UNTIL THE VERY LAST JEW
EIGHTY YEARS SINCE THE ONSET OF MASS ANNIHILATION

“Unto Every Person There Is A Name”
Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day 2021
Dear friends in Jewish communities around the world,

As we approach Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, which this year will take place on April 8th, I call on you all to join with us in observing the ceremony known as “Unto Every Person there is a Name”, remembering the six million of our brothers and sisters by reading out the names of individual Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust.

With this ceremony, we try to return their identities to those millions of Jews whose very existence was taken from them by the Nazi murderers and their allies. Following years of persecution of Jews by the Nazis, who justified their anti-Jewish actions by demonizing the Jews and depicting them as a poison undermining their world, their worldview became even more extreme, eventually embracing the view that wide-scale murder was, in fact, acceptable. At first, this was implemented by the Nazi German forces and their allies during 1940-41 through mass shootings, such as that at Babi Yar, as they advanced into the Soviet Union and the territories it had annexed in Eastern Europe. This eventually led to the comprehensive plans laid out in the Final Solution – a systematic and methodical program of mass murder that sought to exterminate every single Jew in Europe.

As we remember those six million Jewish men, women and children, who were slaughtered by the Nazi death machine, we seek also to return to them the identities that were stolen from them by reading out their names throughout the day on Yom Hashoah.

I call upon you to join with your brothers and sisters here in the State of Israel and throughout the world by participating in this ceremony so that the individual identity of many more of those victims will be remembered on that day.

Sincerely,

Reuven (Ruvi) Rivlin
Jerusalem, Nissan 5781
March 2021

Unto Every Person There Is A Name
Public Recitation of Names of Holocaust Victims in Israel and Abroad
on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day

“Unto every person there is a name, given to him by God and by his parents”, wrote the Israeli poetess Zelda. Every single victim of the Holocaust had a name. The vast number of Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust – some six million men, women and children - is beyond human comprehension. We are therefore liable to lose sight of the fact that each life that was brutally ended belonged to an individual, a human being endowed with feelings, thoughts, ideas and dreams whose entire world was destroyed, and whose future was erased. The annual recitation of names of victims on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day is one way of posthumously restoring the victims’ names, of commemorating them as individuals. We seek in this manner to honor the memory of the victims, to grapple with the enormity of the murder, and to combat Holocaust denial and distortion.

This year marks the 32nd anniversary of the global Shoah memorial initiative “Unto Every Person There Is A Name”, held annually under the auspices of the President of the State of Israel. The project aims to reach out to as many communities and institutions as possible, in Israel and elsewhere. Significantly, this unique context will continue this year as well, despite the adverse circumstances worldwide due to the ongoing pandemic. With this in mind, we are sending you the attached materials, in the hope that you will join us in this essential mission, and hold a name-reading recitation on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day, in compliance with local health and safety regulations.

The theme of this year’s observances is:

Until the Very Last Jew
Eighty Years Since the Onset of Mass Annihilation

In June 1941, after having defeated Yugoslavia and Greece, Nazi Germany launched a surprise attack on the USSR. “Operation Barbarossa” was the codename given to the incursion of some four million troops into Soviet territory. Operation Barbarossa was a milestone in World War II, and a turning point in the fate of the Jews. The campaign in the USSR and the Soviet-annexed territories was an
ideological and racist war to the death, and was characterized even after the battles ended by the implementation of Nazi Germany’s murderous policy and by widespread harm to the civilian population, especially the Jews.

At the rear of the German Army in the war in the USSR were the Einsatzgruppen, four mobile killing units of the SS that were tasked with the war against "ideological threats"—Communists, partisans and Jews. Army units, police and other forces committed murder alongside them. Primarily men were shot in the first weeks after the invasion. Starting early in August 1941, however, the circle of murder gradually expanded to encompass broad swathes of territory and all of the Jews in the occupied areas—men, women and children—except for a small number who were assigned to perform forced labor.

Jewish life that had existed for centuries in Eastern Europe was practically obliterated. In the last months of 1941, the idea of murdering the Jews en masse crystalized into a comprehensive plan, beginning by destroying all the Jews of Europe: extermination camps were established and operated, improved technologies for mass murder were implemented, and deportations by train "to the east" from the rest of Europe began.

The attached materials include texts and readings on this year’s theme that can be incorporated into your online recitation.

To date more than 4,800,000 names of Holocaust victims have been recorded in Yad Vashem’s online Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, with over 2,750,000 names registered on Pages of Testimony.

You can assist in our ongoing names collection campaign by downloading and distributing Pages of Testimony, or by submitting them online through our website: www.yadvashem.org.

Sadly, the generation of Shoah survivors is dwindling rapidly. As the bearers of their legacy, we must do everything possible to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust’s victims. By reciting their names, ages and places of death, we keep their memory alive, and remind ourselves that each man, woman and child was, and is, an entire world.

Sincerely,

Ronen Plot
Acting Chairman
Yad Vashem Directorate
Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day
8 April 2021 – 26 Nissan 5781

Letter from the International Committee
“Unto Every Person There Is A Name”

Introduction

The worldwide Holocaust memorial project “Unto Every Person There is a Name”, now in its 32nd consecutive year, is a unique project designed to perpetuate the memory of the Six Million - among them one-and-a-half million Jewish children – murdered while the world remained silent. The project offers the opportunity to memorialize them not only as a collective, but as individuals – one at a time - through the recitation of their names on Yom Hashoah – Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes’ Remembrance Day. You can help to restore the identity and dignity of the victims of the Holocaust by organizing a name-recitation on Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day, in compliance with local health and safety regulations. Links to lists of names taken from Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, and planning recommendations are included below.

The Unto Every Person There Is A Name project focuses attention on the urgent need to retrieve additional names of Holocaust victims, before they recede into oblivion.

The “Unto Every Person There Is A Name” project is conducted around the world through the efforts of four major Jewish organizations: B’nai B’rith International, Nativ, the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization.

The project is coordinated by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, in consultation with the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and enjoys the official auspices of President of the State of Israel, the Hon. Reuven Rivlin.

