

TEACHER'S GUIDE



# DARING TO RESIST

Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust



A LIVING  
MEMORIAL  
TO THE  
HOLOCAUST

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

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## *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*

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## Curator's Introduction — by Yitzchak Mais

# TEACHING A NEW APPROACH TO THE HOLOCAUST: THE JEWISH NARRATIVE

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Six decades after the liberation of Auschwitz, the Holocaust is indisputably recognized as a watershed event whose ramifications have critical significance for Jews and non-Jews alike. As educators we are deeply concerned with how the Holocaust has been absorbed into the historical consciousness of society at large, and among Jews in particular.

Awareness of the events of the Holocaust has dramatically increased since the 1980s, with a surge of books, movies, and educational curricula, as well as the creation of Holocaust memorials, museums, and exhibitions worldwide. However, after reviewing the characteristics and messages of many of these Holocaust narratives, we were motivated to create the special exhibition *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust* at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

In most Holocaust narratives, Jews are regrettably described as victims who were ruthlessly murdered, with little knowledge of who they were as individuals or as a community. These German-centered narratives routinely highlight Nazi persecution and destruction, without relating to the perspective of how the Jews responded during the Holocaust. Hence, Jews under German domination are depicted as either mere objects in the evolving drama of Nazi butchery, or worse, as passive victims of Nazi persecution.

It is not surprising then that many students — both Jewish and non-Jewish — raise questions that imply partial blame to the Jewish victims. For example, when relating to the response of German Jews prior to the outbreak of WWII, students have asked why the Jews did not take the opportunity to flee Nazi Germany. Likewise, when the almost exclusive depiction of Jewish reactions to German persecution is that of armed resistance, this conveys a problematic message: “If the Jews who rose up in arms were able to decipher the Nazi plans of total extermination, why didn’t others reach this conclusion and respond accordingly?”

Both these queries imply that the victims could have taken an alternative course of action and that by not doing so the victims were “wrong” or, even worse, might be somewhat responsible for their own demise. These questions pose — perhaps unconsciously — a value-laden judgment that finds fault with the Jewish victims, rather than creating empathy with their plight. This widespread depiction of Jews as innocent but passive victims also prevents students from viewing them in a positive light: “Victims” rarely serve as positive role models. There is a critical need, therefore, to present students with a more contextualized presentation of how Jews perceived and vigorously responded to the evolving persecution.

Our goal, in both the exhibition and in this Teacher’s Guide, is to inform and educate the public about the widespread phenomenon of Jewish defiance in the Holocaust, thereby presenting Jews as active agents who exhibited resourcefulness and vitality within the limitations imposed by the tragedy and calamity they were experiencing.

It is essential that our students recognize that Jews could not anticipate their fate. While our post-war generation clearly knows that German anti-Jewish policy ended in systematic mass murder, this historical awareness was not available to wartime Jews. In fact, it was nearly impossible for anyone to believe that an advanced Western nation such as Germany could plan and implement the brutal murder of millions of innocent men, women, and children.

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Understanding this pre-Holocaust mindset is critical in understanding the context of Jewish responses, and demands that students suspend their own historical hindsight.

Students must be encouraged to broaden their understanding of what constitutes resistance. While we consciously offer no set definition of this term, we have organized our presentation around a variety of categories that reflect both the intentions and often the results of the numerous Jewish initiatives of defying the Nazis in all areas of German occupation. They include:

- **Maintaining Dignity:** Preserving individual dignity or Jewish identity, by maintaining Jewish schools; running orphanages such as that created by Janusz Korczak; observing religious rituals; and engaging in cultural or artistic endeavors such as the children's opera *Brundibar* and other artwork by children and adults in the Terezin Ghetto.
- **Documenting the Unimaginable:** Attempts to compile and spread the news of Nazi brutalities, both to Jews in occupied Europe as well as to the free world. This includes documenting Nazi crimes for posterity through such means as underground newspapers, clandestine archives such as *Oyneg Shabbes*, and ethical wills left for future generations.
- **Saving Lives:** Aiding and protecting Jews, through organizing escapes, such as the French-Jewish Scouts escape operations to neutral Switzerland or Spain; producing forged documents; organizing networks to hide Jews in safe places such as convents.
- **Armed Resistance:** Spontaneous acts of revenge; organized armed uprisings in the ghettos and camps; partisan activities; establishing family camps in the forests such as that organized by the Bielski brothers; sabotage of the Nazi war effort.

Our objective is to demonstrate that there was no single response to a given situation, no straightforward cause-and-effect narrative, but rather a continuum of perceptions and a multitude of reactions intended to defy the Nazi plans to dehumanize Jews and ultimately destroy the Jewish people. These diverse forms of Jewish resistance are presented without judgment or establishing a hierarchy of merit.

We also hope to show that while most Jews ultimately fell victim to the brutality that engulfed them, they did not, as a rule, succumb to demoralization or moral collapse. Students will thereby not only empathize with the tragedy of the Jewish people, but also go beyond the humiliation and pain that encounters with the Holocaust often cause. They will learn to appreciate and respect the dignity and strength of both the victims and the survivors. They will understand why, as one resister reflected, the miracle was not that Jews could occasionally take up arms, but that such diverse forms of resistance existed at all.

*For further analysis and details of the exhibition, a companion volume is available for purchase.*

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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This guide will help you prepare your students for a visit to the special exhibition *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*, at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City. A visit to the Museum is inquiry based: We ask student to respond to materials in the Museum, and we involve them in conversations about the meaning of the objects and exhibits they see. The Museum visit is meant to engage students and spark their interest. If we succeed, students will leave the Museum with more questions than answers and a desire to know more.

The Museum visit does not teach history per se, but rather focuses students' attention on individual and group responses to the events of the Holocaust. The historical narrative is more effectively covered in the classroom before the visit. The classroom experience is then reinforced when students step into the turmoil and tragedy of the Holocaust, encountering first hand the power of personal testimonies and authentic artifacts portraying a resilient community.

A useful guide to prepare your students with this historical information can be found on our website at [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org) under "Teach and Learn." In this section, you will find a Teacher's Guide, much like this one, with background information and resources. The Museum also offers a tour to correspond to this program, entitled *Meeting Hate with Humanity: Life During the Holocaust*. Through classroom learning and a Museum visit, students should learn about anti-Semitism and the other conditions that led to the rise of the Nazi party; the significance of the Nuremberg Laws and *Kristallnacht*; the conditions surrounding the transfer of Europe's Jews into ghettos, forced labor, and concentration camps; the continuing struggle for Jewish survivors even after liberation.

Once students have a basic understanding of the events of the Holocaust, the teacher may then focus more specifically on the material in this packet. The material in this Teacher's Guide is divided into two sections:

The first section includes a general lesson plan for introducing the diversity of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. The lesson includes handouts for students which show various artifacts from the exhibition. During the lesson, students examine the artifacts and discuss them in small groups, and then present a summary of their findings to the class. The objective of the lesson is to highlight the diversity of Jewish responses during the Holocaust, and their correlation to the four basic time periods: Responding to the Rise of the Nazis; Resisting Occupation; Resisting Deportation; Resisting Mass Murder.

The second section includes lesson plans for use in Jewish schools, though teachers in other schools may also find the material interesting and useful for their classes. These lessons also utilize material from the exhibition for students to discuss in small groups and then report on their findings to the class. These lessons focus on how Jewish traditions and values served as a source of guidance and inspiration in defying the Nazis.

Finally, there is a section of further resources for use in continued study of this topic. Please feel free to contact the Museum at 646.437.4304 if you need any additional assistance.

# CLASSROOM LESSON PLAN FOR PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

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*To prepare students for their visit to the Museum*



# DARING TO RESIST: Classroom Lesson Plan

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## OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON:

- Review examples of resistance from the Museum's exhibition;
- Discuss how the examples show a variety of types of resistance;
- Explore how the types of resistance correspond to four periods in the history of the Holocaust: Responding to the Nazi Rise to Power; Resisting Occupation; Resisting Deportation; Resisting Mass Murder.

## OUTLINE OF THE LESSON (TOTAL OF 50 MINUTES):

- PART I: Background Information (10 minutes)
- PART II: Artifact analysis in groups (20 minutes)
- PART III: Group reporting (5 minutes per group, 20 minutes total)

## STUDENT HANDOUTS:

- GROUP 1: Responding to the Nazi Rise to Power
- GROUP 2: On Behalf of the Community
- GROUP 3: Documenting the Unimaginable
- GROUP 4: Physical and Spiritual Resistance

## REPORTING INSTRUCTIONS:

- The groups should be reminded of the amount of time they have for their presentation (a suggested 5 minutes);
- The reporter from each group should direct the members of the class' attention to the particular artifacts, and summarize the highlights of the group's discussion;
- After each presentation, in the event that the time is not up, the other members of the group should be asked if they have anything to add to what has been said.

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## **PART I: Background Information**

To begin the lesson, explain that the class will be visiting the special exhibition, *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*, at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust in Battery Park City, New York.

Visitors to this exhibition will be challenged to explore the meaning of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. The Museum consciously offers no rigid definition of what comprises Jewish resistance. The goal of the exhibition is to demonstrate that there was no single response to a given situation, but rather a multitude of reactions intended to defy Nazi plans to dehumanize Jews and ultimately destroy the Jewish people.

To illustrate the evolution of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, the exhibition is organized around four historical periods: Responding to the Nazi Rise to Power; Resisting Occupation; Resisting Deportation; Resisting Mass Murder.

Students should be reminded that at each stage in history, the Jews who experienced these events were not aware of what was to follow next.

## **PART II: Artifact Analysis in Groups**

Explain that the class will be divided into three groups. Each group will examine artifacts from the exhibition. As a whole, the artifacts presented to the groups represent a variety of types of resistance from a variety of historical periods during the Holocaust.

Distribute copies of the handouts, each group receiving multiple copies of a single example provided on the following pages. Each group should have a moderator to guide the discussion, a secretary to record important points, and a reporter who will report to the rest of the class during the general discussion.

While analyzing the artifacts, each group will discuss the following general questions:

1. Describe the item/items.
2. What historical time period does this item represent? How do you know?
3. How does this item represent Jewish defiance? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

For more information about each of the artifacts and photographs in the activities, refer to the credits at the end of this guide.

During the discussion, all of the members of the group should participate and raise various, and perhaps even conflicting, perspectives. The groups do not need to come to any final agreement on the questions, and can even keep a list of additional questions for consideration by the entire class during the general discussion at the end of the lesson.

