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***“Turning All the Past to Pain”:
Current Trends in the
Memorialization of
the Holocaust***

*O Memory! thou fond deceiver
Still importune and vain
To former joys recurring ever
And turning all the past to pain.*

— OLIVER GOLDSMITH

The surge of interest in the Holocaust during the past few decades creates a responsibility to consider the impact of this trend on the Jewish community, and specifically on Jewish identity. The attempt by theologians and historians to make the Holocaust a defining event of Jewish history and to separate it in kind and in magnitude from other tragedies has resulted in a number of thorny issues for observant Jews. If *Tish‘ah be-Av* is the day on the traditional liturgical calendar to mark Jewish suffering, why should one commemorate *Yom ha-Shoah*? How should those in the traditional community respond to modern rituals designed to commemorate the Holocaust? Should a traditional Jew attribute uniqueness to this event given our religious sensitivities to suffering throughout Jewish history? This paper surveys these and other problems posed by the current use of the Holocaust to trigger memory

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as a means of instilling Jewish identity, by investigating the different memorializations of this modern day calamity. Perhaps these difficulties may be mitigated by the traditional means of eliciting memory of tragedy. Religious commemoration of the destruction of the Temples, as discussed in rabbinic literature, therefore, challenges current memorialization and pushes us to examine how the Jewish community achieves a collective identity.

Evoking Collective Memory of the Holocaust

Today, the Holocaust is commemorated in various media. In order to “remember” and “never forget,” a large web of reminders has been woven in the form of literature, art, film, and memorials. We are exposed to the Holocaust through the eyes of an Italian comedian,¹ the voice of a German dwarf,² an illiterate S.S. officer,³ a beautiful and disturbed Polish Catholic woman,⁴ and the cartoon drawings of cats and mice.⁵ We can purchase a paperweight rock engraved with the word “remember” in the gift shop of the American Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. In considering the attention the Holocaust has received in recent decades, it is helpful to identify several types of Holocaust memorialization—as well as some of the difficulties inherent in them.⁶

Survivor Accounts: The most significant act of contemporary memorialization of the Holocaust is the first-hand survivor interviews and accounts—a factor absent in the memorialization of the Temples’ destruction. These personal accounts are generally haunting in their simplicity and power of recall. Claude Lanzmann’s documentary *Shoah* perhaps provides the best example of this genre.⁷ In faltering English and often without the chronology that we have come to expect of history, survivors recount personal horrors. The lack of polish and artifice serve to authenticate the experience.⁸ In the aggregate, such personal recollections are an important lens through which to view recent history. Statistics, dates, and geographic locations are also part of our collective memory of the Holocaust, but these often command less attention than first-hand accounts. Survivor testimonies, by nature, are complex and fragmentary, and retain a great deal of ambiguity. Some survivors, not necessarily conscious of a historical perspective, chart their calamities with others on the time-line of Jewish history. Other personal accounts depict the Holocaust as the central act of suffering of the Jewish people, incomparable to any other, a signal of the impending doom of Jewish nationhood.

Indeed, David Roskies contends that “. . . the survivors of the Holocaust, intent on communicating their incalculable losses, had basically two approaches to draw upon from the fund of ancient and modern sources: one that imploded history, and the other that made the Holocaust the center of apocalypse.”⁹ This perception of the uniqueness of the Holocaust has a significant impact on the concept of collective memory, as will be addressed later. As time passes, these testimonies increasingly are replaced by more literary and aesthetic forms of recall, a natural consequence of distance from the event itself.

Holocaust Museums and Memorials: One of the most significant and controversial attempts at memory recall is the creation of Holocaust memorials and museums, now in most major American and European cities. The presence of such edifices represents an attempt to quantify memory. Once memory is captured in stone or bronze, it is assigned boundaries. The onlooker is being told in a non-verbal fashion what it is he or she is to think about and to remember. James E. Young, author of *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* claims that such manipulation is inevitable in creating memorials to the Holocaust: “A society’s memory . . . might be regarded as an aggregate collection of its members’ many, often competing memories. If societies remember, it is only insofar as their institutions and rituals organize, shape, even inspire their constituents’ memories.”¹⁰ “Museum” has even been turned into a verb: “to museumize” an imagined community is to create a secular cathedral where the artifacts of a nation are gathered to create a coherent sense of history. The impact of this classification is that an imagined community becomes “bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle —countable.”¹¹ Institutions, therefore, have become a means to create collective memory. The artist, architect or urban planner becomes a memory technician, deciding what it is that people should feel and see.

Edward Linenthal’s *Preserving Memory* catalogues the struggle to create the American Holocaust Museum, and in so doing, confronts some of the more troubling aspects of American Jewish “Holocaust consciousness.” The introduction to this work reveals just how deliberate the creation of Holocaust memory is:

The need this book seeks to address is a portrayal of the boundaries of Holocaust memory incorporated into the museum. The book excavates the layers of struggle *to define and delimit the ideas, objects and persons and representations* that best capture the meaning of the Holocaust. These struggles are portrayed in all their exquisite detail, which inevitably raises

larger questions about the *production and use of Holocaust memory*. . . . It examines the ways in which those who shaped the permanent exhibition faced dilemmas about how to begin, what level of horror could be appropriately portrayed through photograph and artifact, how perpetrators could be portrayed without glorification, how various victim groups could be represented appropriately, and how to end without enshrining either despair or redemption. The story offers readers the opportunity to be “present at the creation” of *an institution of Holocaust memory*.¹²

This honest account shows the extent to which artists and curators have tried to shape our experience of this event deliberately.

Historical and Fictional Accounts: The sense of artistic manipulation just described pertains to the writing of history itself. A noted historian of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg, even compares his work to that of an artist:

The artist usurps the actuality, substituting a text for a reality that is fast fading. The words that are thus written take the place of the past; these words, rather than the events themselves, will be remembered. Were this transformation not a necessity, one could call it presumptuous, but it is unavoidable. . . . It is applicable to all historiography, to all descriptions of a happening.¹³

The accounts most subject to this concern are those written in the first person. The author presents the historical events from a personal perspective, but since his or her objective is not necessarily to convey historical fact, the concern for memory supersedes that of accuracy.

In creating this historical texture, many memoirs today straddle the fine line between fact and fiction. One of the most disturbing examples of the pitfalls of current interest in Holocaust literature is exemplified by the controversy caused by Binjamin Wilkomirski’s first hand account.¹⁴ In the search for new and unique ways to depict the monstrosity of the Holocaust and feeding on a rapt audience for Holocaust related non-fiction, Wilkomirski offered the reader *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*. The small book is gripping in its childlike refusal to cite dates and places, the normal groundwork of history. Instead it takes the reader through the horrific small visual experiences of an unsophisticated child: the rat he witnessed running out of a dead woman’s womb, the feelings of having his head knocked viciously against a wall, the discards of an orphanage meal that he feasted on. By its end, the reader is convinced of the verity of the *Los Angeles Times* review on the book’s back cover: “*Fragments* will surely take its place with works by Elie Wiesel

and Primo Levi as a classic first-hand account of the Holocaust.”