Personalizing the Holocaust

The most fundamental feature of the Shoah is the systematic murder of six million innocent Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators for the sole reason that they were Jewish. Each of their deaths was a separate, distinct tragedy that together has caused indelible lasting trauma to the Jewish people. As time passes and fewer witnesses remain, it is imperative to create a personal link between the Jewish people today and those who perished under the Nazi genocidal regime. Recitation of names of Holocaust victims - together with such information as their age, place of birth and place of murder - personalizes the tragedy of the Holocaust. Emphasis is thus put on the millions of individuals – men, women and children - who were lost to the Jewish people, and not solely on the cold intangibility embodied in the term “The Six Million”.

“Unto Every Person There is a Name” rests on the success of Yad Vashem's Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project that to date has identified more than 4.8 million names of Shoah victims and that continues its quest to recover all the six million names.
The Central Theme for Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 2021:
UNTIL THE VERY LAST JEW: Eighty Years Since the Onset of Mass Annihilation

In June 1941, after having defeated Yugoslavia and Greece, Nazi Germany launched a surprise attack on the USSR. “Operation Barbarossa” was the codename given to the incursion of some four million troops into Soviet territory. Operation Barbarossa was a milestone in World War II, and a turning point in the fate of the Jews. The campaign in the USSR and the Soviet-annexed territories was an ideological and racist war to the death, and was characterized even after the battles ended by the implementation of Nazi Germany’s murderous policy and by widespread harm to the civilian population, especially the Jews. Nazi Germany, which had already instituted a policy of expelling, isolating and persecuting the Jews in Germany, Poland and Western Europe—a policy that inflicted hunger, suffering and death—carried out a broad official policy of mass murder for the first time after invading the USSR, which soon became systematic.

At the rear of the German Army in the war in the USSR were the Einsatzgruppen, four mobile killing units of the SS that were tasked with the war on “ideological threats”—Communists, partisans and Jews. Army units, police and other forces committed murder alongside them. Primarily men were shot in the first weeks after the invasion. Starting early in August 1941, however, the circle of murder gradually expanded to encompass broad swathes of territory and all of the Jews in the occupied areas—men, women and children—except for a small number who were assigned to perform forced labor.

Jewish life that had existed for centuries in Eastern Europe was practically obliterated. Approximately one million Jews were murdered within the Soviet Union’s prewar borders, and some 1.5 million Jews were massacred in the territories annexed by the USSR between 1939 and 1940.

The murder of the Jews of the USSR and the annexed territories was the beginning of the consolidation of the “Final Solution”—the systematic annihilation of the Jews by Nazi Germany. By the end of the war, some six million Jews had been murdered.

Scroll down to see the complete rationale and a collection of texts and readings for your use.

Yad Vashem’s extensive collection of video testimonies by Holocaust survivors are also available for incorporation into your ceremony: https://www.yadvashem.org/collections/testimonies.html

In addition to this collection of texts and readings, Yad Vashem has created several Ready2Print exhibitions on a range of subjects that can be printed locally.
For more information about the different exhibitions available, click here
For any queries, and to receive the exhibition files free of charge, please contact: traveling.exhibitions@yadvashem.org.il

Recover Names of Shoah Victims

"Unto Every Person There is a Name” events provide a unique opportunity to gather heretofore unknown names of all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Since its inception, one of Yad Vashem’s central missions has been the recovery of the names and personal stories of all victims of the Shoah. While the Nazis sought not only to physically destroy the Jews but also to obliterate any memory of them, The Shoah Victims’ Names Recovery Project realizes our moral imperative to memorialize each victim as a human being, and not merely a single collective number. (To learn more about the project click here)

The relentless endeavor has to date identified more than four million eight hundred thousand names of Shoah victims, documented in the Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names online at: www.yadvashem.org with over 2,750,000 names registered on “Pages of Testimony” submitted by relatives and others who knew of the victims. The remainder of the victims’ names in the database were derived from various archival sources and postwar commemoration projects. The outstanding universal value of the Pages of Testimony Memorial Collection has been recognized by UNESCO, which in 2013 inscribed it in its prestigious Memory of the World Register.
The Names Database, uploaded to the Internet in 2004, marked a pioneering use of technology in the service of memory, documenting and commemorating nearly three million names of Holocaust victims. To continue to meet the needs of an expanding worldwide community of users, Yad Vashem has upgraded and re-designed the database, making use of an innovative platform that allows the accessibility of online information in a fast and user-friendly format.

Names recitations may be utilized to call upon members of your community to complete a “Page of Testimony” for each unregistered victim, or to volunteer to assist others with this urgent task.

**Take part in creating a “Personal File” for Holocaust victims**

A “Personal File” is a cluster, which contains a number of different name records that refer to the same person. Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names contains information on individuals from millions of testimonies and documents. In many cases, we have various records relating to the same person and, if we could only group them all together, we could tell a more complete story of their life and fate.

The systematic grouping of such records into one “personal file” is complex, and involves methodological and technical challenges.

Yad Vashem has so far managed to create hundreds of thousands of “personal files” that bind together several “name records” related to one person. The “personal files” are displayed in the Names Database, as results about victims/people. Alongside each “personal file”, you will find a number indicating how many “name records” are included in it.

**We need your help to help us create additional files.**

For more information, scroll down past the texts for ceremonies.

**Important links**

> Lists of names
> Pages of Testimony
> Video testimonies

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The official opening ceremony at Yad Vashem marking the commencement of Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day 2021 will take place on Wednesday, 7 April at 20:00 (8 PM) Israel time. The ceremony will be broadcast on Israel’s television and radio channels accessible via the internet, and in six languages on Yad Vashem’s websites, in seven languages on Yad Vashem’s youtube channels, and on Yad Vashem’s English and Hebrew Facebook pages.
We are available to answer any questions that might arise and provide additional material as necessary.

Sincerely,

Members of the “Unto Every Person There Is A Name” International Committee: Inbal Kvity Ben Dov, Dr. Alexander Avram (Yad Vashem); Alan Schneider (B’nai B’rith International); World Jewish Congress; Naftaly Levy (World Zionist Organization); Mr. Ran Yaakobi (Israel Foreign Ministry); Masha Novikov (Nativ).

