

YOM HASHOAH

Educational Resource Guide

INTRODUCTION

After the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, decided that a national day of memorial should be established to remember the victims of the Holocaust. A special committee was established to choose a fitting day in the calendar for this day of national mourning and remembrance. Various groups proposed different dates that would be suitable. The dates put forward were:

1. Tisha Ba'av
2. 9th November -Kristalnacht
3. 10th Tevet
4. 27th January - Liberation of Auschwitz
5. 15th Nissan – Outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

ACTIVITY

In this activity, we will re-enact this special committee that chose the date for Yom HaShoah. Divide into five groups. Each group will be given one of the suggested dates with the accompanying information sheet (see below). Each group should read their information sheet, discuss the accompanying questions, and prepare a short presentation explaining why the committee should choose that date. Each group should then give their presentation to the larger group. After the presentations have been given, participants should vote on which date is the most suitable day for Israel's national memorial day for the Holocaust. Participants should vote according to their opinions and not the date they have been given to present.



(n.d.). *Siege of Jerusalem (70 CE)*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_%2870_CE%29

Tisha Ba'av – The Ninth of Av

Tisha Ba'av, according to tradition is the saddest day in the Hebrew Calendar. According to Rabbinic traditions, it was the day that Bnei Yisrael (Children of Israel) cried in the desert after hearing the report of the spies who had led an advance party into the Land of Israel. According to the Rabbis, God said to Himself: "If the people are crying today for no good reason, I will give them a reason to cry on this day in the future." As a result of this, **both the First and Second Temples were destroyed on this date, as well as many other tragedies that befell the Jewish people.** For millennia, Jews have mourned and fasted on this date to remember all the tragedies that befell the Jewish people on this date.

A list of tragedies that took place on Tisha Ba'av includes:

1. 586 BCE Destruction of First Temple by the Babylonians
2. 70 CE Destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans
3. 135 CE Fall of Betar – the last city of independence after the Bar Kochba Revolt
4. 1096 Beginning of the First Crusade
5. 1290 Expulsion of Jews from England
6. 1306 Expulsion of Jews from France
7. 1492 Expulsion of Jews from Spain
8. 1942 Beginning of deportation of Jews in Warsaw to the death camp of Treblinka

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Yom HaShoah should be on this traditional date of tragedy for the Jewish people?
- What is the connection between the Destruction of the Temple and the Holocaust?
- What would be the arguments against having Yom Hasoah on Tisha Ba'av?



The Holocaust Explained. (n.d.). *Kristallnacht*. Retrieved March 18, 2025.
<https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/life-in-nazi-occupied-europe/oppression/kristallnacht/>

Kristallnacht – The Night of the Broken Glass - November 9th

"Crystal Night" or "Night of the Broken Glass" was a pogrom (massacre or riot against Jews) carried out by the Nazis throughout Germany and Austria on November 9-10, 1938. The name Kristallnacht refers to the glass of the shop windows smashed by the rioters. Officially, Kristallnacht was launched in retaliation for the assassination on November 7 of a German embassy official in Paris - named Ernst vom Rath - by a young Jewish refugee named Herschel Grynszpan. On November 9, vom Rath died of his injuries.

That same night, a group of Nazi leaders gathered in Munich to commemorate the anniversary of Hitler's (failed) attempt to take over the Bavarian Government in 1923. The Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, told the other participants that the time had come to strike at the Jews. The Nazi leaders then sent instructions to their men all over the country - they were not supposed to act as if they had launched the pogrom but were to participate all the same. Within hours, crazed rioting erupted. The shop windows of Jewish businesses were smashed, the stores looted, hundreds of synagogues and Jewish homes were burnt down, and many Jews were physically assaulted. Some 30,000 Jews, many of them wealthy and prominent members of their communities, were arrested and deported to the concentration camps at Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and Buchenwald, where they were subjected to inhumane and brutal treatment, and many died.

During the pogrom itself, some 90 Jews were murdered. After the pogrom was over, the Nazis continued with severe anti-Jewish measures. The Aryanization process of seizing Jewish property was intensified; the Jewish community was forced to pay a fine of one billion Reichsmarks, ostensibly as a payback for the death of vom Rath; and the Germans set up a Central Office for Jewish Emigration (Zentralstelle fuer Juedische Auswanderung) to "encourage" the Jews to leave the country. Western countries and even the Soviet Union were shocked by the Kristallnacht pogrom, and some governments began admitting more refugees.

