

The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School  
Section: Rhythms of Jewish Living  
<http://mcohen02.tripod.com/rhythms.html>  
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**Topic: *Yom HaShoah u-G'vurah*  
(Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day)  
and *Tisha B'Av***

***Key Idea:*** The 27<sup>th</sup> of Nisan is the day chosen by the Israeli Knesset in 1951 to commemorate the Holocaust and the heroism of the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto, hence the original official name of the day, "Day of Destruction and Strength". But in Israel, today *Yom Ha Shoah* translates into "Day of Desolation" in English. The literal meaning of the word *Shoah* is "whirlwind" in Hebrew, and the name is representative of the manner in which the Jews of Europe were exterminated.

Does *Yom HaShoah* commemorate Jewish heroism or Jewish victimization? Who has the right to decide what the lessons of the Holocaust, and the message of *Yom HaShoah*, ought to be? Would it be appropriate to either absorb the catastrophe of the destruction of European Jewry commemorated by *Yom HaShoah* into the tragedies of Jewish history recalled on *Tisha b'Av* (the traditional fast day on the ninth day of the month of Av that commemorates the destruction of both Temples), or to replace *Tisha b'Av* with *Yom HaShoah*?

***Our discussion of the texts:***

**Supplementary Text:** Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays, a Guide and Commentary:*

The 27<sup>th</sup> of Nisan has been established by the government of Israel as the date to commemorate the Holocaust and its victims. The ritual of this day is still in formation, partly because it was instituted by a secular authority; the most traditional rabbinic authorities do not believe a special day should be set aside for the Holocaust and therefore are opposed to the observance of Yom ha-Shoah. In Israel, the day is observed by the closing of all theaters and places of amusement, banks, schools, and most businesses. There are a variety of memorial observances, as there are in the United States...

In the minds of many Knesset members, the Holocaust and the founding of the state are linked on both a historical and philosophical level. The historical link is that this ultimate tragedy that befell the Jews of Europe prompted a sympathetic world opinion and the United Nations to support the creation of the state of Israel as a refuge for Jews. Similarly, the Holocaust convinced virtually every Jew, even those who had until then been indifferent or opposed to Zionism, that the founding of a state was necessary to prevent the recurrence of such a tragedy. On a philosophical level, the Holocaust exposed the problematic nature of the exile (or *galut*) and supported the case for Zionism. These events marked the end of the Eastern European style of Judaism and the growth of a new kind of Jew, symbolized

by the strong and independent *sabra*. Thus the transition between these two commemorative days is symbolic of a change in a mythic dimension marking the beginning of a new era for the Jewish people following the end of *galut*.

**Text 1: From the Testament of Elkhanan Elkes, leader of the Kovno Jewish Council, Oct. 19, 1943.** A father's plea to his children to not allow the atrocities of the Holocaust to be forgotten.

**Text 2: Knesset Proceedings April 12, 1951.** Knesset Speaker Mordecha Nurock's arguments in favor of establishing a memorial day for victims of the Holocaust.

**Suppl. text A: Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million*** (see attached)

**Text 3 and 4: Knesset Proceedings March 27, 1961.** The Knesset's decision to mark *Yom HaShoa V'HaGevurah*: by two minutes of silence throughout the country, ceremonies, lowering flags to half-mast, radio broadcasts reflecting the solemnity of the day, and by closing all places of entertainment. A member from the religious party Agudat Yisrael suggests studying Torah in memory of the deceased and reciting *El Maleh Rachamim* and *Kaddish*.

**Suppl. texts B & C: Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million*** (see attached)

**Text 5: Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 30a.** Traditional observance of the fast day of *Tisha B'Av*.

**Text 6: Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein.** Rav Joseph Soloveitchik proposed to Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in 1977 that the State of Israel annul *Yom HaShoah* and that the Holocaust be commemorated on the traditional mourning day of *Tisha B'Av*. Lichtenstein agrees with the State of Israel's decision not to accept his grandfather's suggestion.

**Text 7: Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Evolution of a Holy Day*.** Greenberg suggests that if *YomHaShoa* had been created by a rabbinic decree, it would have been largely ignored. If it was lumped together with another religious observance, it would have lost its impact. Furthermore, the date chosen for *Yom HaShoah*, just before *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*, Israel Independence Day, positions the creation of the State of Israel as a modern Jewish response to the Holocaust.

**Text 8: Rabbi Mark Washofsky, *Tisha B'Av and Yom HaShoah*.** While the observance of *Tisha B'Av* is problematic for Reform Jews, who do not want to pray for the Temple and its sacrificial system to be restored, *Yom HaShoah* is a day of solidarity and identification with the fate and destiny of Jews around the world.

**Text 9: Rabbi David Golinken, *Remembrance is the Secret of Redemption*.** A contemporary conservative rabbi suggests some reasons why the observance of *Tisha B'Av* has meaning even for Jews who may not aspire to the rebuilding of the Temple. Since redemption is not complete, we must continue to fast on *Tisha B'Av*.