Project Initiator: Haim Roet

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UNTIL THE VERY LAST JEW
EIGHTY YEARS SINCE THE ONSET OF MASS ANNIHILATION

The Annual Theme for Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day 2021

“June 22, 1941 was like an earthquake, like a huge volcano erupting,”¹ recalled Zakhar Trubakov in his memoirs. One of a handful of Jews who witnessed the massacre of the Jews of Kiev at Babi Yar, he described the feeling that gripped him and the public during the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

In June 1941, after having defeated Yugoslavia and Greece, Nazi Germany launched a surprise attack on the USSR. “Operation Barbarossa” was the codename given to the incursion of some four million troops into Soviet territory. The armies of Romania and Finland fought alongside the German military, as did army detachments sent by Germany’s allies—Italy, Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia. The objective of the operation was to precipitate the collapse of the “fortress of Bolshevism” before the onset of winter, and the invading army seized thousands of kilometers of territory. Within a short amount of time, Nazi Germany was besieging Leningrad in the north, and later in the offensive its troops reached the banks of the Volga River in the south, not far from the capital, Moscow.

Operation Barbarossa was a milestone in World War II, and a turning point in the fate of the Jews. The campaign in the USSR and the Soviet-annexed territories was an ideological and racist war to the death, and was characterized even after the battles ended by the implementation of Nazi Germany’s murderous policy and by widespread harm to the civilian population, especially the Jews. The ideological campaign and the identification of Communism (which was called “Bolshevism”) with Jews and Judaism created a close linkage between the war and the anti-Jewish policy. Nazi Germany, which had already instituted a policy of expelling, isolating and persecuting the Jews in Germany, Poland and Western Europe—a policy that inflicted hunger, suffering and death—carried out a broad official policy of mass murder for the first time after invading the USSR, which soon became systematic.

At the rear of the German Army in the war in the USSR were the Einsatzgruppen, four mobile killing units of the SS that were tasked with the war on “ideological threats”—Communists, partisans and Jews. Army units, police and other forces committed murder alongside them. Primarily men were shot in the first weeks after the invasion. Starting early in August 1941, however, the circle of murder gradually expanded to encompass broad swathes of territory and all of the Jews in the occupied areas—men, women and children—except for a small number who were assigned to perform forced labor.

The acts of murder followed a particular template: Through threats and various forms of deception, the Jews were required to report to locations, where they were gathered together. From there they were taken by foot or on trucks to a location nearby—such as a ravine, forest, castle or vacation spot—and murdered. Sometimes the Germans made use of anti-tank ditches, often forcing a group from among the victims to dig the killing pits themselves. The Jews were ordered to undress and hand over their valuables at some distance from the mass graves, and then they were taken to the pits and shot. Many were buried alive. For example, according to the German reports 33,771 Jews from Kiev were murdered in a ravine near the city of Babi Yar on September 29-30, 1941 (on Yom Kippur Eve). In Ponary, a forest about ten kilometers away from Vilnius, Lithuania, over 70,000 people, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jews, were murdered starting in July 1941. During that same time period, Jews were also murdered in similar operations in German-occupied Yugoslav territory and by the Antonescu regime on Romanian-occupied land. Dr. Ahron Peretz, who eventually founded and served as director of the Gynecology Department in Rambam Hospital in Haifa, testified at the Eichmann trial about the murder of the Jews of his hometown of Kaunas, Lithuania: “Only a few survived that place, and they later recounted the shocking events to us.”

The ability of the SS men and the German commanders and soldiers to murder the Jews stemmed first and foremost from their profound identification with Nazi ideology, which was predicated on an extreme antisemitism that considered Jews and Judaism to be the root of all evil in the world. According to this standpoint, the Jews and Judaism were a demonic force that aspired to rule the world, were instigating social revolutions and spreading Communism, and were a destructive race that was poisoning and undermining the very foundations of human existence. After years of persecution characterized by degrading, isolating and depriving Jews of their rights and dignity everywhere the Nazis reached, the Nazi German worldview became even more extreme, to the point that largescale murder that was as comprehensive as possible could be committed. Internalizing Nazi German ideology, propaganda and policy was crucial to the ability to murder Jewish women and men, old people and children face to face. Along with this, a diverse range of psychological and social contexts enabled “ordinary” men to cast off all moral restraint and join in the slaughter of unarmed, innocent civilians.

The German invasion of the USSR also involved pogroms committed by locals against their Jewish neighbors, and tens of thousands of Jews were murdered by their compatriots well before the policy of the German occupiers was clear. Additionally, local militias and organized groups in Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia and eastern Poland collaborated with the Germans and participated in the persecution and murder of Jews. Moreover, Germany’s allies in Romania and Croatia administered an independent policy of persecution, property expropriation and murdering Jews. Many civilians expressed schadenfreude — joy at the misfortune of others — over the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews, and they exploited their plight for their own profit by informing on them, extorting money, and robbing them of their property. There were those who hid and rescued Jews, the few Righteous Among the Nations who risked their lives to help their Jewish neighbors. However, traditional and modern

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antisemitism, the atmosphere of intimidation that the Germans imposed, and the human tendency towards conforming led a majority of the local populations to react to the murder of the Jews with indifference.

Close to a million Jews who lived in the German-occupied Soviet territories managed to flee deeper into the country together with the retreating Soviet army; the evacuation on the “eastbound trains” turned out to have saved them in hindsight, even though these Jews also lived in grim conditions during the war and suffered from shortages and hunger, and sometimes performed forced labor in service to the Soviet authorities.

Under the dark shadow of mass murder, the Jews began the struggle to live. They fled to villages and the woods in search of places to hide. Thousands joined partisan units and fought in the forests. Against all odds, underground cells tried to organize acts of resistance and rescue in dozens of towns and cities. In many ghettos and labor camps, the Jews fought for their human dignity and their Jewish spirit, managing to establish educational, cultural and religious institutions, and even to document some of the atrocities and the suffering for posterity.