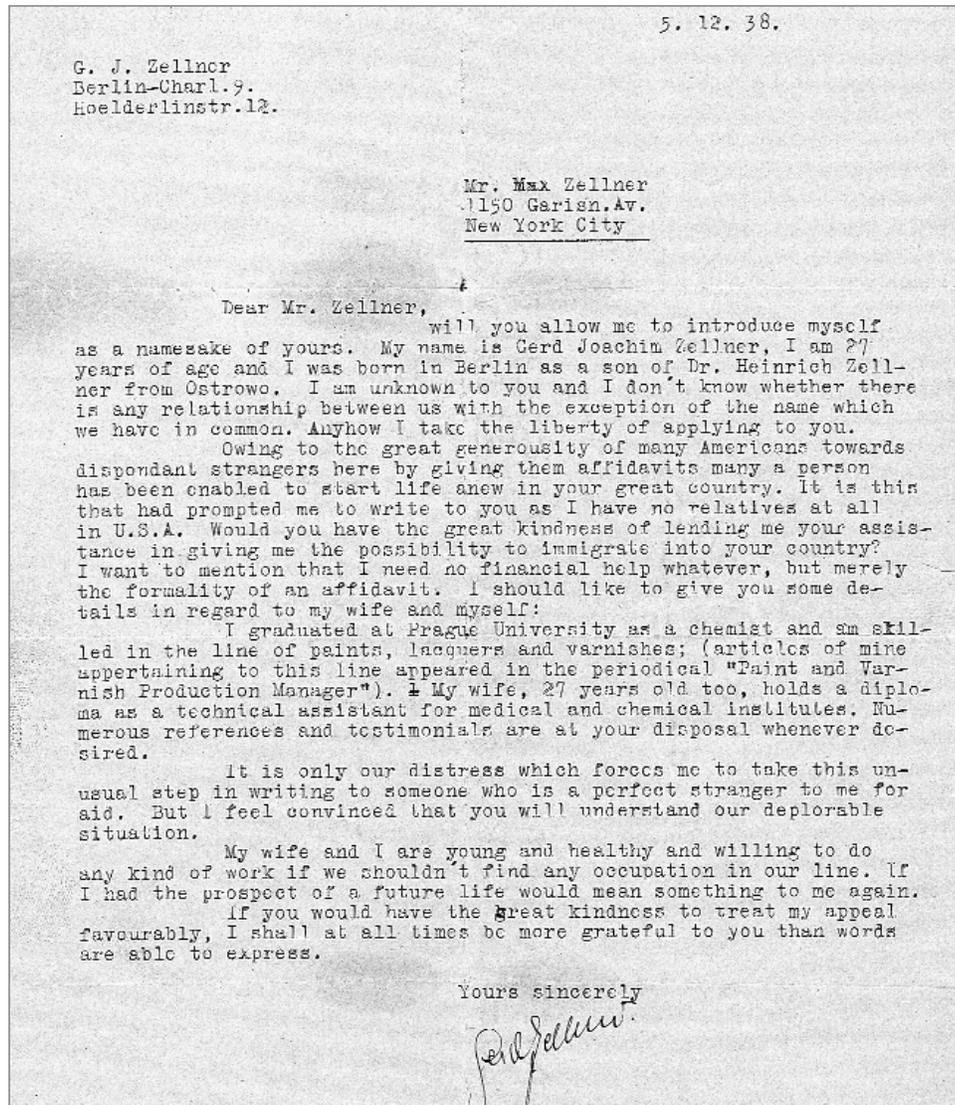
# GROUP 1: Responding to the Nazi Rise to Power



## GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the photograph: What do you see in the window? What do you see in the background?
2. The photograph was taken by the wife of the Rabbi of Kiel, Germany, in 1932. What historical time period does this photograph represent? What do you know about this period in history? Why do you think she took this photograph?
3. How does this photograph represent Jewish defiance? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

# GROUP 1 (Continued)



## GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the artifact: What does the letter say? When was it written?
2. Note that the letter was written in 1938, soon after *Kristallnacht*. What significance did this event have in the writing of this letter? What historical time period does this artifact represent?
3. How does this artifact represent Jewish defiance? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

## GROUP 2: On Behalf of the Community

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### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the photograph: What do you see in the top left-hand portion? What do you see in the foreground? What are the figures doing?
2. Notice that the boy in the top left-hand portion is climbing over a wall. How can this wall provide us with information about the historical context of the photograph? Why do you think this activity is being carried out by young children?
3. How do the activities in this photograph illustrate a response to conditions of isolation and deprivation in the ghetto? How is this an act of self-help on behalf of the children smugglers and their families? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

## GROUP 2 (Continued)



**“When little Genka coughs during the night, I feel pity for her, but I weigh the concern for her health against: Is she contagious?, the expense of extra food....”**

**FROM THE DIARY OF DR. JANUSZ KORCZAK, SHOWN IN THE PHOTO ABOVE**

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

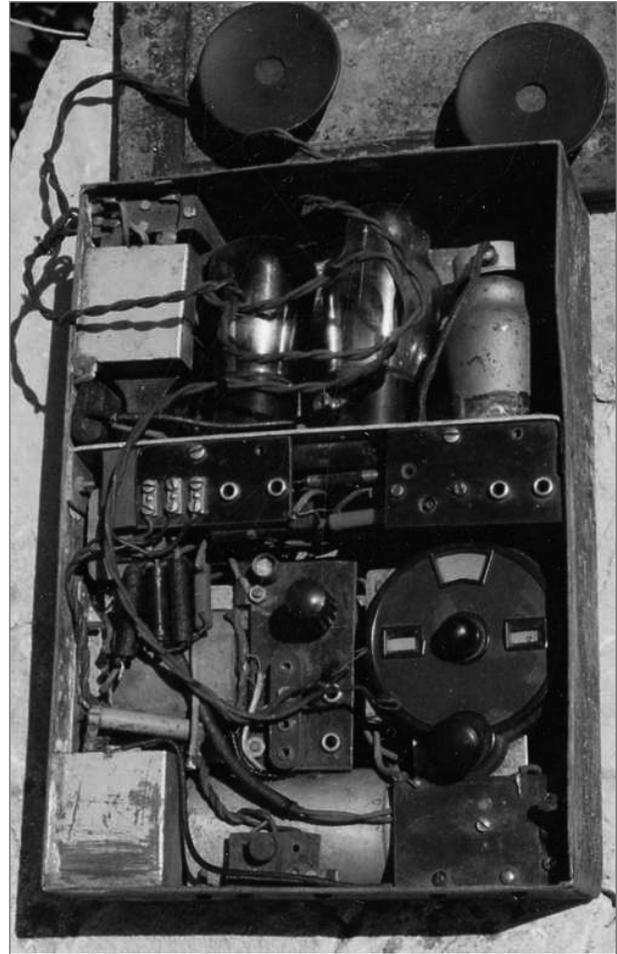
1. Describe the photographs: Who do you see in each of the photographs? What kind of interaction do you think is taking place between the adults and the children? How does the quote relate to the images?
2. Notice that the man in the photograph on the left is wearing an armband. How can this provide us with information about the historical context of this photograph of an Orthodox children’s home in Warsaw? Why were there so many orphans in the ghetto? What special conditions would children find in and Orthodox children’s home?

The photograph on the right depicts another orphanage in Warsaw, run by the famous Dr. Janusz Korczak. On August 4, 1942 Korczak, his assistant Stefania Wilczynska, his staff, and over 200 children were deported to the Treblinka death camp. While there were opportunities for Korczak to leave the ghetto, he decided to stay with his children to the end.

Why do you think adults like these men and women carried out such activities?

3. How do the activities in this photograph illustrate a response to conditions of isolation and deprivation in the ghetto? How is this an act of self-help on behalf of the community? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

## GROUP 3: Documenting the Unimaginable



### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the photographs: What activity do the photographs represent?
2. Why was listening to a radio so important to Jews isolated in Nazi occupied countries?
3. How do the activities in this photograph illustrate defiance? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

## GROUP 3 (Continued)

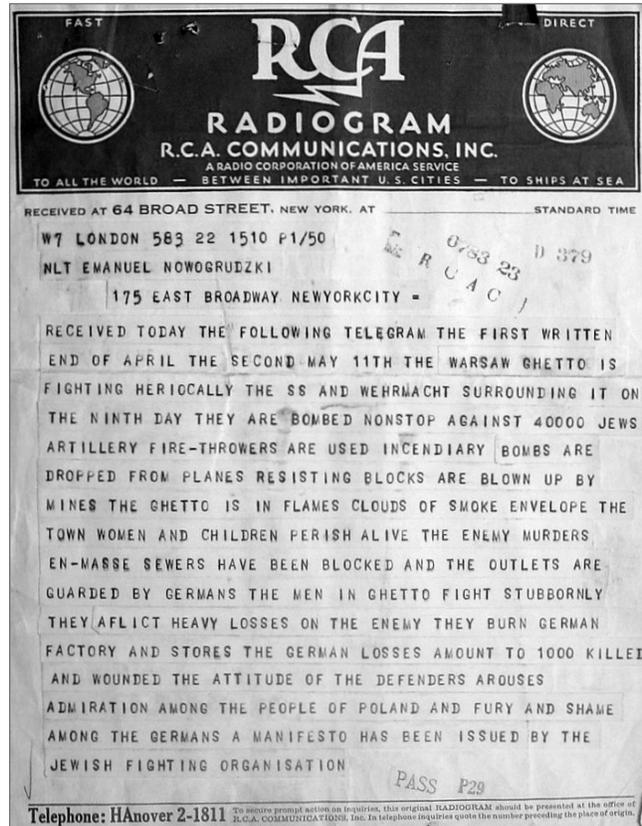
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### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the drawing and the photograph: What is happening in the images? What is the mood?
2. This drawing was made by Felix Puterman. What historical time period does the drawing represent? Why do you think the artist drew this particular picture? The photograph was taken by Faye Schulman, a member of the partisans, after an act of sabotage against the Nazis. Why do you think she took this photograph?
3. How do these images illustrate defiance? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

# GROUP 4: Physical and Spiritual Resistance



## GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Describe the photographs: What types of people do you see? Where are they? What are they wearing? What is the mood of the photographs? Read the document: What event is it describing?
2. Those who took up arms against the Nazis sometimes had a double agenda: To resist the Nazis, and to save lives. How does the photograph of the Bielski family camp (top left) illustrate these two goals? Do you think that Jews who rose up in the forests, ghettos, and camps believed they could win the military battle? Explain the quote from Abba Kovner, underground commander in the Vilna Ghetto: "If we die — then with honor."
3. How do these images illustrate defiance? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

## GROUP 4 (Continued)



“Never say this is the final road for you, Though leaden skies may cover over days of blue. As the hour that we hungered for is near, Beneath our tread the earth shall thunder: We are here!”

TO LISTEN TO A RECORDING OF THE PARTISAN'S SONG, VISIT:

<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/music/detail.php?content=never>

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Consider the lyrics of the song: Summarize what it says. Describe the artifact: What is it? What is it made out of?
2. The Star of David necklace was made by Margit Rubinstein in Auschwitz from the lining of her shoes and brown thread from her clothes. The song was a hymn originally sung in Yiddish by partisans fighting in the forests. Why do you think people would create art or sing, even as death loomed ahead? What historical time periods do the artifact and song represent?
3. How do the artifact and song illustrate defiance? How would you characterize this type of resistance?

# PRE- OR POST-VISIT LESSON PLANS

*Designed specifically for students in Jewish schools*



# MAINTAINING JEWISH LIFE: The Resistance of Rabbi Ephraim Oshry

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## OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON:

- Examine the cultural and religious life of Jews in Kovno before and during the Nazi occupation;
- Discuss the personal and religious dilemmas faced by Rabbi Oshry and his community during the Holocaust;
- Explore three specific examples of resistance by Rabbi Oshry in the Kovno Ghetto.

## OUTLINE OF THE LESSON (TOTAL OF 50 MINUTES):

- PART I: Kovno, Before and During the Nazi Occupation (5 minutes)
- PART II: Rabbi Oshry (5 minutes) and case studies, one per group (15 minutes)
- PART III: Group reporting (5 minutes per group, 15 minutes total)
- PART IV: Concluding discussion (10 minutes)

## STUDENT HANDOUTS:

- GROUP 1: Responding to the Nazi Rise to Power
- GROUP 2: On Behalf of the Community
- GROUP 3: Documenting the Unimaginable
- GROUP 4: Physical and Spiritual Resistance

*With thanks to Rabbi Shmuel Burstein of Yavneh Academy in Paramus, NJ for his research and compilation of the objectives, materials, and approach of this lesson, designed specifically for Jewish school audiences of the Museum exhibition. The final version of the lesson plan was edited and revised by Museum staff.*

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## PART I: Kovno, Before and During the Nazi Occupation

To begin the lesson, present the following background information about Kovno:

Lithuania was home to many of the greatest scholars in the Jewish world, and its institutions of higher Jewish learning were considered among the best available. The city of Kovno was home to one of Lithuania's most important Jewish communities. The great rabbis of Kovno included Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor (1817-1896), the chief rabbi of Kovno and one of the greatest arbiters of Jewish law in the world during the nineteenth century, as well as Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883), who founded the *Mussar* movement that continues to influence the learning in Yeshivot throughout the world to this day. Jews in Kovno numbered 40,000 on the eve of the Second World War II, forming 25% of the city's population. Hundreds of students came to Kovno from throughout Europe to study in *Knesses Yisrael*, the Slobodka Yeshiva.

