

A black and white photograph of a young woman with dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, top. The background is slightly out of focus, showing what appears to be a window or a doorway with a dark frame. The overall mood is positive and hopeful.

“Despite it All, I Am Alive”

The Anguish of Liberation and Return to Life

“It Was the Saddest Day of My Life” – The First Days of Liberation

Liberation

During 1944-1945, towards the end of World War II, Soviet, British and U.S. soldiers rescued what remained of European Jewry from the various labor, concentration and extermination camps. The liberation entailed mixed feelings for the survivors, ranging from happiness to sadness, from a sense of a new beginning to grief over their immense personal loss.

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During the first weeks of liberation, survivors suffered from severe malnutrition, disease, and a difficult emotional state. For thousands, the liberation had arrived too late, and they died of illness, exhaustion and sometimes from overeating. Many of the survivors had lost most of their families.

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“It Was the Saddest Day of My Life” – The First Days of Liberation

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In effect, it was only after receiving the initial assistance, which slightly improved their physical condition, that survivors began the difficult emotional task of internalizing the scope of the tragedy that had befallen themselves and their people.

This chapter focuses on the mixed reaction amongst survivors – joy alongside the feeling of loss, and the physical rehabilitation of the camp survivors.

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From the Testimony of Miriam Akavia:

“I thought I should be happy. I felt the tears, but I knew I should be happy. I started crying all the time, thinking, ‘What have I got left?’ “

(Yad Vashem Archives O.3 V.T/4543)



April 1945, A Survivor Next to a Pot of Potation, Nordhausen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 25/4977)

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From the Testimony of Yitzhak (Antek) Zuckerman:

“That day, 17 January, was the saddest day of my life. I wanted to cry, not from joy but from grief. [...] How could we be happy? I was completely broken! You'd kept yourself going all the terrible and bitter years, and now... we were overcome by weakness. Now we could suddenly allow ourselves to be weak [...] Ultimately there is an end to war. We had lived all that time with a certain sense of mission, but now? It was over! What for? What for? [...] I had never cried; they had never seen me depressed, not once; I had to live strongly, but on 17 January... it's not easy to be the last of the Mohicans.”

(Testimony of Yitzchak Zuckerman (Antek), recorded at the Council of the United Kibbutz Movement on 9-10 May 1947. Published in: Zuckerman, Yitzchak, *The Exodus from Poland*, Ghetto Fighters' House, United Kibbutz Movement Press, pp. 13-16 (Hebrew).)



April 1945, A Survivor Next to a Pot of Potation, Nordhausen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 25/4977)

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In the photograph, we see a survivor sitting in the rubble of the camp after liberation. Next to him is a pot for food and a bucket. He is crying bitterly. Miriam and Antek describe the day of liberation, surprisingly, as a very sad day. Antek even says, *“That day [..] was the saddest day of my life”*.

Why do you think Antek would use such a powerful expression to describe the day of liberation?



April 1945, A Survivor Next to a Pot of Potation, Nordhausen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 25/4977)

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From the testimony of Primo Levi:

“They were four young soldiers on horseback, who advanced along the road that marked the limits of the camp, cautiously holding their sten-guns. When they reached the barbed wire they stopped to look, exchanging a few timid words, and throwing strangely embarrassed glances at the sprawling bodies, and the battered huts and at us few still alive.

To us they seemed wonderfully concrete and real, perched on their enormous horses, between the grey of the snow and the grey of the sky, immobile beneath the gusts of damp wind which threatened the thaw.”

(Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man and The Truce*, (Little, Brown Book Group, 1991), pp. 187-188.)



After Liberation, A British Soldier
Speaking with a Prisoner in the Camp,
Bergen Belsen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 1600/7)

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From the testimony of Zvi Katz:

"When we got up in the morning, the guards had disappeared.... A Red Cross car arrived from the nearby town and took us into the town. There were about 150-200 of us. We went quietly, frightened that things might still not be over... We reached the town and they put us in a large barn. I didn't want to be shut up and I went outside. I reached the town centre. Suddenly a convoy of tanks and armored vehicles drove up. There was a huge black soldier on an armored vehicle! They threw us packets of cigarettes. American soldiers surrounded me and pointed to the death's head symbol of the SS on their chests, and asked me if I'd seen any SS men..."



