



# Remember Us

The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

MENTOR'S GUIDE



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**T**he past is the wellspring for creating a meaningful future. This belief is at the core of Jewish education. As teachers, we help our students connect with Jewish history, and prepare them to become caring participants in the life of humanity.

***Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project*** offers a simple invitation to an act of memory and redemption. We invite bnai mitzvah students to remember a child who was lost in the Shoah before having the opportunity to be called to the Torah.

This Project is not a Holocaust curriculum, but an offer to participate in an act of Jewish memory. It is designed to support your educational objectives without adding additional time commitments. It is “salt for the soup” of your bnai mitzvah and Holocaust education.

# *Remember Us:* *The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project*

The Project is designed for the child who is preparing for bar/bat mitzvah, and his/her family. The student can choose to engage at any point during preparation, from the beginning to just before being called to the bimah. The parent(s) of the child have the opportunity to make sure the child's participation is in line with the family's intentions about Holocaust education. The child's bnai mitzvah mentor (classroom teacher, tutor, education director, or rabbi) provides the material and guides the process.

## *Steps for the mentor*

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught, "Remembrance is the secret of redemption." This is the idea at the heart of ***Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project***. Remembrance is simple and powerful. Here are the steps for helping your students learn and participate in a most Jewish act:

- 1 Read this guide and the printed handouts for parents and students. You are welcome to edit the program to fit the minhag of your community, on your own or in consultation with the Project staff.
- 2 Identify the children and families in your congregation for whom you think participation is appropriate.
- 3 Distribute the brochure and Parent Guide. Some mentors do this during group orientations, some do it one family at a time, some by a cover letter—or a combination.
- 4 With the parents' permission, give the child the "Invitation to the Student."
- 5 Provide the information on the lost child that we will provide to you.
- 6 Be available to mentor the student—answer questions, point to resource material on Holocaust education, and keep an eye on the impact on the student.
- 7 Invite the student to do mitzvot b'shem—in the name of—the child whose memory he or she is carrying.
- 8 Help the student prepare to speak the name of the remembered child from the bimah.
- 9 Encourage the new bar/bat mitzvah to light yahrzeit candles or say Kaddish annually for the child who has been remembered.

*That's all there is to do.* You are introducing the family to a concept, and then simply facilitating their involvement.

## *Outcomes*

Our children have the most significant role in Jewish continuity. Participation in ***Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project*** provides an opportunity for each child to learn that he/she is *becoming a significant vessel of Jewish memory*.

Participation allows the child to experience—in a meaningful, age-appropriate Jewish task — the tikkun of remembering. This capacity to remember blossoms when it is nurtured; it is a gift to be cultivated. The child gains new stature in the community by this public act from the bimah, becoming one who remembers.

In this way the bar/bat mitzvah takes on a greater purpose, through the student's realization that it is not for himself/herself alone.

And through the child-to-child connection, the student is offered a balanced, life-affirming way to relate to this chapter in the life story of our people, with care and intimacy. The child has the opportunity to *grow from experience to commitment*.

## *The role of survivors*

Many communities are blessed to have survivors who talk to the children and bear witness to the Holocaust. We encourage the involvement of survivors in the Project. Perhaps there will be the opportunity for a survivor to supply the name and history of someone he/she would like a child to remember. This can add a unique personal dimension to the program.

## *The historical record*

There is very little known about most of the one-and-a-half million Jewish children who were lost. The reasons for this are a result of historical circumstances. The Nazis did not concern themselves with counting youngsters; they were considered extraneous to bureaucratic record keeping. Rescuers did not keep records; it was too dangerous. Very young children themselves usually did not leave a written trace.

Yet we *can* remember these lives that shone so briefly and left so little behind. By lifting them up in our memories, their existence is redeemed. The Hasidic tale about going to the forest to light the fires, do the rituals, and say the prayers teaches us that we are charged to do our best with what we are given.

If you choose, and with your guidance, your student can research the place and culture of his/her remembered child. However, this is an individual choice and not a necessary part of the Project.

## *Building the future*

We hope that this memorial process will become a part of bar/bat mitzvah ritual everywhere and endure until each lost child is remembered by someone. In time, it could be a ritual like breaking a glass under the chuppah, a memory of past loss at a time of great joy.

Encourage your students to commit to an annual practice to remember their children. They can light yahrzeit candles. They can say Kaddish, on their bar/bat mitzvah date or Yom Hashoah. (Help them ask for reminder cards from the synagogue.) And, maybe most important, they can come to your community's annual Yom Hashoah commemoration to be recognized as the new generation of memory-bearers.

## *Conclusion*

Thank you for your participation in ***Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project***. You are helping your bnai mitzvah students and their families to redeem the memories of the lost children, and to realize their own potential through Jewish memory.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions about the Project. Additionally, we welcome your observations and reflections, as they give us valuable guidance.

Please join us in asking for HaShem's blessing on this act of redemption.

# The Souls

The significance of the past can be changed  
only at the higher level of . . .Tikkun

—Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*

Our acts of remembering have the possibility of lifting the souls of the departed closer to the light of HaShem. We should remember them with respect, and with the clear intention to act for their benefit. This can be simply done, by creating sacred space for the transmission of names and the act of remembering. Language is the expression of this intention. We suggest that you consider using the following.

## ***Opening sacred space***

We know that God is in this place, and we ask HaShem to surround us and keep this space sacred.

## ***To sanctify our intention***

We ask the Shechinah to embrace each of these remembered children in love, and to assist him/her into the infinite peace of God, and for this we give thanks.

## ***To close sacred space***

We thank you, HaShem, for making us aware of this departed life, we thank you for the light that comes through Judaism and Torah, and we thank you for this time that we share.



# Remember Us

The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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**Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project**

is supported by a grant from the Richard and Rhoda  
Goldman Fund, and other grants and donations.