However, as is now widely known, this is not a first hand account of a survivor. The author’s passport identifies him as Bruno Dossekker, a native of Switzerland born on February 12, 1941 to an unwed mother and raised in Switzerland by affluent Protestant foster parents. One could dismiss this as merely a scam if Wilkomirski confessed this as a usurpation of memory. The author, however, remains firm that this account represents the results of memory recall accomplished through therapy decades after the events he claims to have experienced.

In a lengthy essay on the controversy in *The New Yorker*,¹⁵ Wilkomirski defends himself by contending (in the words of the author’s essay) that “. . . a strictly factual reading of *Fragments* is inherently misguided, because it is a book of traumatic early memories, and that the broken and dislocated nature of such memories requires them to be taken on their own terms, as evidence of the trauma they record.”¹⁶ Wilkomirski told the newspaper that uncovered his identity that he had no “valid answer” to the findings of the journalist Daniel Ganzfried: “It was always the free choice of the reader to read my book as literature or to take it as a personal document. No one has to believe me.”¹⁷

There is certainly a wide chasm between (a) creating a deliberate but factually accurate memory trigger; (b) creating an artifice to inform memory in fiction; and (c) falsifying memory. However, while Wilkomirski’s ruse is extreme, it brings to light many of the difficulties of piecing together memories to create history. In Yosef Yerushalmi’s notable book on history and memory, *Zakhor*, Yerushalmi calls memory an “elusive theme.” He adds, “Memory is always problematic, usually deceptive, sometimes treacherous. . . . We ourselves are periodically aware that memory is among the most fragile and capricious of our faculties.”¹⁸ Memory as we usually experience it is not as deliberately or artistically constructed as it appears in these categories of Holocaust memorialization. It is often a messy affair.

As one who studies the mind, neuropsychologist Steven Pinker claims that:

We humans place two very different demands on our memory system at the same time. We have to remember individual episodes of who did what to whom, when, where and why, and that requires stamping each episode with a time, a date, and a serial number. But we also must extract generic knowledge about how people work and how the world works . . . nature gave us one memory system for each requirement: an “episodic” or autobiographical memory and a “semantic” or general knowledge memory.¹⁹

Using this classification, we may suggest that contemporary Jewry is less interested in episodic memory of the Holocaust than in semantic. The artistic approach to capturing catastrophe provides a general framework and angle to view the given event, instead of allowing the readers of history to concoct their own scenarios, based on fact, but fed by imagination. Pinker reminds us that “. . . different engineering demands on a memory system are often at cross-purposes.”²⁰ Thus, our semantic memory may get in the way of our episodic one; general lenses may blur our knowledge of specific dates and places. Today’s artistic renderings of the Holocaust often create events or concepts to fabricate the “texture” of history without the facts. Not only is this troubling from a historical point of view, but often such unique lenses—like those of a German dwarf or Italian comedian—fail to capture the more paradigmatic and often more accurate historical “texture.” It is important that the Holocaust be recounted from many angles; however, to ensure that the Holocaust keep its hold on humanity and the Jewish psyche, we have started to “reinvent it.” Herein lies the danger; our memory may fail our history if it reinvents us.

Rabbinic Responses to the Temples’ Destruction

Our flesh and our hearts fail at the destruction of our portion,
 All of us raise lamentation for the destruction of our nation,
 For the Holocaust ranks equal to the destruction of our Temple.²¹

In many synagogues today, this *kinah*, or poetic lament, is recited to commemorate the Holocaust on the ninth of Av, the day assigned to mark Jewish suffering in history. The tribute to the tragedy makes a bold claim on our memory: “the Holocaust ranks equal to the destruction of the Temple.” It is difficult to compare tragedies, let alone have them compete for historic attention; nevertheless, in this *kinah*, the two tragedies are placed in emotional proximity in the psyche of the reader.

Regardless, the Holocaust and the *Hurban* are memorialized differently in current Jewish practice. One of the rabbinic responses to the Temples’ destruction is to require a *zekher la-Hurban*, a mark to commemorate the loss by leaving an empty space in an otherwise finished setting. In memorializing the Holocaust, however, historians, artists, and writers have created a legacy of fact and fiction, both written and visual, to trigger the memory of this period.²² Two approaches to Jewish memory thus confront us: the lack of artistry in the memory triggers

generated by the Temples' loss and the deliberate and often artistic evocation of memory associated with the Holocaust. The rabbinic suggestion of leaving empty spaces as a *zekher la-Ḥurban* may present a compelling challenge to Holocaust memorialization today.

The destruction of both the First and Second Temples provoked a multiplicity of responses, as recorded in rabbinic and apocryphal literature.²³ *Eikhah* depicts the communal loss in a highly personal fashion, often employing the first person: "For these things I weep: my eye runs down with water . . . my children are desolate because the enemy has prevailed" (1:16). The *Syriac Apocalypse of Barukh* (chapter 10) records the moving prose of paralyzing tragedy: "Blessed is he who was not born, or he, who having been born has died, but as for us who live, woe unto us because we see the affliction of Zion and what has befallen Jerusalem. . . ." The mood created by Holocaust prose and poetry today adheres to these literary forms of response. Other responses to the *Ḥurban*, however, are more uniquely religious in character. There were those who mourned the cessation of the priestly rites and those who turned to the explication of the Oral Law, the immersion in intensive study, for solace.²⁴ There were individuals who turned to asceticism, refraining from the consumption of meat and wine that corresponded to the Temple's sacrifices and libations,²⁵ and those who challenged the ascetic approach: should one refrain from the consumption of even bread and water because of the loss of meal offerings and water libations in the Temple?²⁶ Is not kindness also an effective means of atonement?²⁷ Still other responses espoused the belief that Jewish life post-Temple would become altered beyond recognition.²⁸ Rather than see the event as part of an ongoing history of suffering, some who personally witnessed the destruction saw this event as apocalyptic.²⁹ Other talmudic sages saw in the grief the need for transition, from a religion based on ritual to one based on study and acts of kindness.

A striking *midrash* on Psalm 137, "By the Waters of Babylon," conveys the extent to which the Sages understood the complexity of loss in the scenario they devised to explain verse 4 of the psalm: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"³⁰ In the *midrash*, the Levites were asked to perform a new song by their captors and responded that they literally were unable to play because they had cut off their thumbs. This might be considered an antinomian act, since in doing themselves bodily harm they forfeited their right to worship in the Temple;³¹ it may also, ironically, reveal a lack of faith in a speedy reconstruction of the Temple. Alternatively, the mutilation may demonstrate a most profound

expression of the loss of the Temple: the very bodies of the Levites were rendered incomplete. The sense of loss and “incompleteness” captured in this *midrash*, while not the same as the passive act of leaving an empty space, is indicative of the way that this tragedy would ultimately be addressed in Jewish law.

