

Holocaust and Human Rights Center of Maine

Yom HaShoah Commemoration

Sunday, May 5, 2024

3:00 – 4:30 pm

ERICA NADELHAFT guides the service.

Welcome. Tonight we gather to commemorate the Shoah; to remember the victims, the survivors, the rescuers and the liberators. HHRC staff and community members will offer readings, poems, and prayers. After each piece, we will have a moment of silent reflection. We invite you to listen and sit with these words and remember.

Let us begin with a prayer from Rabbi Lord Sacks and the lighting of three candles:

Today, on Yom HaShoah, we remember the victims of the greatest crime of man against man – the young, the old, the innocent, the million and a half children, starved, shot, given lethal injections, gassed, burned and turned to ash, because they were deemed guilty of the crime of being different. We remember what happens when hate takes hold of the human heart and turns it to stone; what happens when victims cry for help and there is no one listening; what happens when humanity fails to recognise that those who are not in our image are nonetheless in God's image.

We remember and pay tribute to the survivors, who bore witness to what happened, and to the victims, so that robbed of their lives, they would not be robbed also of their deaths. We remember and give thanks for the righteous of the nations who saved lives, often at risk of their own, teaching us how in the darkest night we can light a candle of hope.

Today, on Yom HaShoah, we call on You, Almighty God, to help us hear Your voice that says in every generation:

Do not murder.

Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.

Do not oppress the stranger.

We know that whilst we do not have the ability to change the past, we can change the future.

We know that whilst we cannot bring the dead back to life, we can ensure their memories live on and that their deaths were not in vain.

And so, on this Yom HaShoah, we commit ourselves to one simple act: Yizkor, Remember.

May the souls of the victims be bound in the bond of everlasting life. Amen.

Tam comes to the front and lights candles while Erica recites :

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

Blessed is the flame that burns in the heart's secret places.

Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its beating for honor's sake

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

Erica turns to Tam for her reading.

TAM HUYNH

We begin – with silence.

The silence of death; the silence of life.

The silence after destruction;
The silence before creation.
There are times when songs falter,
When darkness fills life,
When martyrdom becomes a constellation of faith
Against the unrelieved black of space about us.
There are no words to reach beyond the night,
No messengers to tell the full tale.
There is only silence.
The silence of Job.
The silence of the Six Million.
The silence of memory.
Let us remember them, then, as we link our silences
Into the silence which becomes a prayer,
Linking us with the past,
Touching that darkness we cannot fully enter,
The anguish that is memory and love.
And life and death.
Silence.

ERICA

Let us remember the generations who remembered. The tradition of remembering continues. We are a link in this chain. We acknowledge this incomplete list of Maine survivors and invite participants to stand and add the names of any survivors they would like to be remembered.

Julius Ciembroniewicz. Tama Fineberg. Gerda Haas. Dr. Rudolf Haas. Judith Magyar Isaacson.

Rose Magyar. Alfred Kantor. Inge Kantor. Manfred Kelman. Emil Landau. Cantor Kurt Messerschmidt.

Sonja Messerschmidt. Edith Pagelson. Charles Rotmil. Julia Skalina. Jerry Slivka.

Rochelle Blechman Slivka. Alan Wainberg. Walter Ziffer.

Erica calls up Rabbi Erica Asch to sing El Male Rachamim

RABBI ASCH

El Malei Rachamim

Exalted compassionate God, Grant perfect peace in your
sheltering presence, among the holy and the pure, to the souls
of all our brethren, men, women,
and children of the House of Israel and others who were
slaughtered and suffocated and burned to ashes. May their
memory endure, inspiring truth and loyalty in our lives. May
their souls thus be bound up in the bond of life. May they rest
in peace.

And let us say: Amen.

SARA LENNON

We hear an excerpt from the Survivors' Declaration and listen to their words:

The age of the Holocaust Survivors is drawing to a close. Before long no one will be left to say: "I was there, I saw, I remember what happened." All that will be left will be the books of research and literature, pictures and films and archives of testimonies. This will be a new era. The dark inheritance of the Shoah that was so indelibly stamped on the Survivors' souls and hearts will become a historical mission and responsibility imposed upon humanity to fill with content and substance.

