

## **Avner Shalev's Speech at the Inauguration Ceremony of Yad Vashem's new Holocaust History Museum, March 15, 2005**

With awe and reverence we are gathered here to dedicate the new Holocaust museum, here, on Har Hazikkaron, the Mount of Remembrance, in Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem.

Within a few years the few who survived the inferno, those who left behind in Europe their parents, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and all those dear to them, will pass on. They left behind their spiritual world, their culture, the rhythm of their lives, and their worldly goods. They came here naked and bereft of all and built new homes in their ancient homeland.

For years we worked diligently to recover the shards of their stories and the fragments of their memories, their faded pictures, the little – too little – that the victims left behind. And these we exhibit in our new museum.

The museum that we are dedicating today is a monument to those who were murdered – attempting to preserve their names, faces and identities for future generations. This museum is the authentic, personal, cry of the generation of those who can tell the story. It is their Jewish story and ours, and it is the story of the rupture and the universal eclipse of an entire world in which the perpetrator committed murder, the neighbor silently stood idly by and only the very few chose to save their fellow human beings.

This museum is the story of the victim and of the survivor – the story of the anguish, of the suffering, of the loss, and of an entire life extinguished with no one left to tell its story.

We, the second generation, who have salvaged the story from them, and who have retrieved from deep in their cupboards and from the bottom of their modest cabinet drawers the letters, the artifacts, the spiritual treasures that so deeply express their identity, have generously taken upon ourselves the weighty historic responsibility to build out of these fragments of memory this new museum.

And I, Avner Shalev, the sabra born in Jerusalem, progeny of my grandparents, Aigi and Zisel, Shlomo and Zalman, who were murdered during the Shoah and whom I never had the opportunity to meet, took upon myself the mission that they bequeathed to me – “Zachor” - remember – and I have been privileged to realize that mission here, in the public arena. My grandfathers and grandmothers represent an entire generation that has been erased for all of eternity.

We know today that in the rupture in their lives something was torn out of the fabric of our lives as well. We are but a link in the chain of Jewish existence that the Holocaust threatened to cut off. This house looks upon us from the Holocaust, and we look back through it at the Holocaust, and the tree that was cut down shall not be uprooted. From the stump of that tree, grew its trunk and the strong branches from which together with the Holocaust survivors built the State of Israel.

I, Avner Shalev, grandfather to Ruth, Shira, Yonatan, Dan, Yael, Daniel, and Avigayil, promise today, through this house, to my friends, my brothers and sisters

who survived the Holocaust, to my people and to the citizens of the world, that through this memorial flame we will pass on the Jewish understanding that to remember is a positive commandment and a moral imperative to mend the world and to choose life. In the words of the poet Haim Gouri: “To the burned ghetto we have here raised a monument, a monument of life that will never cease.”

I would like to express my gratitude to many, with whose support, talent, and hard work this museum has been completed:

To the Government of the State of Israel who has supported our endeavors;  
To the Claims Conference that answered the sacred call of Holocaust memory;  
To the many donors, our partners, with whose help we have succeeded in realizing our mission;

To the Yad Vashem family and all its devoted workers. For us, the museum that is being dedicated today is the culmination of years of work, and it will lead yesterday’s memory into tomorrow.

To all the artists and artisans who transformed the place, the testimonies, the exhibits into a language that proceeds from the heart and speaks to the heart and builds the bridge to future generations.

My thanks to all of you.

The wings of the museum structure that open to the Jerusalem scenery like hands reaching out in prayer symbolize our commitment to a future of life and hope, and of preserving the human spirit.

This commitment needs to be shared by all of us, especially you, leaders of world. Your presence here strengthens this commitment.

The responsibility upon us all is great, and the choice is ours. As it is written in *Deuteronomy* [30:19]: “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”