



“Passing the Torch”. Assuming our responsibility for memory, hope, and the future

01.04.2025 | Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal

On the occasion of Yom Hashoah, the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal (Canada) invites Christian communities to join their Jewish brothers and sisters in remembrance and prayer, by commemorating the Holocaust during their religious services on Sunday April 27, 2025. This document suggests elements which could be used either for in person or for online worship.

I. Introduction

During World War II, the Nazis murdered six million Jews and many others in an unprecedented catastrophe, the Holocaust, a tragedy which the Jewish community refers to as the Shoah, the purposeful “annihilation” of the Jews by the Nazis.

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

Yom HaShoah is [was] commemorated in the Jewish communities Wednesday, April 23 2025. We wish to join them and express our compassion for the immense suffering of victims and survivors of the Holocaust. We will do it with texts, prayers, and ritual elements suggested by the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal (Canada).

We will have a special thought for those who courageously and actively resisted this turmoil, for the survivors who bore witness to it, and for the following generations who are taking up the torch and in turn assuming the responsibility of preserving memory, passing on hope and building the future.

We also pray for all the victims of genocides that still afflict our world. As we listen, reflect and pray, let us ask God to touch our minds and hearts and to sustain our commitment to promoting respect, justice, peace and love in our society.

II. Testimony of a resistant, Liba Augenfeld

During the Holocaust, the creation of ghettos was a key step in the Nazi process of brutally isolating, persecuting, and ultimately destroying Europe's Jews. In the ghettos, as well as in the concentration camps and killing centres, the Jews resisted the Nazis and their collaborators in various ways to preserve their identity, their humanity and to survive.

Liba Augenfeld, born in Wilno (Poland), now Vilnius (Lithuania), was one of these resistance fighters. In June 1941, Germany occupied Lithuania. The German authorities set up two ghettos in Vilnius. Liba and her parents were forced to move to one of them. For two years, Liba worked in a Jewish orphanage, then joined the Unified Partisan Organisation (Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye), whose main aim was to fight the Germans during the liquidation of the ghetto. There Liba met her future husband, David Augenfeld. The two fled with a group of partisans in the summer of 1943. They joined an active unit in the Narocz forest. They lived in a family camp,

where Liba helped to prepare food and make clothes to support resistance fighters carrying out sabotage operations. Their area was liberated by Soviet forces in July 1944.

Liba Augenfeld's testimony was recorded by the Montreal Holocaust Museum in 1995. We offer two extracts (to choose from):

- the first provides information on the organization of the resistance in the Vilnius ghetto:

(<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/survivors-stories/liba-augenfeld/>);

- the second describes the living conditions and activities of the partisans:

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqWMzJX6lZg>).

Liba Augenfeld emigrated to Canada in 1948, with her husband David and daughter Rivka. Like many second-generation survivors, Rivka took up her mother's torch of commitment and witness. She takes part in activities to welcome refugees and immigrants to Montreal. She is also involved in a program to promote Yiddish culture at the Jewish Public Library.

III. Commemorative rite

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

Leader: Let us pray now for the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and for the victims of all the other genocides still plaguing our world. We will pray, inspired by the prayer entitled "In Memory", written by Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor Alexander Kimel (c. 1927-2018). You are invited to join us by reading aloud the last sentence of each prayer.

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

(A candle is lit by different persons **before** each prayer)

1. For the Children

Leader: Almighty God, full of Mercy remember the generation of Jewish children that were reared for slaughter. Remember the multitudes of children, who in their short lives never experienced joy, knowing only hunger, deprivation and fear. Almighty God, open our hearts to the plight of the deprived and hungry children of today. And let us say:

All: By helping the children of today, we shall keep the memory of the perished alive. Amen.

2. For the Mothers and Fathers

Leader: Almighty God, full of Love, remember all the Jewish mothers and fathers that had to carry their babies to their execution, or led their children to the gas chambers. Almighty God, let their anguish, pain and torture never be forgotten. And let us say:

All: By keeping them in our memory, these mothers and fathers will live forever and ever. Amen.

3. For the Elders

Leader: Almighty God, full of Compassion, remember the plight of the Elders, the Sages and Rabbis, who instead of teaching people how to live in peace, had to teach them how to remain dignified in death. Ruler of the Universe, fill our hearts with compassion toward the Elders, past and present. And let us say:

All: By helping our Elders, we shall honor the memory of those who were murdered. Amen.

4. For the Unknown Heroes

Leader: Almighty God full of Wisdom, remember all the forgotten and unrecognized Jewish heroes, who knowingly and willingly sacrificed their lives, for the sake of others. Ruler of the Universe, open our hearts to the plight of the displaced and rejected members of our society. And let us say:

All: By helping the displaced and rejected, we shall honor the memory of the unknown heroes of the Shoah. Amen.

5. For the Fighters and Liberators

Leader: Almighty God, remember the Partisans, Jewish and non-Jewish, the members of the Resistance, the soldiers who liberated the concentration camps, those who served with the allied forces, and all those who have devoted their lives to peace and freedom. And let us say:

All: By being peacemakers in our own days, we shall honour the memory of the partisans, the resistance fighters and the liberators. Amen.

6. For the Six Million and other Victims of Nazism

Leader: Almighty God, remember the six million Jewish people that were gassed, killed, drowned, burned alive, tortured, beaten or frozen to death. Remember all other victims of Nazism, including Christians murdered because of their faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, persons with disabilities, Roma and Sinti, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. And let us say:

All: By showing respect and compassion for each human life around us, we shall honour the victims and their sacred memory. Amen.