Rachel Prizant Kotok reads her poem THE OCTOGENARIANS WORE BLUE NUMBERS AT SHUL in honor of the beautiful and resilient synagogue elders of her childhood, although they are now gone.

mood

was raw red
nu? Devil-rat
ss diva-demon gas
evil eras

we jews
are lives
a gnome david's star
lived under warsaw

doom

TAM HUYNH

Primo Levi was an Italian Jewish chemist, partisan, survivor and writer. We listen to his words:

You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find, returning in the evening,
Hot food and friendly faces:
Consider if this is a man
Who works in the mud,
Who does not know peace,
Who fights for a scrap of bread,
Who dies because of a yes or a no.
Consider if this is a woman
Without hair and without name,
With no more strength to remember,
Her eyes empty and her womb cold
Like a frog in winter.
Meditate that this came about:
I command these words to you.
Carve them in your hearts

At home, in the street,
Going to bed, rising;
Repeat them to your children.
Or may your house fall apart,
May illness impede you,
May your children turn their faces
from you.

SAM ZAGER

For All These Things I Weep...
Even if I have no words and you have few,
Our reach falling short and our language stammering,
We awaken the memory of an ocean of indescribable
torments, mankind's most enormous slaughter,
With the very muteness of our lips and with a sadness that
transcends language.
For these things I weep:
For the parents who were murdered,
For the brothers, the sisters,
For the children who dreamed.
For these things I weep:
For the house that was destroyed,
For the neighbors who betrayed,
For the street from which they were driven,
For the synagogues that were shattered,
For the whole nation whose life was crushed.
For these things I weep,
For each person, their world, and their mystery,
For their loves, their despairs, and their dreams,
For their study, their deeds, and their pains,
For their memories, their anger, and their laughter,
For each person and their life.

Sam returns to his seat.

Erica calls up Elaine to read a piece by Danny Siegel:

ELAINE KAHANER

A piece by by Danny Siegel

In a religious school, many years ago in the land of Israel, there was a brilliant teacher who though slightly mad, was revered by his students. This story, about this Rabbi and as written by Danny's teacher, is worthy of Eli Weisel.

A certain Jew, of ordinary appearance, came before the Heavenly Court, sometime during that warped eternity, after the flames of Auschwitz ceased to be heard and the crematoria of Dachau were temporarily closed for repairs. No doubt two groups waited outside the courtroom: brightly clad escorts to Gehennom, to Hell, and togaed angels in white, the royal entourage to Eden.

When the door closed behind this Jew, he walked neither terrified nor proud towards the Judge's bar. There was no need for God to pound His gavel on the tabletop - all was quiet as expectant Sinai,

except for the rhythmic footsteps of Selig.

"Did you study Torah, the Bible, my son?" He whispered in his well-known, still small voice.

"No, Blessed Father. I did not study your words."

"Did you pray every day, my little Jew?" He whispered, this time louder and with humor and curiosity.

"No, Lord of all Creation, I did not pray," Selig answered, showing neither chutzpah nor forgiveness in his speech.

Sensing the next answer, the Almighty roared mighty as Pharaoh, "And did you keep my Holy Sabbath?"

And as expected, the Jew again answered the disappointing, "No."

"Be gone! Take him away to Gehennom forever!" screeched the Judge, red-faced and raging for the first time since the Flood. "Get out of here!"

Selig turned to leave as he had entered, without terror, without pride. At the door he paused to face his aging God again, saying, "I, too, have a question, an old-time topic for discussion for the Almighty, and then I will go."

The Holy One, surprised but interested, always curious for questions, sat down on his glorious throne and listened to Selig, who asked: "Tatenyu, bie Hitler bin ich a a yid - bei dir, nayn?" - Father, for Hitler I was a Jew and for You I am not?"

Astounded and drained, God sat in silence, that divine silence of confusion and mystery, as Selig waited for his answer. For as long as it takes for God to come to his senses. He sat in silence, then whispered, "Halachah K'Hitler - Hitler was right."

ERICA

We pause now to recite the Mourner's Kaddish, the Jewish prayer in memory of the dead. All who know the prayer are welcome to join in. Those who are in mourning traditionally rise during this prayer, so please do so if you feel comfortable.

Rabbi Asch recites the Kaddish:

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.

**בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ וְיִמְלִיךָ מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעַגְלָא וּבְזָמַן
קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן**

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלְמָא וְלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא

**יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלֵּל שְׁמֵהּ דְקַדְשָׁא. בְּרִיךְ הוּא
לְעֵלְמָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא דְאִמְרֵין בְּעֵלְמָא. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן**

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן

We honor those who liberated the camps and struggled to save those who remained alive. Noel March, son of a decorated U.S. Army liberator, will read the words of Harry J. Herder, one of the liberators of Buchenwald.

