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## *Yom Hashoah – Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*

### **YOM HASHOAH — ZACHOR, REMEMBER!**

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**The Holocaust, Rembrandt and the Quest for Authenticity:** *Nathan Lopes Cardozo, Jerusalem Post, Apr. 6, 2013*—Rembrandt reminds us that if we want to really live we must show flawless integrity and demonstrate great authenticity. It is all about making a genuine contribution to the world, with no regard for gain. A person must make sure that he can look at himself in the mirror at the end of his life and say, I lived my life; it did not just pass me by.

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### **PRESIDENT SHIMON PERES**

*Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Apr. 7, 2013*

“Today, Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day is also the memorial day for 70 years since the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. There was a never a rebellion like it. They were so few and their bravery remained as a model for so many. From now and forever. Today we salute their bravery with the flags flying in the wind of freedom. These are flags of exaltation, not only of grief.

A clear line exists between the resistance in the ghettos, in the camps and in the forests and the rebirth and bravery of the State of Israel. It is a line of dignity, of renewed independence, of mutual responsibility, of exalting Gods name. As a ray of hope which was not extinguished even during terrible anguish. The ghetto fighters sought life even when circumstance screamed despair.

The civilized world must ask itself how in such a short space of time after the crematoria were extinguished, after the terrible death toll that the allied powers endured to put an end to the Nazi devil, it is still possible for the leadership, like that of Iran, to openly deny the Holocaust and threaten another Holocaust.”

*From the Jerusalem address by President Shimon Peres, on Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day.*

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## WARSAW GHETTO SURVIVOR IN ISRAEL RECALLS UPRISING

*Aron Heller*

[Associated Press](#), Apr 6, 2013

Two days before her comrades embarked on an uprising that came to symbolize Jewish resistance against the Nazis in World War II, 14-year-old Aliza Mendel got her orders: Escape from the Warsaw Ghetto. The end was near. Nazi troops had encircled the ghetto, and the remaining Jewish rebels inside were prepared to die fighting. They had few weapons, and they felt there was no point in giving one of them to a teenage girl whose main task to that point had been distributing leaflets.

"They told me I was too young to fight," said the survivor, now 84, who uses her married name, Aliza Vitis-Shomron. "They said, 'You have to leave and tell the world how we died fighting the Nazis. That is your job now.'"

She's been doing that ever since, publishing a memoir about life in the ghetto and lecturing about the revolt and its legendary leader, Mordechai Anielewicz. While nearly all her friends perished, she survived the ghetto and a later period in a Nazi concentration camp. She made it to Israel, married and has three children, seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. On Sunday night, 70 years after the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Vitis-Shomron is set to speak on behalf of Holocaust survivors at the official ceremony marking Israel's annual Holocaust memorial day.

"It's a day of deep sorrow for me, because I remember all my friends in the (resistance) movement who gave their lives," said Vitis-Shomron. "But it was also a wonderful act of sacrifice by those who gave up their lives without even trying to save themselves. The goal was to show that we would not go down without a response." Six million Jews were killed by German Nazis and their collaborators in the Holocaust of World War II, wiping out a third of world Jewry.

The 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising was the first large-scale rebellion against the Nazis in Europe and the single greatest act of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. Though guaranteed to fail, it became a symbol of struggle against impossible conditions, illustrated a refusal to succumb to Nazi atrocities and inspired other acts of uprising and underground resistance by Jews and non-Jews alike.

While the world marks International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Jan. 27, the date of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, Israel's annual Holocaust memorial day coincides with the Hebrew date of the Warsaw ghetto uprising — highlighting the role it plays in the country's psyche. Even the day's official name — "Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day" — alludes to the image of the Jewish warrior upon which the state was founded. The ghetto battle contrasts with the image of Jews meekly marching to their deaths.

Israel has wrestled with the competing images for decades. After setting up their state in 1948, just three years after the end of the war, Israelis preferred to emphasize the heroic resistance fighters, though their numbers were relatively small. In recent years they have come around to recognizing the overwhelming tragedy of the murder of millions of Jews and the traumas of the survivors who still live along them.