After the First World War, Kovno became the capital of the newly established state of Lithuania, and Jews were granted equality before the law. Even after war broke out in 1939 in neighboring Poland, Lithuania remained independent. This ended after the Soviet Union forcibly took over the little nation, in 1940. Lithuania became a Soviet republic. Religious observance, the teaching of Torah, and studies of the Hebrew language were forced underground. Thousands of Jews took flight to the inner reaches of Soviet Union, or were exiled there. This period lasted between 1940 and the German invasion of June 1941.

When the Germans invaded Kovno a bloodbath of suffering and persecution hounded the Jews. The agony of unbridled violence began on June 24, 1941. Local Lithuanian collaborators “hunted” for Jews in the streets. Acts of barbarous slaughter against entire families were committed. Children were murdered in front of their parents. Many students of the famed Slobodka Yeshiva were among the 800 Jews butchered in the first days of German occupation. During this period, the famous Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman (1875-1941), a preeminent disciple of the Chofetz Chayim, was in Kovno and was among those who were murdered. His death was particularly tragic because he had returned to Europe from safety in America to be with the Jewish community during its hour of need.

The movement of close to 30,000 Jews into the Kovno Ghetto began on July 15, 1941 and lasted until August 15, 1941. Kovno's Jews were abused and humiliated in the ghetto until the Germans ultimately murdered them in the prisons of the Seventh Fort, the Ninth Fort, and in Estonia. Others were deported to Auschwitz. The few who remained towards the end of the war were evacuated towards Germany, and the rest went into hiding in underground bunkers. Germans firebombed each building, but some Jews managed to escape. When the Soviets liberated Kovno, there were only 90 Jews still alive in hiding, and another 500 had survived in the forests with the partisans

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## PART II: Rabbi Oshry, and Case Studies

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- We learned that Jews were active culturally and religiously in Kovno before the Nazi occupation. How do you think they will use this same spirit in resistance against the Nazi assault? What challenges would Jews face in trying to maintain Jewish life?

Explain that the class will be divided into three groups. Each group will explore a case study about Rabbi Ephraim Oshry and his activities in the Kovno Ghetto. Explain the following about Rabbi Oshry:

Rabbi Ephraim Oshry was a recognized Torah scholar in his youth, who studied under some of the great Torah scholars of his day, including the Chief Rabbi of Kovno, Rabbi Avraham Dov Schapira, and the deans of the Slobodka Yeshiva.

During the Holocaust, he served as an important resource for Jews in Kovno, answering the most complex and agonizing questions of Jewish law and morality at a time of unprecedented crisis in Jewish history. Rabbi Oshry was awed by the devotion and faith of many “simple Jews” who insisted on asking him their questions of Jewish law and observance. He speaks of spiritually motivated men and women who would not relinquish their faith or the intensity of their Jewish pride.

He began keeping a record of these religious and moral questions, and his answers to those questions (called “*Responsa*” in Jewish literature) on scraps of paper during the war. He buried these papers in tin cans. He hoped to retrieve the papers after the war, which is precisely what he did after liberation. After the war, he wrote out the questions he received and the answers he gave, and published them in five volumes entitled, *She'elot u-teshuvot mi-ma'amakim*. Some of these questions and answers were subsequently translated into English and published in one volume, *Responsa* from the Holocaust.

Distribute copies of the handouts, each group receiving multiple copies of a single example from the case studies provided on the following pages. The handouts include questions for discussion. Each group should have a moderator to guide the discussion, a secretary to record important points, and a reporter who will report to the rest of the class during the general discussion. While reading the case studies, each group should reflect on the following general points:

1. Summarize the dilemma faced by Rabbi Oshry and the Jewish community.
2. Summarize Rabbi Oshry's response.
3. What is your reaction to Rabbi Oshry's approach to the dilemma?

During the discussion, all of the members of the group should participate and raise various, and perhaps even conflicting, perspectives. The groups do not need to come to any final agreement on the questions, and can even keep a list of additional questions for consideration by the entire class during the general discussion at the end of the lesson.

# GROUP 1: Religious Observance

During the period when Jews were confined to the Kovno Ghetto, they suffered under extreme physical constraints as well as spiritual ones. Yet, despite the impossible circumstances many Jews continued to observe Jewish law as best they could.

As a leader in the community, Rabbi Oshry conducted secret prayer quorums (*minyanim*) and taught Torah to boys and young men in the ghetto, under the very real threat of death. [At right: The shofar that Rabbi Oshry used in the Kovno Ghetto.]



Members of the community often approached Rabbi Oshry for guidance. New questions arose in Jewish law as conditions became more and more difficult. At first, Rabbi Oshry simply worked from his impressive memory to answer their many questions. In February 1942, however, Kovno's Jews were forced to hand in their books to the German authorities, and Rabbi Ephraim Oshry was placed in charge of a Nazi warehouse of the city's vast collection of confiscated Jewish books. This position allowed Rabbi Oshry access to a myriad of important sources for understanding and interpreting Jewish law. He was able to use these books to better answer the many questions presented to him by the residents of the ghetto.

Rabbi Oshry also recorded many examples of Jews who carefully buried and otherwise hid holy books from the Germans, in an effort to resist. They creatively sought places to keep their books out of German hands, hoping they would later be recovered and used for sacred purposes once again.

**GROUP DISCUSSION:** What challenges would Jews face in trying to observe Jewish law in the ghetto during the Holocaust? What kinds of specific issues of Jewish law might arise?

On the day before Rosh Hashanah of 1942, Rabbi Oshry was asked on behalf of Jews in a labor camp whether, in the absence of any other shofar, they could fulfill the obligation of hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah by blowing a slightly cracked shofar.

How do you think Rabbi Oshry responded? In his answer, Rabbi Oshry made reference to *Rosh Hashanah*, 27a in addition to a great variety of interpretations of this Talmudic passage.

According to Rabbi Oshry, most scholars maintained that if less than half of the shofar is cracked, it may be used. All the more so in this situation, when no other shofar was available. He also considered the fact that these Jews were seeking to fulfill a *mitzvah* (commandment) while still alive. As he poignantly explained, they did not know what tomorrow would bring.

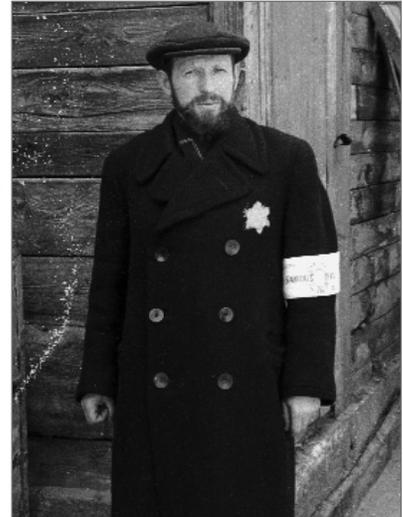
**GROUP DISCUSSION:**

1. Summarize the dilemma faced by Rabbi Oshry and the Jewish community.
2. Summarize Rabbi Oshry's response.
3. What is your reaction to Rabbi Oshry's approach to the dilemma?

## GROUP 2: Endangering Oneself for Others

During the period when Jews were confined to the Kovno Ghetto, members of the community found Rabbi Oshry for guidance. Often, they were placed in situations where they were challenged to find a moral way to act, in accordance with Jewish law, under ambiguous circumstances.

On June 25, 1941, Rabbi Oshry was asked whether a Jew may place himself in a situation which may cause his death, in order to save the life of fellow Jews who are certainly going to be murdered.



### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What circumstances do you think gave rise to this question?
- How do you think Rabbi Oshry responded?

In the early days of the assault against the Jews of Lithuania, the community considered sending the secretary of the leading rabbinical assembly (*Agudat HaRabbanim*) to ask the local Lithuanian authorities to free students of the Slobodka yeshiva who had been imprisoned in the Seventh Fort, and were certainly doomed to be murdered there. Rabbi Oshry was consulted as to whether it was morally correct under Jewish law to ask the secretary, Rabbi Dovid Izkowitz, to place his life in mortal danger by meeting with the Lithuanians. Clearly, there was a very real chance they would murder the rabbi, aside from refusing his request.

In determining his response, Rabbi Oshry considered the following Talmudic passages:

*Sanhedrin*, 73a: “If one person sees another drowning in a river, or being dragged as prey by an animal, or being attacked by robbers, he is obligated to save the person in danger. This is because it says in the Torah, “Do not stand idly by your fellow’s blood (Leviticus 19:16).”

*Sanhedrin*, 74a: “Who can say your blood is redder [than another’s blood]? Perhaps his blood is redder than yours.”

In the first passage, Jewish law requires a person to help his or her neighbor. On the other hand, the second passage shows that mortals cannot know whose life is more valuable (i.e. whose blood is “redder”). As such, how can one person decide to risk his life for another? If read in this way, the passages seem to contradict one another! In deciding between the two approaches, Rabbi Oshry cited the following interpretation:

*Tosafot*, *Yevamot*, 53b: “Only in the case where a man is being forced to murder another by a direct action on his part do we say he must not; because of [the principle:] ‘How do we know whose blood is redder?’ However, where the death of another might take place through no direct action of his, but only through his refraining from taking action, on the contrary! He may say, ‘How do we know that my neighbor’s blood is redder than mine?’ There is no obligation to save his neighbor at the cost of his own life.”

## GROUP 2: (Continued)

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Rabbi Oshry concluded that by the strict rule of law no one had the right to command Rabbi Itzkowitz to endanger himself by approaching the Lithuanian authorities. Though this meant the possible freeing of Jews who were certain to die, by going to the authorities he would possibly be arrested and murdered himself.

However, the cases Rabbi Oshry cited for his initial conclusion involve the would-be rescuer putting himself in certain danger. What does the law say about a person putting himself in “possible danger”?

Rabbi Oshry cited the *Aruch HaShulchan* to give further guidance:

*Choshen Mishpat*, 426, paragraph 4: “Each case must be decided on its own merits, and one should weigh the matter carefully, and not be too careful with himself... For, anyone who saves the life of a single Jew is considered as if he saved the entire world (Sanhedrin 37a).”

Rabbi Oshry also noted that the *Netziv* agreed that one is not obligated to place himself even in possible danger for another, but he notes that taking this risk is a mark of special piety:

*Emek She’elah*, 129:4: “It is a *middas chassidus* (charitable characteristic) for a person to hurry to save a fellow Jew who is placed in a situation of grave danger.”

In the end, Rabbi Oshry ruled that the opinions of the *Netziv* and *Aruch HaShulchan* are sufficiently important to “allow” a person who is brave and noble enough to attempt to rescue another. Rabbi Oshry added: “This is especially so in this case, where the very existence of Torah depends on students of the yeshiva, who consecrate their lives to its study.”

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Summarize the dilemma faced by Rabbi Oshry and the Jewish community.
2. Summarize Rabbi Oshry’s response.
3. What is your reaction to Rabbi Oshry’s approach to the dilemma?