Jewish life that had existed for centuries in Eastern Europe was practically obliterated. Approximately one million Jews were murdered within the Soviet Union’s prewar borders, and some 1.5 million Jews were massacred in the territories annexed by the USSR between 1939 and 1940. In the last months of 1941, based on the accumulating experience in mass murder, and particularly due to the ideological radicalization that considered the war to be an “all-or-nothing” moment, the idea of murdering the Jews en masse crystalized into a comprehensive plan, beginning by destroying all the Jews of Europe: extermination camps were established and run, improved technologies for mass murder were implemented, and deportations by train “to the east” from the rest of Europe began. The murder of the Jews of the USSR and the annexed territories was the beginning of the consolidation of the “Final Solution”—the systematic annihilation of the Jews by Nazi Germany. By the end of the war, some six million Jews had been murdered.
“My dearest,

Before I die, I am writing a few words. 
We are about to die, five thousand innocent people. 
They are cruelly shooting us.

Kisses to you all, 
Mira…”

Translation of a Yiddish note, found in a woman’s clothing, 
during an exhumation carried out in October 1941 at the 
murder site of Jews near the village of Antanase, Lithuania

On 25 August, 1941, Jewish women as well as children 
under the age of eight, who previously had been driven 
out of Rokiskis to the village of Antanase, were taken to 
the pits in the Antanase Forest, along with Jews from 
the Lithuanian towns of Obeliai, Pandelis, Panemunelis, 
Suvainiskis and Kamajai. There they were all shot. 
Karl Jaeger, head of Einsatzkommando 3a, which carried 
out the execution, reported that a total of 1,160 Jews – 
112 men, 627 women and 421 children – were executed 
in the vicinity of Obeliai that day.
“We remain alive and healthy. It is crazy here and I want to leave. Sixty percent of the population of the city has already left. We are alone here but where should we go, to whom and with what? There is no news from Sasha. Tsipa has already been gone for several days. If she hadn't joined the army, I would have gone with her to Khabar[ovsk] and perhaps we might have met, but now there is not hope of that. After we are no more, take revenge on our neighbors. There are many hooligans in the city. I have already experienced so many pogroms [in my life], but I can't endure any more. I wish our dear sons victory. How much I would like to live to [the day of] victory.”

Liba Chesnina

The postcard that was sent by Chesnina was addressed to K.G. Rubinshtein in Leningrad. Chesnina was apparently murdered at Babi Yar on September 29 or 30, 1941

To Pour Out My Bitter Soul: Letters of Jews from the USSR 1941-1945, ed. Arkadi Zeltser, Yad Vashem publishers
We walked, we walked, we walked, for a long time, thinking terrible thoughts. I felt like this was the end, that's what I thought...
They brought us to the Ninth Fort...
Suddenly, we were put inside a field, we went, and there were already Germans standing there. I saw a large pit, and they told all of us to undress...
I came to an enormous pit, maybe 5 metres big, and I fell inside... Amongst the first inside, and they started to shot in salvos... I fell to the bottom...
I didn't know what was happening to me, and they kept falling, falling...
Suddenly my mother was next to me, at the bottom, and I see that she is covered in blood, and she screams in Yiddish: Yudke, how are you?... What was she talking about? Our lives were over! The screams, the hellish screams, reaching up to the skies...
And then I didn't see anything anymore...
Suddenly I see that I am alive. I move my fingers, I move my legs...
Suddenly I started to feel that something was being poured over me, my skin was burning. The non-Jews up there were disinfecting the dead – they poured lime over us. It touched my body through everything, it started to burn me, it hurt me and I wanted to get out of there, I started pushing...
Bodies were lying one on top of the other...
Without wanting to, without even the thought of escaping, I didn't know what I was doing, at the end of the day I was just a boy. I pushed right and left...
Suddenly I saw that I was outside. Night, I see stars in the sky...
Where should I go? What should I do? I look down at myself... I'm wearing my nightgown, the long one with the pockets... I am all red, wet with blood, I'm wet, what should I do? Where should I go? ...
I hear some kind of bird up high; Cuckoo, cuckoo. Oy, I thought in my heart, how lucky she is. She doesn't have a long nose, she has nothing, she flies where she wants, how good she has it, she's free...

Yehuda Beilis was born in Kovno, Lithuania in 1927, the youngest of Eliezer and Chana's three sons. In October 1941, Yehuda's family was sent to the Kovno ghetto. A few days later, they were taken with thousands of other Jews to the Ninth Fort, the site of the mass murder of Kovno Jewry. Yehuda was pushed to the edge of a pit. He heard shots, and the murdered Jews fell into the pit bringing him down with them. When he regained consciousness, he found himself in pitch blackness at the bottom of the pit. He made his way out through the bodies, and ran away. He reached a forest home and begged for help. The residents tended his wounds, fed him and gave him clothes but, fearing for their lives, they asked him keep their deeds secret. Back inside the ghetto, Yehuda told the remaining Jews what had happened to him, but they could not believe him. In the summer of 1944, upon the liquidation of the Kovno ghetto, Yehuda and his brother Yosef were sent to Dachau and put to work in the Kaufering labor camp. Yosef didn't survive, and Yehuda was left alone in the world. In 1946, Yehuda immigrated to Eretz Israel. He joined the IDF and fought in the War of Independence. He got married and raised a family.
September 3, 1941

My Dear, my Husband, Most Beloved of All,

I write this letter to you two months after you've gone. Much has happened to me during this time, and now I must part from you! It's impossible for me to describe to you the hell of our lives. I will try, in only a few words, to tell you the main stages.

It started immediately after you left, on the very same day. On Friday morning, the city was already occupied – yet battles continued for six days. It seemed that no stone would remain intact over another. We managed to go through all this with the baby, under terrible hardships and harsh tortures in the cellars and in the church.

We knew that life wouldn't be sweet, but we had hope that they would let us live, and the worst case would be death from starvation. Kind people were found who brought us a slice of bread until it would all settle down a little. We started selling things in order to get food. We were so satisfied; it was as if we cast the lottery of life. This is how we lived until August 14th.