Discussion Questions

- Why should Kristallnacht be the official date for Israel's Yom HaShoah?
- What does Kristallnacht symbolise?
- Why should it not be chosen?

Jews of Warsaw assembled before deportation to Treblinka



Yad Vashem. (n.d.). [Title or description of the image] [Photograph].
https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/warsaw_ghetto_testimonies/liquidation.asp

10th Tevet - Yom Kaddish Klali

In the first half of 1942, the Nazis carried out what they called **Aktion Reinhard** – the systematic extermination of the Jewish population of Poland in the three death camps of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. News of this systematic annihilation of Polish Jewry in gas chambers first reached the Jews in Palestine/ Eretz Yisrael in the late summer of 1942. As a result of this, the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv called on all the Jewish community in Palestine to fast and pray on the minor fast day of the 10th of Tevet (the next fast day in the Jewish calendar, associated with the destruction of the First Temple) as a national day of mourning and prayer as a response to mass murder being carried out in Poland. In the following years of the war, the Rabbinate continued to use the 10th of Tevet as a national day of mourning for the Holocaust taking place in Europe.

After the war, Holocaust survivors arriving in Israel, as well as relatives of victims already living in Israel, asked the Rabbinate when they should recite the Kaddish, a memorial prayer for their relatives when they did not know the date that they were murdered. The Rabbinate instituted that as the 10th of Tevet had already been designated as a day of mourning for the Holocaust, it should also be a 'Yom Kaddish Klali,' a day for saying Kaddish for relatives when the date of the murder was unknown.

Aktion Reinhard was the code name for the Nazi operation to exterminate the 2,284,000 Jews living in the five districts of the general government, including the Warsaw, Lublin, Radom, Cracow, and Lviv districts. During the last few months of 1942, the operation was extended to the Bialystok district, adding some 210,000 Jews. Aktion Reinhard was named after Reinhard Heydrich, the main organizer of the "Final Solution" in Europe, who Czech resistance fighters had assassinated. The Nazis began planning Aktion Reinhard in the fall of 1941. SS chief Heinrich Himmler appointed Odilo Globocnik (SS and Police Leader of the Lublin district) to head up Aktion Reinhard and SS-Hauptsturmfuehrer Hans Hofle as chief of operations. They were assigned a staff of 450 Germans, including 92 men who had previously worked for the Euthanasia Program. In addition, the Aktion Reinhard headquarters recruited a special unit made up of Ukrainian volunteers, most of whom had been Soviet prisoners of war.

Three extermination camps were established for Aktion Reinhard: Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Belzec, situated along the Lublin-Lviv railway, was constructed between November 1941 and March 1942. The extermination process began there on March 17, 1942. Sobibor, located east of Lublin, was built in March and April 1942 and was opened for operations in early May 1942. Treblinka, located 50 miles northeast of Warsaw, was set up in June and July 1942 and began functioning on July 23, 1942—in conjunction with the mass deportation of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto.

The Nazis set up a deportation process that they used unwaveringly in most parts of Eastern Europe. Their main goal was to keep the victims in the dark about where they were going until they arrived. In the smaller ghettos, the Nazis carried out this process in just one or two days. In the large ghettos, which sometimes contained hundreds of thousands of Jews, the deportation could not be carried out in one day only. Thus, the Judenrat would be instructed to gather several thousand people each in several smaller aktionen. If the Judenrat could not or would not provide the Germans with the number of people they had asked for, German and Ukrainian troops would be sent in to break into the houses and courtyards where the Jews were hiding and drag them out. After being removed from the ghetto, the Jews were marched to a railroad station, where they were jammed into cattle cars.

The trip to the extermination camp sometimes only took a few hours but often took days. The long trip and the insufferable conditions in the train cars (including overcrowding, terrible heat in the summer months, cold in the winter, and lack of water or sanitation) resulted in many people dying en route. In July 1942 Himmler visited the Aktion Reinhard camps. Afterwards, he ordered that the deportation of the General government's Jews was to be completed by December 31 of that year. However, the army appealed his order, citing its need for Jewish manpower for the war effort. As a result, it was decided to keep some Jewish laborers in several of the large ghettos for the time being.

During Aktion Reinhard, the Germans confiscated vast amounts of Jewish property, worth more than 178 million reichsmarks. The cash and valuables gathered in the extermination camps were sent to the SS Economic-Administrative Main Office (Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt, WVHA). At the same time, other items were spread out among the Economy Ministry, the army, SS workshops, and the ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) living in the occupied territories. Aktion Reinhard continued until early November 1943, when the last General Government Jews in the Majdanek, Poniatowa, and Trawniki camps were exterminated as part of Operation Erntefest. Altogether, more than two million Jews in the General government were killed during Aktion Reinhard.