In the end, Rabbi Itzkowitz courageously went to the Lithuanian authorities. He succeeded in winning the release of the yeshiva students.

However, Rabbi Oshry added these final words about this episode with Rabbi Itzkowitz: “May the Almighty remember this unto him for good and avenge his pure blood, which was later spilled in the concentration camps of murder and destruction.”

## GROUP 3: Saving the Children

Shortly before the Soviets liberated the city, Rabbi Oshry hid together with 33 other Jews in an underground bunker. The Germans were determined to burn each building in the ghetto before retreating. Over 1,500 of Kovno's remaining Jews were flushed out of their homes and killed by the Germans or otherwise died in the flames. Only 90 Jews managed to survive in hiding until they were liberated by the Soviets in August, 1944. They had nearly suffocated from a lack of air and the intense heat of the surrounding burning buildings. Among those who survived, 34 were in Rabbi Oshry's group.



After the war, Rabbi Oshry set out immediately to locate Jewish children who were placed in non-Jewish homes or church institutions, to reclaim them for the Jewish people.

The rabbi wrote letters to priests in the area, thanking them for all they had done until that point in rescuing a remnant of Lithuania's Jewish children. He asked them to announce in their churches that surviving Jewish children be returned to their families and community. A few priests made the call from their pulpits, but there was no response.

Various Jews, including Rabbi Oshry, took the initiative to visit surrounding non-Jews in person to obtain information about Jewish children possibly still in hiding. The *Vaad Hatzalah* played a role in coordinating these activities. Eventually, Rabbi Oshry's efforts were met with success. One child that he found was left with the following note from his Jewish mother as she parted with him:

*"My child! I am leaving you forever.  
You are a Jew and remain a Jew.  
Better to die as a Jew than to live as a non-Jew."*

The newly restored Kovno Jewish community set up an orphanage to serve as a home for the children that were found. Rabbi Oshry then moved with many of them, first to Italy and later to America.

In Italy, Rabbi Oshry established a yeshiva. Later, in America, he became a rabbi at the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol in New York City. He remarried and raised a new family of three daughters and six sons.

Leaving a tremendous legacy to the world, Rabbi Oshry died on September 28, 2003.

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Summarize the dilemma faced by Rabbi Oshry and the Jewish community.
2. Summarize Rabbi Oshry's response.
3. What is your reaction to Rabbi Oshry's approach to the dilemma?

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## PART III: Group Reporting

### Reporting Instructions:

The groups should be reminded of the amount of time they have for their presentation (a suggested 5 minutes). The reporter from each group should direct the members of the class' attention to the particular case study, and summarize the highlights of the group's discussion. After each presentation, in the event that the time is not up, the other members of the group should be asked if they have anything to add to what has been said.

## PART IV: Concluding Discussion

### The concluding discussion should incorporate the following information:

In a 1975 *New York Times* article about the Holocaust and resistance, Rabbi Oshry paid tribute to both physical and spiritual expressions of resistance to the German occupation. Recalling this period in his life, he said: "One resists with a gun, another with his soul."

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What legacy do the actions of Rabbi Oshry and the Jewish community of Kovno leave for us today?

### FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Should students wish to explore this topic further, the following resources may be useful:

- Gutman, Israel. *Fighters Among the Ruins*. Washington, D.C: Bnai Brith Books, 1988.
- Oshry, Ephraim. *She'elot u-teshuvot mi-ma'amakim*. New York: Gross Bros., 1959.
- Oshry, Ephraim. *Responsa from the Holocaust*. Brooklyn: Judaica Press, 2001.
- Oshry, Ephraim. *The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry*. Brooklyn: Judaica Press, 1995.
- Rosenbaum, Irving. *The Holocaust and Halakhah*. New York: Ktav Publishing, 1976.
- *New York Times*, Obituary for Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, October 5, 2003.

# RESISTANCE OF THE WORKING GROUP: Rabbi Michael Dov Ber Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann

## OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON:

- Examine the circumstances of the resistance efforts of the Working Group;
- Explore three specific resistance efforts of the Working Group;
- Discuss the personal and religious dilemmas faced by the leaders of the Working Group in their lives during the Holocaust.

## OUTLINE OF THE LESSON (TOTAL OF 50 MINUTES):

- PART I: The Working Group (5 minutes) and optional text study
- PART II: Reading of three case studies, one per group (15 minutes)
- PART III: Group reporting (5 minutes per group, 15 minutes total)
- PART IV: Concluding discussion (15 minutes)

## STUDENT HANDOUTS:

- GROUP 1: Stopping the Slovak Deportations
- GROUP 2: The *Europa* Plan
- GROUP 3: Bombing the Railroad Tracks to Auschwitz

*With thanks to Rabbi Shmuel Burstein of Yavneh Academy in Paramus, NJ for his research and compilation of the objectives, materials, and approach of this lesson, designed specifically for Jewish school audiences of the Museum exhibition. The final version of the lesson plan was edited and revised by Museum staff.*

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## PART I: The Working Group

To begin the lesson, present the following background information:

During the period of WWII, a group of Jews came together in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, in order to find a way to respond to the brutal persecution they faced under Nazi control. The members of the group came from various geographic, political, professional, and Jewish backgrounds, and included both men and women. They spread their net of assistance and resistance wide, establishing connections with Jewish communities throughout neutral and occupied Europe. The members of the group answered an inner call to come together despite their differences, to assist their people in a moment of extraordinary crisis.

In their own country of Slovakia, the state had the dubious distinction of being the first Nazi ally to request that Jews be deported. The Nazis and their collaborators sent the first transport of Slovak Jews to Auschwitz on March 26, 1942 and continued the deportation of more than 58,000 Jews through Yom Kippur, 1942. Shortly after Yom Kippur, the deportations of Slovak Jews stopped for two years. The efforts of the Working Group are part of the unfolding of this remarkable story. The group also helped smuggle more than 10,000 Jews to freedom across the Polish border into Slovakia and across the Slovak border into Hungary.

Rabbi Michael Dov Ber Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann shared the leadership of the underground group. In Hebrew, Rabbi Weissmandel called the group the “*Va’ad HaMistater*” (The Hidden Council). The Working Group initiated some of the most audacious ideas for rescue during the Holocaust. Both Rabbi Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann undertook extremely dangerous missions and were even caught and imprisoned by the Gestapo at one point before others arranged for their release.

Rabbi Weissmandel dared to dream big. He also demanded the same of his fellow Jews. He reminded them they would have to answer to God and their own conscience for the decisions they made during the Holocaust.

Following this introduction, lead a brief discussion with the class, using the following questions:

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- Why do you think Rabbi Weissmandel called the group “*Va’ad HaMistater*”?
- What values do you think motivated the members of the group to come together for this purpose?

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### OPTIONAL TEXT STUDY:

To review Jewish sources related to saving lives, consider the following:

- Leviticus, 19:16: “Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of your brother.”
- *Ketubot*, 19a: “There is nothing that stands in the way of saving a life, except for [transgressions of] idolatry, immoral intimate relationships, and murder.”
- *Ta’anit*, 11a: “At a time of hardship for the Jewish community, one should not go to his home and eat and drink... Rather, a person should afflict himself with the community, as we find that Moses sat on a stone [an uncomfortable place] while the Jewish people fought Amalek in battle. A person should cause him/herself some measure of discomfort so that he/she feels at one with those who are suffering.”
- *Bava Batra*, 8b, which states that *pidyon shvuyim* (redeeming captives), is a *mitzvah rabbah* (great mitzvah), and that captivity is worse than starvation and death.
- *Yoreh Deah*, 252:3, which states that one who delays ransoming a captive is considered like a murderer.
- *Gittin* 4:6 (*Bavli Gittin*, 45a), which states that one does not ransom captives for more than their value, because of the [financial] burden on the community, and so that they should not seize more captives.
- Other examples, where in practice captives are redeemed for large sums of money: *Gittin* 45a; *Gittin* 58a; *Ketubot* 52 a-b.

Students may discuss how these texts relate to the circumstances of the Holocaust as they read the case studies about the activities of Rabbi Weissmandel, Gisi Fleischmann, and the Working Group.

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## PART II: Case Studies

After introducing the basic historical circumstances, divide the class into three groups to each explore a case study about the activities of the Working Group. Distribute copies of the handouts, each group receiving multiple copies of a single example from the case studies provided on the following pages.

The handouts include questions for discussion. Each group should have a moderator to guide the discussion, a secretary to record important points, and a reporter who will report to the rest of the class during the general discussion.

While reading the case studies, each group should reflect on the following general points:

1. Summarize the activities of the Working Group described in this handout.
2. What historical circumstances motivated these activities?
3. How are these activities an example of resistance?
4. To what extent were these activities “successful”?
5. What ethical dilemmas did the Working Group face in taking these actions?

During the discussion, all of the members of the group should participate and raise various, and perhaps even conflicting, perspectives. The groups do not need to come to any final agreement on the questions, and can even keep a list of additional questions for consideration by the entire class during the general discussion at the end of the lesson.

During the reporting, students should address the five general questions.

### FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Should students wish to explore this topic further, the following resources may be useful:

- Bauer, Yehudah. *Jews For Sale?* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Fuchs, Abraham. *The Unheeded Cry*. Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1998.
- Yahil, Leni. *The Holocaust*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Marrus, Michael R. *The Holocaust in History*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987.
- Rabbi Weissmandel’s own recollections are included in a book published by his family and students, called *Min HaMetzar* (“Out of the Depths”), published in Jerusalem, in 1960.
- Texts of two letters sent by Rabbi Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann appear in the exhibition’s companion volume, p. 90-93.

# GROUP 1: Stopping the Slovak Deportations

Rabbi Michael Dov Ber Weissmandel played an important role in the plan to stop Slovak deportations. How did he have the audacity to suggest such a plan? How did he have the brilliance to execute it? More information about his personal background may shed some light on these questions:

Born in 1903 in Hungary, young Michael Dov Ber moved with his family to Slovakia while he was a boy. Both areas were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. He studied in the local yeshiva and even as a child exhibited tremendous intellectual and creative abilities:

- Young Michael Dov Ber decided to write his own bar mitzvah lecture, called a “*p’shetl.*” This was something extremely rare for a young boy, requiring a mastery of the vast literature of the Torah. Upon reading a copy of the lecture before it was given, however, Weissmandel’s grandfather feared that compliments over the tremendous work would go to his grandson’s head. Weissmandel’s grandfather wished his grandson to be a humble, God fearing man, so he offered the boy ten gold coins if he would not deliver the speech. Indeed, Weissmandel did not deliver the lecture until many years later.
- In Nitra, an important Torah center in Slovakia and the site of the last functioning yeshiva in occupied Europe during the Holocaust, the young Weissmandel became a pupil of Rabbi Shmuel David Ungar, and soon married Rabbi Ungar’s daughter, Bracha Rachel. At the celebration, Weissmandel delivered a sophisticated two and a half hour Torah lecture. One of the respected Torah scholars present, Rabbi David Meisels, awarded Weissmandel *smicha* (rabbinic ordination) as a wedding gift on the spot! Furthermore, Rabbi Meisels offered any of the other students gathered there instant ordination if they could simply repeat what the new “Rabbi Weissmandel” had said.

Rabbi Weissmandel’s personality was rich and complex. He possessed great passion, sharing his deepest feelings of ecstatic joy and tearful despair on the most important days of the Jewish calendar. When Slovak Jewry began to feel the pain of persecution under the Nazis, Rabbi Weissmandel immediately engaged his intellect and heart in the search for a way to respond.

