



Remembering the past,  
honouring the memory,  
shaping the future

THE FORUM FOR  
**Yom HaShoah**  
Annual Jewish Remembrance Day  
for Victims of the Holocaust

## ***Yom HaShoah and Holocaust Memorial Day*** *by Ben Helfgott OBE*

I am constantly being asked what is the point of commemorating Yom HaShoah now that the Holocaust Memorial Day has been established.

Although the two events are mutually exclusive, they nevertheless perform - in their own way - essential and specific function.

The decision to hold a National Holocaust Memorial Day was announced by the Prime Minister Tony Blair on the 27th January 2000 on the occasion of the Stockholm International Forum of the Holocaust. He, like many other leading statesmen who participated at the Forum felt that the lessons of the Holocaust are of universal significance and that the Holocaust has become a touchstone for political and moral behaviour and continues to be of fundamental importance and relevance to each new generation.

Yom HaShoah is essentially a Day of Remembrance when we reflect on the tragedy which befell the Jewish people during the Nazi Reign of Terror. It is a day when we cherish and revere the memory of six million of our people who were gratuitously and viciously annihilated.

The commemoration of the six million dead has inevitably become a cornerstone of Jewish consciousness. It is an inescapable part of our collective memory, a part of our identity and a means of our self understanding. In our commemoration of the Shoah we have always stressed that the Holocaust is not only an indelible memory of horror to the Jewish people, it is also a permanent warning to all the people in the world.

The ovens of the extermination Camps of Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek Belzec, Chelmno and to some extent Auschwitz were working 24 hours to full capacity. Day by day, week by week, towns and villages were being emptied of Jews. During that year four million Jews were deliberately, systematically and ruthlessly murdered, of whom almost two million were POLISH Jews living within the General Government. Never in the annals of history have so many people been killed in one year. It is worth noting that 198 countries are represented at the United Nations of whom 78 countries have a population below four million.

Numbers do not convey what went on in the minds of the people in the Ghettos when rumours of intending deportations reached them. Can one imagine their helplessness? The despair of parents in not being able to save themselves or their children? Can one imagine how children agonised over their parents desperate bid to save them?

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### **The 'Forum' comprises the following UK Sponsoring & Participating Organisations:**

45 Aid Society / 45 Aid Second Generation Group  
Aish UK  
Anne Frank Trust  
Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen & Women  
Association of Jewish Refugees  
Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre

Board of Deputies of British Jews  
Council of Christians & Jews  
Holocaust Educational Trust  
Holocaust Memorial Day Trust  
Holocaust Survivor Centre  
Imperial War Museum

Jewish Lads' & Girls' Brigade  
Jewish Museum  
London Jewish Cultural Centre  
Maccabi GB/CST  
Pears Foundation  
Rabbi B Marcus, Central Synagogue

Second Generation Trust  
UJIA JLEC  
Union of Jewish Students  
Wiener Library  
Yad Vashem UK  
Zionist Youth Council

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Working with the Board of Deputies of British Jews

In the Ghetto of my hometown, Piotokow, I used to meet with a small group of my contemporary 12 to 13 year old boys and girls. In the programme you will find photos of some of the group which were taken in July 1942, three months before the deportation.

We were all fond of reading and met to discuss and exchange books. However, at around that time our minds were preoccupied with the kind of fate which awaited us. The inscribed pictures were given individually as a memento to an older friend who miraculously survived and against all odds managed to save them.

I would like to read you the Inscriptions which express the mood of the time.

**Lusia Miller.**

It is terribly, terribly sad when young people are dying. Because everything, everything in me wants to live. Especially at such a young age, because at the age of 13 one begins to learn about life. Perhaps it is good that it is such an early age. I don't know... but I do not want to die.

**Nusia Landau.**

If it has to be like this, if it has to be the end let my picture be a memento of the old days.

**Dziunia Grubsztein.**

Bronka, now there will be nothing, nothing, only nothing. But there was so much and there could have been so much more.

**Renja Nusenowicz.**

I told you everything and you gave me hope which I lacked and because of it I love you very much and I feel so close to you.

Within ten weeks of these pictures being taken, these children together with their parents and siblings were deported to the gas chambers of Treblinka. One and a half million children suffered a similar fate.

How can the comparatively few of us who survived ever forget them? How can we forget the men, women and children for whom there is no one to say Prayers? Can one really forget these events which are so indelibly engraved on our minds? We will continue to remember them. This is the significance of Yom HaShaoh.