After Liberation, A British Soldier
Speaking with a Prisoner in the Camp,
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(Yad Vashem Archives, 1600/7)

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From the testimony of Zvi Katz:

"...I ran as fast as I could back to the barn. I burst in and shouted: "The Americans are here!" Nobody moved -- they all stared at me with an apathetic and unbelieving gaze. I shouted out my news again, and then some young men approached me and asked me not to start a panic. They began to interrogate me: What did they look like? Was I sure? And then I remembered and I took out the packet of Camel cigarettes from my pocket, and asked "What's this?" Wild jubilation broke out, and everyone ran outside [..]"

(Yad Vashem archives 03-4433, p. 27 (Hebrew))



After Liberation, A British Soldier
Speaking with a Prisoner in the Camp,
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(Yad Vashem Archives, 1600/7)

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In this photograph we see a survivor and an Allied soldier in a concentration camp, at the time of liberation. Many prisoners had been imprisoned for months and sometimes years before they were liberated, and had been cut off from life outside the fences. Notice the subtle gestures between the soldier and the survivor. The survivor is holding an object in his hands – apparently a pack of cigarettes. There appears to be a conversation between the two.

In the two testimonies, the Allied soldiers seemed almost fantastic: Zvi Katz had to show the pack of cigarettes he had received from the soldiers for his friends to believe him, and Primo Levi describes them as “*wonderfully concrete and real*”. Why do you think he describes the soldiers that way?



After Liberation, A British Soldier Speaking with a Prisoner in the Camp, Bergen Belsen, Germany (Yad Vashem Archives,1600/7)

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From the Testimony of Uri Hanoch:

“So what would we do? We would steal the bread even if we didn’t need it. [...] There wasn’t one [prisoner] who didn’t have half a loaf of bread under their pillow. This wasn’t just because they wouldn’t give us any – bread meant security. Only bread, by the way. Not a potato, not an apple and not a pear. That wasn’t security. Security was bread. We’re talking about bread. There wasn’t one [prisoner] who didn’t have bread with in their bed. Only bread. This is a story of bread.”

(Testimony of Uri Hanoch on Yom Hashoah, 1996, Yad Vashem Archives.)



After Liberation, A Child in a Prisoner’s Uniform Eating His First Meal, Dachau, Germany (Yad Vashem Archives, 1771/13)

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In the photograph we see a young boy, who is a survivor of the Dachau concentration camp in Germany. He is holding a large bowl of soup, and eating his first meal. Notice the look on the child's face and his skinny fingers. His forehead is knotted like that of an old man, and the boy looks years older than his real age. What special difficulties do you think this boy might have experienced as a child in a concentration camp?

In Uri Hanoch's testimony, he speaks about the sense of security that bread provided prisoners and survivors after the war. What kind of security do you think bread could provide a young boy who has just been released from a camp?



After Liberation, A Child in a Prisoner's Uniform Eating His First Meal, Dachau, Germany (Yad Vashem Archives, 1771/13)

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From the Testimony of Elie Wiesel:

“Our first act as free men was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. We thought only of that. Not of revenge, not of our families. Nothing but bread. And even when we were no longer hungry, there was still no one who thought of revenge. On the following day, some of the young men went to Weimar to get some potatoes and clothes [..]

Three days after the liberation of Buchenwald I became very ill with food poisoning. I was transferred to the hospital and spent two weeks between life and death. One day I was able to get up, after gathering all my strength. I wanted to see myself in the mirror hanging on the opposite wall. I had not seen myself since the ghetto.

From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me.”

(Wiesel, Elie, Night, Discus Books, 1958/1960 [translated by Stella Rodway].)



