

"Years Wherein We Have Seen Evil"

Ceremony Launches New Educational Series on Religious Life During the Holocaust

■ "I have experienced some very moving, unusual and special occasions, yet I feel something extraordinary now [...]."

With these emotional words, Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev began a ceremony at the end of October, launching the series of educational textbooks about religious life during the Holocaust, *Years Wherein We Have Seen Evil*. The ceremony was held in the Yad Vashem Synagogue, in the presence of Mordecai Tessler of the United States, the son of Edith and Rudolph Tessler who generously supported the development of the series (see box), Chief Rabbi of Modi'in Rabbi David Lau, Yad Vashem's Chief Historian Prof. Dan Michman, and Director of the International School for Holocaust Studies Dorit Novak. In the packed audience were distinguished rabbis, public figures and educational directors of ultra-Orthodox municipalities and councils across Israel. The ceremony was hosted by Rabbi Dudi Zilbershlag, a member of the Yad Vashem Directorate.

The series tells the story of Jews who maintained their observance of Jewish laws and customs during the Holocaust. It expresses the values and experiences of the religious and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, while



maintaining accurate academic historiography. The rich material is taken from varied sources, including archival documents, rabbinic sources, Jewish religious decisions, and survivors' memoirs. The four volumes discuss a variety of different topics—German Orthodox Jewry under Nazi rule, the ghetto period, rescue during the Holocaust, and the Final Solution—from various historical, ethical and *halachic* aspects. The first

two volumes have been published together with CDs, which include a compilation of survivor testimonies.

"The series represents the backbone of the multi-faceted work being done in the ultra-Orthodox section of the International School for Holocaust Studies," explained Shulamit Imber, the School's Pedagogical Director. "It is the first endeavor of its kind, and it fills a very important

Rudolph and Edith Tessler

■ Rudolph Tessler is originally from the town of Vișeu-de-Sus in Romania, home to 5,000 Jews before WWII. His childhood was centered around family and kindness to others, and the importance of his faith—his family was Hasidic—was evident in the celebrations of each Jewish holiday.

Tessler's idyllic childhood came to an abrupt end in April-May 1944, when the entire Jewish population of the area (8,000-14,000) was loaded onto trains under the guise of being taken into Hungary to work in labor camps. Instead, they were taken to Auschwitz.

In his memoir *Letter to My Children: From Romania to America via Auschwitz*, Rudolph wrote: "Sixty-seven members of my family—my mother, her father, my three sisters, three of my brothers, and many aunts, uncles and cousins—were murdered at Auschwitz." Only

Tessler, his father and two of his brothers survived to see liberation.

Tessler's upbringing had emphasized community and family devotion—traits not forgotten in the concentration camps, where he and his family members often rescued one another from certain death. His father, always a source of strength and guidance to his family, provided counsel to many prisoners in the camp, and eventually assumed the role of camp rabbi. Tessler's remaining family members and seven other Jews from Vișeu made a special effort to observe their faith. Bending rules at risk to their lives, they worked together to smuggle wheat, grind it into flour, and bake matzos to distribute for Passover. The group also secretly gathered to pray on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. These religious observances offered some comfort in the camp.

After liberation, Rudolph spent time at the Funk Kaserne camp, a transient DP camp in Munich. He left for America in September 1947, and met Edith Hoffman in New York City in 1950. Edith was originally from Papa, Hungary. Her family had lived there for close to 200 years; her great-grandfather was the Chatam Sofer, the renowned rabbi of Bratislava. She was the youngest survivor of a family of ten children. Her parents and seven brothers and sisters were murdered at Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Mühldorf. Edith was just 17 years old when liberated from Bergen-Belsen. After the war, she recuperated in Sweden for close to three years and then came to America. She and Rudolph were married in 1951.