NOEL MARCH

We headed for the woods talking softly to each other, the talk full of wonderment—the hows, the whys. We had no answers. As limited as our combat experience had been, we had seen dead men, we had seen wounded men from both sides with the immediacy of battle, with no time for conjecture. We had done what we could for the wounded and then had got on with the job that had to be done.

None of us, no one in our company, even amongst those who had been the originals, was prepared for what we were now surrounded by. It was not “human”. It did not seem real. But it was all too real, it was the only life that some of the prisoners had known for years. Maybe it was all too human. Maybe this is what we are.

ERICA

We acknowledge the struggle to maintain one’s dignity and humanity in the most barbaric of times.

MEGAN LADD

Viktor Frankl was a neurologist, psychiatrist, and survivor. He writes:

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

ERICA

Who is the man who guarded his humanity even
when transformed into dust,
A father who sent away his daughter to live,
A mother who sent away her son,
A granddaughter who fought for her
grandmother’s life,
A man who held the hand of a Stranger.
Who are the woman and man
who took up arms,
And inscribed new lines in the

Chronicles of freedom,
A man who kept his commandments
bound in tefillin (phylacteries),
A woman who issued forged papers,
And who stole across borders.
Who are the man and woman who wrote, painted,
told stories and dreamed,
Those who photographed and documented human
testimony,
The one who laughed and the one who loved,
The woman who scribbled recipes to make
the hunger subside,
And those who shared a slice of bread.
Who is the man who lifted the collapsed
during roll call,
The woman who completed the forced
labor of her sister,
Those who shared a word of
encouragement,
And those who, at twilight,
Under the shadow of the
crematorium pillar of smoke,
Stood in prayer and song.
Who are the children who played and dreamed,
And who wrote their poems between fences,
And those who never lost hold
of their little hands,
Even as they walked to their death.
Who is the man, the woman, the child
and the elder,
Who sanctified the Image of Humankind.

SARA LENNON

Survivor Hugo Gryn writes:
But in the midst of darkness there was also light.
A light of hope and faith.
A light of human kindness and resistance.
A light that dispelled the darkness.
It was the cold winter of 1944 and although we had
nothing like calendars, my father, who was my
fellow prisoner, took me and our friends to a corner
in our barrack. He announced that it was the eve of
Hanukkah, produced a curious-shaped clay bowl,
and began to light a wick immersed in his precious,
but now melted, margarine ration. Before he could
recite the blessing, I protested at this waste of food.
He looked at me - then at the lamp - and finally
said: "You and I have seen that it is possible to live
up to three weeks without food. We once lived
almost three days without water: but you cannot
live properly for three minutes without hope!"

ERICA

Let us also remember the righteous among the nations:

Their faiths and their countries
were varied,
but they all rejected
noninvolvement and instead
they held out a hand.
They exemplify the
human spirit.

NOEL MARCH

In January 1943, after detention in camps in Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande and in prisons in Romainville, Orléans, and Compiègne, Dr. Hautval was sent to the Birkenau death camp with another two hundred French women prisoners. Hautval, a devout Protestant, was housed with five hundred Jewish women prisoners, and was nicknamed "the saint." She applied her medical knowledge to treat Jewish prisoners who had contracted typhus, secluding them in a separate part of the block, in order to prevent contagion. Hautval, employed as a physician by the camp commander, refrained from reporting the prisoners' illness and thereby spared them immediate death. She treated Jewish patients with boundless dedication, and her gentle hands and warm words were of inestimable value to Jews in the hell of Auschwitz. [S]he said, in words engraved on the prisoners' memory, "... Let us behave like human beings as long as we are alive."

ERICA

The Talmud says that
the human was created as a unique
being in the world, to teach that one who
destroys a single soul has destroyed an
entire world. And one who saves a single
soul has saved an entire world.

So let us engage in the sacred work of tikkun olam
today. Let us not wait another moment.
Let us repair the world with love for one another.
Let us start today with a resolve to fight injustice.
Let this service remind us of the horrors of the past
and the hope for the future.
Let us dedicate ourselves to faith, hope and the
traditions of our people.
Let the memory of all those who were killed inspire
us to become more loving and kind, and to speak
out against injustice wherever it occurs.

May the memory of the righteous be for a blessing.