1945, Prisoners Awaiting Evacuation to a Field Hospital, Wöbbelin, Germany (Yad Vashem Archives 217/7)

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From the memoirs of Yaakov Lahat:

"I cannot describe the joy. People were going wild. The food storerooms [..] were broken into, and people stocked up on bread, sausages and various canned goods. So long as there was still a crush to get into the food storerooms I didn't dare go in, because I might have gotten trampled. When the place had somewhat emptied out, I entered one of the sheds and looked for flour. I found a bag [..] of flour and I took some margarine as well. Nothing else. I knew that after prolonged hunger, one shouldn't pounce of food that is difficult to digest. Nighttime came. In addition to food, each person took a blanket."

(Israel Ring (Ed.), *How Embers Survived* [Hebrew], Moreshet and Ein Hamifratz Kibbutz 1995, p. 130.)



1945, Prisoners Awaiting Evacuation to a Field Hospital, Wöbbelin, Germany (Yad Vashem Archives 217/7)

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- In the photograph, we see liberated prisoners awaiting medical assistance. We can see that healthier prisoners assisted those who were worse off. Notice their worried expressions.
- Both testimonies by Elie Wiesel and Yaakov Lahat describe the chaos that immediately followed liberation, when survivors could eat more than starvation rations for the first time. Thousands grew ill and died from overeating, after having survived the concentration camps.



1945, Prisoners Awaiting Evacuation to a Field Hospital, Wöbbelin, Germany
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- The first days of liberation were a form of transformative period between the world of the prisoners to the world of survivors.
What was the significance of mutual assistance in the first days of liberation?
- In Elie Wiesel's testimony, he describes his severe physical condition. He tells of the first time he looked at a mirror, and how that moment haunted him for years after liberation: "From the depths of the mirror, a corpse gazed back at me. The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me." What is the "corpse" Wiesel is talking about? What role does this corpse play in Elie Wiesel's life?



1945, Prisoners Awaiting Evacuation to a Field Hospital, Wöbbelin, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 217/7)

“What to Do Now? After All, Life Must Go On” – Loneliness and the Search for New Meaning

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During the war, the difficulties of daily life and the constant struggle to stay alive did not leave much room to think about the fate of family members. Many of the survivors who had lost loved ones during the Holocaust only began confronted the enormity of their loss after liberation. This liberation closed one tragic circle, but opened a new set of difficulties: after years of physical torment and fear, survivors now had to face the loss of their old world. They had to bid a final farewell to their parents, partners, children, homes, cities, and world - their entire identity

“What to Do Now? After All, Life Must Go On” – Loneliness and the Search for New Meaning

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The loss was often accompanied with a sense of guilt over their having survived while their family members had been murdered. The search for a new path was often accompanied by a tremendous feeling of loneliness and shame. However, many survivors say that besides the emptiness and desperation in their lives after the Holocaust, they also had a strong drive that led them to find new meaning in their lives. In this chapter, we will focus on some of those attempts to find meaning.

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From the testimony of Helen Borko:

April 1945, A Camp Survivor,
Bergen-Belsen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 7283/115)

“Then came a loneliness that took over me sevenfold. I had already lived amongst Jews, but it seemed that each of us here [...] is lonely within – a loneliness within a collective. At nights I would lay on the hard mattress – provided by UNRRA – bundle up in blankets, but I couldn’t sleep a wink. The thoughts came one after another: my past, father’s house, my small town in which all Jewish life had ceased. I couldn’t find any relief. What should I do now? After all, life must go on [...] I was searching for someone with whom I could share my feelings. Those few women whom I had befriended, and who would bare their souls – I didn’t find much interest in them. I needed more than that.”

(Helen Borko and Joseph Perlstein, *Bederech Lo Derech* [Hebrew], pp. 23-24.)

April 1945, Two Survivors After Liberation,
Bergen-Belsen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 181/69)



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From the Memoirs of Aviva Opaz:

April 1945, A Camp Survivor,
Bergen-Belsen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 7283/115)

“I started coming to terms with my being and orphan and my loneliness. The little girl awoke in me, the one who missed family warmth and a mother’s coddling. In the moments of idleness, the pain and [sense of] crisis grew stronger. At nights I would cry, and by day I was very sensitive, and was easily offended. It was just as reaching the goal was so near that I was attacked by weakness.”

