

## INTRODUCTION

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I am a fourth-generation American Jew who cannot name a single relative who perished in the *Sboab*. That reality will be shared by more and more of us, especially as we become the first generation to live without any individuals who can share direct accounts of their personal experiences during, before, and immediately after the Holocaust. There are only two options in the face of this reality: to forget what happened, which would be obscene; or to remember in new ways that remain meaningful for a new generation. The latter is what it means to remember for life.

Memory is always about choice. We can choose to remember the past in ways that will stir our anger and evoke our rage. We can choose to remember in ways that stimulate sadness and provoke pain. And we can choose to remember in ways that challenge us to take from the past those memories and lessons that we need right now in order to be the people we most want to be, and to help create the kind of world in which we most want to live. We can remember for life.

Nowhere is that kind of choice-making more important than in connection with the *Sboab*. And never has it been more important than it is right now, because we are the first generation that will live without the presence of those who can tell us in their own words what they have seen with their own eyes. We are the first generation who will not be able to rely on the direct experience of the survivors to help us understand what happened in those dark years.

While our reliance on their presence as the guarantor of our memory has been beneficial in so many ways, it leaves us now with two profound challenges. First, to acknowledge that continuing to remember as we have for the last sixty years will become increasingly impossible, and second, to

appreciate the potent opportunity we have in creating the next generation of Holocaust memory, one that will be cherished not only for its own sake, but, like the memory of every other past tragedy in our people's past, as a point of embarkation for the next chapter in our eternal story. This book was created to rise to these two challenges.

*Remember for Life* connects our most ancient teachings with the lives of those who saw those teachings tested probably more than any other. Now we have the opportunity to learn from them the lessons that have always been embedded within that tradition, lessons about life and living to the fullest in every sense of the word.

When Sherman Jacobson, initial supporter of this work, and CLAL Executive Vice Chairman Donna Rosenthal sat down in my office two years ago, I had no way of knowing that the book you now hold in your hands would be produced. In fact, I never imagined working on any kind of volume about the Holocaust at all. But in the end, this book is not only about the Holocaust. It is about the sacred opportunity to remember the past in ways that will help guarantee the future.

*Remember For Life* continues an ancient tradition that dates back to the Hebrew Bible—a tradition of remembering traumatic events, such as the Exodus from Egypt, in ways that enhanced the lives of those who went free and the lives of all those around them. It is about choosing life—even, or perhaps especially, as we make our choices about how to remember the deadliest of times.

When Sherman came to my office, he brought a single request. He wanted to see what could be done to make

Holocaust memory a more regular part of the synagogue service. In truth, I was not sure how to answer him. I was worried that if I told him what I really thought, he would be upset, and it was apparent from the first moments of our initial meeting that he was such an intelligent and passionate man that that was the last thing I wanted to do. He noticed my hesitation and, in his gently forceful way, pushed me to respond.

I explained that I thought one *Yom Hasboab* a year was enough—that the rabbis of two thousand years ago were brilliant in their forcing virtually all of the rest of Jewish tragedy memory into three weeks in the summer, leaving the other forty-eight weeks of the year to focus not on remembering Jewish death, but on celebrating Jewish life. A sixteen-to-one life to death ratio seemed about right to me, and I did not really believe we needed to change that ratio by including a *Yom Hasboab* moment in each week's Shabbat morning service.

So he asked me, what should we do? I told him that we should invite the words of survivors into our lives on a regular basis, but not primarily as teachers about hatred and death. Instead, we must find a way to invite their presence as teachers of life, ethics, decency, and love. I wanted to see if we could actually begin to remember more often without always remembering more horror. I hope that we, the first generation that will live without them, might begin to honor the survivors of the *Sboab* as more than symbols of past horror and death—that we could come to see them as *rebbe*s, as masters of the value of life and as guides about how to live the life we are given more fully and more deeply.

To that end, we have assembled this collection of stories taken from the words of the survivors themselves, edited

them as little as possible, and present them to you as commentaries on the weekly Torah readings and holidays that fill our year. Our Torah is called a *Torat Hayim*, a living teaching, a teaching for life. We honor that tradition by sharing with you these teachers of that Torah.

This book helps us to remain connected to our past by focusing on its ability to help us live more fully in the present and create a richer future for ourselves and our world. With their stories, each of the people in this book teaches us about life and how it can be lived more meaningfully, more ethically, and more joyfully. That has always been the purpose of our Torah, and there are no better people to remind us of that than the story tellers in this book. They know that ours is a Torah of life, an eternal story that is assured by our willingness to link our own life stories to it, and to learn from them both.

In finding a few moments each week to share one of their stories, both they and the Torah from which we read will come more alive. And just as importantly, so will we. Torah into life and life into Torah—the ancient rhythms will continue, memory will be created, and wisdom will be shared, for life.

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