The laws pertaining to the remembrance of the Temples can be found in *Shulḥan Arukh*, in the section of laws concerning the ninth of Av. Although these laws are not uniquely mandated on that day, they appear there because the day itself marks the *Hurban*. They include the following:

1. When the Temple was destroyed, the Sages decreed that in that generation one was not to build an edifice completely plastered and finished like the buildings of royalty. Rather one should plaster and finish one’s home and leave a cubit-by-cubit space without plaster opposite the threshold. If one were to purchase a courtyard that is already completely plastered, the courtyard may be left to remain in that state; one is not obligated to remove its walls.

2. Similarly, they decreed that when one lays the table for a festive meal, one should omit something customarily present and should leave one place-setting empty, absenting the tableware that is usually placed there. When a woman wears her silver and gold jewelry she should leave off one piece that she is normally accustomed [to wear] so that she does not don a complete set of jewels. When a groom takes a bride, ash should be placed on his forehead in the place he dons his phylacteries. All of these acts are to remember Jerusalem as it says [Psalms 137:5]: “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem . . . if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour.”³²

This verse from Psalms is taken by the Sages not as a poetic statement but as a legal mandate. At our happiest hours, we must create a sense of loss that will remind us of the loss of the Temples. The commentaries on *Shulḥan Arukh* expand and debate the limits of these laws. For example, if one purchases a home from non-Jews that is already built, then there may be no need to remove plaster. However, R. Yisrael Meir Kagan (*Hafez Ḥayyim*) wrote at the turn of the century, in his commentary on the *Shulḥan Arukh*, *Mishnah Berurah*, that if the home had been purchased from Jews who had built it but had neglected this practice, then one must repair the error by removing the plaster. *Ba’er Heitev*, the eighteenth-century commentary of R. Judah ben Simon Ashkenazi, discusses whether it would be permitted to paint a square instead of removing the plaster from a square of the wall, assuming that

one could fulfill the command by accretion in place of incompleteness. Painting is adding a layer, and the law ideally demands that the space be unfinished; it is not a matter of taking away but of not completing. *Rama*, writing in sixteenth-century Poland, adds that there are those accustomed to breaking the glass at weddings rather than placing ash on the groom's forehead—the custom we are most familiar with today.³³ These discussions and notes on the original formulation by R. Karo underline the question of how passive or active the memory trigger of the loss should be. Is one able to create empty space actively, through painting, or must one passively leave the original site without plaster, incomplete? Is placing ash, a quiet act of symbolic value, as effective as the dramatic smashing of a fragile object?

These laws and the ensuing discussion have, as their underlying theme, the notion of incompleteness, although some acts render this more effectively than others. The perfect moment of wedding happiness is diminished by the shattering of the glass or the placement of the ash. Something is deliberately absent in the construction of a home, the setting of the table, and the placement of one's jewelry. No attempt is made to "fill in" the emptiness. On the contrary, the law demands and attempts to create the experience of emptiness. As the text continues, there is a brief discussion of the permissibility of music post-Temple, and then in a rather dramatic close, the halakhah states: "It is prohibited for an individual to fill his mouth with laughter in this world." This moves beyond the simple layout of the home and the festivities of happy occasions. Jewish law demands a change in the very composition of a person's daily mental state. Following the destruction of the Temple, no individual can claim complete happiness. R. Karo, in his closing lines of this section, is citing the position of R. Yoḥanan in the Talmud:

R. Yoḥanan said in the name of R. Shimon b. Yoḥai: It is forbidden to a man to fill his mouth with laughter in this world, because it says, "Then our mouth be filled with laughter and our tongue with singing" (Psalm 126:2). When will that be? At the time when, "They shall say among the nations, 'The Lord hath done great things with these.'" It was related of Reish Lakish that he never again filled his mouth with laughter in this world after he heard this saying from R. Yoḥanan, his teacher.³⁴

The comment of *Ba'er Heitev*, cited earlier, continues, stating that this applies "even at a festive meal such as a wedding or Purim." Even at an occasion which normally demands, even commands, happiness, we are not free to feel this emotion fully. *Mishnah Berurah* adds his note in compliance with several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commen-

tators on the *Shulḥan Arukh*: total happiness distracts us from commandment performance. In this regard, incomplete happiness is not related necessarily to the Temples' destruction, but to a lifestyle that is generally conducive to seriousness of purpose.

In fact, it is in this context in the Talmud that R. Yoḥanan's remarks appear. Mar, the son of Ravina, made a wedding feast and expressed concern that his colleagues were becoming too merry. He brought out a very expensive glass and broke it in front of them, and "they became serious"—the desired outcome.³⁵ Similar stories are then recorded, followed by R. Yoḥanan's advice. However, in codifying these laws, R. Karo relates R. Yoḥanan's statement to the experience of the Temples' destruction (as did other codifiers before and after). In so doing, R. Karo affirms the way that Jewish tragedy is remembered: it is a loss unquantifiable and inexplicable.³⁶ The mystery and terror of it can be captured only by absence. Any attempt to render the tragedy would not enhance our collective memory, but diminish it.

Creating empty spaces as a memorial to loss, as in the memorialization of the *Ḥurban*, avoids many of the difficult historical thorns and caprice of memory discussed previously. However, although it is interesting to consider how this rabbinic construction may influence our current thinking on memorialization, it is important to bear in mind several caveats which may have influenced the difference in commemoration of these two periods. First, the sages of the Talmud did not live in a media-influenced society and did not have the elaborate means to create memory recall as we do today. Furthermore, *Ḥazal* did not limit themselves to ritual memorialization alone. The prose and poetry explored earlier demonstrate their attempt at a more literary form of recall.

Second, the laws of *zekher la-Ḥurban* are designed to trigger personal and not communal memory. It is easier for an individual to consider personal loss when his or her home or table is marked with such a *zekher*. More dramatic means may be required to prompt communal introspection.

Third, the commemoration of the *Ḥurban* has been considered and refined over centuries, whereas the Holocaust is yet in our recent memory. It is difficult to estimate the way in which it will be remembered hundreds of years hence.