Before the war, Warsaw had a vibrant Jewish community, and a third of the city's population was Jewish. The Nazis built the Warsaw ghetto in 1940, a year after occupying Poland, and began herding Jews into it. The ghetto initially held some 380,000 Jews who were cramped into tight living spaces. At its peak, the ghetto housed about a half a million Jews, said Havi Dreifuss, a researcher at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial who has studied the ghetto.

Life in the ghetto included random raids, confiscations and abductions by Nazi soldiers. Disease and starvation were rampant, and bodies often appeared on the streets. The resistance movement began to grow after the deportation of July 22, 1942, when 265,000 men, women and children were rounded up and later killed at the Treblinka death camp. As word of the Nazi genocide spread, those who remained behind no longer believed German promises that they would be sent to forced labor camps.

A small group of rebels began to spread calls for resistance, carrying out isolated acts of sabotage and attacks. Some Jews began defying German orders to report for deportation. The Nazis entered the ghetto on April 19, 1943, the eve of the Passover holiday. Three days later, the Nazis set the ghetto ablaze, turning it into a fiery death trap, but the Jewish fighters kept up their struggle for nearly a month. The Jewish fighters who had fortified themselves in bunkers and hiding places managed to kill 16 Nazis and wound almost 100, Dreifuss said.

They were ultimately brutally vanquished. Anielewicz and others died inside the bunker on 18 Mila Street, which later became the title of a famous novel by Leon Uris that fictionalized the events. "It was a moral victory. No one believed the Jews would fight back," said Dreifuss. "It's amazing that after three years of Nazi occupation, starvation and illness, these people found the strength to disobey the Nazi orders, stand up and fight back."

Anielewicz, who was in his early 20s, became a heroic figure in Israel, with a village and streets across the nation named in his honor. Vitis-Shomron remembers him well. She said he was a tall, charismatic leader of a younger generation who refused to submit quietly to the Nazis as their parents did.

"His theory was, 'don't get used to what is happening. Don't accept it,'" she said. "The Nazis wanted to turn us into slaves, and he said that only free people could resist." The approach put Vitis-Shomron at odds with her parents, who objected to her activity in the youth movement. Often she would defy the Nazi curfew and only return home in the morning. She narrowly escaped S.S. officers in the streets as she posted underground leaflets calling on Jews to resist or escape.

She said the hardest part for her was escaping before the uprising began, joining her mother and younger sister in their hideout on the Polish side of town outside the ghetto. She remembers watching the red skies above the burning ghetto, where her friends were waging war. "If it was up to me, I would have stayed behind and fought to the death with them. I had no fear," she said. "The uprising represented Jewish pride. It was us saying, 'we will not die the way you want us to. We will die the way we want to, as free people.'"

Vitis-Shomron was later captured and sent the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp with her mother and sister. They all survived and eventually made it to Israel. Her father was deported from the ghetto and killed in a Nazi death camp.

Today, Vitis-Shomron volunteers for Yad Vashem, collecting pages of testimony from fellow survivors that help build the museum's depository of names of the victims. Despite her own past, she claims not to have experienced the psychological damage that plague other survivors. "I never saw myself as a victim. I was on the active side, the resisting side," she said. "It helped me cope."

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**ESCAPE FROM AUSCHWITZ TAKES SHAPE**  
*David B. Green*

*[Ha'aretz](#), Apr. 7, 2013*

April 7, 1944, is the day on which Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler began their escape from Auschwitz, a process that resulted in a detailed report that provided the world with a first-hand account of the systemic mass murder taking place there.

Rudolf Vrba (originally Walter Rosenberg, 1924-2006) and Alfred Wetzler (1918-1988) were both Slovak Jews who had been arrested in 1942 and ended up in the Auschwitz II camp, also known as Birkenau. They recognized one another from home, and decided to escape together.