Shortly afterwards, they moved to Chicago, where, with Edith by his side, Rudolph became a successful businessman. Always prioritizing

by Nava Weiss



■ *At the ceremony launching the educational series Years Wherein We Have Seen Evil. Left to right: Shaya Ben Yehuda, Rabbi Dudi Zilbershlag, Avner Shalev, Mordecai Tessler*

role in the field that until now has been absent in most comparable literature.”

The event concluded with a ceremonial presentation of the Yad Vashem key to Mordecai Tessler by Avner Shalev and Shaya Ben Yehuda, Managing Director of the International Relations Division. “My parents wish to express their appreciation for the talent and diligence Yad Vashem has demonstrated in completing this project,” said Tessler. “I am sure that it will have a decisive impact on Holocaust studies and on students around the world.”

The author is Head of the Ultra-Orthodox Section at the International School for Holocaust Studies.



■ *Edith and Rudolph Tessler*

the values of humanity, family and community in his work, they both dedicated a major part of their lives to public service. Together they donated generously to Israeli health care and educational institutions. They have three children, Florence, David and Mordecai, and many grandchildren. The Tessler family is a dedicated friend of Yad Vashem and is deeply committed to Holocaust remembrance.

New in the Virtual School

www1.yadvashem.org/education

by Jonathan Clapsaddle

e-Newsletter on "Kristallnacht"

■ The December issue of “Teaching the Legacy: e-Newsletter for Holocaust Educators” marks the 70th anniversary of the November 1938 Pogrom (*Kristallnacht*). This new issue features an interview with survivor Miriam Ron—who witnessed the events—ideas for a ceremony to mark the day, an article on teaching this subject in the classroom, book reviews and other educational resources.

New Online Courses on the Holocaust

■ Registration is now open for the following online educational courses: “Jewish Life in the Ghettos,” “The Final Solution of the Jewish Problem,” and “Life Lessons—Bringing Holocaust History to Your Classroom.” Course lessons are updated every other week. A qualified instructor from the International School supervises each course, grading and supplying feedback for the assignments.

Yad Vashem’s online courses are developed and operated with the support of the Claims Conference, the Adelson Family Foundation and the Kennedy Leigh Charitable Trust.

New Russian Portal

■ On 1 January 2009, the International School for Holocaust Studies launched a new Russian-language portal. Developed with the generous support of the Genesis Philanthropy Group, this portal is designed to make information and educational material on the Holocaust easily accessible to Russian-speaking audiences. The portal features encyclopedia entries, photographs, testimony, diaries, letters, documents and frequently asked questions, as well as educational materials that include lesson plans, an interactive learning environment and more.

The materials on the portal have been carefully selected to provide a panoramic view of the Holocaust, while stressing events that transpired in areas of the Former USSR. Historical documentation draws from Yad Vashem’s extensive archives and body of research, as well as the educational material developed by staff at the International School for Holocaust Studies.

Educational Material in Other Languages

■ The Yad Vashem Education and e-Learning website features material in 19 languages. Following is a small selection of new material:

Hungarian: “The Warsaw Ghetto”—Lesson plan focusing on some of the Jewish welfare organizations in the Warsaw ghetto

German: “The Holocaust in the Classroom”—Online course for teachers

Italian: “The Transport”—Lesson plan addressing the question, “How was it humanly possible?” The focus is on personal choice and responsibility as some of the most important moral lessons raised by the Holocaust.

Russian: “The Holocaust in Odessa: The Tragedy of the Jews of Transnistria”—Teaching unit focusing on everyday dilemmas of Transnistrian Jews in the ghettos and camps during the Romanian occupation. Also in Russian, “Dilemmas and Survival in the Kovno Ghetto”—Lesson plan on this central Lithuanian ghetto, examining the *Judenrat*, the struggle with imminent death, everyday dilemmas, the fate of children, and resistance

Spanish: “Jewish Life in the Ghettos”—Online course

This material is developed with the generous assistance of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims (ICHEIC).

The author works in the Internet Department at the International School for Holocaust Studies.