One day, Rabbi Weissmandel met a friend in the streets of Bratislava who told him about a Jew who had escaped deportation by bribing a local official in exchange for his freedom. Suddenly, Rabbi Weissmandel saw a tremendous opportunity. He reasoned that what was done for one Jew might also be done for others! He began at once to investigate the possibility of bribing German and Slovak officials in the hope of stopping deportations.



## GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What does Rabbi Weissmandel propose in order to save the Jews of Slovakia?
- What kind of ethical dilemmas does the idea of negotiation with the Nazis present?

# GROUP 1: (Continued)

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The Working Group made contact with a local German SS official named Dieter Wisliceny, the representative of Adolf Eichmann in Slovakia, and presented their plan. Ultimately, Wisliceny agreed to stop the deportations for a payment of \$50,000 in new American dollar bills originating from somewhere outside Slovakia.

First, Rabbi Weissmandel wrote letters on beautiful stationary from a certain fictitious “Mr. Ferdinand Roth,” who he claimed was a noted “representative of World Jewry” in Switzerland. The Germans took this seriously and began negotiating with “Mr. Roth.” Then, a local Jew named Shlomo Stern presented half of the necessary money, raising some from local Jews and providing the rest himself from money he had secretly hidden, buried in the ground. An interesting problem arose: Mr. Stern’s dollars were wrinkled and smelled of rotting vegetation, but Wisliceny wanted his dollars “new and clean.” So, Shlomo Stern and his wife spent the night washing, drying and “ironing” their dollar bills! The next day, Wisliceny received half of his new, freshly cleaned dollars “from Switzerland.”

It is difficult to prove that the payment was the actual cause, but it is clear that after the first payment was received deportations were halted for seven weeks. The Working Group also bribed local Slovak officials so they would not urge the Germans to resume deportations, and paid several labor camps that employed Slovak Jews to prove to the Germans that Jews were valuable in aiding the economy.

The Working Group then turned to Hungarian Jewry to raise funds for the second payment. However, there were many impediments to these and other Jews from whom Rabbi Weissmandel requested money. Perhaps because the Hungarian Jews were living largely undisturbed at this point and they did not grasp the severity of the situation, or because of the impediments to transferring money safely across borders, the money did not arrive, and Wisliceny ordered the deportation of an additional 3,000 Slovak Jews to Auschwitz.

Weissmandel fired off urgent letters to leaders of Hungary’s Jewish communities on Yom Kippur, pleading: “We can in no way do this from our own resources, and we have placed our trust in our brethren, the children of Israel... Please do not delay even a minute doing this good deed which, in my opinion, takes precedence over the Sabbath and Yom Kippur.” A day after Yom Kippur the money arrived from Budapest. Whether or not the payment was the cause, the deportations of the last 25,000 Jews in Slovakia were delayed for two years, through the end of 1944.

## GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Summarize the activities of the Working Group described in this handout.
2. What historical circumstances motivated these activities?
3. How are these activities an example of resistance?
4. To what extent were these activities “successful”?
5. What ethical dilemmas did the Working Group face in taking these actions?

## GROUP 2: The *Europa* Plan

The Working Group tried to halt the deportation of Slovakia's Jews by paying off Nazi officials in 1942. They then set out to save all Jews still alive in occupied Europe, including Holland, France, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Hungary, as well as surviving Polish Jewry. This dream of rescue became known as the "*Europa* (Europe) Plan."

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- How could the Working Group convince Nazis that they had enough money for this plan?
- How would the Working Group actually raise enough money for this plan?

Rabbi Weissmandel drafted a letter to his Nazi contact from a fictitious "Ferdinand Roth," the alias he claimed as a wealthy "representative of world Jewry" in Switzerland. Roth promised his contact, Wisliceny, a fortune of money if the Nazis would pass the "big test" of saving the remainder of European Jewry. Wisliceny passed the information on to Eichmann, who received Himmler's permission to open negotiations. Himmler may well have been interested in seeing how much "world Jewry" was willing to pay in order to save lives. The agreed on price began at \$2,000,000 to \$3,000,000.

Rabbi Weissmandel and Gisi Fleischmann fired off letters to Jewish organizations, begging for their help in this new plan. They pointed out that for "two or three dollars" it was possible to rescue a Jewish soul. But as time wore on, the necessary funds did not arrive. On October 17, 1943, Gisi Fleischmann wrote:



"...I can hardly express how unhappy I am that promising negotiations failed because of the terror of the *tzorer* (enemy) and his *avadim haosrim* (accomplices). Unfortunately, I keep thinking that if the demanded *emtzaim* (funds) had been at our disposal, the negotiations would have been favorable... In the meantime... the *tzorer* (enemy) absolutely wants to accomplish his *mifal bitul hayehudim* (destruction of the Jews) and I fear that he could succeed..."

"My dear *chaverim* (friends), I now close and convey my heartfelt wishes on the occasion of the high holidays. May God pity His people, may we be all blessed with *geulah* (redemption)... When I think of the possibility of this dream coming true, that I could be with you, our dear brothers in *Eretz* (Land of Israel), then my heart stops beating, and this hope is the meaning of my life. I have to believe in the realization of this dream, because it gives me strength and courage to endure."

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What saddens Gisi Fleischmann about the present situation?
- What gives Gisi Fleischmann hope?

## GROUP 2: (Continued)

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In 1939, Gisi Fleischmann had sent her two daughters to live in *Eretz* Israel, which was known as Palestine at that time. This had been an agonizing decision for her: Should she join her daughters and flee to Palestine? Or should she stay with her aged mother and the Jews in Slovakia?

In the following excerpt from a letter she wrote we hear her agony:

“I thought I would go mad from worry and pain... you know how my deep concern for my beloved girls weighs so heavily on me, so much so that I find it exceedingly difficult to concentrate on my other important tasks. To this I must add my other personal tragedy, that my dear, beloved, poor mother, with whom I live is very sick, and so I am like a ball that one throws here and there between my duties as a daughter to my mother and a mother to my daughter. To all these worries you must add the great feeling of responsibility I bear towards the public...”

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What ethical dilemmas does she describe in this letter?
- What does Gisi Fleischmann mean when she talks of the “responsibility I bear towards the public”?

Gisi Fleischmann was a woman uniquely suited to the cause of rescue. A member of a respected rabbinical family, she was a cousin of the famous Rabbi Ungar of Nitra, and thus related to Rabbi Weissmandel by marriage. Her husband was a wealthy businessman who died shortly before the war. She was the Slovak representative of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), a relief organization headed by American Jewry. She was also a local Zionist leader. She was a woman of very great courage and wisdom, and also had a very practical approach to life. She displayed remarkable steadiness and calm during the harrowing years she led the Working Group.

Gisi Fleischmann stayed in Slovakia to provide rescue for her people.

In September 1944, Gisi Fleischmann was deported to Auschwitz. She was never heard from again.

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Summarize the activities of Gisi Fleischman and the Working Group described in this handout.
2. What historical circumstances motivated these activities?
3. How are these activities an example of resistance?
4. To what extent were these activities “successful”?
5. What ethical dilemmas did the Working Group face in taking these actions?

# GROUP 3: Bombing the Railroad Tracks to Auschwitz

In the spring of 1944, Alfred Wetzler and Walter Rosenberg (also known as Rudolf Vrba) arrived in Slovakia. They shared with the Working Group the remarkable story of their escape from Auschwitz, and described specific details about their horrifying experiences there, including the dates of arrivals of transports, the specific countries from which the transports arrived, and how many Jews had been murdered upon their arrival.

Rabbi Weissmandel soon had a transcript of their testimony in his hands. He translated and condensed the information for wider distribution. These reports came to be called “The Auschwitz Report” or “The Auschwitz Protocols.” He hurriedly sent copies to Jews in Switzerland and in Hungary. He warned the leaders of Hungarian Jewry exactly where their people were being taken.

He wrote urgently to Pinchas Freudiger, leader of Orthodox Jewry in the Hungarian capital of Budapest. He spelled out everything Hungarian Jewry could expect to happen from the moment the Germans began confining them in ghettos. He told him all roads from Hungary led to Auschwitz, and he told him what “Auschwitz” meant. Rabbi Weissmandel told leaders of Hungarian Jewry to urge the Jews to resist. He said that even if half of Hungarian Jewry were killed resisting, far more would live that way than were they to travel to Auschwitz. Above all, he said, don’t get on the trains!

## GROUP DISCUSSION:

- How do you think Jews in other countries responded to the information distributed to them in the “Auschwitz Protocols”?
- How are the efforts described in this situation examples of resistance?



Tragically, many Hungarian Jews did not receive the information, especially outside Budapest. Others did not believe it. They were deceived by the Germans into believing they were off to a new work site with a beautiful sounding name, *Waldsee* (literally, “forest lake”). Of course, none of them had ever heard of it before — because it did not exist.

On May 15, 1944 the deportations of Hungarian Jewry to Auschwitz began, with more than 12,000 Jews being sent away each day, and continuing with incredible speed.

## GROUP DISCUSSION:

- Why didn’t the Jews of Hungary respond to the warnings about their deportations?
- What further efforts could the Working Group take to prevent the murder of Hungary’s Jews?

## GROUP 3: (Continued)

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Rabbi Weissmandel conceived of a singularly important idea for large-scale rescue: He urged Jews in the free world to pressure the Allies to bomb the railways leading out of Hungary to Auschwitz. Rabbi Weissmandel sent out an urgent telegram on May 16, 1944, a day after the deportations began, specifying an exact route to bomb, pleading with fellow Jews to rescue the last large Jewish community in Europe.

One of his telegrams arrived at the *Va'ad Hatzalah* rescue organization, headquartered in the home of Recha and Isaac Sternbuch in Switzerland. Working together with the World *Agudath Yisrael* organization in New York, they in turn sent urgent messages President Roosevelt's War Refugee Board. This organization had been set up by the American government in January 1944 to help aid Jews.

Ultimately, the Allies refused the request to bomb the rail tracks, despite receiving the details of the Weissmandel report. Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy explained, "The War Department fully appreciates the humanitarian importance of the suggested operation. However, it is considered that the most effective relief to the victims ... is the early defeat of the Axis."

By summer's end 430,000 Hungarian Jews had been deported, but in late June 1944 President Roosevelt and Pope Pius XII decided to cable the leader of Hungary, Miklos Horthy, asking for a halt to the deportations. The King of Sweden also joined in asking Horthy to save the remaining Jews "in the name of humanity." Horthy ordered the deportations stopped on July 6, 1944. By war's end, 140,000 Budapest Jews were still alive.

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- How was a network of people in different parts of the world instrumental in conveying information from the Working Group to the Allies?
- What can we learn from this example about the ability of individuals and organizations to work together to effect change?

That same summer, there were still 25,000 Jews alive in Slovakia. After a large revolt of partisans in Slovakia, in which many Jews took part, the Germans turned their attention to the eradication of this community. Deportations from Slovakia began, again. On September 7, 1944, Rabbi Weissmandel was arrested together with his family and sent to the labor camp in Sereď, Slovakia. Then they were then sent to Auschwitz. Nazis ordered a photographer to take 22 different photos of Rabbi Weissmandel in different poses, so that he could be easily recaptured if he escaped. Instructions were sent on to Auschwitz to make sure that Rabbi Weissmandel was murdered swiftly.

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Summarize the activities of the Working Group described in this handout.
2. What historical circumstances motivated these activities?
3. How are these activities an example of resistance?
4. To what extent were these activities "successful"?
5. What ethical dilemmas did the Working Group face in taking these actions?

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## PART III: Group Reporting

### Reporting Instructions:

The groups should be reminded of the amount of time they have for their presentation (a suggested 5 minutes). The reporter from each group should direct the members of the class' attention to the particular case study, and summarize the highlights of the group's discussion. After each presentation, in the event that the time is not up, the other members of the group should be asked if they have anything to add to what has been said.