In the memoirs that Vrba wrote after the war, he explained how he had attempted to commit to memory the numbers of transports arriving in Auschwitz, and their places of origin, how he had discussed the way in which Jews were killed with Sonderkommandos who worked in the camp, and how, in early 1944, a Polish kapo told him that the camp was expecting the imminent arrival of one million Hungarian Jews, for whom a new rail line, heading directly to the gas chambers, was being constructed. He also heard German SS troops saying how they looked forward to receiving Hungarian salami from the anticipated arrivals, who would be told they were coming to work at a labor camp, could be expected to arrive with provisions.

On April 7, the two men snuck into the area between the two fences marking off the camp's inner and outer perimeters. They knew from others' earlier escape attempts that guards would continue to search for an escaped prisoner for three days after his reported disappearance. For that reason, Vrba and Wetzler hid for the next two days under a woodpile, emerging only on April 10.

They then headed by foot toward the Polish-Slovakian border, 130 kms away. Crossing into Slovakia on April 21, they got in touch with the local Judenrat (Jewish council), whose head, Dr. Oscar Neumann, interviewed them separately over three days, extracting every detail they could recall about Auschwitz. By April 27, they had prepared an extensive and carefully edited document in German and Hungarian. It included sketches of the layout of the various camps that made up Auschwitz-Birkenau, lists detailing the arrival of transports they had witnessed, and the operation of the gas chambers and crematoria. Most of what they reported was later corroborated by Holocaust historians.

On November 26, 1944, the Vrba-Wetzler Report, together with two other eyewitness accounts from Auschwitz – that of Arnost Rosin and Czeslaw Mordowicz and the “Polish Major’s report” of Jerzy Tabeau – were published by the U.S. War Refugee Board, in a document that became known as the “Auschwitz Protocols.” The same day, it received detailed coverage in the New York Times. Long before then, however, the Hungarian government had begun deporting the country’s Jews, 100,000 of whom were sent to Auschwitz between May 15 and May 27, most of whom were killed on arrival.

There is disagreement about exactly who within the Hungarian Jewish community received early notice of the Vrba-Wetzler Report, but it seems clear that Rudolf Kastner, of the Budapest Rescue and Aid Committee, had a copy of it in hand by early May. At the time, Kastner was negotiating with Adolf Eichmann for the ransoming of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis – the country’s Jewish community was 800,000-strong. Neither Kastner nor other members of the Hungarian Jewish Council made the Vrba-Wetzler Report public, presumably because they didn’t want to jeopardize negotiations with the Germans. In the end, Kastner and Eichmann arranged for the release of 1,684 Jews, and their safe passage to Switzerland.

Only after Rosin and Mordowicz, also Slovakian prisoners, escaped from Auschwitz, on May 27, and the full Auschwitz Protocols were smuggled into Switzerland, did pressure begin to mount on the pro-Nazi Hungarian head of state Miklos Horthy not to cooperate with the German demands for the Jews’ deportation. Requests from Washington and the Vatican apparently led to Horthy’s decision on July 7 to halt the deportations of the Jews of Budapest (by then Jews from the rest of the country had already been murdered). The halt was only temporary, however, since Horthy’s government was overthrown by the Arrow Cross Party in October, which established a Nazi puppet government.

After the war, Vrba received a doctorate in chemistry and biochemistry, and eventually made his way to Vancouver, Canada, where he died in 2006. He published journalistic accounts of his experiences in 1961, but when he offered to testify at the trial of Adolf Eichmann that same year, the Israeli government declined, saying it could not pay his travel expenses. Instead, he submitted written testimony. Wetzler returned to Bratislava, Slovakia, after the war, where he worked as an editor and later on a farm. He also wrote up his memoirs, under the pen name of Jozef Lanik. He died in 1988.

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## THE HOLOCAUST, REMBRANDT AND THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY

*Nathan Lopes Cardozo*

*[Jerusalem Post](#), Apr. 6, 2013*

As we approach Holocaust Remembrance Day, I think of Rembrandt's superb Large Self-Portrait, which is exhibited at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. It cast a spell on me when I first saw it, but on Holocaust Remembrance Day it invites thoughts that penetrate deeper and deeper into my very being. When trying to do the impossible – imagining what happened to members of my family and to millions of other Jews who perished in the Holocaust – Rembrandt's self-portrait awakens me from my slumber.

