

**Resistance In the Holocaust:
Against All Odds
Source Materials for Session One**

Genocide Movie resources and locations

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3p7bqw>

<https://archive.org/details/theworldatwar20genocide19441945/theworldatwar20genocide19441945reel2.mov>

In two parts, may be downloaded

DEHUMANIZATION AND STARVATION

Viktor Frankl

Suddenly there was a stir among my fellow inmates

who had been standing about with pale, frightened faces, helplessly debating. Again, we heard the hoarsely shouted commands. We were driven with blows into the immediate anteroom of the bath. There we assembled around an SS man who waited until we had all arrived. Then he said, "I will give you two minutes, and I shall time you by my watch. In these two minutes you will get fully undressed and drop

everything on the floor where you are standing. You will take nothing with you except your shoes, your belt or suspenders, and possibly a truss. I am starting to count - now!"

With unthinkable haste, people tore off their clothes. As the time grew shorter, they became increasingly nervous and pulled clumsily at their underwear, belts and shoelaces.

Then we heard the first sound of whipping; leather straps beating down on naked bodies.

Next, we were herded into another room to be shaved; not only our heads were shorn, but not a hair was left on our entire bodies. Then on to the showers, where we lined up again. We hardly recognized each other; but with great relief some people noted that real water dripped from the sprays.

While we were waiting for the shower, our nakedness was brought home to us: we really had nothing now except our bare bodies -- even minus hair; all we possessed, literally, was our naked existence.

During the latter part of our imprisonment, the daily ration consisted of very watery soup given out once daily, and the usual small bread ration. In addition to that, there was the so-called "extra allowance", consisting of three-fourths of an ounce of margarine, or of a slice of poor-quality sausage, or of a little piece of cheese, or a bit of synthetic honey, or a spoonful of watery jam, varying daily. In calories, this diet was absolutely inadequate, especially taking into consideration our heavy manual work and our constant exposure to the cold.

The sick who were "under special care - that is, those who were allowed to lie in the huts instead of leaving the camp for work -- were even worse off.

When the last layers of subcutaneous fat had vanished, and we looked like skeletons disguised with skin and rags, we could watch our bodies beginning to devour themselves. The organism digested its own protein, and the muscles disappeared. Then the body had no powers of resistance left. One after another the members of the little community in our hut died. Each of us could calculate with fair accuracy whose turn would be next, and when his own would come.

Factors which made Resistance Difficult

Factors which made Resistance Difficult

- 1. Dehumanization**
 - 2. food**
 - 3. shelter**
 - 4. lack of military training**
 - 5. disease**
 - 6. lack of communication**
 - 7. illusions**
 - 8. Jewish demography, most married with kids at an early age**
 - 9. Fear**
 - 10. collective responsibility, threat of reprisals**
 - 11. Jews knew history, they know that masters usually do not kill slaves, they thought that if they worked that they would stay alive**
 - 12. hostility of the local population**
 - 13. lack of weapons**
 - 14. Jews not suited to be in the woods and to be partisans**
 - 15. religion – wait for the messiah – optimistic fatalism – ani maamim**
 - 16. inability to separate families**
 - 17. lack of a patron**
 - 18. others ?**
-

Poetry

Waldyslaw Szlengel “It Is Time”

And when the killers will have pushed you and forced you
And dragged, stuffed you into the steam chamber
And sealed the hatch behind you,
The hot steam will begin to suffocate you, to suffocate you,
And you will scream, you will try to run—
And after the torture of dying will have stopped,
Then they will drag you out and throw you in a horrible pit;
They will put your stars out—the gold teeth in your jaw—
And you will turn into ashes.

A section of “Song of the Murdered Jewish People,” titled “To the Heavens,” by Yitzchak Katzenelson

Have we changed so much that you don't recognize us as of old?
But why, we are the same—the same Jews that we were, not different,
Not I. . . Not I will to the prophets be compared, lo and behold!
But they, the millions of my murdered ones, those murdered out of hand.
It's they. . . they suffered more and greater pains each one.
The little, simple ordinary Jew from Poland of today...
Compared to him, what are the great men of a bygone past?
A wailing Jeremiah, Job afflicted, Kings despairing, all in one—it's they!
You have no God in you! Open the doors, you heavens, open wide,
And let the children of my murdered people enter in a stream.
Open the doors for the great procession of the crucified,
The children of my people, all of them, each of them a God—make
room!

Terezin Children's Poetry

BIRDSONG

He doesn't know the world at all
Who stays in his nest and doesn't go out.
He doesn't know what birds know best
Nor what I want to sing about,
That the world is full of loveliness.

When dewdrops sparkle in the grass
And earth's aflood with morning light,
A blackbird sings upon a bush
To greet the dawning after night.
Then I know how fine it is to live.

Hey, try to open up your heart
To beauty; go to the woods someday
And weave a wreath of memory there.
Then if the tears obscure your way
You'll know how wonderful it is
To be alive.

