

Dealing with the Aftermath

New Research Center Established at Yad Vashem

by Leah Goldstein

■ During the International Conference on the Holocaust, the Survivors and the State of Israel held in December (see box), an announcement was made establishing of the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the Shoah. In a special interview for *Yad Vashem Jerusalem*, chair of the new Center Dr. Ze'ev Mankowitz described the process that led to the establishment of the Center, and its priorities in the coming years:

In the aftermath of the Shoah, how did survivors choose to remember the enormous trauma they had experienced?

In his book *The Ethics of Memory* [Hebrew], the philosopher Prof. Avishai Margalit talks about an argument between his survivor parents who came to Israel after the war: his mother claimed that it was the role and even duty of the survivors to preserve the memory and story of the suffering of the victims, to be their living memorial candles. By contrast, her husband averred that it was unbearable to live only to preserve the memory of those who were gone. Better to build a community that thought primarily about the future and the needs of the present, rather than one controlled from afar by a mass grave.

At first glance, one could say that in the short-term the father was right, given the pressing and demanding needs and realities of life in the young nation, with its burning problems and unrelenting challenges. However, after 60 years, one may discern voices weeping over the "victory" of the mother, the fact that remembrance has become a central component in our lives.

International Research Conference: "The Holocaust, the Survivors, and the State of Israel"

■ From 8-11 December 2008, Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research held an international conference marking Israel's 60th anniversary and the contribution of Holocaust survivors to the State. Over three days, scholars, researchers, historians, journalists and artists from Israel and abroad addressed various issues relating to the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, the survivors' role in building the State and their new lives in Israel, and the transformation of Holocaust memory over six decades of commemoration.

Why establish the new Center now?

In the years following the Holocaust, the circle of those dealing with its significance, its commemoration and how to transmit its legacy to the coming generations expanded. Leading this development was Yad Vashem, which recently has delved more extensively into the aftermath of the Holocaust. As such,

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the initiative of Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem, to establish the new Center in memory of his late wife, Diana, was warmly welcomed. As Eli said, "A critical aspect of the story of the Holocaust survivors is how we struggled to return to life. How were the survivors received by their countrymen and societies? How did our new homes treat us and view us? These questions, I believe, are vital to a deeper understanding of the long-lasting effects of the Holocaust."

What are the main aims of the Center?

The Center seeks to promote scholarship and international projects on a number of planes, including the fate of the remnants of the Jewish communities in European countries and their countries of immigration; the ramifications of confronting the Holocaust in Israel and



■ Dr. Ze'ev Mankowitz addresses the International Research Conference on the contribution of Holocaust survivors to the State of Israel

the Jewish world; the legal handling of Nazi war criminals and their henchmen; economic struggles to restore Jewish property and receive compensation; commemoration work in all its forms; and confronting the Holocaust in research and scholarship, philosophy and theology, as well as its artistic representation in literature, material and performing arts.

What part do survivor testimonies play?

Because of the importance and urgency, every aspect of the study of Holocaust survivors is our first priority. Those who are familiar with Holocaust survivors' testimonies are also aware that in most cases, the detailed descriptions of all they experienced, suffered and lost end with a condensed, almost laconic, description of the process of liberation and its aftermath.

The first question a historian must ask is, what happened? But that is no longer the only one. Today, we also have to ask: How does the past cast its shadow over the present? How does one experience a traumatic event and how does one remember it? The historian looks from the outside, while the bearer of the memory supplies a unique look from within.

Advisor to Yad Vashem, delivered the keynote address, "Did the Holocaust Lead to the Creation of the State of Israel?"

The final day of the conference saw a special session in conjunction with the Project on the Contribution of Holocaust Survivors to the State of Israel. Moshe Sanbar, Chairman of the Project's Directorate, and Micha Shagrir, producer and director of the film *The Phoenixes*, participated in the session, which included a special screening of the film.