(Aviva Opaz, Children’s Kibbutz [Hebrew], Yad Vashem – The International Research Center, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 89.)

April 1945, Two Survivors After Liberation,
Bergen-Belsen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 181/69)



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April 1945, A Camp Survivor,
Bergen-Belsen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 7283/115)

In the top photograph, a boy is lying in a bed in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, after liberation. The boy is covered with a blanket, his arms are folded, hands clenched, and he has a sad look on his face. After liberation, many survivors had to cope with a terrible loneliness, accompanied by the nagging suspicion – and sometime the firm knowledge – that they had lost their family members and friends. Many thought they were the only remnant of their family, or even sometimes their town. *(Continued)*



April 1945, Two Survivors After Liberation,
Bergen-Belsen, Germany
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April 1945, A Camp Survivor,
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In the bottom photograph we see two survivors from from Bergen-Belsen wearing clothes that look slightly oversized on their malnourished bodies, their faces are gaunt. One survivor is leaning on her friend, and both are looking towards the side, outside the frame. Hellen Barko mentions a “loneliness within a collective.”

What do you think she meant? What do you think the survivors could do to try and lessen, if only slightly, the terrible loneliness they felt after liberation?



April 1945, Two Survivors After Liberation,
Bergen-Belsen, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 181/69)

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From the Testimony of Antonia Rosenbaum:

“One day an American officer came and said: “We very much want to continue to help you but we cannot. The war isn’t over yet, and you have to go home. The moment that he said “home”, it was as though everything came crashing in on me. What is “home”? Where is “home”? Where do I have a home? Who will I go home to? I started to yell: “I don't have a home! I’m not going home” So he told me: “I can’t keep you here.”

I suddenly woke up. For years you are weak, fighting day-to-day, afraid. You don’t have to time to think about normal things – that was so distant. All of a sudden you start to breath, to eat, to recover, and then you wake up an realize what a tragedy [has occurred]. There’s no home, nothing.”

(Yad Vashem Archives, 0.33/26427



1945, Evacuation of Prisoners, Wobbelin, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 217/11)

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In the photograph, a U.S. soldier is evacuating a prisoner from the camp, half supporting him and half dragging. The prisoner is kneeling on the ground, crying, finding difficulty in leaving the camp. Despite the intense desire the prisoners had to return to being free human beings, many feared the moment of evacuation, and even objected to their evacuation. How does Antonia explain the resistance of some liberated prisoners to being evacuated? What is the difficulty she describes?



1945, Evacuation of Prisoners, Wöbbelin, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 217/11)

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From the testimony of Eva Braun:

"When I heard about freedom, I was also very frightened. What would we find? We had survived, and we had to return to civilization, but how did one behave in a normal world? We were two young girls who had nothing. Who would look after us? What would we do? There was excitement, but our feelings were mixed. We were afraid. It's hard to describe and explain these feelings of simultaneous fear and joy. That was our next stage. Now, after liberation, what were we going to do? We had nothing. We were frightened that we might not have anyone left in the world. We needed someone to look after us and take care of us. And to a great extent I was looking after my little sister and another girl [..] "



1945, A Survivor Sitting on a Bundle,
Dachau, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 3CO5)

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From the testimony of Eva Braun:

"...More than anything else I wanted someone to look after me and relieve me of the burden of caring for the girls, so that I wouldn't have to be responsible, so that I would be under an adult's protection. It's hard to explain it, but I wanted someone to look after me, I wanted someone to lean on. It turned out that freedom is relative to a very great extent. Worry about the future weighed heavily on me. We had to build our future, but how does one build a future?"

(Kleiman, Yehudit and Springer-Aharoni, Nina, *The Anguish of Liberation*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1995, pp. 45-46.)