Fourth, the laws of *zekher la-Ḥurban* were created by and for a religious society. The empty spaces created in rabbinic commemoration would have been filled in the minds of the religious onlooker with

images pertinent to a person observant of Jewish law. Today, in the absence of a religious cement that defines and frames society, a secular community can observe loss without recourse to traditional rituals, and probably would opt to do so. How should a *secular* Jewish community consider this century's losses? The answer may depend on different views of history and of tradition.³⁷

The Claim of Uniqueness

Jews are often reminded to invoke memories of the recent past and of ancient history, usually, although not exclusively, related to debacles of Jewish history. *Tanakh* uses the word “*zakhor*,” “to remember” no fewer than 169 times. According to tradition, Jews are mandated to recall several events from *Tanakh* on an annual and often daily basis. At the end of the morning service in many *siddurim*, six “remembrances” are listed for daily recitation. These “remembrances” are biblical verses where the word “*zakhor*,” “remember,” appears. We recall how we provoked God in the desert with our worship of the golden calf,³⁸ Miriam’s illness and its cause,³⁹ Shabbat,⁴⁰ and our redemption from Egypt.⁴¹ Thus, not only pain and suffering form Jewish consciousness. Sanctity, rest, redemption and revelation are the bedrock of our inner spiritual composition. Acts of both destruction and construction are remembered. One of the most seminal memories in this list and in the Bible is the command to “remember” and its negative formulation, “never forget,” the tribal cruelty of the Amalekites towards the wandering Jews in the desert.⁴² Yet the words “remember” and “never forget” in the second half of twentieth-century Jewish life evoke entirely different associations. Currently, few would make the connection to ancient hatreds.

The religious recollection of Jewish history has often relied upon events depicted in traditional sources as precedents by which to understand catastrophe. In prophetic readings of history, events are linked to each other through Divine Providence and the “lessons” they teach. In a statement that dovetails with approaches to Jewish tradition, the historian John Barton has argued that prophetic readings of history demonstrate “faith in the sense of finding direction and purpose, even predetermined stages in world history.”⁴³

According to historian Christopher Rowland, “[such] records of past history are included mainly to show that, if the information about history up to the present has been correct, the same is likely to be true about the future predictions as well.”⁴⁴ History, as recorded for religious

readers, links events through discernible patterns which yield moral or spiritual messages. The ancient and recent past resonate with each other when their respective lessons are taught together. Perhaps it is this confluence that undergirds the rabbinic notion that the ninth of Av is a day upon which all Jewish tragedies are marked, with no single calamity the object of exclusive attention.⁴⁵ Many catastrophes are placed side-by-side in order to communicate critical messages to the Jewish community at large.⁴⁶ Jewish historical consciousness becomes the key to survival. History, according to this view, is studied not for its own sake, but for its ability to inform national or religious consciousness.

But this view of a continuum of religious history is not shared by all historians. In his study of Jewish responses to catastrophe, David Roskies contrasts the traditional understanding of the value of history with more modern notions of history's role: whereas ancient Israel attributed patterns to history that were "transhistorical, governed by God," modern writers often tried to make a "Torah out of history."⁴⁷ History for its own sake, rather than the formation of religious consciousness, is the object of such study. This, Roskies claims, raises "a host of painful questions as to the role that the memory of past destruction played and continues to play in the politics of Jewish survival."⁴⁸

Nowhere is the "Torah-out-of-history" approach more evident than in the recording of the Holocaust, arguably the most well-documented event of human history. Many have called the Holocaust a "unique" event in Jewish history that demands a separate and distinct approach to its remembrance.⁴⁹ The claim of uniqueness justifies the existence of *Yom ha-Shoah* in addition to *Tish'ah be-Av*, and also singles out the Holocaust for special treatment in the consciousness of Jewish suffering. Nevertheless, as the Holocaust has received more attention in scholarship and popular culture, there has been some recent questioning of the unique status accorded it.

A paradox of memory has been created, perhaps unwittingly. There is a desire to connect the Holocaust to a litany of Jewish persecutions in history; yet, at the same time, there is a trend that seeks to disconnect it from past catastrophes by demonstrating its uniqueness. In religious readings of history, placing an event on a historical continuum gives it both significance and a vocabulary drawn from within tradition by which to understand it. If we take the Holocaust out of this continuum, we risk, among other dangers, losing the paradigms of tragedy within our ancient history to understand our recent past. We lose as well the vocabulary of tradition that has helped us confront other catastrophes.

Claims of uniqueness in history are rarely confirmable, nor are they always instructive or sagacious. What happens to Jewish history's sense of continuity when faced with the claim of the Holocaust's uniqueness?

In their effort to maintain faith in God in the face of often incredible suffering, Jewish victims of tragedy in all centuries felt constrained to view their experiences as part of a continuum and not as something radically new and different. Although they may have objectively believed that the magnitude of their suffering was unprecedented, they never presented it as such, for fear that this might indicate that God was finally breaking His covenantal bond and severing His close relationship with His people, a thought they simply could not abide and one that their faith would not allow them to accept. Whatever cataclysmic event they experienced was never seen in isolation, as *sui generis*, but, on the contrary, was portrayed as just the latest example of the age-old, consistently recurring phenomenon of God's punishment for Jewish sin. Indeed, the Jewish collective memory was so long and sharp that at any time it confronted even a tragedy of major proportions, it was able to place it into paradigms of previously experienced tragedies and destructions.⁵⁰

Collective Memory and Invented Traditions

Another issue that demands evaluation in the current memorialization of the Holocaust is the creation of ritual and identity that has resulted from regarding the Holocaust as the seminal event of Jewish history. The deliberate attempt to create collective memory has been termed by Benedict Anderson "the formation of 'imagined communities.'" Imagined communities arise when the attraction of nationalism supplants interest in organized religion. Imagined communities adopt a vocabulary and shared rituals to create connections among their adherents. In order to create concepts of nationhood, borders are drawn, new languages are spoken, maps are devised, and museums are established. All of these devices create an imagined community. "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."⁵¹ In other words, the inability of people to know each other creates the need to have a language of nationalism that gives the impression of intimacy. Using Anderson's concept, it can be claimed that remembrance of the Holocaust has created a sense of Jewish community at a time of such assimilation that formal religious practice can no longer be assumed to be a common

unifying factor. Not only has the Holocaust become the object of this century's collective memory, but it has become, in large part, the very cement of the Jewish community. Commemorating it has created national connections and secular traditions.