On Yom Hashoah one can virtually smell the blood of the six million Jews killed, including one and a half million children. Walking through Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, I see the faces of many of them, and it is not difficult to imagine that these children could have been mine. After all, I missed the Holocaust by a hair's breadth.

Rembrandt's portrait looks more powerful than ever after such a moment of reflection. He was 12 when the Thirty Years' War began, and this painting was done four years after the devastation of Europe ended. In those days there was no market for Rembrandt's many self portraits.

They were not painted for clients, nor were they expected to be sold. This was integrity at its best: masterpieces painted with no regard for remuneration or even career advancement. They were created just "to be," because there was no way to suppress them in the mind of Rembrandt's genius. An overflow of unrelenting authenticity.

At a time like this, I think of the millions killed during the Holocaust and ask myself what I have done with the life granted to me but denied to those millions. True, one must do something for a living, but Rembrandt reminds us that if we want to really live we must show flawless integrity and demonstrate great authenticity. It is all about making a genuine contribution to the world, with no regard for gain, and even being prepared to pay the price of one's rank and position in the conventional community. A person must make sure that he can look at himself in the mirror at the end of his life and say, I lived my life; it did not just pass me by.

We live in a world where there are too many beauty salons. We have created a cosmetic world in which man's real face is hidden, yet we are told that this is what life is all about. People try to convince us that we live in a world of dishonor and impropriety; that it is wishful thinking to believe in virtue and integrity; and that the only way to survive is to substitute selfishness for goodness.

They claim that to endure one must be suspicious, and that authenticity is a non-starter. We are told to be more evasive and smooth-tongued in order "to make it." In this way, man engages in a life of fear, and needs to believe that ambush is the normal dwelling place of all men.

Rembrandt lived among the Jews of Amsterdam, my birthplace, and had a close relationship with them. He no doubt heard of the many Portuguese and Spanish Jews who were burned to death by the Inquisition, or had run away from Spain and Portugal because they knew one needs to be authentic in order to live. They

taught him that if man is not more than human he is less than human, and that the art of being a Jew is to know how to go beyond merely living and not become just a memory.

It is our destiny to live for that which is more than ourselves. Perhaps it is this great message of Judaism that prompted Rembrandt to begin painting for no gain and no career.

And so I stand in front of Rembrandt's Large Self-Portrait and realize that in the face of the Holocaust I need to create my own self, with my integrity intact, and with no gain or fame, so that I will not be put to shame when millions who had no chance to live will ask me what I did with my life, and, God forbid, I will fall silent.

*The author is the dean of the David Cardozo Academy in Jerusalem and author of many books.*

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## ON TOPIC

**Remembering the Holocaust, Gaza Style:** *Stand for Israel*, Apr. 7, 2013—[Watch this video](#). It shows a Holocaust memorial service in the south of Israel being interrupted by the *tzeva adom* – the “red alert” alarm letting civilians know to seek shelter. It is heartbreaking and appalling. What should appall you isn't that Gaza terrorists would fire a rocket at Israel on Holocaust Memorial Day.

**Muslim Anti-Semitism in Western Europe:** Manfred Gerstenfeld, *Tundra Tabloids*, Feb. 20, 2013—European governments often avoid exposing Muslim anti-Semitism. In colonial times, Western racism far exceeded any other discrimination. With these guilt feelings, to accuse an immigrant minority group of having a high percentage of people who hate another minority – i.e., the Jews – is not done.

**Combatting Anti-Semitism:** Arsen Ostrovsky, *Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 7, 2013—George Santayana, the Spanish- American philosopher, famously said “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Regrettably, it seems that Europe has failed to learn from its darkest days of anti-Semitism in the last century and is now condemned to repeat those same mistakes once again.

**Study: Global Anti-Semitism Rises by 30 Percent:** Sam Sokol, *Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 7, 2013—Last year the world saw a “considerable escalation in anti-Semitic manifestations, particularly violent acts against Jews,” constituting a 30-percent increase over 2011, according to a Tel Aviv University study released on Sunday.

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