## Part IV: Concluding Discussion

### The concluding discussion should incorporate the following information:

Before he got on the cattle trains to Auschwitz, Rabbi Weissmandel instructed his fellow Jews to escape at any cost. He advised them to saw their way through the cattle cars and jump to safety. His own wife and children were placed far from him in a different section of the train, and were murdered in Auschwitz. But Rabbi Weissmandel hid a small saw in a loaf of bread and used it to escape the cattle car and jump to freedom. The Nazis fired at him, but he escaped unhurt and finally made it to a bunker

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- How did Rabbi Weissmandel resist the Nazis to the very end?
- What impossible decision did he have to make in order to survive?

not far from Bratislava. From there, he escaped to Hungary, eventually arriving in Switzerland. He never overcame his grief for not having saved his family, Slovak, and Hungarian Jewry, however. After the war, Rabbi Weissmandel came to this country, remarried, established a new family, and was involved in building Torah life in America. He founded the American center of the Nitra Yeshiva in Mt. Kisco, New York, which remains a flourishing Torah community with hundreds of students.

Despite this success, Rabbi Weissmandel still relived the horrors of the Holocaust all the remaining days of his life. Writing to a student, he admitted, "There were days and years when in the suffering of my soul I prayed to the Almighty, as Jonah the prophet had once in Nineveh, saying, 'And now, O Lord, take my soul, for it is better for me to die than to live.'" In 1957, his health declined, he was hospitalized and died. He left behind a tremendous legacy.

### GROUP DISCUSSION:

- What successes did Rabbi Weissmandel have to be proud of about his life?
- What is the meaning of his life and legacy to you?

# ETHICAL WILLS FROM THE HOLOCAUST: A Final Act of Defiance

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## OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON:

- Explore the concept of a “will,” understand that ethical wills are a specific form of will, and explore the history of wills in Jewish tradition since Biblical times;
- Explore three ethical wills that were written during the Holocaust, and reflect on the spirit and attitude of the authors of these wills in the face of death;
- Understand how ethical wills constitute a form of resistance during the Holocaust.

## OUTLINE OF THE LESSON (TOTAL OF 50 MINUTES):

- PART I: What is a will? (5 minutes)
- PART II: Reading of three ethical wills, one will per group (15 minutes)
- PART III: Group reporting (5 minutes per group, 15 minutes total)
- Part IV: General discussion comparing and contrasting the documents (15 minutes)

## STUDENT HANDOUTS:

- GROUP 1: Dr. Elchanan Elkes
- GROUP 2: Ben-Zion Rapoport
- GROUP 3: Rabbi Leib Geliebter  
*(An expanded version of this will appears in the exhibition's companion volume, p. 46-48.)*
- FOLLOW-UP: Activities and Resources

*With thanks to Rabbi Jack Bieler of Silver Spring, Maryland for his research and compilation of the objectives, materials, and approach of this lesson, designed specifically for Jewish school audiences of the Museum exhibition. The final version of the lesson plan was edited and revised by Museum staff.*

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## PART I: What is a Will?

### A. INTRODUCTION

To begin a discussion about wills with the class, ask the students to share their definitions of the term. The discussion should raise the following points:

- The etymology of the word “will” is related to the idea of “wish” or “desire;”
- A will is created to give clear instructions of the wishes of a person concerning relevant matters after his or her death;
- A will regards the allocation of assets (called the “estate”) of the deceased;
- The will names an executor to manage the estate;
- A will often gives funeral and/or burial instructions, and nominates guardians of minor children;
- To insure the validity of a will, it is signed, dated, and witnessed.

For more information on the legal definition of will in this country, visit <http://dictionary.law.com> and search for “standard will.”

Ask students if they are familiar with the Hebrew term for will. The origins of the Hebrew term for will, “*Tzava’ah*,” are biblical.

#### OPTIONAL TEXT STUDY:

Students may review two biblical sources:

- II Kings, 20: 1  
“Set [*Tsav*] to thy house, for thou shalt die...”
- II Samuel, 17:23  
“And he set his house in order [*Vayitzav*]... and he died”

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## B. ETHICAL WILLS

Ask students if they have ever heard of the term “ethical will.” What do they think this term means? The discussion should raise the following points:

- An ethical will is a final personal message;
- It includes thoughts, values, memories, life lessons, advice, hopes for the future;
- It may ask for forgiveness and forgive others;
- An ethical will is not a legal document.

*In Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper*, author Barry Baines notes that legal wills bequeath valuables, while ethical wills bequeath values. Where do people derive their values? Discuss this question with the students. The author notes that the wisdom of ethical wills may come from three sources:

- What has been passed down to a person from those who came before;
- One’s own life experiences;
- What one thinks may come in the future; what he has left to do.

### OPTIONAL TEXT STUDY:

To review a variety of Jewish ethical wills, students may explore the sources listed below. Ask students to compare and contrast the various examples: How do these wills differ from the standard will? How do the identities and relationships of the authors influence their message to the future generation? Compare the focus and tone in the various examples.

- I Kings, 2:1-9, in which King David, aware of his imminent death, gives instructions and words of wisdom to his son.
- *Brachot*, 28b, in which the Talmud describes the instruction of R. Yochanan ben Zakai to his students.
- The *Iggeres HaRamban*, written to his elder son, Nachman. A printable copy of this document is available at: <http://www.pirchei.com/specials/ramban/printabl.htm>
- The testament of Eliezer of Mayence, Germany, c. 1357, as recorded in Jacob Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook*, 315-1791, (New York: JPS, 1938), and also at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/jewish-wills.html>

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## PART II: Ethical Wills from the Holocaust

A particularly unique and moving form of “ethical will” was written by Jews caught up in the Holocaust. The imminent mortality of these individuals due to the horrific and relentless persecutions to which they and their co-religionists were subjected inspired any number of impassioned pleas and heart-wrenching letters during their last days to be sent or smuggled out to their family members.

After introducing the concept of ethical wills during the Holocaust, divide the class into three groups. Distribute copies of the handouts, each group receiving multiple copies of a single example from the three ethical wills provided on the following pages. The handouts include questions for discussion. Each group should have a moderator to guide the discussion, a secretary to record important points, and a reporter who will report to the rest of the class during the general discussion.

Each handout contains some basic information about the author of the ethical will, as well as a reproduction of the original will and its translation.

While reading the documents, each group should consider the following general questions:

1. What does the author hope for the future?
2. What does the tone of the will reveal about the author’s emotions?
3. How does the author support the statements in the ethical will with Jewish values and sources? What does this tell us about the author’s Jewish identity?
4. These ethical wills are on display at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, at the very end of the special exhibition, *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*. How are these ethical wills examples of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust?
5. Why would the Museum decide to place these wills at the very end of their exhibition?

After reading through the documents, students are guided by five additional questions specific to the ethical will at hand. These additional questions are designed to help students consider the general questions above with more attention to detail.

During the discussion, all of the members of the group should participate and raise various, and perhaps even conflicting, perspectives. The groups do not need to come to any final agreement on the questions, and can even keep a list of additional questions for consideration by the entire class during the general discussion at the end of the lesson.

During the reporting, students should address the five general questions on the first page of their handout.

# GROUP 1: Dr. Elchanan Elkes

Dr. Elchanan Elkes was chairman of the Jewish Council in the Kovno Ghetto in Lithuania. A man of unique moral stature and courage, he was a Zionist, and encouraged resistance activities in defiance of Nazi orders. Prior to the liquidation of the ghetto, he was sent to Kaufering concentration camp, where he died of typhus. Though Dr. Elkes perished, his ethical will, written in Hebrew on October 19, 1943 reproduced here and translated on the back of this page, was smuggled out of the ghetto and ultimately reached his son, Joel, in England.



## Student Instructions:

In your group, ask for a volunteer to read aloud. Begin by reading the information about Dr. Elchanan Elkes, above. Then, read the translation of Dr. Elkes' ethical will on the opposite side of this page. As you read, consider the following questions, and return to discuss them with the group after the reading is complete:

1. What does Dr. Elkes hope for the future?
2. What does the tone of the will reveal about Dr. Elkes' emotions?
3. How does Dr. Elkes support the statements in this ethical will with Jewish values and sources? What does this tell us about his Jewish identity?
4. This ethical will is on display at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, at the very end of a special exhibition about Jewish resistance. How is this ethical will an example of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust?
5. Why would the Museum decide to place this will at the very end of their exhibition?

There are five more specific points for discussion on the reverse side of this sheet, to help you look at specific details that are relevant to answering the five general questions above.

During your discussion, encourage all of the members of the group to participate and raise various, and perhaps even conflicting, perspectives. Your group does not need to come to any final agreement on the questions, and can even keep a list of additional questions for consideration by the entire class during the general discussion at the end of the lesson.

*Kovno Ghetto, October 19, 1943*

*My beloved son and daughter!*

*I am writing these lines to you, my beloved children, after we have been here, in the Valley of Tears [Psalms, 84:7], the Kovno Ghetto, for more than two years. We have learned that in the very near future our fate will be decided: the Ghetto in which we find ourselves will be crushed and torn asunder. We fear that only those capable of slave labor will live; the rest are probably sentenced to death.*

*With my own ears I have heard the awful symphony of weeping, wailing and screaming of tens of thousands of men, women and children, which have rent the heavens. No one throughout the ages has heard such a sound. Along with many of these martyrs I have quarreled with my Creator, and with them I cried out from a broken heart, 'Who is as silent as you, O Lord!'*

*In the most excruciating moments of our life you, my beloved, have always been food for our thoughts and nourishment for our hearts. During the long black nights, your beloved mother would sit beside me and we would both dream of your life and future. Our most fervent desire is to see you again, to embrace you and tell you over and over how closely we are tied to you and how our hearts throb whenever we remember you.*

*I doubt very much, my most beloved children, that I shall ever see you again, or clasp you again to my heart, and before I depart this world and from you, my most precious, I'd like to tell you for the nth time how much we cherish you and how much our souls yearn for you.*

*My beloved Yoel! Be a loyal son to your people. Try with all your might to settle in the Land of Israel. Tie your destiny and future up with the land of our future. As to you, my beloved daughter Sarah, I trust, my precious, your clear common sense and sound judgment. Take the road of life together, hand in hand. Let no distance part separate you, let no event of life tear you asunder.*

*Remember, both of you, what Amalek has done to us. Remember that and don't forget it for the rest of your lives and pass this memory as a sacred testimony to future generations.*

*For a fleeting moment I close my eyes and behold you two standing before me. I embrace and kiss you and say to you that I am your loving father to my very last breath.*

### **Additional Points to Consider:**

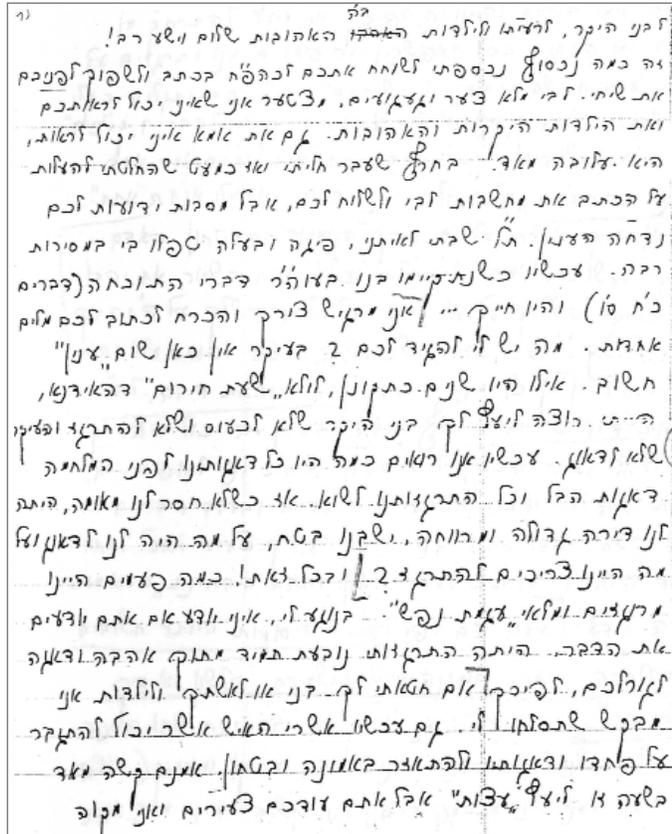
1. Dr. Elkes uses the term "Valley of Tears" (Psalms 84:7) to describe Kovno. How is this term particularly appropriate for the situation in Kovno, based on what Dr. Elkes describes? Consider the difference between crying out from a valley versus crying out from a mountain, for example.
2. Dr. Elkes exclaims that the situation leaves him with a theological dilemma. What is this dilemma, and what is the history of this kind of question in Jewish tradition? When might such a question come up?
3. Describe Dr. Elkes' emotions about his children: How does thinking about them give him comfort? How might it upset him?
4. Why do you think the Land of Israel is so important to Dr. Elkes?
5. What does Dr. Elkes ask future generations to remember? Why?