Another component of imagined communities is what Eric Hobsbawm has called the invention of tradition. Invented traditions, he claims, are "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition."⁵² We should expect the creation of such traditions when "a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which old traditions had been designed, producing new ones. . . ."⁵³ Invented traditions rely upon history to create continuity: ". . . all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement group cohesion."⁵⁴

In the past decades, we have invented traditions of Holocaust memory that are deliberately linked to Jewish history and tradition to create continuity.⁵⁵ The concept of invented traditions helps us understand statements such as, "We need an '*Eicha*' [Lamentations] of the Holocaust, something short and strong that will have an effect on believers and non-believers alike."⁵⁶ A new "tradition" is suggested; it has roots in the sacred biblical canon, but may be predominantly secular in nature. Even the creation of a day to commemorate the Holocaust by the lighting of six *yahrzeit* candles to mark the six million who perished is an invented tradition. In the State of Israel, a moment of silence is observed nationally on *Yom ha-Shoah*; this ritual innovation was passed by the Knesset on April 7, 1959 as one of a series of invented traditions for *Yom ha-Shoah* observance:

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 programs 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.⁵⁷

The imagined community and the traditions that evolve to support it are helpful in creating a nationalistic rather than a religious perception of the Holocaust. In addition, by separating the Holocaust as a unique event, it becomes disconnected from religious readings of history and acquires greater significance in nationalistic approaches to history.

What national identity are we creating through current interest in the Holocaust? Peter Novick, in his recent controversial book, *The*

Holocaust in American Life, discusses the role of collective memory and identity:

The most significant collective memories—memories that suffuse group consciousness—derive their power from their claim to express some permanent, enduring truth. Such memories are as much about the present as about the past, and are believed to tell us (and others) something fundamental about *who we are now*. . . . For a memory to take hold in this way, it has to resonate with how we understand ourselves: how we see our present circumstances, how we think about our future. . . . We embrace a memory because it speaks to our condition; to the extent that we embrace it, we establish a framework for interpreting that condition.⁵⁸

However, Novick questions the current use of the Holocaust to form Jewish identity in America today, particularly since much less attention was given to it in the years and decades immediately following the tragic events. He claims that the new interest may be explained by what is happening in current political life: “Modern American politics is a competition for enshrining grievances. Every group claims its share of public honor and public funds by pressing disabilities and injustices. National public life becomes the settlement of a collective malpractice suit... the assertion of the group’s historical victimization . . . is always central to the group’s assertion of its distinctive identity.”⁵⁹ Thus, the Holocaust offers to the group that bears its memory a sense of distinctness and victimization.

In addition, the Holocaust has been used to create a secular version of Jewish identity, with the necessary accompanying ritual. It is often invoked to forge a sense of uniqueness and victimization to define contemporary Jewish identity.⁶⁰ Rabbi Irving Greenberg even makes the bold assertion that the Holocaust “would become a channel to the recovery of the rest of Judaism.”⁶¹ He claims that just as the destruction of the Temple spurred the creation of the synagogue, the destruction of European Jewry would prompt the creation of a Holocaust museum.⁶² Novick, however, finds it problematic to “tacitly endorse [Hitler’s] definition of ourselves as despised pariahs by making the Holocaust the emblematic Jewish experience.”⁶³

Others, such as contemporary writer Michael Goldberg, have also challenged the historical priority awarded the Holocaust today.⁶⁴ Goldberg contends that Judaism, like other religions and nationalities, has master stories. These stories help define the culture’s values and objectives. Until this century, the Exodus from Egypt had been the Jews’ prominent master story. Now, this master story is being replaced by accounts of the Holocaust.⁶⁵ As evidence of this trend, a letter to the

New York Times Book Review (July 18, 1999) regarding a recent work on the Holocaust cites the following conclusions of an American Jewish Committee poll: “remembrance of the Holocaust is more important to Jewish identity than synagogue attendance, observing Jewish holidays or any other alternative offered.” Whereas the Exodus story ultimately brings us to the Promised Land, the stories of the Holocaust predominantly (although not exclusively) tell us about physical survival. Goldberg notes that the spiritual destiny that is a focus of the Exodus master story is not a common denominator of the Holocaust stories—rather, they often depict the sacrifice of morality and religion. If we understand that history and memory are not only about the past, but also about where the past leads us for the future, the differences along the journey are significant.

For the secular Jew, who may not appreciate the religious import of the Exodus, this post-Holocaust identity, which places survival, rather than God and religion, at the center of the Jewish experience, may strengthen Jewish identity overall. Theologian Emil Fackenheim claims that the voice of Auschwitz offers a rationale for Jewish survival, even for those Jews who fail to hear the voice of Sinai.⁶⁶ An evil that has no explanation exists in the world, and the role of Judaism is to survive despite this evil. Fackenheim’s promotion of this idea rests on the argument for the uniqueness of the Holocaust, because he maintains that Judaism’s very reason for existence is in reaction to this singular event. If the Holocaust is not unique in status, this rationale proves impossible. Ironically, the argument for the uniqueness of the Holocaust may be detrimental to the formation of national identity. Placing this one event above other historical catastrophes may give the calamity the attention it is due, but it feeds into an essentially negative Jewish world view. Indeed, Michael Wyschogrod criticizes Fackenheim’s thinking as “negative natural theology,” precisely because it does not promote any positive reason for maintaining national identity:

There is no salvation to be extracted from the Holocaust, no faltering Judaism can be revived by it, no new reason for the continuation of the Jewish people can be found in it. If there is hope after the Holocaust, it is because to those who believe, the voices of the Prophets speak more loudly than did Hitler, and because the divine promise weeps over the crematoria and silences the voice of Auschwitz.⁶⁷

Thus, the voice of Auschwitz makes sense only if the voice of the Prophets is heard first. The narratives of the Holocaust read alone cannot provide a positive Jewish identity, whether one is secular or religious.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his famous discourse *Kol Dodi Dofek*, distinguishes between the covenant in Egypt and the covenant of Sinai.⁶⁸ The covenant in Egypt represents our national-historical existence. The covenant at Sinai represents a commitment to a meaningful life as framed by God's command. Both covenants are essential to the formation of the Jewish people. The covenant in Egypt is marked by survival against "goral"—"fate." *Goral* is random and meaningless and reduces man to a passive state of response to suffering. "Yi'ud"—"destiny"—on the other hand, is the hallmark of the covenant at Sinai. The sense of destiny symbolized by the covenant at Sinai is:

an active mode of existence, one wherein man confronts the environment into which he was thrown, possessed of an understanding of his uniqueness, of his special worth, of his freedom, and of his ability to struggle with his external circumstances without forfeiting his independence or his selfhood. . . . Man is born like an object, dies like an object but possesses the ability to live like a subject, like a creator, an innovator, who can impress his own individual seal upon his life and can extricate himself from a mechanical type of existence and enter into a creative, active mode of being. Man's task in the world, according to Judaism, is to transform fate into destiny; a passive existence into an active existence; an existence of compulsion, perplexity, and muteness into an existence replete with a powerful will, with resourcefulness, daring, and imagination.⁶⁹

By contrast, the covenant in Egypt is grounded in reaction. Rabbi Soloveitchik introduces this covenant as relevant to secular Zionism, founded on the solidarity created by suffering. To be part of this covenant, one responds to suffering with acts of *hesed*. But as much as this is a critical component of Jewish nationhood, it is not the only component. Indeed, as R. Soloveitchik maintains, "[o]ur historic obligation, today, is to raise ourselves from people to a holy nation, from the covenant in Egypt to the covenant at Sinai, from an existence of necessity to an authentic way of life suffused with ethical and religious values. . . ."⁷⁰

What concerns contemporary writers and rabbis today is the danger in making a "Torah" out of history with the Holocaust as its central event. As the defining event of Jewish existence, the Holocaust yields a collective memory of the past and an identity of the present and future which is about persecution and survival and little else. It appears better to place the Holocaust on the continuum of Jewish history. The Holocaust is not diminished by such placement; if anything, it offers the rich supportive prose of persecution composed by Jews throughout the ages. The context links the recent catastrophe to a framework of meaning that

is not about survival alone, and allows the rituals of the past to inform ritual innovation in the present.

