

(WHY) SHOULD WE (BE) REMEMBER(ED)?

O memory, source alike of joy & misery! And humanity: are we not the animal that remembers? What is culture, civilization, if not the bodying forth of memory & the determination to maintain it, reverting to savagery in one generation if the determination fails--or, like the Nazis, becoming savages when the determination to remember what should have remained forgotten succeeds?

1 Devotion is the adoration of what's considered divine (ie, God or someone/something functioning in loco dei, in God's place, as God-substitute): religion is the practice of remembering the divine & rendering that memory impressive. Devotion that does not body itself forth as religion bodies itself forth as romanticism; but it's a continuum, or (to use another figure) the circles overlap, there being always a religious tinge to serious romanticism & a romantic quality in vital religion. A Nazi rally was German romanticism in its most frightening form, but we all know that it's power lay in its being a profoundly, demonically, religious event, in devotion to "the German Spirit" (a.k.a. "Blood & Soil").

2 The Nazis wanted the Third Reich to "last a thousand years" & be remembered forever. Ironically, the people who most want the Nazis to be remembered are the Jews, their most dramatic-specific victims: Yom haShoa is a Nazi rally in reverse. As did the Nazi rallies, these annual events are both romantic (moving the feelings to love & loathe) & religious (at least in the negative sense of remembering the demonic, but at least implicitly in the sense of remembering the divine & rendering "Never again!" impressive as God's will).

3 This Thinksheet continues my perplexed scowl in #2420, "What is a Shoa-Holocaust Interfaith Remembrance?" There, I was critical of what seemed to me the subtle duplicity of a planning committee that loaded the trappings of worship into the event but insisted the event be seen as "not worship." But since the event was undeniably religious, we have the right & duty to inquire as to the god, the devotion-object. And in that that was something other than the biblical God, the event was blasphemous, idolatrous. My religious feelings were being deliberately stirred, but not by a call to attend to God, to pay attention to the One Who Is To Be Perpetually Remembered....Is it possible to have a Jewish &/or Christian service of remembrance that's not religious? & if faithfully religious, theocentric? & if theocentric, "worship" in biblical mode? No, but it's possible to have such unfaithfully, not centered in God but in an event. It's possible, & it happened. I'm reporting my feeling of its uncleanness, unkosherness, betrayal of God & our biblical heritage Jewish & Christian.

4 Whether by Jews or Christians or (my preference) both together, Yom haShoa worship should center in God--in praise, in prayer, in search for meaning & guidance. It should include open & honest wrestling with *What was God doing in (Exodus & Exile &) Shoa-Holocaust?* More than any other people in history, the Jews have made creative-redemptive-vicarious responses to suffering; that contribution is the conceptual foundation of Christianity in the Cross (as Jesus' resurrection is its experiential foundation). So what was God doing in Shoa? Suffering with the victims (remember Wm. James "the Fellow-Sufferer who understands"?). True. Anything else? Are not the Hebrew prophets a rich resource for prayerful reflection on active possibilities (God's suffering being the passive actuality)? I must make this fearful confession: much that Jews & Christians do in remembering Shoa seems to me a dodge, an evasion of a painful theological task. Is the burden of history too great? Is "the lesson of the Holocaust" this, that not even God is in all respects "the God of history," trustable to save? Are we logically driven into a-historical mysticism or a-theistic resignation (as Rabbi Rich. Rubenstein in AFTER AUSCHWITZ)? I will not accept these God-diminishing or God-eliminating anodynes. (I'm thinking of a Jewish friend who gave up Moses for Jesus, then gave up Jesus for Buddhism, writing me that "Only now am I free from the burden of history!").

5 "Remember/Forget" is the past tense of "Attend." Because our **attention** is our most valuable gift at both ends (ie, in what it costs us & in what it means to others), I never tire of saying that what gets our attention gets us....We use the expression "selective memory" pejoratively, as when Ron. Reagan "just can't remember" even some major factors in the Iran/Cotra scandal. But there's a good sense: memory is either adventitious, as in dreams, or deliberate, as in one's daily devotions; & the latter category has some influence on the former: we're directly responsible for what we choose to remember/forget, & indirectly for what drifts into our subconscious & preconscious....Because attending, deliberately remembering, is a present activity with a past focus, the tense of the two together is past-progressive (or "perfect"). Eg, Prov.3:5fREB): "Put all your trust in the LORD....At every step you take keep him in mind, and he will direct your path" (cf., freq. in NT, praying "without ceasing"). The God of Abraham-Moses-David-Jesus-Paul-YOU.

6 Note the different ways of reading this Thinksheet's title. (1) Should we remember? Yes. (2) Why...? To be human, & not lose our relationships, bearings, perspective, hope. (3) Should we be remembered? Yes. (4) Why...? Because at least we'll have some value as encouragement where our example's good & caution where it's bad. Also--& this is big in Judaism--because being remembering is **how our life continues after our death**: it's our immortality, or at least one aspect of it...."You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy Levy's bread," says the ad. But you do have to be Jewish, it seems to me, to feel the full motivating force of the goal of leaving a good name as one's immortality--being remembered as a benefactor of humanity, whatever the degree of benefaction in the world's eyes. Rabbi Kushner's second book (Thinksheet #2423) rings all the changes on this sanction, which is all the more powerful because he envisages no personal afterlife. Of the author of Eccl. (esp. as to 2:15f, the sense of futility that the wise man is no more remembered than the fool), K. says (p.38) "He cannot handle the fact of dying and leaving no trace behind." K. himself can't stand the thought, & he does his best to make the thought intolerable to others....Respecting this Jewish mindset, as I do, & observing its indubitable benefits in human history through the centuries, I nevertheless feel no desire to be remembered except by my immediate loved ones. I am deeply concerned, centrally concerned, that God be remembered in history (the Jewish "sanctification of the Name," which appears also immediately after the address in the Lord's Prayer, includes this); & I am at one with the sinner who asked Jesus to remember him (L.23:43; cp. many biblical prayers that God remember the righteous, the faithful, the martyrs). My faith is thisworldly in that here & now I try to remember-serve-please the Lord (enough motivation for good deeds complementing the good news of God's love in & through Jesus); & otherworldly in that God will remember me in "theworld to come."

7 A Yom haShoa observance could be, for nonJews, a mere commemoration of Hitler's murder of six million Jews; remembering "lest we forget" & are thus (Santayana) "condemned to repeat the past." But for Jews the observance is religious, for remembering the martyrs (lest they die the second death of disappearing from history) is a religious obligation. Reflecting on outbreking antiJudaism in Eastern Europe along with the breaking out of much else in the general breakup, Elie Wiesel is even sadder than usual: "We wrote words, we made books. And we failed" to keep Shoa effectively in the world's mind (7May90 NW, p.44). That failure, however, is only partial, & mainly of the outer, monitory purpose.

8 Through the years I've collected, in 3x5 & 8½x11 files, much material under the heading "Remember/Forget." It's an instructive spiritual exercise to meditate on each of the boxes, A-H, of this grid. Eg, consider "D" on forgiveness vis-a-vis this line in the Lord's Prayer: "And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." God forgets ("E"), doesn't remember ("B"), our repented-of sins: how am I doing in "B" & "E" vis-a-vis penitent sinners against me?....Jon Sobrino, remembering his six dead Jesuit colleagues in El Salvador (Apr/90 SOJOURNERS, p.21): Salvation means "that our lives make sense. Deep sense....Remember Jesus of Nazareth."

		do	don't	should	shouldn't
REMEMBER	A	B	C	D	
FORGET	E	F	G	H	