In the morning of that day, the terrifying drama began, as if from Dante's dramas. No, this isn't correct. Dante wasn't capable of imagining such terrifying spectacles as these. Between two rows of soldiers, armed with clubs, we were led to the forest; we stood there on a pit, surrounded by machine guns, and we silently waited for death. 1,900 people found their death there. The rest returned home. On this plot we left our father. We didn't grieve his death a lot. Healthy logic dictated that we survived to live a life worse than death. But the will to live was so strong, that we were happy even with such a life. We didn't believe that we would be forced to go through something similar again. This period of life continued for four weeks and it had its "surprises" like: handing over silver and gold, payment of a ransom of 100,000 rubles, while waiting for them to organize the ghetto for us.

On August 31, rumors circulated that tomorrow the drama would repeat itself, the one we had already experienced. I didn't believe it, and yet the drama was repeated. This time we handed over Rossi, who was our "father" after our father's death. She had a strong will and physical strength for everything: she sold her articles, got food, managed the entire house and in additions she went daily to forced labor, from six in the morning until six at night. She ended her life yesterday...
Today the rumor circulated that it would already be tomorrow. Since lately all rumors have come true, I'm parting from you already today. I've described to you only the dry facts, but my feelings, sometimes insane, I will not succeed to describe! And mainly when I look at my son. My dear, if only you would know what a beautiful and wonderful child he is. The heart explodes when I think that tomorrow, I myself will carry him to eternal rest, and he laughs and shouts "Ay"... God does not want me to be privileged to hear him say "Mother". He saved my life twice because they sent back mothers with their little children, and now I wanted to save him but there is no chance.

I wanted to convert to Christianity. The Christian clergy went to ask permission for this, but they don't have any hope of getting such permission – therefore I must part from life. Mother is holding up pretty bravely: she is just grieved and painsed that she can't save the child, and that she won't see you again.

I and Mother kiss you all strongly, and we request that after your return – don't stay behind here, on our parents' land. Run away from the memories, from the place of our suffering, as if you're running from the plague. Weep over our fate, and try putting your lives in order.

And you my dear, whatever happens, put your life in order, because life has its own rules. Don't forget me, and don't forget your firstborn son, whom you would have been proud of, if God had not given us such a punishment.

We kiss you one extra time and part from you,
Bluma, Mother and our son.

Master of the Universe! I've lived another entire month and again I deluded myself with hope, but it's in vain. Tomorrow is Yom Kippur, and it will really be the Day of Judgement for me and your wonderful son Yoske.

I so much don't want to die!
The boy is so wonderful, and to die like this!

(Bluma Stirnberg left the letter with a Polish neighbor called Piotroksowska)

_Last Letters from the Shoah_, ed. Walter Zwi Bacharach, Yad Vashem publishers, pp. 274-276
We marched in the street, surrounded by Nazis with dogs and rifles. We didn’t know where they were taking us. We marched nearly all day, until we reached Ponar. The Nazis were all around us with their guns and dogs, and we could already see the pits. Panic, screaming, crying to the Heavens....it was terrible there. Everyone started to run... maybe they could escape – but it was clear that escape was impossible. Then they told us to undress, and started to take people, ten at a time, stand them at the edge of the pit, and shoot them. I still managed to say goodbye to my brother, who was taken to the second pit, for the men.

I bade him goodbye with a wave of my hand – that was all I could do. I was amongst the last to be taken. When they shot me, they wounded me in the leg, but the bullet did not penetrate. That was my good fortune: they just wounded me. I had no choice but to roll over onto the dead bodies, and I was on the edge, looking. And then I....I saw....what the nazis still did to the girls. With whips. They whipped them and then they killed them. My big brother Moshe, grandmother Chaina and aunt Sarah Gittel were murdered in that pit. I was left alone, the sole survivor of my entire family.

Dina Levine Baitler was born in Vilna in 1934, the second daughter in a family of three children. In 1940, when Vilna was under Soviet occupation, Dina’s father was deported to Siberia, accused of being a capitalist. In 1941 the Germans conquered Vilna and soon after, during an Aktion in the ghetto, Dina, her older brother and her grandmother were caught and taken to the killing pit in Ponary. There, on the edge of the pit, they were shot together with thousands of other Jews who had been taken from the ghetto. Seven-year-old Dina, who was slightly wounded by a shot in her leg, fell into the pit among the corpses. Towards morning, Dina pulled herself out of the pit and headed towards the forest. She wandered through the forests and villages for the rest of the war begging for food and shelter. While wandering, she met a woman who helped her adopt the false identity of a Polish orphan, and with that identity she continued her wandering until she came across Russian soldiers to whom she told her story. After the war she returned to Vilna and was placed in a Jewish orphanage where she remained until she completed her studies. She searched for her mother and younger brother but their fate remained unknown. Her father, who was in Siberia, survived the war and immigrated to Israel. Dina married and in 1960 she also immigrated to Israel, where she raised a family.
During the months of August and September 1942, thousands of Jews were herded into the synagogue in the town of Kowel, Poland where they were imprisoned until their execution. In their fear and desperation, many of them wrote on the walls of the synagogue using whatever they could — unsharpened pencils, pens and even their own fingernails. Last testaments, letters and declarations were written in Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish. Below are some of the inscriptions that were found.

18,000 Jews were murdered in Kowel.

---

"Reuven Atlas, you should know that your wife Gina and your son Imush was murdered. Our son cried bitterly. He did not want to die. Go to war and take revenge for the soul of your wife and your one and only son. They are taking us to die, and we are innocent."

Gina Atlas

"Do not forget what we have been through, do not forget our blood, the blood of our sons that has been shed, the blood that was as pure as the water of the Sea of Galilee. We cry for revenge!"

Yehuda Schechter

"Earth, do not cover our blood!
Sun, take vengeance for us!
10th of Elul [August],
Bluma and Yaakov"

"We want to live so much, but they won’t let us —
Basia and Magda...."

"Quiet!
The murderers are coming.
Our hearts beat [faster] when we hear their voices.
God, take us to Your eternal arms.
The murderers will pay with their blood!
May they be torn to pieces by our sons who come after us.
One more hour, one more minute.
May you be blessed, beautiful world that I have never seen!
Sarah Arbaiter and her family"
I am writing for the last time before my death. If someone remains alive, remember the fate of our brothers. I am calm in a strange way even though it is hard to die at the age of 20.