Creating Memory “Spaces”

Writing about memory, a child of survivors contends that “. . . remembrance stitched together solely of persecution and victimization is a dangerous proposition. The survivors of the Holocaust knew what it was like to be Jewish pro-actively, and their exquisite stories of prewar Jewish life . . . are a compass for the next generation.”⁷¹ What serves as a guidepost for future Jewish life is not only memory of the persecution, but also of life before it. Though the voice of religious texts may not speak to the secular Jew, perhaps the memories of pre-war Jewish life will. The era can be reconstructed through stories and photographs of active communal life.⁷² But such memories can also be triggered by the creation of empty spaces. Just as a *zekher la-Hurban* carries meaning for the religious community because it prompts us to think of what has been lost, art and fiction can depict the state of emptiness that is left in the wake of the Holocaust. Short stories, movies, cartoons, and even cookbooks attempt to hold fast to a fading memory of the contemporary catastrophe. But perhaps the deliberate attempt to forge memory of this century’s debacle fills a space that should be left empty. Perhaps the crafted memory leaves us unable to experience loss as a blank, empty space.⁷³ We have many triggers which facilitate thinking about the Holocaust, but those same triggers impair our ability to think about the void left by the destruction of entire families, villages, and Jewish places of study and worship—the blank spaces. When we leave blank spaces, we are inclined to fill them with the object mourned. Thus, when we fill the empty spaces created by the Holocaust, we should recall the texture of daily Jewish life and the vibrant Jewish institutions. Instead we record the loss by means of factual and fictional accounts of the process of loss itself. We are left with a national Jewish identity that revolves around loss. The covenant in Egypt, in the modern Jewish psyche, surpasses the covenant at Sinai. Yet this covenant cannot affirm a positive and meaningful existence. When the tragedy assumes uniqueness, the people who had experienced it are robbed of their uniqueness, and we are left with a legacy of destruction alone.

We can now understand that empty space has more meaning than expression of loss alone. While we have artistic renderings of the Temples’ destruction, notably the *Kinot*, which borrow as well from the imagery of

Jeremiah and Lamentations, loss is captured largely through the deliberate creation of a state of emptiness. The Halakhah mandates that we instill in ourselves a consciousness of the loss of what once was; blank spaces provoke us to imagine what was once there as they demand to be filled in. The blank spaces, however, are an effective trigger only when the absence is consciously felt. For this reason, an act of omission is done *zekher la-Hurban*—to beckon the onlooker to fill in the space with what is missing, the Temple itself.

If the destruction of the Temples can be compared in any way to the evocation of Holocaust memory today then it is in what sociologist Erika Apfelbaum calls, “a legacy in the form of absences.”⁷⁴ If the method of remembering the Temples were applied to the Holocaust, we would first consider the loss and then strive to fill the space. The laws of remembering the Temple thus challenge today’s approach to memory, while suggesting ritual innovation that is rooted in the past and may help create meaning for the future. Our national collective memory and new invented traditions, therefore, should include “a legacy in the form of absences,” one that can move us from the covenant in Egypt to the covenant at Sinai.

Notes

I thank David Shatz, Joel Wolowelsky, Jacob Meskin and an anonymous referee for their guidance and comments on this paper.

1. “Life is Beautiful,” directed by Robert Benini.
2. Ursula Hegi, *Stones from the River* (New York, 1994).
3. Bernard Shlink, *The Reader* (New York, 1997).
4. William Styron, *Sophie’s Choice* (New York, 1979).
5. Art Speigelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (New York, 1986).
6. There are those who have questioned the possibility of an artistic rendering of the Holocaust. See Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1996) and Berel Lang, “Translating the Holocaust: For Whom Does One Write?” *Judaism* 48 (Summer 1999): 334-344.
7. For the text of this documentary see *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust* by Claude Lanzmann (New York, 1985). The oral text in its written form shows just how halting the language is.
8. In the “Letters to the Editor” section of the *New York Times Book Review*, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising recently commented on a review of a book about the Holocaust, which contended that the work was not written well. The reader of the review was disturbed by this critique and felt that the reviewer had missed the point: “All those books written by survivors are mostly poor literature but will endure because of their ring of truth. In

decades to come, many of these books will be recited or taught to the children of the 21st century, while the academic and sophisticated interpretations of the Holocaust will go into oblivion,” Jack Eisner, *The New York Times Book Review* (December 26, 1999): 4.

9. David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 226.
10. James E. Young, Introduction, xi.
11. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 184.
12. Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle over the Creation of America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1995), 3-4. The italics are mine.
13. Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago, 1996), 83. This replacement of words with events did not mean for Hilberg a manipulation of the facts. He writes specifically that his “watchwords were comprehensiveness and quantity,” the latter referring to as many documents as he could locate to confirm information.
14. Binjamin Wilkomirski, *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (New York, 1996).
15. Philip Gourevitch, “The Memory Thief” in *The New Yorker* (June 14, 1999).
16. *Ibid.*, 52.
17. *Ibid.*, 51.
18. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982), 5.
19. Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York, 1997), 124.
20. *Ibid.*
21. This *kinah* is found in Abraham Rosenfeld's *Tisha B'Av Compendium* (New York, 1989), 173-75. It is likely that Rosenfeld himself authored it since the author is identified as “Abraham Isaac Jacob” in the poem and immediately before it without a patronymic. The author tries to mimic the style of the *kinot* by using biblical verses to refer to a contemporary tragedy.
22. So saturated is the Holocaust market that a recent advertisement for a new book on the Holocaust has a reviewer claim that it is not “just another book about the Holocaust,” *New York Times Book Review* (December 26, 1999): 2. The same issue also contained a letter to the editor about another book on the Holocaust as well as a review of a novel about post-war Germany. In such a market, not only do tragedies compete, but so do the recountings of tragedy.
23. See Baruch M. Bokser, “Rabbinic Responses to Catastrophe: From Continuity to Discontinuity,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50 (1983): 37-61.
24. The transition from Jerusalem to Yavneh initiated by R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai exemplified this sea change in Judaism in the second century. R. Yoḥanan was instrumental in instituting several measures to both mark the Temple's destruction and ensure a vibrant Jewish life without it. For a good introduction to the subject, see Ephraim Urbach, *The Halakhah: Its Sources and Development*, trans. Raphael Posner (Yad la-Talmud, Israel, 1986), 268-275.
25. For more on the ascetic response to the Temple's destruction, see Sara Epstein Weinstein, *Piety and Fanaticism: Rabbinic Criticism of Religious Stringency* (Northvale, NJ: 1997), 94-96.