1945, A Survivor Sitting on a Bundle,
Dachau, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 3C05)

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In the photograph we see a prisoner in the camp, after liberation, sitting on top of a bundle. These are presumably all his possessions, and he is wrapped in many layers of clothing. His body language projects fear, loneliness and sadness. Eva Braun, who had been under the care of her sister as at the time of liberation, describes the fear of the things to come, and the heavy burden she had to bear. Eva and the prisoner in the photograph both, in their own way, indicate to the difficulty of “returning to normal life.” What, do you think, did survivors fear once they had been liberated from the camps? What were the difficulties they faced in returning to a free world after the war?



1945, A Survivor Sitting on a Bundle,
Dachau, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives 3CO5)

“We Jews - No One Was Waiting For Us ” – Where To?

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Once free of Nazi tyranny, and finally able to return to their homes, many survivors discovered that most or all of their families had perished, and that they no longer had any home to return to. Attempts by prisoners to return to the places they had lived in before the war did not always succeed. Oftentimes the local population, particularly in Eastern Europe, proved antisemitic and hostile toward Jews, and saw them as unwelcome guests. In Western Europe, where most Jews' homes were still standing, survivors were also often disappointed by their reception from their neighbors and the bureaucratic agencies that were meant to assist them. Ultimately, they were forced to find their way back to life on their own.

“We Jews - No One Was Waiting For Us” – Where To?

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Many of the survivors attempted to return to their prewar homes, as soon as their physical condition allowed so. This often brought great frustration and disappointment. Returning home often involved a long and perilous journey. War-torn Europe remained in utter chaos. Basic transportation lacked, and was often dangerous. When the survivors reached their old homes, they had to confront a new reality. In most cases, there was no one there waiting for them. In others, there was another family member roaming amongst the rubble. In those few cases when couples found each other, child found parent, brother found sister etc., the small fraction of Jews who survived served as a testament to the enormity of the loss and the finality of the disaster. While the local population attempted to rebuilt itself and was counting the dead, Jews were counting the living.

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From the Testimony of Yosef Zalman Kleinman:

“There was an enormous train, with two large locomotives pulling it, that started moving southwards. [..] The journey took several days, and was cramped [..] Italians were returning from all over Europe. [..] At every train station, Italians would alight from the train, returning to homes they hadn’t seen in years. All the townspeople waited for this train with refreshments, here and there even a welcoming orchestra. Every station, people would get off, but for us Jews – no one was waiting for us... For me, it was twinge in my heart... For me.. it was a clear picture that we had no one.”

(Yad Vashem Archives, O.3 V.T/131)



A Child Sleeping Between Train Cars on the Return Journey from Buchenwald to Hungary
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6839/5)

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From the Testimony of Shmuel Shulman Shilo:

“Suddenly I’m standing in the middle of the city [..] and I ask myself, “So what? Home – gone, family – gone, children – gone, my friends are gone, Jews – gone. Here and there would be a Jew a hardly knew. This is what I fought for? This is what I stayed alive for? Suddenly I realized that my whole struggle had been pointless, and I didn’t feel like living.”

(Yad Vashem Archives, 0.3, V.T/135)



A Child Sleeping Between Train Cars on the Return Journey from Buchenwald to Hungary
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6839/5)

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In the photograph we see a boy returning to Hungary from the Buchenwald concentration camp. The boy is sleeping between two train cars, on an improvised bed of hay. Many children returned home alone, passing through cities and countries in a state of chaos. Yosef Kleinman describes the sense of loneliness upon returning home. What were the difficulties that survivors faced upon reaching their hometowns?



A Child Sleeping Between Train Cars on the Return Journey from Buchenwald to Hungary
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6839/5)

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From the Testimony of Miriam Weichselfisch

“It was clear to all of us that there was no place for us in Poland. Jewish blood was being spilt everywhere. Then we found out about a chance to leave Poland and get to Czechoslovakia. We packed our bundles; we took our daughter who was still in diapers and at midnight my husband arrived; he had grown a beard so nobody would recognize him...

We began to walk to the Czech border, and then we reached Salzburg (Austria). We spent about six months in Salzburg, and then we had to walk through the high mountains -- the Alps. It wasn't easy to walk on those paths with a little girl...”