My dear mother! There was no chance of saving ourselves. We were taken [to the synagogue] from outside the ghetto. We are about to die a horrible death. We are sorry that we can't be together with you. I can't forgive myself for this. I thank you, my mother, for all your efforts. I kiss you many many times. Forgive us for all the trouble we caused you more than once.

Dobcia Kagan

I am writing these words with tears and I can't live any longer.

My right hand will be forgotten if I forget the tragedy of the Polish Jews.

Eliahu. (original in Hebrew)

We – Haim Ben Zvi Yitzhak Liberman from Brześć [nad Bugiem] and Ester the daughter of the prominent Rabi Zvi Morgershtern from Kock were caught on the holiday of Rosh Ha Shana. We were kept alive for ten days. Please report my death to the Rabbi of Brześć so he can say the "Kaddish" [Jewish memorial prayer] for us.

The gates are opened. Here are our murderers. Dressed in black. On their contaminated hands they wear white gloves. They shove us from the synagogue in pairs. Dear sisters and brothers, it is so hard to part from a beautiful life. You who remain alive – never forget our little and innocent street of the Jews. Sisters and brothers, take revenge against our murderers.

Esther Schroll
At the beginning of September of this year, I had occasion to be in Kovel [Kowel] while searching for my mother and mother-in-law. I already knew their fate, but I wanted to find at least something to remember them by, perhaps a photograph or something else. I arrived in Kovel at night.... Not one stone was left standing on another stone. Not a trace of the houses remained; it was just like a wasteland, overrun with weeds as tall as a man. Only one large synagogue was still standing, outwardly untouched, as though it were mocking me. Without even wanting to I entered the building where people had spent their lives, cradle to grave, where people had worshipped, blessed their labors and the fruits of their labors. What did I see before my eye? A huge, empty two-story structure that could accommodate a thousand or fifteen hundred people. The altar had been pulled down. The Torah scrolls were burned. There were no benches and the walls had been pockmarked by bursts of automatic weapons fire. Two huge lions were the only "living" witnesses to the terrible savagery perpetrated by the Nazis in what had once been God's temple. In spite of myself, I remained standing on the very threshold, ... and was already thinking about leaving, but I wanted to have a closer look and to examine the holes in the walls: Had there been a battle here? Perhaps this had been a fortified position for the Germans? When I approached the walls, I was filled with horror. The walls began to speak. It turned out that the walls were covered with writing in pencil. There was not a single empty spot of the wall. These were the last words of the doomed, their farewell to this world. The Nazis had driven people in here, and then, after robbing them of everything down to their last stitch of clothing, had led them out naked to be shot somewhere outside of Kovel, in the city cemetery, in the swamps or forests.... They had also killed people right here, those who were too weak, or who had cursed their murderers. My heart began pounding, and it ached. I had seen a lot of sadness... had been through the whole of
the Great Patriotic War from day one... I had seen many towns and villages burned by the Germans. But now I could no longer contain myself. Perhaps my mother's last pleas were here? I began to read the inscriptions carefully. I was hurrying because I could feel my legs giving way, while tears were choking me and getting in the way of my reading. ... Somehow, the walls made me feel ashamed, as though they were saying or thinking about me: "You went away and left us. You did not take us with you. You knew that this would happen to us and you left us all alone". The inscriptions were packed so closely together that each writer had tried to draw a line around their own so as to make their cry for help, for vengeance, stand out the more strongly. They were written in different languages: in Yiddish, Polish, and Russian. In every inscription, the words for revenge – "Nekome!" [Yiddish], "Pomst!" [Polish (sic)] and "Otomstite!" [Russian] were written clearly. I did not find an inscription from my mother: either I could not find it or she had joined in these calls silently. The names of entire families were written out, dates of executions, and words addressed at the heads of the inscriptions to various people who had managed to get away and join the partisans or the Red Army... In every inscription were the words "Avenge us!"
My dear sister and brother-in-law,
I am writing this last letter of farewell before my death. I will leave this letter with a Christian, who will send it to you after the war. I am writing to you about our tragic death, a death that overtook all of the town's Jews – they were shot for seven days in the month of Elul. I, together with Yudka and Saraka and Itzik ran away. We were confused when we ran and we lost one another. They shot at Zelda and at … together with all the Jews. All the Jews of Moletai are buried in one grave in back of the yards of Moletai, near Lateka. I lie in a pit with Yudka for 16 weeks. We suffered in a dreadful way... I am writing this letter as a prisoner in jail. We are counting the minutes until they come to take us and execute us. In a few minutes. They caught Jews in the yard of 8 Anmisel. Abba Shniplisker was there with his family. They came here from the "afterworld" – that is, they suffered hunger and cold. We left unclothed, it was still warm before Rosh Hashanah, and now we are ten days into Tevet (1941). It is very cold. At the end we were forced to register, but they caught us on the way and tomorrow they are going to shoot us. I don't know whether they will shoot us in Moletai or in Utena. We haven't found them yet, because they shot them. 21.12.41 [...] There is not one single Jew in any town. Today we see how the world looks without Jews.
I prepared a tombstone for Father. I will try at the police to get permission to transfer the tombstone to the cemetery, accompanied by a policeman. Perhaps there will be a possibility to visit the graves of our parents and the martyred slain people of Moletai. Mother doesn’t have a tombstone, because it was too early. I had not yet finished saying Kaddish. Be well. These are my last words. Your brother who perished and his son Yudel Nutlevich. Today is 21.12.1941 and it will be our day of remembrance.

My dear uncle and aunt,
This last letter of farewell, I am writing to you from prison, condemned to death... Thousands and thousands of people have fallen. The blood of those slain will not be silenced. It hurts to leave this wonderful world. Before we even began to live, we fell, me and Father, together with our family. You won’t know where our corpses will wind up. I end my letter, live in happiness and enjoy the beautiful world.
Your devoted nephew, who perished, Yudel Nutlevich, Moletai, December 21, 1941 from prison – a few days before death.”

