

Confession and Remembrance  
Holocaust Remembrance Day Readings

**Slavery in North America**

Over the course of 350 years, 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped and taken across the ocean to labor in plantations, mines, and other industry in the New World. Two million died during the voyage. Many millions more died from starvation, disease, abuse, and literally being worked to death. In many colonial societies, enslaved people did not live long enough to raise a family.

Half of all children born in slavery died before they reached their first birthday.

500,000 enslaved people were forcibly brought from Africa to North America, and the enslaved population grew exponentially here. Slave owners prohibited enslaved people from learning to read and write, and rewarded obedient behavior with favors, while those who rebelled were brutally punished. Many masters sexually abused enslaved women. Marriages had no legal basis, but enslaved people did marry and raise families; many owners encouraged this as it created a larger labor pool and increased their capital. Owners did not hesitate to divide families by sale or removal.

Enslaved people labored in fields of tobacco, rice, and cotton, as domestic workers and farmhands, and in construction trades. Millions of people were enslaved, dehumanized, brutalized, used, and discarded to build the economy and infrastructure that has sustained the United States for nearly three centuries.

*Leader: Even in the valley of the shadow of death,*

*All: This light shines in remembrance of those whose lives were stolen and used for the pleasure and profit of others.*

Excerpt from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Ann Jacobs

My grandmother was much praised for her cooking; and her nice crackers became so famous in the neighborhood that many people were desirous of obtaining them. She asked permission of her mistress to bake crackers at night, after all the household work was done; and she obtained leave to do it, provided she would clothe herself and her children from the profits. Upon these terms, after working hard all day for her mistress, she began her midnight bakings, assisted by her two oldest children. The business proved profitable; and each year she laid by a little, which was saved for a fund to purchase her children. Her master died, and the property was divided among his heirs. My grandmother remained in service to his wife as a slave; but her children were divided among her master's four children. As she had five, Benjamin, the youngest one, was sold, in order that each heir might have an equal portion of dollars and cents. He was a bright, handsome lad, nearly white; for he inherited the complexion my grandmother had derived from Anglo-Saxon ancestors. Though only ten years old, \$720 was paid for him. His sale was a terrible blow to my grandmother, but she was naturally hopeful, and she went to work with renewed energy, trusting in time to be able to purchase some of her children. She had laid up three hundred dollars, which her mistress one day begged as a loan, promising to pay her soon. Of course, no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding; for, according to Southern laws, a slave, *being* property, can *hold* no property.

*Leader: Never again.*

*All: May we have the courage to say: Never Again.*

## Armenia

When World War I began, Ottoman propaganda claimed Armenians were a national security threat, and they arrested, tortured, and killed leaders and intellectuals. 40,000 Armenians in the military had their weapons confiscated and were forced into hard labor. Men were arrested and killed in mass shootings outside their towns and villages. In April 1915 the Armenian population was ordered deported from their homes and forced on death marches, hundreds of miles toward the Syrian desert with no food or water, disguised as a “resettlement program.” Hundreds of thousands of people died, and those who survived were put into concentration camps.

Property was confiscated, and Armenian cultural heritage was destroyed, including masterpieces of ancient architecture, old libraries, and archives. Entire cities were leveled to remove all traces of the 3,000 year old civilization.

Scholars estimate that by 1923, 1.5 million Armenians were dead and tens of thousands more were displaced. As he prepared to invade Poland two decades later, Hitler noted he wasn't concerned about international repercussions in his quest to exterminate the Jews, because “Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?”

Armenians observe April 24th, the day targeted mass killings began, as a remembrance day.

*Leader: Even in the valley of the shadow of death,*

*All: This light shines in remembrance of those whose lives were lost to the pursuit of power, and whose memory is still put aside in service of ideology.*

John Minassian, a survivor of the 1915 Armenian genocide, tells of his experience in this excerpt from his book *Many Hills to Climb, Memoirs of an Armenian Deportee*.

### The First Day

It was an ironically bright and sunny day when our band of 300 Armenians started to move south. Women were crying bitterly, and the elders had practically to drag the youngsters along... I could see close friends, relations, neighbors, church members, classmates. All good people who had worked hard and always helped others and their church and schools whenever asked. Many of them did not know how to read or write, but they had a keen sense of right and wrong. These fine people were now being made into refugees only because they had clung to their ancient beliefs and the faith of their ancestors. They marched proudly under a yoke of hatred, prejudice and bigotry, their morale high, their spirit as yet unbroken. They knew that their only "crime" was being Armenian. They had deep convictions about this, held for centuries, never broken by the ups and downs of history. They were robbed of their belongings, their homes and their security. Who was entitled to their homes, their properties? They were built by their fathers, and their fathers' fathers before them.

