

Yom HaShoah



Yom HaShoah is officially known as Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day. *Shoah* which means catastrophe or utter destruction in Hebrew is also known as the Holocaust, from a Greek word meaning "sacrifice by fire." A difficulty arises because the biblical sacrificial offerings were often atonement offerings. Using the term "Holocaust" has led some people to speak of the Shoah as though those who the Nazis destroyed were atonement offerings to the world. Steadily, Jews have started abandoning the word, and using the unambiguous "Shoah," instead.

On this day we remember the Shoah (atrocities committed by Nazi Germany in World War II, including the genocide of six million Jews) and honor the memory of those who perished. As the name suggests, it is a day dedicated to memorial and somber reflection in recognition of the millions of lives lost under Nazi persecution. But Yom HaShoah also reminds us to reflect on the acts of resistance that took place throughout the war. For this reason, an early proposal favored by many survivors and Zionists called for the holiday to be commemorated



on the 14th of Nisan, the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, perhaps the most well-known of the many revolts against Nazi aggression. The recommendation was dismissed because of the day's proximity to Passover, but the spirit was maintained when the Knesset (legislative branch of the Israeli government) approved a plan calling for Yom HaShoah to be observed within the timeline of the actual uprising just two weeks later. The 27th of Nisan was ultimately chosen, placing the commemoration in between Passover and Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day.

Having just completed Passover, the timing of Yom HaShoah is a constant reminder about the importance of maintaining resistance despite circumstances which make it nearly impossible to do so, and our struggle for continued survival.

In Israel this connection is explicitly made with the official state ceremony at the Warsaw Ghetto memorial at Yad Vashem, the Shoah museum in Jerusalem. In America, congregations have special services to honor this day. MRT has an annual Yom Hashoah program, which is typically held on a Sunday. Many other organizations and institutions of education have special Memorial events, as well.

In the face of unspeakable tragedy, we revisit the hope and determination that has come to define Jewish resilience and fortitude. Despite the somber reminders of this day, it is also a time to focus on life's blessings as well as the positive, uplifting stories that Shoah survivors have provided us, which helps us treasure all the good and brave individuals who were true heroes to the Jewish people. Remembering that there were 11 million victims of Nazi brutality and barbarism, even while Jews were the largest of the victims, we cannot heal the world only by remembering our own victims and survivors. It is important to include the wider community in all commemoration of our mutual goal to end hate in the world.