Last Letters from the Shoah, ed. Walter Zwi Bacharach, Yad Vashem publishers, pp. 122-123
A troubled evening approaches. The streets are full of people.... Whoever can do so, hides. The word "maline" has become relevant. To hide, to bury oneself: in a basement, in an attic, to save one's life....

The tenants of the house go into a hide-out. We go with them. Three floors of warehouses in the courtyard of Shavli 4. Stairs lead from one story to the other. The stairs from the first to the second story have been taken down and the opening has been closed up with boards. The hide-out consists of two small warehouses. You enter the hide-out through a hole in the wall of an apartment which borders on the uppermost story of the hide-out. The hole is blocked ingeniously by a kitchen cupboard. One wall of the cupboard serves at the same time as a little gate for the hole. The hole is barricaded by stones. The flat through which you enter the hide-out is located near our apartment. Little groups of people with bundles go in. Soon we also crawl through the hole of the hide-out. Many people have gathered in the two stories of the hide-out. They sneak along like shadows by candlelight around the cold, dank, cellar walls. The whole hide-out is filled with a restless murmuring. An imprisoned mass of people. Everyone begins to settle down in the corners, on the stairs....

We are like animals surrounded by the hunter. The hunter on all sides: beneath us, above us, from the sides. Broken locks snap, doors creak, axes, saws. I feel the enemy under the boards on which I am standing. The light of an electric bulb seeps through the cracks. They pound, tear, break. Soon the attack is heard from another side. Suddenly, somewhere upstairs, a child bursts into tears. A desperate groan breaks forth from everyone's lips. We are lost. A desperate attempt to shove sugar into the child's mouth is of no avail. They stop up the child's mouth with pillows. The mother of the child is weeping. People shout in wild terror that the child should be strangled. The child is shouting more loudly, the Lithuanians are pounding more strongly against the walls. However, slowly everything calmed down of itself. We understand that they have left. Later we heard a voice from the other side of the hide-out. You are liberated. My heart beat with such joy! I have remained alive!"


Yitskhok Rudashevski, an only child born in 1927, lived with his parents in the town of Vilna. The German army took over Vilna when Yitskhok was fourteen years old. He faithfully recorded events in the Vilna Ghetto from June 1941 to April 1943. When it became clear that Hitler planned the total “liquidation” of Vilna, Yitskhok and his family went into hiding. On the fifth or sixth of October of 1943, the Germans discovered their hideout and took them to Ponar, where they were murdered.
PONARY / Shmerke Katcherginsky

The river Vilya,
Chained and aching,
Longing to be free,
Burdened with its ice,
Is breaking
Through towards the sea.
Darkest black
Will start to whiten,
Through the mist
A sun will lighten –
Horseman, have no fear,
Your son is here.

Softly, softly,
As we stumble,
Hearts are frozen numb –
Till the prison walls
Will crumble
We must all be dumb.

Come, my darling,
Now’s no time for
Smiling, but for grief –
Let the spring
For those who hate us
Be an autumn leaf.
May our hope
Like welling waters
Spring up from the deep,
With the swallow
Will come Father
Sleep now, darling, sleep.
Like the Vilya,
Few and flowing,
Like the trees,
All green and growing,
Joy will find its place
In your sweet face.

Softly, darling,
Don’t cry, dearest,
Let me hold your hand –
Those who hate us
Will not ever
Try to understand.
Even seas are not unending,
Prison bars
May yet be bending,
Only our long night
Is without light.

Spring has come
And brought its bowers
But for us it’s fall,
Days are like
Bouquets of flowers –
Our lives taste of gall.
Now the trees
Are golden-leaved
But grief blooms
In our heart –
Here a mother
Sits bereaved,
Her child is in Ponar.

Sofly, softly in the silence
Graves around us grow –
Those who hate us
Sowed the seeds
A harvesting ago
Many roads lead to Ponar
But none at all lead back,
Father went
And joy went with him,
Days are dreary and black.

Softly, darling,
Don’t cry, dearest,
Let me hold your hand –
Those who hate us
Will not ever
Try to understand.
Even seas are not unending,
Prison bars
May yet be bending,
Only our long night
Is without light.

Spring has come
And brought its bowers
But for us it’s fall,
Days are like
Bouquets of flowers –
Our lives taste of gall.
Now the trees
Are golden-leaved
But grief blooms
In our heart –
Here a mother
Sits bereaved,
Her child is in Ponar.
Ponary, the murder site of the Jews of Vilna and the surrounding area, was situated 10 km south of Vilna on the road to Grodno. Before the war it was a forested area used for holidays and recreation. Vilna residents used to go there for their summer holidays and to gather berries and mushrooms. The site was chosen for murder due to its proximity to the train track and also because there were pits 12-23m wide and 5-8m deep. There were high embankments with ditches between the pits, which had been dug by the Soviets in 1940 as a planned emergency fuel store. From June 1941 until July 1944 over 75,000 people were murdered in Ponary, most of whom were Jewish, the others were Soviet prisoners of war and local opponents to the Nazi regime. The victims were brought to the murder site on foot, by motor vehicles and by train; in groups of tens, hundreds and thousands. There, they were shot and buried.
My Beloved and Dear Ones,

... If we had to describe all that we went through in this war, particularly from 22.6.1941, numerous volumes would not be enough and these wouldn't include everything. Can you imagine life with barbarians for 22 months, when not one day went by without tragedy? Whoever didn't live through this would not understand it. If you ever read about what happened here – don't think of it as some hallucination of an author, but as the one-hundredth or one-thousandth part of what happened here, because nobody is capable of understanding the soul of a Jew. The Aryan author will give you only dry facts. Is it possible to understand that a person marches in the crowds towards his funeral, and before nearing they tell him to get undressed, because the murderers are loath to [waste] the clothes. This is definitely unbelievable! And despite this, that's how it is.

Only Yosef and his son have survived from my whole family, but they won't live long, because soon there will be a "purification" operation of Eastern Poland from Jews – and an "operation" means that they kidnap people, lead them to the cemeteries and shoot them.

Under these conditions, we've spent 22 months, we hid and concealed ourselves in different bunkers, but finally we must surrender [...]