After a while, my three-year-old sister wanted to be picked up, so I carried her. Her twin brother also wanted to be lifted. I put down sister and picked him up. Father, weakening, would raise his head once in a while and repeat, "Many hills yet to climb."

In fact, the promise of "relocation" was a myth. We trudged on. Mother never complained, nor did Father, but he was losing faith in what had promised to be our destination. He concluded that this was a road leading nowhere, but he was kind and encouraging nevertheless. He felt responsible for all of us in this unpredictable world.

*Leader: Never again.*

*All: May we have the courage to say: Never Again.*

## The Holocaust

After the Nazi party rose to power in Germany in 1933, Jews were forced to move, often to different cities or countries, and live in increasingly crowded designated areas, referred to as ghettos. Most were meant as a temporary means of isolating Jews from the German population until they could be moved elsewhere. The first concentration camps were built in 1933. In 1939, the government forcibly relocated Jews from ghettos to concentration camps. Thousands died from working conditions, exhaustion, and starvation. In many camps, Nazi doctors conducted medical experiments on prisoners against their will, often killing them in the process.

In 1942, fifteen Nazi leaders met at a conference to discuss the “Jewish Question”. Their job was to decide the most efficient way to exterminate the Jews. They decided that Jews would be sent to camps where the showers would be filled with poisonous gas that would suffocate them. This decision at the conference is called the “Final Solution.”

Between the ascension of the Nazi regime to power in Germany in 1933 and the defeat of the German army in 1945, six million Jews and over four million Slavs, Roma, people with disabilities, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, and political and religious dissidents were systematically killed.

The word “Holocaust,” with Greek roots meaning “destruction by fire” and a common translation of the Hebrew word “Shoah,” is nearly universally understood to refer to these events. Today, April 23, is Yom haShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, when we recall the many lives lost in the pursuit of ideology and fictitious racial purity, and we commit ourselves to Never Again.

*Leader: Even in the valley of the shadow of death,*

***All: This light shines in remembrance of those whose lives were seen as a problem with death the “solution,” those believed to be corrupting the purity of the superior race, class, religion, and party.***

From *The Diary of Anne Frank*:

It’s really a wonder that I haven’t dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can’t built up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness. I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too. I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.

*Leader: Never again.*

***All: May we have the courage to say: Never Again.***



## **Cambodia**

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, seized control of Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh. Black-clad soldiers marched millions of people out of cities into labor camps in the countryside, where physical abuse, disease, exhaustion, and starvation were common. Money, free markets, schools, private property, foreign styles of clothing, religious practices and other aspects of traditional Khmer culture were abolished, and buildings such as schools, pagodas, and government properties were turned into prisons, stables, camps, and granaries.

The Khmer Rouge persecuted the educated—such as doctors, lawyers, and current or former military and police. Christian, Buddhist and Muslim citizens also were specifically targeted. It was very common for people to be shot for speaking a foreign language or wearing glasses, as these were traits that were associated with the West. Many were also shot for smiling or crying as it was forbidden to show any kind of emotion.

Approximately 2 million people lost their lives in just over three years—around a quarter of the country's population. One million of those were buried in mass graves in the infamous “killing fields.”

*Leader: Even in the valley of the shadow of death,*

***All: This light shines in remembrance of those whose lives were sacrificed to the ideal of an imaginary past and future, whose bones lie restless on the ground.***

Exerpts from “A Personal Nightmare: An Original Khmer Poetry”

By The Late Venerable Aggadipo Ly Van (Buddhist monk & survivor of Cambodian Genocide)

English Translation & Editing Samkhann C. Khoeun

*(this section of the epic is about fleeing as refugees)*

The path down the mountain was narrow and steep; as the crowd was packed together tightly,  
To avoid harm, people must hang onto vines, tree roots, branches, and small trees;  
Tossing their bundles down the precipice, the men left down hurriedly,  
And waited for their newborns to be passed down from the hands of their mothers.

We descended the mountain from dawn till late afternoon, finally reached the low basin,  
Surrounded by dense forest and enclosed by a pair of huge mountains;  
A great number of those who searched for firewood were killed by landmines;  
Many others looking for water had suffered the same providence.