After Liberation, Jewish Survivors Boarding Trucks of the Bericha Movement, on Their Way to Israel (Yad Vashem Archives, 6950/3)

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From the Testimony of Miriam Weichselfisch

"...My husband was a Bericha guide. He was very active, he used to lead groups, and I was dragged along with our little girl on the paths. I had a link with Palestine and I had a bit of 'pull', so they hid me with the child, and another woman with her daughter in another box. We sat in the box and no-one knew we were there. They covered us with planks, and there was a truck that took all the bundles belonging to those who were walking through the Alps... From Salzburg we went to Milan in Italy...

On the way they wanted to give the children sleeping pills so they wouldn't cry, but as a mother I didn't want to use the sleeping pills because I was frightened that my daughter might not wake up again... The cold was many degrees below freezing, snow and a very hard winter. My daughter started to cry at the Austrian-Italian border and so they made the motor run very noisily so that they wouldn't hear her crying..."



After Liberation, Jewish Survivors Boarding Trucks of the Bericha Movement, on Their Way to Israel (Yad Vashem Archives, 6950/3)

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From the Testimony of Miriam Weichselfisch

“From Milan they took us in buses to a place where we could embark on ships and sail. In fact they weren’t ships, but just fishing boats, and I remember it was in the middle of the night... We were packed in the boat like sardines in a tin. We sailed, and out at sea a ship was waiting for us... when we began to sail the English caught us. Our disappointment was tremendous... They took the sick to Haifa and took us to Cyprus...”

(Yad Vashem Archive 03/4209, pp. 24-26 (Hebrew).)



After Liberation, Jewish Survivors Boarding Trucks of the Bericha Movement, on Their Way to Israel (Yad Vashem Archives, 6950/3)

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In the photograph, we see a group of Jewish families loading their possessions on a truck, that was part of the *Bericha* movement. These were organized attempts to assist Jews to reach Europe's borders, and from there – to Eretz Israel. On the face of it, joining the *Bericha* movement may seem like a natural enough choice. However, try to think of the difficulties – physical and mental – survivors faced in deciding to join the *Bericha*.



After Liberation, Jewish Survivors Boarding Trucks of the *Bericha* Movement, on Their Way to Israel
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6950/3)

“He Remembers Yesterday and Misses Tomorrow” – The Displaced Persons’ Camps

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After the end of the war, Displaced Persons’ (DP) camps were set up by the allies in Germany, Austria and Italy, for Jews and non-Jews. Life in the DP camps was difficult, crowded, with no privacy, and often with little to do and a strong sense of emptiness. Nevertheless, the the story of the DP camps represents an important chapter in the renewal of the Jewish people as a individuals and as a group. The attempt to recover from the personal, familial and social loss manifested itself in starting new families, a strong desire to study and learn a craft, and in establishing communities in the camps with widespread social, cultural, political and religious activity.

“He Remembers Yesterday and Misses Tomorrow” – The Displaced Persons’ Camps

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In addition, the Zionist ideology and the desire to found a new home in Eretz Israel gave survivors hope and strength to fight for a home of their own. With the help of various organizations, the Jews in the DP camps managed to raise world awareness to their plight, and gather support to ease the strict immigration laws and open the gates to Eretz Israel (pre-state Israel). The DP camps were gradually dismantled, and the last of the survivors left the camps in 1957. An estimated 300,000 people spent time in Austrian and German DP camps by 1950.

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“We happened upon the school during recess. There was a pleasant bustle of children, and the merriment of schoolchildren fills the air. We are reminded of our childhood years, when we studied math and would make jokes at the teachers’ expense... Since then we’ve endured suffering and wandering, great losses and tragedies. The children of [Bergen] Belsen seem more serious to me than the schoolchildren of my youth. The hardships they’ve endured left a stamp on these children that’s usually reserved to the experiences of adults. This explains a comment made by the gymnasium headmistress, Prof. Helena Wroval, who said that the children are more interested in literature, history, physics and chemistry than in table tennis, even though they have a special hall for various games and listening to radio.”