Discussion Questions

- Why should the 10th of Tevet be chosen as Israel's Yom HaShoah?
- Why might secular Israelis not want this to be the date?



Museum of Jewish Heritage. (n.d.). [Title or description of the image] [Photograph].
<https://mjhny.org/blog/auschwitz-history-an-introduction/>

27th January - Liberation of Auschwitz 1945

More than any other site, Auschwitz is the symbol of the Holocaust. It was the largest and deadliest of all the camps created by the Nazis, with 1.2 million people murdered there, over 1.1 million of them Jews. The full extent of the nature of Auschwitz became known to the world upon its liberation by the Soviet army on January 27th, 1945.

The commander of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Rudolf Höss, stated in his autobiography that in 1941 (no exact date is given), he was summoned to Berlin, where Himmler informed him that Hitler had issued an order to solve the "Jewish Question" for good and that the order was to be implemented by the SS. "The existing extermination places in the east are unsuited to a large scale, long-term action. I have designated Auschwitz for this purpose," Himmler said.

Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest of the concentration and extermination camps established on Polish soil, served concurrently as a labor camp and as a center for the rapid extermination of Jews. Chosen as the central location for the annihilation of the Jewish people, it was equipped with several extermination facilities and crematoria. Extermination was carried out using Zyklon B gas, a substance that had previously been tested on Russian prisoners of war.

Birkenau (Auschwitz II) was established in October 1941, three kilometers from Auschwitz. Exterminations in Birkenau began in March 1942. There were four gas chambers in the camp that used Zyklon B gas. Until November 1944, the camp functioned as a factory for mass murder, receiving transports from all over Europe. Most of those brought to the camp were Jews, and nearly all were immediately sent to the gas chambers. Only a small percentage was selected for labor in the camp itself, in munitions plants at satellite camps, or in the "medical" experiments of Dr. Josef Mengele and his staff. In the spring and summer of 1944, the rate of extermination increased as the Jews of Hungary and the Lodz ghetto were brought to the camp.

The process of selection and murder was carefully planned and organized. When a train stopped at the platform, veteran prisoners received the victims and gathered their belongings in several barracks in an area known as "Kanada." The arrivals were lined up in two columns – men and boys in one, women and girls in the other – and SS physicians performed a selection. The criterion was the appearance of the prisoners, whose fate, for labor or death, was determined at will. Before entering the chamber, they were told they were about to be disinfected and ordered to undress. The doors of the chamber were locked, and the gas was introduced. After the victims were murdered, their gold teeth were extracted, and the Sonderkommando sheared women's hair – groups of Jews forced to work in the crematoria. The bodies were hauled to the crematorium furnaces for incineration, the bones were pulverized, and the ashes were scattered in the fields.

Repeat selections took place several times during the day in roll calls. Inmates who had become weak or ill were separated from the ranks and sent to the gas chambers. A brutal regimen based on a set of punishments and torture was invoked in the camp. Few managed to survive. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, more than 1,100,000 Jews, 70,000 Poles, 25,000 Sinti and Roma (Gypsies), and some 15,000 prisoners of war from the USSR and other countries were murdered.

Discussion Questions

- Why should the date of liberation of Auschwitz be Israel's Yom HaShoah?
- What is the symbolism of the day?
- Why should it not be the chosen date?



Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. (n.d.). *16 May 1943: Warsaw Ghetto Uprising ends*. Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.
<https://hmd.org.uk/resource/16-may-1943-warsaw-ghetto-uprising-ends/>

15th Nissan 1943 – The outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*

In the Spring of 1943, as part of the Final Solution, the Nazis decided to carry out the final liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto and render the city, formally the home of a 430,000-strong Jewish community, free of Jews. The chosen date of the action was Seder Night, the first night of Pesach, celebrating Jewish freedom. However, as opposed to the mass deportations of 1942, the Nazis were met by armed and organized resistance. It was [the first civilian-armed, urban uprising in Nazi-controlled Europe](#). It took the Nazis more than a month to finally crush the rebellion.

On July 22, 1942, on the eve of the Ninth of Av in the Jewish calendar, the Germans began the mass deportations from the Warsaw ghetto. By the time they ended on September 21, Yom Kippur, some 265,000 inhabitants of the ghetto had been deported to the Treblinka extermination camp.

