

“...Thus the first and most fundamental of all purposes of events and especially an event of such vastly fearsome scope, is to awaken men from the lethargy of habit and materialism and to cause them to think of God. And the *manner* in which this catastrophe took place offers numerous clues and hints of the causes and the purposes. This colossal tragedy of history deserves endless study, and as long as the world endures, man can continue to gain lessons of the greatest magnitude. The insane and entirely causeless hatred of Israel was nothing less than a Divine madness. It was God’s open demonstration against assimilation whether physical or mental, and the demonstration was so clear that only the most blind could ignore it. The decrees of Nazi Germany were aimed at separating Jews from gentiles in every possible manner. There would be no social contact, no business contact, no contact in schools, housing, travel resorts, shopping. There would be no personal identity (e.g. the insistence on Jewish names), the badge on Jewish garments (an unwelcome reminder to appear Jewish) and similar decrees that had the same purpose.”

-extract from “a divine madness” by Rav Avigdor Miller

A discussion on The Holocaust based on A Divine Madness

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Carved into a concentration camp cell wall:

"If there is a God, he will have to beg for my forgiveness."

Rabbi Sacks: "After the Holocaust I feel I must believe in God, because I simply cannot believe in humanity." "I ask myself God where were you? Words came into my mind and this is what they said. I was in the words you shall not murder. I was in the words you shall not oppress a stranger. I was in the words said to Cain when he murdered Hevel 'Your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.'"

Rav Lichtenstein: "Anyone who emerges from Yad Vashem experiences profound depression—and quite understandably so. But when you emerge and see the hills of Judea and Jerusalem rebuilt, you can take some comfort. We should not attempt to do an "accounting" and say that this is God's compensation to us for the Holocaust. The State of Israel is not the solution to that problem but rather an opportunity for us to fulfil our mission. It is not an answer but rather a challenge and a destiny, and our responsibility is to work towards its realization!

Rav Soloveitchik: When the desire for rational inquiry seizes man, he can do nothing but fortify his belief in the Creator, accept God's judgment, and acknowledge the perfection of His action...

...If we want to ask a penetrating question at a time beset by terrifying nightmares, it is incumbent upon us to do so in a halakhic mode: What obligation accrues to the sufferer as a result of his suffering? What commanding heavenly voice breaks through from the midst of suffering?...

...Then and only then shall we emerge from the depths of the Holocaust with enhanced spiritual stature and augmented historical splendour, as it is written, "And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10) — double in quantity and quality...

Elie Wiesel: "to forget a holocaust is to kill twice."

Anne Frank: "Despite everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart."

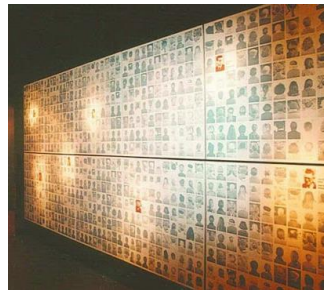
Abel Herzberg: "There were not six million Jews murdered. There was one murder – six million times."

A Related Story: Viktor Frankl – Man's Search for Meaning

Shortly after arriving at Auschwitz, Frankl was stripped of his most precious possession—a manuscript that was his life's work, which he had hidden in his coat pocket. Realizing that the odds of his survival were small, "no more than one in twenty-eight," he had what he describes as "perhaps his deepest experience in the concentration camps."

"I had to undergo and overcome the loss of my mental child. And now it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me; neither a physical nor a mental child of my own. So I found myself confronted with the question whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of meaning."

"Not yet did I notice that an answer to this question with which I was wrestling so passionately was already in store for me and that soon thereafter this answer would be given to me. This was the case when I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn-out rags of an inmate who had already been sent to the gas chamber...Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in a pocket of the newly acquired coat one single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, containing the most important Jewish prayer, *Shema Yisroel*. How should I have interpreted such a "coincidence" other than as a challenge to *live* my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?"



Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What does he mean by the manner in which the holocaust took place offering clues and hints?
- What do you understand from the phrase "a divine madness"?
- What does he mean by "physical and mental" assimilation?
- Why does he refer to the reminder to appear Jewish as "unwelcome"?

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What dangers come from only being presented with an extract?
- Rav Avigdor Miller did not publish this work in his lifetime. He kept in his desk draw (unfinished) and it was found and published after his death. What do you think the story may have been behind all this?
- How should we relate the holocaust to other tragedies in Jewish history such as the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash? Is there anything that makes the holocaust particularly pertinent?
- What is the limit on what we should interpret as God-given (hashgacha)? Is there a limit?
- What do you think of other opinions on "why" when it came to the holocaust? Take a look at the green box to the left.
- What do you think would be a just punishment for the atrocities committed by the Nazis? What is the difference between vengeance and justice? Should forgiveness be a discussion?

Some personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Do you agree with Anne Franke's quote?
- Have you been to Poland? Would you ever want to go? Why?
- What genuine thoughts do you have about life and living it when contemplating an event of such magnitude? How can we comprehend it?
- Do you think we need to find "hope" in the holocaust? Can we?

Some Interactive Resources:

Films: Holocaust survivor Anka Clarke would make a point to watch practically every new holocaust film or documentary made in her lifetime. She praised films like Schindler's list and The Pianist for being accurate and warned people against the accuracy of films like "The Boy in Striped Pyjamas." What do you think these films present accurately or inaccurately? Why is this important or not important?

Roleplay: There were multiple responses to the holocaust from what would become the leaders of different sects of Judaism. Have chanichim attempt to act out what the responses of people like the Chazon Ish, Rav Kook, Rav Soloveitchik or the Lubavitcher Rebbe would be. Who is right? (Contact 07952973425 for an actual fictional script and more on this).

Song/video: "The Holy Hunchback" – Aaron Raazel

YouTube: Any of the thought-provoking Yom Hashoah Rabbi Sacks videos

Art: This exhibit by Ronit Lombrozo is kept in the Ghetto Fighters house in the north of Israel. It is a wall of faces of non-Jewish people with most of their black and white faces facing away. And a few coloured ones facing towards you. What do you think it means? The second picture shown is the "hall of names" at Yad Vashem. What is it and how does it compare to the first picture? What lessons can we take from both of these?

Poem: Wouldn't be right to pick a single one here – use the internet – there are thousands.

Instagram: Ask chanichim to use their phones to watch parts of the holocaust diary eva.stories.