(A. Witmann, “Undzer Schtme – The First Periodical of the Surviving Remnant”, in Geshet 4 [Hebrew], 1987.)



Hebrew Lesson in the DP Camp, Gauting, Germany
(Yad Vashem, 1486/308)

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Notice the photograph of a lesson in a classroom. On the board, we can see sentences various sentences in Hebrew. In the photograph of the Yavneh school, the sign reads – “see you soon in the holy land!” According to the testimony, why do you think children were more interested in “serious” classes than in games and sports?



Hebrew Lesson in the DP Camp, Gauting, Germany
(Yad Vashem, 1486/308)

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From the Memoirs of Miriam Raz-Zonshein:

"I couldn't imagine how a seder [Passover ritual meal – trans.] is conducted with a lot of people. To my surprise, the group seder went ahead with great celebration. There was a lot of singing, and the text was read in Hebrew. We read the hagaddah [book containing the order of the seder – trans.] just like it was at home, and asked the Four Questions. There was a lot of singing performances, as well as group singing. One of the things that especially touched me was a child who got up on one of the tables and sang Rachel's [Jewish songwriter – trans.] song 'eulay" ("and perhaps"). ..."



A Child Eating in a Displaced Persons' Camp, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 177go2)



Women and Children in the Displaced Persons' Camp, Feldafing, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6228/76)

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From the Memoirs of Miriam Raz-Zonshein:

“He had a voice that went up to the heavens, and when he reached the song “Oh, My Kineret” [name of a sea in Israel], I’m convinced that somewhere up in that starlit sky, even the lord himself was listening to this marvelous singing. The seder went on for many hours. People refused to leave the festive event. Everyone is overcome by great emotion, and even after the official closing of the event, many people sit on the grass and sing.”

(Miriam Raz-Zonshein, *Birds in Black and White* [Hebrew], Moreshet Yad Vashem, Tel Aviv 2002, pp. 187-188.)



A Child Eating in a Displaced Persons' Camp, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 177go2)



Women and Children in the Displaced Persons' Camp, Feldafing, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6228/76)

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In the photographs, the concern of the parents for their children is apparent. For survivors in the DP camps, the need to feed and care for the basic needs of their children became especially significant. Why?



A Child Eating in a Displaced Persons' Camp, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 177go2)



Women and Children in the Displaced Persons' Camp, Feldafing, Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6228/76)

A New Home: *“I waited a long time for the day I can land in a free country”*

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Holocaust survivors in the DP camps focused their efforts on emigrating from Europe and starting a new life. Two thirds of the survivors immigrated to pre-state Israel. The remaining third immigrated to the United States and various other western countries. Their absorption in Eretz Israel involved many difficulties, which also characterized the first years of the State. Despite these difficulties, the survivors displayed remarkable absorption capabilities, and with time become an integral component of Israeli society.

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From the Testimony of Dorothy Finger:

“During the war years I lost what other kids had. I lost my family, home, friends, happy school years. I had to forget that I was growing up and needed an education. I had to go to work and forget about life. [...] I lived in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany and dreamt about my freedom in the United States or Israel. Once I decided to do something about my future, I wrote a letter to an uncle of mine who lived in Wilmington and asked him for help. He did. He sent me an affidavit. His son, who was a captain in the Air Force in the United States Army, was in Germany. He found me and took me with him and I stayed with him and his wife for one year. He helped me to come to the United States. I waited a long time for the day I can land in a free country, where there is no difference of what race or religion you are, where everybody is free and happy. All kids are going to school and enjoying life. I waited a long time and got what I waited for so long. I received my passport [...]”

Yad Vashem Archive (0.69/203)



Refugees Sleeping Aboard an American Airplane, on a Flight Leaving Germany (Yad Vashem Archives, 6228/53)

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In the photograph, we see a Jewish family aboard an airplane, immigrating to the United States. They are sitting on the airplane deck, father and child are sleeping. The child is heavily wrapped, clutched firmly by the father. The family members are gathered together, on their way to a new country. What difficulties do you think an immigrant family of Holocaust survivors, might encounter in a foreign country?