The deportations were carried out at the Umschlagplatz – a train station and adjacent square situated on the edge of the ghetto. Those deported were packed into sealed, locked freight cars with little water and poor ventilation.

When the deportations began, the Nazis promised that people who voluntarily reported for “transfer” would receive three kilograms of bread and one kilogram of jam. After a few days, the volunteers stopped coming, and the Nazis switched to siege tactics: city blocks would be closed off, and the Jewish Police would remove the buildings’ residents to the streets. The Germans would carry out a selection while Polish or Ukrainian policemen would search in the abandoned homes for Jews in hiding. Many Jews who hid in the buildings or tried to escape the selection on the street were murdered on the spot. Most of the Jews who underwent the selection were chosen for deportation and sent to the Umschlagplatz.

After the deportations to Treblinka, between 55,000 to 60,000 Jews remained in the Warsaw ghetto and they were concentrated in a few building blocs. The area of the ghetto was thus severely reduced.

A sense of bitter disillusionment and abandonment settled upon those who remained in the ghetto, the majority of whom were teenagers. Many blamed themselves for not resisting and for allowing their families to be deported. It was clear to them that they would share the same fate. Thus, they resumed their attempts to establish a fighting underground organization.

The first attempts to establish an armed resistance organization within the ghetto took place even before the deportations. The "anti-Fascist bloc" was established between March and April 1942, based on a communist cell in the ghetto. However, the Gestapo discovered its leader in May 1942, who was arrested and murdered.

Representatives of three Zionist youth movements ("Hashomer Hatzair," "Dror," and "Akiva") established the first cell of the new organization. Members of the "Poalei Tzion" party joined them in October. Thus, the "Jewish Fighting Organization" (ZOB) was established. Within a short period of time, other youth movements joined the organization, as well as non-Zionist parties – the "Bund" and the Communists. The commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization was Mordechai Anielewicz of "Hashomer Hatzair," who was 23 years old. The Revisionist Zionist youth movement "Beitar" established its own fighting organization, the "Jewish Military Union" (ZZW).

On January 18, 1943, the Germans launched another Aktion. The underground leadership, believing it to be the onset of the final deportation, ordered its forces to respond with arms. Upon discovering the resistance, the Germans decided to halt the Aktion. This incident marked a turning point for most of the ghetto population, which from then on prepared for mass resistance and for hiding in underground bunkers in the cellars of homes.

The final Aktion began on April 19, 1943, the eve of Passover. The fighting groups and ghetto inhabitants barricaded themselves in bunkers and hideouts, their demonstrations of resistance taking the Germans by surprise. The ZOB scattered its positions throughout the ghetto; the ZZW did most of its fighting at Muranowska Square, impeding the Germans' attempts to penetrate their defenses. In response, the Germans began to systematically burn down the buildings, turning the ghetto into a firetrap. The Jews fought valiantly for a month until the Germans took over the focal points of resistance. It was the first popular uprising in a city in Nazi-occupied Europe.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising became an example for Jews in other ghettos and camps. The uprisings that followed, however, were smaller in scope because of their isolation, a shortage of arms, and hostile surroundings.

Discussion Questions

- Why is the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising a fitting date for Israel's Yom HaShoah?
- What does the uprising represent, and how is it connected to the State of Israel?
- Why can the Yom HaShoah not be on the date of the start of the uprising?
- What is problematic with using the uprising as a symbol for all of the Shoa?

CONCLUSION

The special committee chose the 27th of Nissan. This date was chosen to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The 15th of Nissan, the date of the outbreak of the uprising, was not an option because of Pesach, so a date the week after Pesach was chosen as the uprising lasted for over a month. This choice reflected the ideology of the young State of Israel, which was proud of the Jews that rebelled and fought against the Nazis as opposed to those who were passive victims. The second reason for this choice was the desire to link Yom HaShoah to Yom Hazikaron and Yom Haatzmaut, which occur the following week in the Hebrew calendar. This also reflects the ideology of the State of Israel at the time, which viewed the establishment of the State of Israel as the solution to the persecution suffered by the Jewish people in exile, especially the Holocaust.

Concluding Discussion Questions:

- What do you think of the decision made by the committee?
- What is problematic about remembering the Holocaust through the prism of resistance?
- How do you think attitudes towards Holocaust memorialization have changed since the early years of the State of Israel?
- Do you believe the history of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel should be linked?