

From Remembrance to Commitment

Resources to commemorate the Shoah in Christian services

Sunday April 26, 2020

During the Second World War, the Nazis murdered six million Jews and many others. Jews call this disaster the Shoah, “the annihilation” and commemorate it every year. In 1999, the National Assembly of Quebec officially recognized “Yom HaShoah” (Holocaust Memorial Day) and encouraged the people of Quebec to join in. The Canadian Government did the same in 2003.

In this exceptional year marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, no physical gathering is possible, but several churches are offering alternatives ways to join for prayer, including online.

Yom HaShoah 2020 is observed on Tuesday, April 21st. In order to join their Jewish brothers and sisters in remembrance and prayer, Christian communities are invited to commemorate the Shoah during their religious services, Sunday, April 26th. This can be easily done by integrating some of the elements suggested in this document. Most of them can be adapted for online worship.

Introduction

During World War II, the Nazis murdered six million Jews and many others in an unprecedented catastrophe, the Holocaust, a tragedy which the Jewish community refers to as the Shoah, the purposeful “annihilation” of the Jews by the Nazis. Many survivors of the Holocaust have settled in Canada after the war to begin a new life for themselves, their families, and their descendants.

Every year, members of the Jewish community remember their pain and share their experiences during the Day of the Shoah or Yom HaShoah, some 12 days after the beginning of the Jewish Passover.

As numerous Jewish communities are commemorating Yom HaShoah these days, we wish to join them and express our compassion for the immense suffering of victims and survivors of the Holocaust. We will do it with texts, prayers, and ritual elements suggested by the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal.

During this Commemoration, we will also pray, for the victims of all other human tragedies still plaguing our world. We will ask God to open our eyes to the presence of

the divine in each human being and to support our commitment to promote respect, justice, peace, and love in our society.

1. Biblical readings

If it is allowed by the liturgical rules of the congregation, the following adaptation of the biblical readings of the day is suggested.

First Lesson: “Love your fellow as yourself” (Leviticus 19:1-3, 9-18, 32-34)

(A portion of the Torah read in the Synagogue this week.)

Reader: The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy. You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My sabbaths: I the LORD am your God. [...]

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the LORD am your God.

You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD.

You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly. Do not deal basely with your countrymen. Do not profit by the blood of your fellow: I am the LORD.

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the LORD. [...]

You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God.

Second Lesson “Love one another deeply from the heart” (1 Peter 1:17, 22-25)

(The second lesson of the day, slightly adapted)

Reader: If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever." That word is the good news that was announced to you.

2. Commemorating the Shoah

Survivors' stories

Several short videos of survivor's stories can be found on the website of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, <https://museeholocauste.ca/en/survivors-stories/>.

A few samples:

Ida Novak: on the liquidation of the Lodz ghetto and her deportation to Auschwitz:
<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/survivors-stories/ida-novak-liquidation-lodz-ghetto/>

Irene Ross: adopted by a Christian couple, she lived with them for three years:
<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/survivors-stories/irene-ross/>

Joseph Kastner: on the daily life in the camp of Bergen-Belsen
<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/survivors-stories/joseph-kastner/>

Commemorative rite

If permitted by the liturgical rules of the congregation, six commemorative candles, placed on a table, are lit one after the other before each intention. Otherwise, a visual or musical support evoking the memory of the Shoah may be used.

Leader: Let us pray now for the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and for the victims of all the other human tragedies still plaguing our world. Let us remember what happens when tolerance and respect for differences are forgotten. Let us commit ourselves to action so that atrocities like this never occur again.

(If candles are lit, the following paragraph is added: Candle lighting is an integral part of Holocaust remembrance. The candle as a symbol of the Shoah is powerful. On the one hand, fire symbolizes destruction and death. But the flame is also a symbol of hope and light and the future. As we light these candles and as we pray together, let us shine light on the darkness of the Holocaust.)

1. Jewish victims

(First candle is lit)

Leader: We first remember the Jewish victims who were murdered in the camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmo, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka and elsewhere during the Shoah. And let us say:

All: We remember the Jewish victims of the Shoah and we commit to perpetuate their memory!

2. Survivors

(Second candle is lit)

Leader: We also remember the survivors: our Jewish sisters and brothers who still bear the scars of this horrible event, but who have rebuilt their lives, here and elsewhere in the world. Let us remember and commit to honour life!

All: We remember and commit to honour life!

3. Other victims of Nazism

(Third candle is lit)

Leader: We remember other victims of Nazism: Christians resisting because of their faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, disabled ones, Roma or Sinti, gay or lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Let us remember and commit to respect differences.

All: We remember and commit to respect differences!

4. Victims of other genocides

(Fourth candle is lit)

Leader: We remember the victims of other genocides, persecuted because of their origin, culture or religion, and those who are displaced or exiled by wars and ethnic conflicts. Let us remember and commit to help!

All: We remember and commit to help!

5. Righteous

(Fifth candle is lit)

Leader: We remember the "Righteous among Nations" and the people who risked their lives for others. We think of the righteous who campaign today for human rights. Let us remember and commit to righteousness.

All: We remember and commit to righteousness.

6. Liberators and peace makers

(Sixth candle is lit)

Leader: We remember the brave soldiers who liberated the camps, those who served with the allied forces to put an end to oppression, and all people who have devoted their lives to peace and freedom. Let us remember and commit to peace making.

All: We remember and commit to peace making.

Final prayer

Leader: Holy One of Blessing, welcome the prayer of our hearts. As we remember, help us to move into action and to keep such horrors from happening again. Beyond our words, guide our work, as we build a way of justice and peace for all humanity. And let us say together:

All: Amen!