26. This controversy appears in *Bava Batra* 60b and in *Tosefta Sotah* 15:11-15.
27. The same Rabbi Joshua cited in *Tosefta Sotah* also appears in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, 4 as bewailing the Temple in ruins and being advised by R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai not to grieve since “. . . we have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving kindness, as it is said: ‘For I desire mercy and not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6).’” (*The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, trans. Judah Goldin [New Haven, CT, 1994], 34.)
28. See *Berakhot* 8a, 31a; *Ta’anit* 29a; *Gittin* 46a-47b; *Sotah* 48b-49a.
29. See David Berger, “Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus,” *AJS Review* 10 (1985): 141-64.
30. *Midrash Sokher Tov*, #137.
31. Regarding *kohanim*, Maimonides specifically mentions the deformation or loss of fingers or thumbs as disqualifying a priest from conferring the priestly benedictions to the public since “the public gazes upon him” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Nesi’at Kappayim* 5:1-2).
32. *Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim*, 560:1-2.
33. Professor Jonathan Sarna drew my attention to the contemporary practice of encasing the remnants of the glass cup used under the *huppah* in a Lucite mold. This practice may be sentimental but it would challenge the symbolism presented by the cup’s being shattered in the first place.
34. *Berakhot* 31a, Soncino edition, translated by Maurice Simon (London, 1984).
35. *Berakhot* 30b-31a.
36. While it is a matter of conjecture, there are two clues that may relate this statement to the Temple’s destruction. One lies in the originator of the statement, Rabbi Simon bar Yoḥai, the other in the proof text he uses. R. Simon bar Yoḥai lived during the Hadrianic persecutions of Jerusalem in the second century. His teacher, R. Akiba, witnessed the Temple’s destruction. According to the Talmud, R. Simon bar Yoḥai fled the religious persecutions in Jerusalem and took refuge in a cave for over a decade. His disdain for gentiles was overt: “Slay the best of gentiles.” He blamed the spiritual decline of Israel on the Romans: “All that [the Romans] have done, they have done in their own interest. They have built market places to set harlots in them; baths to rejuvenate themselves; bridges to collect tolls.” Living for over a decade in near solitude, witnessing the martyrdom of scholars and the changes brought under gentile rule perhaps led him to the conclusion that no real happiness can exist in this world. However, in the talmudic passage where he arrives at this conclusion, he hints at the possibility of joy under one curious condition: “Then our mouths shall be filled with laughter . . . when they say among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them’” (Psalms 126:2). It is the very recognition of God by gentiles that will allow the Israelites to worship happily. Their failure to recognize divinity, as manifested by the destruction of the Temple and the persecution of scholars, created a state of unrequited sadness for the Jewish people.
37. I am grateful to Chani Shatz, who pointed out the problem of creating an experience analogous to the *zekher la-Ḥurban* for the secular community and drew my attention to some of the difficulties in comparing the Holocaust to the experience of *Ḥurban*.

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38. The verse from Deut. 9:7 is one that contains the word “*zakhor*,” and, therefore, demands remembrance. The incident itself can be found in Exodus 32.
39. Deut. 24:9. See Num. 12 for the actual incident.
40. Ex. 20:8.
41. Deut. 16:3.
42. Deut. 25:17-19. In *Megillah* 18a, the Sages interpret this double command, in both the active and the passive voice, as referring to two different acts of memory. See also *Sifrei* to Deut. 25:19. The active, “ba-peh,” demands vocalization, whereas the passive is “ba-lev,” in the heart. Nevertheless, the rabbis commanded attendance in synagogue specifically during the recitation of this verse during the annual cycle of Torah readings. See *Berakhot* 21b and *Megillah* 30a. There is some debate as to whether or not women are included in this obligation. *Sefer ha-Hinukh* (#603) exempts them on the grounds that women did not wage war, and since women are generally exempt from time bound commandments, there was no need to obligate them in this time bound arena. However, Maimonides in positive precept #189 did not exclude women in his enumeration of this command and *Minḥat Hinukh*, commenting on *Sefer ha-Hinukh*, ad loc., asks why women should be exempted given that in an obligatory war even brides from their bridal chambers are obligated to assist (*Sotah* 44a). *Minḥat Hinukh* concludes that the act of remembering cannot actually be bound by time even if it is read at a particular juncture in the calendar year. As such, women are obligated in it as they would be in any positive commandment not bound by time. The debate about a woman’s inclusion demonstrates the extent of concern that all participate in this communal act of remembrance.
43. John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (New York, 1986), 220. Barton argues that such a vision of history is useful in thinking about prophecy in ancient Israel. It was not only descriptive or predictive, but also interpretive; it lay the groundwork for thinking of history as a series of events consistent with a divine plan. “Neither past nor future is, of interest for its own sake but because both point to the constancy of divine providence . . . the difference between narratives about the past and predictions of the future is of quite minor importance by comparison with other distinctions, such as that between optimism and pessimism in interpreting the meaning of events, whether past or future” (224-25). Barton argues that Josephus also read history this way, and viewed prophetic tradition as a means of charting divine providence in history.
44. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York, 1982), 137. Rowland challenges the casual use of the term “apocalypse” as denoting, “pessimistic prognostications about the cataclysmic demise of a hitherto ordered society and the move from the predictable to the bizarre and chaotic. In these circumstances moral norms disappear and superstition triumphs over rational explanation” (23). Rowland presents rabbinic thought and apocalyptic thought as sharing historical determinism. For more on this, see John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York, 1984), particularly “The Apocalyptic Genre,” 1-32, and “The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypticism,” 205-216.
45. This raises an important and heated issue in the current observance of *Yom*

ha-Shoah for religious Zionists. On the one hand, the failure to observe this day would be offensive to national consciousness, particularly in Israel. On the other hand, observant Jews are highly sensitive to religious paradigms created by the Sages. Would religious Zionists be more authentic to tradition to follow the ultra-Orthodox observance of *Tish'ah be-Av* only as the day of all mourning? And even if religious Zionists were to admit that the latter approach is more in keeping with normative halakhic patterns of commemoration, would they then be able to stake out such a position or would it cause such insult that it would undermine their intentions for consistency? Perhaps it is this very community, religious Zionists and the centrist Orthodox, who can rehabilitate the need for “blank spaces” as an authentic mode of commemoration, following the conclusions of this article. Even though these questions are difficult and potentially divisive, they need to be addressed.