# GROUP 2: Ben-Zion Rapoport

Ben-Zion Rapoport wrote this letter to his son, daughter-in-law and granddaughters, in Nowy Sacz, Poland. The letter, reproduced here with excerpts translated on the back of this page, was written in Hebrew on June 9, 1942.

### Student Instructions:

In your group, ask for a volunteer to read aloud. Begin by reading the information about Ben-Zion Rapoport, above. Then, read the translation of Rapoport's ethical will on the opposite side of this page. As you read, consider the following questions:



1. What does Ben-Zion Rapoport hope for the future?
2. What does the tone of the will reveal about Ben-Zion Rapoport's emotions?
3. How does Ben-Zion Rapoport support the statements in this ethical will with Jewish values and sources? What does this tell us about his Jewish identity?
4. This ethical will is on display at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, at the very end of a special exhibition about Jewish resistance. How is this ethical will an example of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust?
5. Why would the Museum decide to place this will at the very end of their exhibition?

There are five more specific points for discussion on the reverse side of this sheet, to help you look at specific details that are relevant to answering the five general questions above.

During your discussion, encourage all of the members of the group to participate and raise various, and perhaps even conflicting, perspectives. Your group does not need to come to any final agreement on the questions, and can even keep a list of additional questions for consideration by the entire class during the general discussion at the end of the lesson.

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*I have been longing to speak with you, at least in writing, and to pour out my heart to you.*

*We see now that all our worries of before the war were foolish, and all our upsets for nothing. When we lacked nothing, had a large, spacious apartment, and were secure; what did we have to worry about and why did we get upset?*

*The only way to choose is the one of faith and confidence. Man must do all he can, and for the rest, he must trust in God, who can do everything. "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you." [Psalms 55:23] Another important thing that I want to emphasize is to guard your tongue from speaking falsehood, from slander, gossip, and judging people harshly.*

*These are, in my opinion, the most important principles of a pure life: truth, faith and trust in God, and guarding your speech, and the rest is interpretation.*

**Additional Points to Consider:**

1. Ben-Zion Rapoport states his longing to communicate with his family. Why do you think this ability to express himself is so important to him?
2. What new outlook does Ben-Zion Rapoport express about the conditions of his life before the war? Discuss how his experiences illuminate the saying in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of Our Fathers) 4:1, "Who is wealthy? He who is content with his share."
3. Two themes in Jewish thought are personal striving ("*Hishtadlut*") on the one hand, and faith and trust in God ("*Bitachon*") on the other. How does Ben-Zion Rapoport reflect these two themes in his ethical will? When might a person know that he has done all he can in a particular situation, and it is now time to rely on God for what will follow? How does the quote from Psalms relate to this question?
4. Why do you think precaution against speaking falsely, slander, gossip, and judging others is the other important message Ben-Zion Rapoport gives to his family?
5. The last line of this ethical will is reminiscent of a famous saying of Rabbi Hillel, recorded in the Babylonian Talmud in *Shabbat*, 31a. He states that the tenet "Do not do unto others what is hateful unto you" is the most important concept in the Torah, the rest is interpretation. Explain why Ben-Zion Rapoport would feel that the last line of his ethical will is the essence of Judaism.

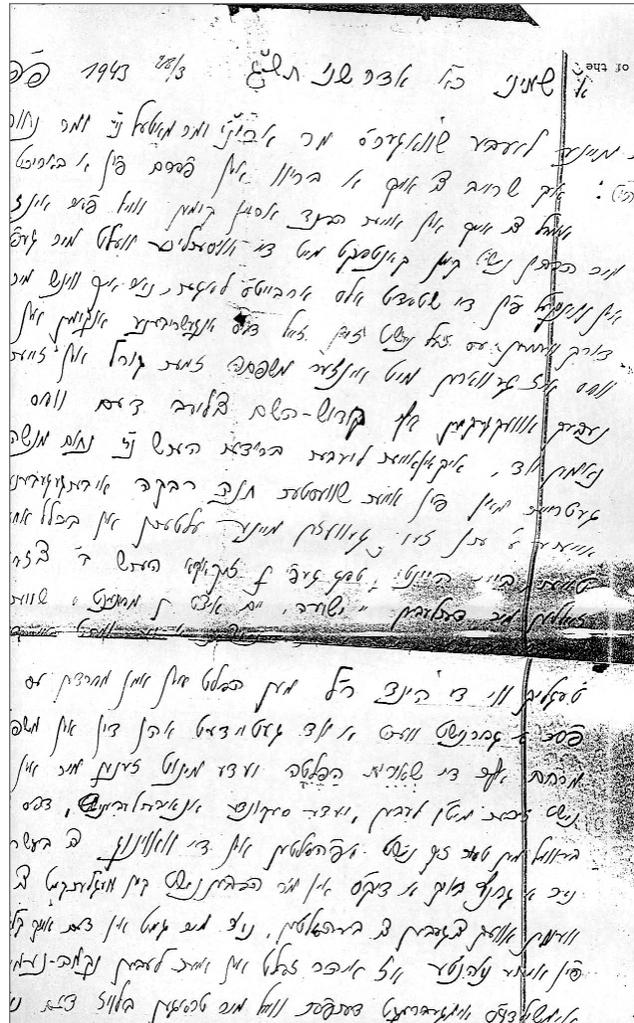
# GROUP 3: Rabbi Leib Geliebter

Rabbi Leib Geliebter wrote this letter in Yiddish to his brothers-in-law on March 23, 1943, in a labor camp in Czestochowa, Poland. The letter, reproduced below with excerpts translated on the back of this page, was buried, and then retrieved after the Holocaust by Rabbi Geliebter. Rabbi Geliebter settled in New York after the war, and died in 1973.

### Student Instructions:

In your group, ask for a volunteer to read aloud. Begin by reading the information about Rabbi Leib Geliebter, above. Then, read the translation of Rabbi Geliebter's ethical will on the opposite side of this page. As you read, consider the following questions:

1. What does Rabbi Geliebter's hope for the future?
2. What does the tone of the will reveal about Rabbi Geliebter's emotions in writing it?
3. How does Rabbi Geliebter support the statements in this ethical will with Jewish values and sources? What does this tell us about his Jewish identity?
4. This ethical will is on display at the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, at the very end of a special exhibition about Jewish resistance. How is this ethical will an example of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust?
5. Why would the Museum decide to place this will at the very end of their exhibition?



There are five more specific points for discussion on the reverse side of this sheet, to help you look at specific details that are relevant to answering the five general questions above.

During your discussion, encourage all of the members of the group to participate and raise various, and perhaps even conflicting, perspectives. Your group does not need to come to any final agreement on the questions, and can even keep a list of additional questions for consideration by the entire class during the general discussion at the end of the lesson.

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*I am writing you a letter in the form of a report, not knowing if it will ever reach you, because we have no contact with the outside world... My only wish is to let you know what happened to our family, their fate and, how they perished... sanctifying God's name, just because they carried the name, "Jew."*

*I am turning to you in the name of all who perished. In your lifetime, take revenge for our young Jewish blood, young souls that call out to you. Remember and say Kaddish [mourner's prayer]. See to it that Mishnayot [chapters of oral law] should be learned, and erect monuments for your parents, sister, brother and children... The souls [of the deceased] are crying out: "God, take revenge for the spilled blood of your servant." [Psalms, 79:10] It is even a greater heartache since no sign of a grave remains. God have mercy. The dear souls should not be forgotten. The Yahrzeit [memorial day] should be [remembered] every year.*

*Remember us all your lives.*

**Additional Points to Consider:**

1. If Rabbi Geliebter has no assurance that anyone will ever read what he has written, why does he write nevertheless?
2. How does the author understand the concept of sanctifying God's name ("*Kiddush HaShem*")?
3. What does Rabbi Geliebter mean when he calls upon the readers of his ethical will to "take revenge"? Discuss whether this appeal necessarily contradicts the biblical statement in Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge..."
4. Why does it trouble him that not only will these people be murdered, but that no markers or gravestones will remain to show where they are buried?
5. Once the children and siblings of those who were murdered during the Holocaust have passed away, how should those who were killed be commemorated?

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## PART III: Group Reporting

### **Reporting Instructions:**

The reporter from each group should direct the members of the class' attention to the particular ethical will being discussed, read the will, and summarize the highlights of the group's discussion including any unresolved issues that may have occurred to the group.

The groups should be reminded of the amount of time they have for their presentation (a suggested 5 minutes). After each presentation, in the event that the time is not up, the other members of the group should be asked if they have anything to add to what has been said.

Members of the other groups should take notes during each presentation, so that they will be able to compare and contrast the three examples during the general class discussion.

## Part IV: Concluding Discussion

### **General class discussion should be guided by the following questions:**

- What are the similarities and differences among these three ethical wills?
- How do you think the relatives of the authors of these ethical wills would have reacted to these documents? Would they encourage surviving relatives to take action? Would their actions be limited to the specific requests of the authors, or would they undertake additional activities?
- The ethical wills of these three men could be viewed as a form of resistance to the Nazi persecutors. How do these documents reflect a defiant attitude even in the face of terrible oppression?

It is important to emphasize that even though these individuals responded differently to the dire circumstances in which they found themselves, rather than simply giving up and resigning themselves to their respective fates, they were future oriented, and considered how their descendents were to carry on even if they themselves would be prevented from doing so. Their simultaneous optimism and pessimism is a powerful example of the indomitable Jewish spirit.

At the end of the lesson, the students may be assigned follow-up activities according to the suggestions on the next page. The handout also includes resources for further exploration of this topic.