Refugees Sleeping Aboard an American Airplane,
on a Flight Leaving Germany
(Yad Vashem Archives, 6228/53)

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From the Memoirs of Menachem Meir:

“On October 6th, 1948, in the early morning hours, after a journey of several days in the stormy Mediterranean Sea, the “Azmaut” [“Independence”] immigrant ship lay anchor at Haifa Port. It was the day after Rosh Hashana, the festival of the new year. It felt like I was dreaming.

With dawn, I stood on deck with 1,050 other immigrants. We all gazed at the coast we were reaching, and at Mount Carmel growing taller as we drew near. We looked on, full of hope and expectation towards reaching the promised land. I felt I had reached home. I was sixteen...”



Postwar, Two Brothers, Survivors
from Transnistria

(Yad Vashem Archives, 156f04)

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"...The Declaration of Independence had taken place five months previously. The armies of the Arab countries had already invaded. The War of Independence was raging in full force. I wanted to be part of this historic event from its beginning, or at least from the earliest moment I could join it. I did not have a brother, a relative or a friend. I was alone, but not lonely. I wanted to enlist to the Israel Defense Forces. As soon as I arrived at the port, I turned to the first Israeli officer I saw and asked him how I enlist. He looked at me from above and said, "but you're only sixteen."

(Menachem Meir and Frederik Reimes, *Do the Trees Blossom There?* [Hebrew], Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 2000, p. 141)



Postwar, Two Brothers, Survivors from Transnistria

(Yad Vashem Archives, 156f04)

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In the photograph we see boys – brothers – who had emigrated from Romania. A large part of the survivors arrived in pre-state Israel alone, as Menachem Meir says. Young Menachem wanted to enlist to the army, until a policeman told him he was too young. Why do you think he was so determined to join the army?



Postwar, Two Brothers, Survivors from Transnistria

(Yad Vashem Archives, 156f04)

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What is Halina Birenbaum trying to tell us in her poem? Think of the difficulties facing the family in the photograph. Note also their clothing, belongings, and other details in the photograph.

"My life started from the end

first I have known death, then - birth

I was growing amidst hatred, in the kingdom of destruction

only to learn later about creation

breathing bleakness, fires, deterioration of feeling

this was the atmosphere of my childhood [..]

My life began from the end and just then

everything returned to the beginning,

I was resurrected.

It was all not in vain, not in vain,

because goodness is not less powerful than evil

in me is strength too

I am the proof."



March 1951, Family from Romania, after Disembarking from an Immigrant Ship, Israel

(Yad Vashem Archives, 5290/19)

Conclusion

From the Testimony of Elazar Adler:

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“This matter of rehabilitating the She’erit Hapleta (the surviving remnant), the desire of Jews to live – it was unbelievable. People got married. They would take a barrack and divide it into ten small room for ten couples. The life instinct overcame everything else – “despite it all, I am alive” – and one even lived an intensive life. When I look today at the three years in Germany [after the war], I am amazed. We took children and made them into human beings. We printed newspapers. We restored the soul to the bones. Revenge for the Holocaust? Who had time for that? You knew the reality, you knew you had no family, that you were alone, that you had to act – you were busy doing. [..]”

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“...After such destruction – building a new life, getting married, bringing children into the world? Out of forgetting, one could build a new life. Somehow, the life instinct was so strong that it kept up alive, otherwise there would have been suicides. That wasn’t all, however. Today, I see that what saved us was the struggle for Eretz Israel. The struggle for Eretz Israel made us recognize that this had to be our main effort. The struggle for Eretz Israel meant taking young people and giving them a Zionist education, teaching them Hebrew, sending them to Israel [despite the immigration restrictions – trans.], assisting people on the Bericha routes. We were then at a stage of doing. This doing gave a point to living.. It kept us alive.”

(Yad Vashem Archives, 0.3/5426, pp.41-42)