46. See Lucy Dawidowicz, *What is the Use of Jewish History?* (New York, 1992), 5. For interesting observations on the writing of history that have relevance for this article, see in the same book, “History as Autobiography: Telling a Lie,” 20-37.
47. Roskies, 13.
48. *Ibid.*, 14.
49. Yehuda Bauer makes the argument for uniqueness in “The Place of the Holocaust in Contemporary History,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry I*, ed. Jonathan Frankel (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 218, based on the geographical expanse of the Holocaust and the desire for total annihilation of a people without the possibility of escape through conversion or other means. Steven Katz has also made the argument for the uniqueness of the Holocaust in Jewish history in *Holocaust in Historical Context*; see especially 28. Peter Novick in *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 1999) contends that such a position is gerrymandering and can have a deleterious effect on the perception of other events: “By making the Holocaust the emblematic atrocity, have we made resemblance to it the criterion by which we decide what horrors command our attention? Is the (quite unintended) result that horrors which don’t meet that criterion seem insufficiently dramatic . . . ?” (257). Berel Lang (“So What if the Holocaust is Unique?,” review of *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, in *History and Theory* 35 [1996]: 378-383) has also questioned the significance of Katz’s conclusion about uniqueness: “It is as though the effort to establish the ‘fact’ becomes an end in itself, with any further justification self-evident. But such justification is not self-evident, indeed not evident at all. . . . Nothing in the enormity of the Nazi genocide would change if that series of acts turned out to be the second—or fifth—instance of its kind.”
50. Judith Tydor Baumel and Jacob J. Schacter, “The Ninety-three Bais Yaakov Girls of Cracow: History or Typology?” in *Reverence, Righteousness and Rahmanut: Essays in Honor of Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung* (New York, 1992), ed. Jacob J. Schacter, 109. See also Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York, 1984).
51. Anderson, 6.
52. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 2.
53. *Ibid.*, 4.

54. Ibid., 12.
55. James Young uses the framework of historical continuity in his discussion of the appointment of a specific day to commemorate the Holocaust, "When A Day Remembers: A Performative History of Yom Hashoah," *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993), 263-281.
56. Benjamin West, *Yad Vashem News* 2 (1970): 7.
57. Quoted from "Day of Memorial for Victims of the European Jewish Disaster and Heroism—27 Nissan, 5719," *Yad Vashem Bulletin* (October 1959), 27.
58. Novick, 170. For critical reviews of Novick's book, see Tony Judt, *New Republic* (July 19 and 26, 1999) and Lawrence Langer, *New York Times Review of Books* (June 27, 1999). In contrast, Arnold Jacob Wolf proclaimed Novick's book "the most important book ever written on 'The Holocaust in American Life' (not the Holocaust as such, but its presentation in the United States) . . ." See Wolf, "The Shoah in America," *Judaism* 48, 4 (1999): 490.
59. Novick, 8, citing Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory?: Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial," *History and Memory* 5 (Fall-Winter, 1993), 147.
60. To be properly understood, the creation of an identity as a result of tragedy would have to be analyzed in its relation to other such events in Jewish history. For example, the Spanish Inquisition did forge a strong identity among its "survivors" who, although banished to many different countries, often remained distinct as a group. Post-exilic consciousness was a feature of the intellectual climate of the sixteenth century. For more, see Eleazar Gutwirth's "The Expulsion from Spain and Jewish Historiography" in *Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky*, eds. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steve Zipperstein (London, 1988), 141-162; Haim Beinart, "The *Converso* Community in 16th and 17th Century Spain," in *The Sephardi Heritage*, ed. R. D. Barnett (New York, 1971), 457-478, and Beinart, "The Expulsion from Spain: Causes and Results" in *The Sephardi Legacy*, ed. Haim Beinart (Jerusalem, 1992), 11-42; and Joseph Hacker, "The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century," in the same volume. Hacker also writes about this in "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Jewish Thought of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 95-136.
61. Irving Greenberg quoted in Paula E. Hyman, "New Debate on the Holocaust," *The New York Times Magazine* (September 14, 1980), 109.
62. Irving Greenberg, *Living in the Image of God* (Northvale, NJ, 1998), 231.
63. Novick, 281.
64. Michael Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive? Looking Past the Holocaust Toward a Jewish Future* (New York, 1995). See the first chapter, "A Tale of Two Stories: Exodus vs. Holocaust," 3-17.
65. Goldberg asks: "When set against the backdrop of these rival narratives, Exodus and Holocaust, what happens to the Jewish community's convictions about God, Torah and the people Israel? These three after all have historically been the focal points of Jewish identity . . . I submit that the Holocaust's true significance can only come into focus through the powerful corrective lens afforded by the master story of the Exodus" (p. 6).
66. Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York, 1970).

67. Michael Wyschogrod, "Faith After the Holocaust: A Review Essay of Emil Fackenheim's *God's Presence in History*," *Judaism*, 20, 3 (1971): 294.
68. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Kol Dodi Dofek: It is the Voice of My Beloved that Knocketh," trans. Lawrence Kaplan in *Theological and Halakhic Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. Bernhard H. Rosenberg and Fred Heuman (Hoboken, NJ, 1992). The essay was originally delivered publicly on *Yom ha-Azmaut* at Yeshivat Rabbenu Yizhak Elhanan, Yeshiva University, New York, 1956.
69. R. Soloveitchik, 54-55.
70. *Ibid*, 104.
71. Lisa Lipkin, "Letter to the Editor," *The New York Times* (May 6, 2000).
72. The desire to better capture Jewish life in pre-war Europe was the objective of a photography exhibition that is currently traveling the United States, "And I Still See Their Faces." The organizers of the exhibit requested photographs of Jews from pre-war Europe from those still living in the towns and cities once inhabited by Jews. They received close to ten thousand photos documenting Jewish communal and personal life. These photos and a brief explanation of where and how they were found are collected in the book, *I ciagle widze ich twarze* (And I Still See Their Faces), ed. Golda Tencer (Warsaw, Shalom Foundation, 1999).
73. This contention does not deny the fact that many artistic renditions of the Holocaust have tried to capture loss through the depiction of empty space. This, however, does not change the essential argument, since most triggers of Holocaust memory do try to fill in empty space with imagery and since one could debate whether or not the artistic rendering of empty space is still a deliberate creation or promoting the experience of loss.
74. Erica Apfelbaum, "*La Memoire á Eclipses et la Memories Volée*," *Traes* 9 (1984), 286, as seen in Ellen S. Fine, "The Absent Memory," *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York, 1988).