# FOLLOW-UP: Activities and Resources

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## ACTIVITIES:

1. Each of the authors came from or wrote from a different place affected by the Holocaust. Study the history or the conditions that were associated with each of these locations, as well as the history and size of the Jewish community in these places prior to the Holocaust. Research whether any Jews are left in these locations today. Suggestions for places to begin your research are listed below:
  - a. Nowy Sacz, Poland: [http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/nowy\\_sacz/](http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/nowy_sacz/)
  - b. Kovno, Lithuania: <http://www.ushmm.org/kovno/>
  - c. Czestochowa, Poland: <http://www.edwardvictor.com/Czestochowa.htm>
2. Ask your parents, grandparents, other relatives, and/or acquaintances if anyone has ever left them an ethical will. If they have such a document, would they allow you to read it and discuss it with them? Compare them to these three documents and consider similarities as well as differences.
3. Pick a personality from Jewish history with whom you are familiar, and compose an imaginary ethical will that he or she might have left to his or her descendants.
4. In the 2004 documentary *Hiding and Seeking: Faith and Tolerance after the Holocaust*, director Menachem Daum states that he hopes his children will see his film as a “*Tsava’ah*” (Hebrew for “will”) to them. Watch the film and discuss your response to this statement. For more information about the film, visit: <http://www.hidingandseeking.com/>
5. Dr. Emil Ludwig Fackenheim (1916 - 2003) was a noted Jewish philosopher, rabbi, and Holocaust survivor. In his book, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem*, he created a concept of the “614th mitzvah.” Traditional Jewish law contains 613 mitzvot (commandments) as compiled by Maimonides. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Fackenheim asserted that we must add another commandment, stating: “Thou shalt not hand Hitler posthumous victories. To despair of the God of Israel is to continue Hitler’s work for him.” How is the writing of ethical wills in keeping with Fackenheim’s challenge?

## RESOURCES:

- Abrahams, Israel (ed.). *Hebrew Ethical Wills*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006.
- Baines, Barry. *Ethical Wills: Putting your Values on Paper*. Cambridge: Perseus Publishing, 2002. (See also: <http://www.ethicalwill.com/> )
- Kolitz, Zvi. *Yosl Rakover Talks to God*. New York: Vintage International 2000.
- Reimer, Jack and Nathaniel Stampfer (ed.) *Ethical Wills: A Modern Jewish Treasury*. New York: Schocken, 1983.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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For a listing of resources for teaching about other topics related to the Holocaust, please refer to the *Meeting Hate with Humanity* Teacher's Guide, available to download at [www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org).

## PRINT CURRICULA

### Anti-Defamation League, Yad Vashem, and the USC Shoah Foundation Institute

- *Echoes and Reflections*, a multimedia curriculum on the Holocaust

### The Ghetto Fighters' House

- *Traces of Humanity: Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust*, an educational kit
- *Korczak of the Children*, videocassette and activities guide

### United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

- *Resistance During the Holocaust*, an educational pamphlet

### Yad Vashem

- *Resistance: Spiritual Resistance, Revolt, Partisans, and the Uprising in the Death Camps*, an educational kit

## WEBSITES

- Ghetto Fighters' Museum — [www.gfh.org.il](http://www.gfh.org.il)
- Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw — [www.jewishinstitute.org.pl](http://www.jewishinstitute.org.pl)
- Jewish Partisans Educational Foundation — [www.jewishpartisans.org](http://www.jewishpartisans.org)
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum — [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)
- Yad Vashem — [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)

## FILMS

*Daring to Resist: Three Women Face the Holocaust* (1999, 57 minutes)

The story of three teenagers who resisted the Nazis: Faye Schulman, Barbara Rodbell, and Schulamit Lack

*Flames in the Ashes* (1986, 90 minutes, with subtitles)

Documentary footage showing a variety of forms of resistance

*The Partisans of Vilna* (1987, 130 minutes, with subtitles)

Interviews with survivors who tell the story of resistance in the Vilna Ghetto

*Escape from Sobibor* (1987, 149 minutes)

Recreation of the prisoner uprising at the Sobibor extermination camp

*Resistance: Untold Stories of the Jewish Partisans* (2001, 60 minutes)

Stories of the partisans, told through testimony and film

*Uprising* (2001, 210 minutes)

Dramatic reenactment of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Continued)

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## GENERAL RESISTANCE RESOURCES

Aisenstein, Reuben. *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Europe*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974.

Arad, Yitzhak. *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Bauer, Yehuda. *Rethinking the Holocaust*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001.

Blatter, Janet, and Sybil Milton. *Art of the Holocaust*. New York: The Rutledge Press, 1981.

Friedlander, Albert. *Out of the Whirlwind*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1968.

Friedlander, Saul. *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution 1933-1939*.  
New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

Gutman, Israel. *Fighters Among the Ruins*. Washington, DC: B'nai Brith Books, 1988.

Kaplan, Marion. *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*.  
New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Kowalski, Isaac. *The Anthology of Armed Jewish Resistance*. Jewish Combatants Publishing House, 1986.

Krakowski, Shmuel. *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942-1944*.  
New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984.

Kurzman, Dan. *The Bravest Battle: The Twenty-Eight Days of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*.  
New York: Putnam, 1976.

Laska, Vera. *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voice of Eyewitnesses*.  
Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983.

Langbein, Hermann. *Against All Hope: Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps, 1938-1945*.  
New York: Paragon House, 1994.

Mais, Yitzchak, and Bonnie Gurewitsch, eds. *Daring To Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust*.  
New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, 2007.

Marrus, Michael R. *The Holocaust in History*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987.

Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust and the Jewish Historical Institute.  
*Scream the Truth at the World: Emanuel Ringelblum and the Hidden Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto*.  
Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny INB, 2001.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Continued)

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Rings, Werner. *Life With the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe*. New York: Doubleday, 1982.

Stadtler, Bea. *The Holocaust: A History of Courage and Resistance*. West Orange: Behrman House, 1975.

Suhl, Yuri, ed. *They Fought Back: The Story of the Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe*. New York: Schocken Books, 1967.

Volavkova, Hana (ed). *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camps, 1942-44*. (Expanded second edition by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.) New York: Schocken Books, 1993.

Weber, Thomas. *Lodz Ghetto Photo Album: Photographs by Henrik Ross*. London: Chris Boot Ltd., 2004.

Zuccotti, Susan. *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

Zuckerman, Yitzak. *A Surplus of Memory; Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

## NOVELS, BIOGRAPHIES, AND MEMOIRS

Dawidsohn-Draenger, Gusta. *Justyna's Diary: Jewish Resistance to Nazis in Wartime Poland*. San Bernardino: The Borgo Press, 1995.

Drucker, Olga Levy. *Kindertransport*. New York: Henry Holt, 1992.

Duffy, Peter. *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Saved 1,200 Jews, and Built a Village in the Forest*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.

Eliach, Yaffa. *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*. New York: Vitage Books, 1988.

Goldman Rubin, Susan. *Fireflies in the Dark: The Story of Friedl-Dicker Brandeis and the Children of Terezin*. New York: Holiday House, 2006.

Goldman Rubin, Susan. *The Cat with the Yellow Star: Coming of Age in Terezin*. New York: Holiday House, 2000.

Gotfryd, Bernard. *Anton the Dove Fancier*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1990.

Grossman, Mendel. *My Secret Camera: Life in the Lodz Ghetto*. San Diego: Gulliver Books, 2000.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Continued)

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Gurewitsch, Brana. *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women who Survived the Holocaust*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998.

Lifton, Betty Jean. *The King of Children: The Life and Death of Janusz Korczak*. New York: Farrar, St. Martin's Griffin, 1988.

Meed, Vladka. *On Both Sides of the Wall: Memoirs from the Warsaw Ghetto*. New York: Holocaust Library, 1979.

Neimark, Anne E. *One Man's Valor: Leo Baeck and the Holocaust*. New York: Dutton, 1986.

Rashe, Richard. *Escape from Sobibor*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1982.

Ringelblum, Emmanuel. *Notes from Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*. New York: Schocken, 1974.

Rose, Leesha. *The Tulips are Red*. South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1978.

Rosenberg, Blanca. *To Tell at Last: Survival Under False Identity, 1941-45*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Tec, Nechama. *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Yoran, Shalom. *The Defiant*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Zapruder, Alexandra (ed.). *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

# PHOTO CREDITS

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**Cover and p. 8:** Rachel Posner, wife of Rabbi Dr. Akiva Posner, took this photograph from their window in Kiel, Germany, on Hanukkah, 1932. She wrote on the back of the photograph, “The flag says, Death to Judah. The light answers, Judah will live forever.” Photo: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Shulamith Posner-Mansbach.

**Page 5:** Formal education was banned in the Kovno Ghetto on August 25, 1942. Limited classes for young children continued clandestinely, as pictured in this image taken between 1941-42. Photo by David Chaim Ratner: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eliezer Zilber.

**Page 9:** Letter from Gerd Joachim Zellner in Berlin to Max Zellner in New York, December 5, 1938. Gift of Mary Anne Kilcullen.

**Page 10:** Smuggling food into the Warsaw Ghetto. The boys usually sold most of the smuggled food; the proceeds helped support their families, who would have starved on the official rations. Photo: Ringelblum Archive, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, Poland.

**Page 11:** Orthodox children’s home in Warsaw, April 1940 (top, left). Photo by Leo Forbert: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Zydowski Instytut Historyczny Naukowo-Badawczy.

Dr. Janusz Korczak (top, right). Photo: The Ghetto Fighters’ House, Israel.

**Page 12:** Resistance fighters listening to a clandestine radio in the Kovno Ghetto. Photo (left): Zvi Kadushin © Beth Hatefutsoth, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv.

Radio of Kalman Weksler, listened to clandestinely in the Lodz Ghetto (right). Courtesy of the Ghetto Fighters’ House, Israel.

**Page 13:** Pencil drawing by Feliks Puterman (top). Gift of David and Janet Rogowsky.

Nazi train sabotaged by partisans (bottom). Photo by Faye Schulman: Collection of Faye Lazebnik Schulman.

**Page 14:** Bielski Partisan Family Camp in the Naliboki Forest, 1943 (top, left). Photo: Ghetto Fighters’ House, Israel.

Sixteen year-old Stanislaw Szmajzner, Jewish partisan. Szmajzner helped organize the uprising and escape from the Sobibor death camp. After his escape, he fought with the partisans. Photo (bottom, left): Gift of Stanislaw Szmajzner, Yaffa Eliach Collection, donated by the Center for Holocaust Studies.

Telegram about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising from the Polish Government-in-Exile in London to Bund leader Emanuel Nowogrudzki in New York, in English, May 1943 (right). YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

**Page 15:** Star of David necklace of Margit Rubeinstein, Auschwitz, 1944-1945. Gift of Sugar siblings in memory of Rosenfeld and Schwartz families.

# PHOTO CREDITS (Continued)

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**Page 16:** Flag created by Martin Friedländer (facsimile), Germany. The Nuremberg Laws of September 1935 stated that Jews were not allowed to show the German national colors. They were, however, allowed to show the “Jewish national colors.” Mr. Friedländer made up a Jewish flag based on the leaflets of the Keren Kaymet and hung it out the window. The newspaper “*Angriff*” published a photo of the flag and commented on it. Jewish Museum Berlin.

**Page 20:** Shofar of Rabbi Ephraim Oshry used in the Kovno Ghetto. Collection of the Oshry family.

**Page 21:** Rabbi Ephraim Oshry. Photo: Zvi Kadushin. © Beth Hatefutsot Photo Archive, Tel Aviv.

**Page 23:** Jewish children in hiding at convent. Photo: Collection of Marion and Hadassa Kozak.

**Page 29:** Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel. Photo: Yad Vashem Photo Archive.

**Page 31:** Gisi Fleischmann. Photo: Yad Vashem Photo Archive.

**Page 33:** Auschwitz Postcard, 1952.

**Page 40:** Ethical will of Elchanan Elkes, October 19, 1943. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, gift of Joel Elkes.

**Page 42:** Ethical will of Ben-Zion Rapoport, June 9, 1942. Yad Vashem Archives.

**Page 44:** Ethical will of Rabbi Leib Geliebter, March 23, 1943. Collection of Dr. Joseph Geliebter.

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