(...)

Like the Khmer saying: “Going in the water, you’ll face hungry crocodiles; by land, you’ll meet tigers;

Entering the jungle, you’ll be cut by sharp thorns; climbing trees, you’ll face angry wasps;”

At that time, the Cham and Javanese would just charge forward;

And were blown to death by landmines as they cleared a safe path for others.

(...)

Along the remote, desolate path, we slept exposed to the wind and rain;

We were starving and chilled to the bone, our log fires could not provide any flame;

Swarms of hungry mosquitoes and gnats made our sleep in vain,

Throughout the night, our clothes were sopping wet by heavy rain.

At sunrise, we gathered together and march on hurriedly,  
Until we arrived at Mount Tbaeng Mean Chey, our stomachs were rumbling with hunger;  
We were exhausted from the terrifying journey; even pausing for a rest sapped our strength;  
We were famished, parched and trembling from exhaustion.

(...)

We were determined not to turn back, despite artillery attacks from the army;  
Even with landmines exploding everywhere, men and women still forged ahead steadily,  
Live and die, nothing could keep us from reaching the third countries,  
To build new lives and seek glorious freedom and liberty.

*Leader: Never again.*

*All: May we have the courage to say: Never Again.*

## **Syria**

Since its outbreak in March 2011, the conflict in Syria has cost the lives of more than 470,000 people, displaced approximately 11 million, and involved numerous atrocities and crimes against humanity.

The conflict is not simply a civil war between opposing armed forces. What began as a peaceful democratic uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime has transformed into a violent struggle between local, national, regional, and international forces, in which civilians are targeted as a systematic strategy of war.

Syria's Sunni Muslim majority have borne the brunt of the Syrian government's mass atrocities, while some of the forces opposing the regime have committed intentional violence against Syrian civilians. In addition, the self-proclaimed Islamic State, which since the spring of 2013 has been battling government forces in Syria and Iraq as well as some of the Syrian opposition forces, is waging a campaign of persecution and horrific brutality against religious communities and others who do not ascribe to its brand of Islamist extremism.

In August 2013 and again in April 2017, chemical weapons were used, and have killed upwards of 200 people, many of them children. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are currently almost 5 million Syrian refugees registered.

*Leader: Even in the valley of the shadow of death,*

*All: This light shines in remembrance of those whose lives and deaths are seen as little more than pawns in a political, economic, and religious power game.*

excerpts from "Under Siege" (for Aleppo)  
by Mahmoud Darwish  
Translated by Marjolijn De Jager  
<http://www.warscapes.com/poetry/poem-aleppo>

Here on the slopes of hills, facing the dusk and the cannon of time  
Close to the gardens of broken shadows,  
We do what prisoners do,  
And what the jobless do:  
We cultivate hope.

(...)  
You who stand in the doorway, come in,  
Drink Arabic coffee with us  
And you will sense that you are men like us  
You who stand in the doorways of houses  
Come out of our morningtimes,  
We shall feel reassured to be  
Men like you!

(...)  
It is up to the soul to come down from its mount  
And on its silken feet walk  
By my side, hand in hand, like two longtime  
Friends who share the ancient bread  
And the antique glass of wine  
May we walk this road together  
And then our days will take different directions...

(...)  
In the state of siege, time becomes space  
Transfixed in its eternity  
In the state of siege, space becomes time  
That has missed its yesterday and its tomorrow.

(...)  
My friends are always preparing a farewell feast for me,  
A soothing grave in the shade of oak trees  
A marble epitaph of time  
And always I anticipate them at the funeral:  
Who then has died...who?

(...)  
The water in the clouds has the unlimited shape of what is left to us  
Of the sky. And other things of suspended memories  
Reveal that this morning is powerful and splendid,  
And that we are the guests of eternity.

*Leader: Never again.*

*All: May we have the courage to say: Never Again.*



## South Sudan

According to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, South Sudan is on the brink of catastrophe. In the past year, there has been an increase in hate speech; a crackdown on journalists; and deepening divisions between the country's 64 tribes.

Supporters of the president, mainly from the majority Dinka tribe, and supporters of the ousted former Vice President, mainly from the Nuer tribe, are fighting for control of towns. Citizens are being targeted for murder, rape, assault, and torture on the basis of their ethnic identity.