Concluding prayer

Leader: God of our Ancestors, let the ashes of the human beings incinerated at Auschwitz, the rivers of blood spilled at Vilnius, Majdanek, and elsewhere be a warning to all humankind that hatred is destructive, violence is contagious, and that humanity has an unlimited capacity to inflict cruelty.

Almighty God, as the torch is passed on to our generation, help us, Jews, Christians and other people of good will, to preserve the memory of the victims of the Shoah to show hope and courage as the Resistance fighters did, and to build together a world of peace and justice. And let us say :

All: Help us to carry on the torch, preserve the memory, show hope, and work together to build a world of peace and justice. Amen!

IV. Songs and prayers

I walk through Theresienstadt (Ilse Weber)

(**Ilse Weber** was a Czech author and songwriter. Ilse, her husband, and their younger son Tommy were sent to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt in February 1942. She would accompany herself on guitar while she sang her lullaby-like songs to children and the elderly of the ghetto. When her husband was deported to Auschwitz (1944), she and Tommy went with him. It is said that Ilse sang to her son and many other children as she accompanied them voluntarily into the gas chambers. A recording of this song is available [here](#), in German with English subtitles).

I walk through Theresienstadt,
my heart as heavy as lead.
Until suddenly my path comes to an end,
there just by the bastion.

There I stop on the bridge
and look out into the valley:
I want so much to go on,
I want to go home so much!

Home! – You wonderful word,
you make my heart heavy.
My home was taken away from me,
now I have none left.

I turn away sad and weary,
I feel so heavy:
Theresienstadt, Theresienstadt,
I wonder when the suffering will end,
when will we be free again?

The Butterfly (Pavel Friedmann)

(**Pavel Friedmann** wrote this poem in the Theresienstadt concentration camp on 4 June 1942. On 29 September 1944 he was deported to Auschwitz where he was murdered. Music by Lisa Glatzer Shenson. A musical version is available [here](#).)

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 goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.

The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto.

After the Horror (Alden Solovy)

(**Alden Solovy** is a contemporary Jewish poet and liturgist. In this poem, he meditates about reclaiming life in the shadow of unthinkable atrocity.)

Hold fast to the breath of life.
Hold fast to the song of life.
Hold fast to the soul of life.

This is my sacred duty, G-d of old,
As survivor, as witness, as a voice of history and truth.
Why else did I live when so many died?
Why else do I stand when so many were put to rest?
Why else do I hope and yearn when so many were silenced?

Hold fast to awe and wonder.
Hold fast to radiance and light.
Hold fast to mystery and majesty.

This is my sacred duty, G-d of old,
As mourner, as testimony to horror and destruction.
What else remains? What else endures?
What more can You ask of me,
But to choose life in the shadow of death?

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El Maleh Rachamim

El Maleh Rachamim (God filled with mercy) is a funeral prayer used primarily by the Ashkenazi Jewish community. This prayer is recited at the funeral service, at the grave of the departed, on remembrance days, and on other occasions during which the memory of the dead is recalled. (*Listen to El Maleh Rachamim [here](#).*)

God, filled with mercy, dwelling on high, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your Divine Presence, among the holy and the pure who shine as the light of the firmament, to the souls of our beloveds whom we recall with blessing on this day.

Master of compassion, gather them forever in the shelter of Your wings; may their souls be bound up in the bonds of life.

The Eternal is their inheritance; may they rest in peace. And let us say Amen.

The Kaddish

The "Mourners' Kaddish" is an Aramaic prayer recited as part of the mourning rituals in Judaism. The word Kaddish means "sanctification." The Kaddish makes no mention of death; we say Kaddish to show that despite our losses, we can still praise God. It is an expression of acceptance of Divine judgment and righteousness at a time when a person may easily become bitter and reject

God. Another explanation is that by sanctifying God's name in public, the mourners increase the merit of the deceased person. Kaddish is a way in which we continue to show respect and concern for our loved ones even after they have died. (*Listen to the Kaddish [here](#).*)

Magnified and sanctified is God's great Name in this world, created as God willed. May God's majesty be established in our lifetime and the life of all Israel, and of all humankind, speedily and soon, and let us say: Amen.

May God's great Name be blessed forever, in all worlds, unto eternity. Blessed, praised, and glorified, extolled and honoured, adorned, exalted and acclaimed, be the Name of the Holy One, the blessed, beyond all prayer and song, praise and consolation that may be uttered in this world; and let us say: Amen.

May there be abundant divine peace, bringing good life for us, and for all Israel, and for all humankind and let us say: Amen.

May the Source of Peace in celestial heights grant peace to us, to all Israel, and to all humankind, and let us say: Amen.

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

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

Leader: May God bless you and keep you. May God's light shine upon you, and may God be gracious to you. May you feel God's presence within you, and may you find peace.

All: Amen!

VI. Video Resources

A video of a slightly different version of the *Commemorative prayer* is available [here](#).

A video of the 2024 Christian Commemoration of the Shoah at the Unitarian Church of Montreal is available [here](#).

The Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Montreal (Canada), established in 1971, is composed of representatives of various sponsoring organizations and of associate members, who come together on a regular basis in order to build and strengthen mutual understanding and support between Christian and Jewish communities.

Source: [Canadian Centre for Ecumenism](#).