, December 1990.  
 Also see Zerubavel's "New Beginning, Old Past: The Collective Memory of Pioneering in Israeli Culture," in New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1990), pp. 193-215; and "The Holiday Cycle and the Commemoration of the Past: History, Folklore and Education," in The Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, vol. II (1986), pp. 111-18.
4. The Tenth of Teveth commemorates the beginning of the siege; the 17th of Tammuz marks the first breach in the walls of the city; the Ninth of Av recalls the destruction of the Temple; and the Third of Tishri remembers the assassination of Gedaliah, the governor of Judah appointed by Nebuchadnezzar. For details surrounding the historical origins of these dates, see Theodor H. Gaster, Festivals of the Jewish Year: A Modern Interpretation and Guide (New York: Morrow, Quill, 1978), pp. 194-6.
5. In a further example, it is possible that the Chmielnicky massacres commenced on precisely the same day as the Blois blood libel murder of 32 Jews 477 years earlier, as is traditionally believed. But it is more likely that when the anniversary of the Blois massacre in 1171 became a day of fasting for Jewish communities in England, France, and the Rhineland, it also became the anniversary for subsequent massacres occurring in the same general period on the calendar.
6. From Yad, Hilchot Ta'anivot 5:1.
7. See Irving Greenberg, The Jewish Way (New York: Summit Books, 1988), p. 330. Contrary to Greenberg's suggestion that this date never caught on with religious Jews, the Tenth of Teveth is, in fact, widely observed by much of the ultra-orthodox community in Israel, where jahrzeit candles are kindled and ceremonies are conducted at the Mount of Olives cemetery.
8. Divrei Haknesset 1951, p. 1657.
9. For a much more detailed, anthropological analysis of the calendar's narrative, see Don Handelman, Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 194-200.  
 In his rich study, Handelman also reminds us that in falling seven days before Yom Hazikkaron, Yom Hashoah recapitulates the Jewish mourning period (shiva) of seven days.
10. For a much more extended discussion of the statist's attitude toward the Holocaust, see Liebman and Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel, pp. 100-18.

11. Divrei Hakneset 1959, p. 1386.
12. See Saul Friedlander, "Die Shoah als Element in der Konstruktion Israelischer Erinnerung," Babylon 2 (1987): 10-22; "The Shoah Between Memory and History," Jerusalem Quarterly 53 (Winter 1990); and "Roundtable Discussion," in Berel Lang, ed. Writing and the Holocaust (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1988), p. 288.
13. Irving Greenberg also recalls that in 1984, Rabbi Pinchas Teitz proposed yet another alternative date for Yom Hashoah: the anniversary of Hitler's death--i.e., the 17th of Iyar, the day before Lag B'omer, the festival celebrating the end of the Sfirah period (The Jewish Way, pp. 332-33).
14. Quoted from "Day of Memorial for Victims of the European Jewish Disaster and Heroism--27 Nissan, 5719," Yad Vashem Bulletin, October 1959, No. 4/5, p.27.
15. For some innovative examples, see David Roskies, Night Words: A Midrash on the Holocaust (Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation, 1971); Roskies and Irving Greenberg, eds. "Holocaust Commemoration for Days of Remembrance" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Memorial Council, 1981); Abba Kovner, Megillot Ha'eduth (Israel: Mossad Bialik, 1989); Marcia Sachs Littell, ed. Liturgies on the Holocaust (Philadelphia: Anne Frank Institute, 1986); Albert Friedlander and Elie Wiesel, The Six Days of Destruction: Meditations toward Hope (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1988).
16. As quoted in Liebman and Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel, p. 178 (emphasis added).
17. As quoted in Liebman and Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel, p. 184.
18. We might recall in this context the Yad Vashem World Council's first convention was held in 1957 on the 19th of April (anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), which fell that year on the 8th of Iyar and not on the 27th of Nissan, at Har Hazikkaron. After reading a number of letters, the chairman, Benzion Dinur, asked all to rise for a moment's silence. According to one report, "the council rose in a minute's silence in memory of the victims of the European holocaust and of those who fell in the defense of the homeland." In this equation, martyrs and fighters are united here by the memory of those who were both. See "Yad Washem World Council Convenes on Memorial Hill in Jerusalem," Yad Vashem Bulletin, April 1957, No. 1, p. 31 (emphasis added).
19. From the Opening Ceremony of "Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day, Nisan 26, 5747 - May 1, 1989," courtesy of Yad Vashem Memorial Authority.
20. In Israel's more recent past, the long, steady siren acquired further memory still; it was the all-clear signal sounded in the wake of Iraqi missile attacks in January 1991.
21. Only one photograph I know, taken from the Tel Aviv - Jerusalem highway, conveys this sense of stopped motion. The stillness of the drivers standing at attention beside their cars outside is captured precisely by the figure of the roadway itself, which functions as a backdrop of assumed movement. See the photograph by Frederic Brenner in A.B. Yehoshua and Frederic Brenner, Israel (London: Collins Harvill, 1988), pp. 2-3.

22. Benzion Dinur, "Problems of Research," Yad [V]ashem Studies I, 1957, pp. 9-10.
23. Arye L. Kubovy, "Nissan 27--A Day of Examen of Conscience," Yad Vashem Bulletin, No. 6/7, June 1960, p. 2.
24. Yad Vashem News 2, 1970, p. 7.
25. David Golinkin, "Yom Hashoah: A Program of Observance," Conservative Judaism 37, Summer 1984, pp. 52-64; and "How Should We Commemorate the Shoah in Our Homes?", Moment 14, June 1989, pp. 30-5.