3. Songs and prayers

Eli Eli (Hannah Szenesh)

Born in 1921, Hannah Szenesh migrated from Hungary to Israel at age 18. In 1943, she volunteered to go and save Jewish lives into Nazi-controlled areas. Parachuted into Yugoslavia, she went to Hungary, was discovered and executed in 1944, at age 23.

A few interpretations of Hanna Szenesh's poem Eli, Eli are available online:

Carli Golbin Neman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkjsqUQsrhE>

Ofir Ben Shitrit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgEHWyQsi_k

Eli, Eli
Shelo yigamer l'olam: Hachol
v'hayam Rishrush shel
hamayim B'rak hashamayim
T'filat haadam.

O God, My God
I pray that these things never
end: The sand and the sea
The rush of the waters The
crash of the heavens
The prayer of the heart.

El Maleh Rachamim (God filled with mercy)

El maleh rachamim is a funeral prayer used by the Ashkenazi Jewish community. It is recited going up to the grave of the departed, on remembrance days, and on other occasions during which the memory of the dead is recalled.

A few interpretations of El maleh rachamim are available online:

Ariella Forstein: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wth4VQLToc>

Jordi Savall: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13IS-qjEyWU>

El maleh rachamim
shocheyn bamromim
Ham'tzay menucha nechona
tachat kanfei ha'shekhinah
b'ma-alot kedoshim u-t'horim
k'zohar harakia mazhirim
et nish'mot kol ayleh
sheh-hizkarnu ha-yom livrachah.
Ana ba'al harachamim
hastireym b'seyter kenafecha
l'olamim u'tzror bitzror ha-
chayim
et nishmoteyhem.

Adonai hu nachalatam v'yanuchu
v'shalom al mishkevotam.
V'nomar Amen.

God, filled with mercy,
dwelling on high,
grant perfect rest under the wings
of Your Divine Presence,
among the holy and the pure who
shine as the light of the firmament,
to the souls of our beloveds whom
we recall with blessing on this day.
Source of compassion,
Gather them forever In the shelter
of Your wings; May their souls be
bound up in the bonds of life.

The Holy One is their inheritance,
May they rest in peace.
And let us say Amen.

Kaddish

The "Mourners' Kaddish" is an Aramaic prayer that is said as part of the mourning rituals in Judaism. Faithful Jews recite the Kaddish to show that despite their losses, they still

praise God. It takes us to a place of wholeness - of peace. The Kaddish suffuses both the most profane and the most mundane places with the holiness of God's Name, and wrests an Amen from those places where it has not yet been forthcoming. This is the Amen we have been listening for. This is the Amen that sustains the entire world.

Interpretations of the Kaddish available online:

With Hebrew-English text: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5dUVhQxLDM>

Hans Bloemendal : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTQGo87R_ek

<p>Yitgadal v'yitkadesh shemei rabba b'alema di v'ra chirutei. V'yamlich malchutei b'chayeichon uv'yomeychon uv'chayei d'chol beyt yisrael... ba-agala uvizman kariv, v'imru: Amen.</p>	<p>Magnified and sanctified is God's great Name in this world, created as God willed. May God's majesty be established in our lifetime and the life of all Israel, and of all humankind, speedily and soon, and let us say: Amen.</p>
<p>Y'hei shemei rabba mevarach. l'olam ul'alemei alemaya. Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa-ar, v'yitromam, v'yitnasey, v'yit-hadar, v'yit-alei, v'yit-hallal, shemei dekadsha b'rich-hu, le-eyla min kol birchata v'shirata tushbechata v'nechemata da-amiran be-alema v'imru: Amen</p>	<p>May God's great Name be blessed forever, in all worlds, unto eternity. Blessed, praised, and glorified, extolled and honoured, adorned, exalted and acclaimed, be the Name of the Holy One, the blessed, beyond all prayer and song, praise and consolation that may be uttered in this world; and let us say: Amen.</p>
<p>Y'hei shelama rabba min shemaya ve'chayim tovim aleynu V'al kol yisrael... V'imru: Amen.</p>	<p>May there be abundant divine peace, bringing good life for us, and for all Israel, and for all humankind and let us say: Amen.</p>
<p>Oseh shalom bimromav Hu ya-aseh shalom aleinu, V'al kol yisrael, v'al kol yoshvei teivel V'imru: Amen.</p>	<p>May the Source of Peace in celestial heights grant peace to us, to all Israel, and to all humankind, and let us say: Amen.</p>

Final blessing

The Priestly blessing (Num. 6:24-26)

In this priestly blessing, we ask for the peace of God, which includes not only the absence of war, but also good health, security, inner harmony, wellness, prosperity, and long life. It brings about both physical social and health.

To listen to the priestly blessing online:

Misha Goetz & Joshua Aaron: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eN2Y1dNG8c>

Lize Hadassan Wiid: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brOv7YMRufg>

Leader: Yivarech'cha Adonai v'yishmerecha. Ya-eir Adonai panav eilecha vichunecha Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem l'cha shalom.	May God bless you and keep you. May God's light shine upon you, and may God be gracious to you. May you feel God's presence within you always, and may you find peace.
All: Amen!	

A video of this prayer is available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/406184450>



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Collaboration et thanks:

Cantor Heather Batchelor, Sylvain Campeau, Sylvain Murray



Musée Holocauste Montréal
Montreal Holocaust Museum

<https://museeholocauste.ca/>



<http://www.oikoumene.ca/>