We are leaving this letter with decent people who we knew here, who have done a lot for us without any benefit for themselves. They can tell you when we were murdered and where we are buried.

Be healthy and at peace.

I kiss all of you warmly.

Manak

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According to a letter from an S. Tcherwinski, who sent this letter and others to a relative in Israel in 1946, Manak (Emanuel) "in his wish to avenge the death of those dear to him, shot the police that wanted to take them out of the bunker; and with the last remaining bullets he ended his family's lives and his own life – because he did not want to be led by the murderers to the execution spot and undergo all the tortures prior to their death."

Last Letters from the Shoah, ed. Walter Zwi Bacharach, Yad Vashem publishers, pp. 274-276
Dear Nadenka,

Thank you for everything that you did for us during the past, most difficult days of our life. Do not weep for us. Death is the best, the only way out for us. Be well, my dear Nadenka. If there is a God in heaven, may He bless you, your sisters and dear ones. May He allow you to live to see better days. If you see my children and those of Fania Grigorevna, tell them about our last moments.

Loving you, Sofia Ratner

Give my letter that is addressed to them to my children. I wonder whether they are still alive.

[on the envelope:] “Please, dear Nadenka, give this letter to my children at the first opportunity.”

Letter written by Sofia Ratner from the Vitebsk ghetto, sent to Nadezhda Shidlovskaia on 8 September 1941, with an enclosed letter to Sofia’s children, dated 6 September 1941. Nadezhda (Nadia) Shidlovskaia [nickname: Nadenka], an ethnic Belorussian, worked for the family of Sofia Ratner as a domestic helper and lived with them. After the war, Nadezhda Shidlovskaia was taken by Sofia Ratner’s daughter to Leningrad and lived with her family there.

Dear children [and grandchildren] – Marusinka, Atochka, Vitenka and Ninochka, farewell. I am dying. What we are experiencing here in the ghetto is indescribable. It would be better to die. Nadia is the only person who from the onset of the catastrophe until the end helped us, did not abandon us despite the great risk to her life. She is a pure person, pure as crystal. And she has remained that way despite the terrible environment of looting, violence, abuse, cruelty, baseness and betrayal. Do not ever forget this! Do everything you can for her if she needs anything. She is the only, one, the person who has been closest to us. Dear ones, beloved ones beyond measure, farewell. I don’t know if all of you are alive. We don’t know about anything that is going on outside; we are cut off from the entire world. We are here with Aunt Fania, of course, along with all the Jews remaining in Vitebsk. Farewell once more, dear ones. How hard it is to part from you forever. Your forever loving mother.

We are still alive. Our ghetto has been surrounded with barbed wire. We are doomed to death by starvation.

(The inmates of the Vitebsk ghetto who had not died from starvation were murdered by the Germans on October 8-10, 1941, in the Tulovskii (Ilovskii) Ravine.).

To Pour Out My Bitter Soul: Letters of Jews from the USSR 1941-1945, ed. Arkadi Zeltser, Yad Vashem publishers
Each of us has a name
given by God
and given by our parents

Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear

Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls

Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors

Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing

Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love

Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work

Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness

Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by our death.

WE INVITE YOU TO TAKE PART IN CREATING A “PERSONAL FILE” FOR HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

Guidelines for Suggesting “Personal Files” in the Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names

Archives Division, Yad Vashem
What is a “Personal File”?

- A “Personal File” is a cluster, which contains a number of different name records that refer to the same person.

- Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names contains information on individuals from millions of testimonies and documents. In many cases, we have various records relating to the same person and, if we could only group them all together, we could tell a more complete story of their life and fate.

- The systematic grouping of such records into one “personal file” is complex, and involves methodological and technical challenges.

- Yad Vashem has so far managed to create hundreds of thousands of “personal files” that bind together several “name records” related to one person. The “personal files” are displayed in the Names Database, as results about victims/people. Alongside each “personal file”, you will find a number indicating how many “name records” are included in it.

- We need your help to help us create additional files.

>> Stage 1: Conducting a Search

Search the Names Database.

Searching for “Krakowska Zisla” from Będzin, we receive two results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Krakowska</th>
<th>Zofia Zisla</th>
<th>1892</th>
<th>Będzin, Poland</th>
<th>murdered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krakowska</td>
<td>Zysla</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Bedziny, Poland</td>
<td>murdered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

>> Stage 2: Selecting Results for Comparison

The two results in our example are unrelated, but a first look at the details makes us think that this may be the same person.

To try to check whether this is true, we will look at both results in depth.

In the “Add to list» column, mark the entries that we want to compare by pressing the «+» button.
From the table you can see that the details in the two records are quite similar:
- The name and the maiden name are similar
- The year of birth and place of birth are similar
- Pre-war residence is similar (though not the same)

>> Stage 2: Selecting Results for Comparison (continued)

Next to the list of results, a new window will open, listing our selected entries, along with a comparison tool:

Note: You can also select an existing cluster to add additional name records related to that person

>> Stage 3: Comparison of Records

Notice the buttons at the bottom of the window. Click the «Compare» button.

From the table you can see that the details in the two records are quite similar:
- The name and the maiden name are similar
- The year of birth and place of birth are similar
- Pre-war residence is similar (though not the same)
If we are convinced from the comparison that both records actually point to the same person, a suggestion can be sent to the “Hall of Names” team in the Yad Vashem Archives to bind them in a “personal file”, i.e. a “cluster”. To submit the suggestion, click the “Suggest” button.

Fields for filling in your personal information will appear below:

If you have any additional comments you can fill them out in this free-text field.

If you have scans of documentation to add that assist in identifying the records as referring to the same individual you can attach them here.

When you finish click the “Submit” button.
After submitting, you will receive a confirmation message (be patient – it may take a minute or two):

You can click the “Clear” button at the top of the screen of your selected records and return to the list of results.

Now you can try to find and suggest another Personal File!

The Yad Vashem team will review your suggestion and, if approved, it will upload it to the Names Database site in one of the upcoming updates.

We are very grateful to you for your help.

For questions and inquiries you can contact the Yad Vashem team at any time: clusters@yadvashem.org.il