The UN panel that visited South Sudan in the autumn of 2016 said "There is already a steady process of ethnic cleansing underway in several areas of South Sudan using starvation, gang rape, and the burning of villages. The scale of the rape of women and girls is mind-boggling. Everywhere we went across this country we heard villagers saying they are ready to shed blood to get their land back." There are multiple armed groups, people are targeted based on ethnicity, houses are being torched, food insecurity is rampant, and freedom of movement denied to certain tribes. 50,000 people have been killed, and 2 million people have fled their homes in the past three years.

*Leader: Even in the valley of the shadow of death,*

*All: This light shines in remembrance of those who continue to live daily in fear, whose lives are marked by ethnic and gender violence, and whose deaths hold little interest for the rest of the world.*

winners of 2016 UNICEF "peace & unity" children's poetry contest in Juba, South Sudan:

*1st place, boys class: Louis Pitia Patrick, 14 years old*

Peace, peace, peace

We need peace in our country

We need peace in our communities

We need peace in our homes

We need peace worldwide

What can you do to ensure peace prevails in your community

To me I can do the following on my own capacity

Sensitizing people in the community

Acting drama with peace message

Composing song with peace message

Meetings

Avoid tribalism in communities

Call leaders to pass peace message

Games and sports should always be organized

Producing posters and banners with peace message

My fellow children, join me and build a peaceful South Sudan

And conducive environment than being in conflict always

*1st place, girls class: Clara Alex Ramadan, 16 years old*

They are careless about my needs  
I need Peace  
Where people live at ease  
I need security  
So that I plant coffees and beans

Give me school  
So that I'll be the next Nobel Prize winner  
for finding the cure to HIV

I have huge dreams  
And ambition to make them reality  
I have the determination and self discipline  
To see every goal surpassed

I'll go to college  
Not to party and have fun  
Because when I'm an adult  
There will be no generation of corruption  
Segregation or tribalism

Though I hurt myself I would never hurt anybody else  
Because I am a girl  
Because I am a girl  
Because I am a girl

*Leader: Never again. All: May we have the courage to say: Never Again.*

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Throughout history and throughout the world, we have seen the inhumanity we are capable of  
perpetrating and allowing. Too many lives have been taken.  
Native, First Nations, and Indigenous peoples...  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people...  
the Disappeared of Latin America...  
Rwanda...  
The Congo...  
Yazidis in Iraq...  
And so many others both known and forgotten, yet precious and beloved.

*Leader: Even in the valley of the shadow of death,*

*All: This light shines in remembrance of those who have been killed because of who they are,  
who they love, how they look, how they worship, or where they fit on the socio-political-  
economic scale.*

*Leader: Never again.*

*All: May we have the courage to say: Never Again.*

## **You**

*Tiki Krakowski (1995)*

(Holocaust Survivor)

You

You, have the power to rebel.

You, have the power to change this hell.

You, have the ability to end this strife.

You can save a life.

Then why

Do you sit here,

And pretend that you don't care?

You, have the ability to put together the shattered.

You, have the power to lift up the battered.

You, have the power to bring truth to the lies.

You, can silence the cries.

Then why

Do you sit here,

And pretend that you don't hear?

You, have the power to light up the dark.

You, have the power to create the spark.

You, have the ability to end all the hunger.

You, can put together what has gone asunder.

Then how

Can you live and be

And pretend that you don't see?

You, have the power to stand up for what is right.

You, have the ability to end this bitter fight.

You, have the power to influence others.

You, can help your brothers.

Then how

Can you live and be

And not speak?

## **Lord of the Arab, Lord of the Jew**

By Ronald G. Haznedl 1971

Lord of the Arab, Lord of the Jew  
Lord of the old and Lord of the new,  
Lord of the Russian, Egyptian and Greek,  
Lord of the mighty, Lord of the weak.

Lord of the earth and the vastness of space  
Help me see past the nose on my face.  
The myriads of stars are the jewels on Thy crown;  
Help me see past the edge of my town.

The pyramids of Egypt, the forum of Rome,  
I am Thy child, so these are my home.  
Jerusalem and its struggles, Rome and its glory;  
I am Thy child, so these are my story.

From idolatry deliver me, Maker of all,  
From worshipping one culture as if it were all.  
Deliver me from using Thy great name in vain,  
By taking my own tastes, and signing Thy name.

Lord of the earth and the vastness of space,  
Lord of each nation, Lord of each race,  
How magnificent Thy worlds, how complex are they all.  
My prayer is that mine will not be too small.