--Anonymous 1941

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
against a white stone.... Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure
because it wished
to kiss the world good-bye. For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Pinned up inside this ghetto.
But I have found what I love here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut branches in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly. That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here, in the ghetto.
Pavel Friedman, June 4, 1942 Born in Prague on Jan. 7, 1921.
Deported to the Terezin Concentration Camp on April 26, 1942.
Died in Auschwitz on Sept. 29, 1944.

The Three Types of Resistance

- a. Spiritual Resistance
- b. Moral (or Cultural) Resistance
- c. Active (Or Physical) Resistance.

Further Reading

The Importance of Resistance in Holocaust Curricula for Teens

Rabbi Fred Guttman

It took a long time for Jews to come to grips with what had happened during the Nazi Holocaust. I had a friend many years ago whose father was a doctor and because of that, he was shielded by the Polish partisans in the forest. My friend was six years old at the time.

Shortly after the establishment of Israel, my friend came to the country and entered into the school system. He told me that no one really wanted to speak about what had occurred during the Holocaust.

Actually, he felt somewhat ashamed. His classmates referred to what has happened as an instance of Jews being led like “sheep to the slaughter.” In early Israel, no accusation could have been more biting and hurtful to a young child.

All of this changed in 1961 with the Eichmann trial and the live publicity which it received. As the Nazi the minister of transportation, Eichmann was responsible for 73% of the deaths of 6 million Jews.

The publication of Elie Wiesel’s “Night” in English in 1960 had the effect of making people in Western countries want to learn and know more.

Yet even at that time, there were historians, most prominent among them Raul Hilberg, who maintained that the phenomenon of Jewish resistance was insignificant.

In the late 1970s and early 80s, the phenomenon of Jewish resistance was re-examined by historians. Led by the historians at Hebrew University, especially Yehuda Bauer, people began to understand that resistance was indeed significant and was a suitable subject for discussion for historical investigation.

Bauer felt that resistance should not merely be defined as physical or active resistance, but should include other categories as well, particularly categories which enabled Jews to maintain their dignity and self-respect. In

doing this, Bauer rejected the claim that Jews were led to their deaths like "sheep to the slaughter "

Clearly, resistance needed to be defined more broadly. In order to understand resistance, it would need to be defined and categorized.

So briefly, how do I teach this subject to teenagers?

First, I have them make a list of all of the factors which made resistance difficult, if not impossible. From there, students have an understanding that acts of resistance in this situation were incredibly amazing. Usually, students come up with fifteen to twenty factors.

From there, I identify and give examples of three types of resistance. These are:

A. Spiritual resistance which I define as doing anything possible to maintain one's humanity. This could be art, music, poetry, prayer, drama and education.

B. Moral resistance is the act of trying to save someone else's life. This could be done by sharing or smuggling food or medicine, trying to help someone continue living and hiding others.

This would not be limited to Jews and it is under this rubric that I teach extensively the subject of the Righteous Among the Nations. I mention that there are more than 2,000 trees planted at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to honor those, mostly Christians, who did their best to save Jews, often at great peril to their own lives. A fairly extensive sub-unit of any such Holocaust curriculum should be an examination of four to five stories of the Righteous Among the Nations.

C. Active resistance which can be divided into two categories: individual acts and collective organized acts.

For many years, Jewish historians sought to maintain the unique nature of the Holocaust. Comparing it to other genocides was frowned upon. In the past two decades, this has changed.

It is true that the magnitude of the Nazi slaughter of the Jews was unique, but if the history of the Nazi Holocaust is to have any significance in

preventing future genocide and atrocities, it must be studied together with other instances of mass murder, most notably the Rwandan and Cambodian genocides.

The bottom line is that by teaching the topic of resistance to our teens, we can hopefully help and inspire our teens not to be bystanders, but to be “upstanders” in the face of injustice, hatred and bigotry. In that light, I hope that I will be able to teach an in-service training on this topic in the near future.

The past seven years have seen a significant increase in hate crimes in our country and abroad. Scapegoating and persecuting others for political purposes is something that unfortunately is to be found on the left and the right of the political spectrum.

The subject of resistance during the Holocaust is incredibly important for the students we are teaching. In my opinion, it is just as important now as it was in 1980 when I started teaching high school students the history of the Holocaust. I have always believed that “Never Again!” begins in the classroom!

The students that we teach today will obviously grow up to be the leaders of tomorrow. What teachers are doing in teaching Holocaust and Genocide studies is much more significant than merely teaching a unit in the class. It is no less an attempt to inspire and create a generation of young activists who will fight bias, bigotry, racism, homophobia and anti-Semitism with all of their beings.

If we can succeed in this monumental task, we can help our country and the world move towards a future of justice, compassion and peace.

Rabbi Fred Guttman (M.H.L., M.Ed., D.Div) has taught and developed curriculum in the teaching the Holocaust for more than 40 years. He is the Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Emanuel of Greensboro, the former principal of an American school in Israel and currently is the Mid Atlantic Regional Director of the International March of the Living. He has taken American teens and adults to Poland on 19 trips and hopes one day to lead a trip of teachers from North Carolina to Poland.