

In Blessed Memory of a Dream:

Mordechai Shenhavi and Initial Holocaust Commemoration Ideas in Palestine, 1942–1945

Mooli Brog

This study examines the initial social construction of Holocaust commemoration in the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community of Palestine). It presents and analyzes proposals that were put forward in Palestine and abroad to commemorate the exterminated European Jews between the summer of 1942, when the first reports about mass exterminations were received, and the summer of 1945, shortly after the end of World War II.

The following questions are posed: What was the reasoning in the Yishuv for the need to establish a national commemorative project for those who had been annihilated in the Diaspora? Who were the people who suggested such projects and what were their motives? What kind of memorial site did they wish to erect? Where did they propose to build the memorial site and what were the reasons for their choice? Finally, what can the answers to these questions teach us about Holocaust consciousness in the Yishuv at that time?

The research on methods of preserving the past in different societies has focused primarily on the theme of “social frames of memory.”¹ My intention is to examine the Holocaust commemoration in the Yishuv with the help of a definition offered by Barry Schwartz. He has depicted memory mainly as a cultural system and has offered a semiotic interpretation of culture. Expanding on Clifford Geertz’s observations² on the essence of cultural patterns in commemoration, Schwartz suggests that “As models of society, events of the past are the key to [understanding] the present. As a model for society, events of the past are expressed by the present.”³ This differentiation is meaningful for our discussion because it sharpens the significance of the

¹ The French historian Pierre Nora argues that since in today’s age of scientific objectivity it is hard to distinguish between informative reporting and interpretation of meaning, there is a struggle between “history” and “memory” in describing the past. Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de me’moire*,” *Representation*, vol. 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 7-25.

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books., 1973) pp. 87-125.

³ Barry Schwartz, “Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II,” *Sociological Review*, vol. 61 (October 1996) p. 911.

dislocation in the structuring of Jewish memory that has occurred in the modern era.

The Jewish remembrance narrative has traditionally been written from a deterministic point of view. “For the rabbis ... knew that history had a purpose,”⁴ explains Yosef Haim Yerushalmi. Thus, the present is structured as part of a given whole, i.e., the past in a new guise. Memory of the past was traditionally shaped in religious patterns only because the Jewish destiny and historical purpose were defined in terms of a religious mission. Since the Jewish faith defines the Jews’ dispersion as temporary, the religious commemoration of traumas experienced by Jewish communities was accomplished through religious constructions and the Hebrew calendar, rather than commemoration at the site of the trauma. This made it possible to “condensate” the memory⁵ of events that occurred at different times and places and that were constructed as similar into one symbolic date. Thus, the memory was molded *during* a crisis (and, afterward, the memory *of* the moment of crisis) into one recognized and fixed pattern.

A significant change, however, has begun to occur over the past 200 years. In the course of this period, Zionism has made an effort to reconstruct the Jewish past in that “History becomes what it had never been before - the faith of fallen Jews.”⁶ The debates concerning the commemoration proposals that this article discusses took place during wartime, at the height of the crisis. Thus, they serve as a unique expression of attempts to construct a consciousness of World War II and the extermination of European Jewry as part of the “historical memory” of the *halutz* (Zionist-pioneering) Jewish society in Palestine. The changes that the commemoration ideas underwent during the war reveal the dynamic nature of the shaping of a collective memory and, particularly, the crucial role of cultural perspective (religious, national, ideological, or other) in the social constructing of the past. The substantive difference between the impact of the Holocaust experience in Europe and in Palestine is a factor of the utmost importance in determining the goals

⁴ Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 21.

⁵ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1995), p. 8.

⁶ Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p. 86.

involved in shaping Holocaust remembrance in the *halutz* (pioneer) culture of Palestine.

Despite the testimonies that were brought to the attention of the Yishuv leadership, it was unable to cope with the information about the horrors that transpired at the end of the ghetto period.⁷ This impotence fomented public anger against the leadership, which was overtly and harshly criticized in the daily press and at public gatherings. Many were uncomfortable and frustrated by the appalling gap between the placid life in the Yishuv and the suffering and slaughter in Europe, as if they were two separate worlds.

The “negation of the Diaspora” creed made it hard to internalize the testimonies from Europe and constituted a formidable obstacle to the fulfillment of the commemoration ideas.⁸ Zionism viewed Europe and Palestine as a dichotomy of values - the Diaspora, negative; Palestine, positive - just as with their status in *halakhah* (rabbinical law). However, the sense of pain, loss, bereavement, and confusion experienced by many in the Yishuv, including the leadership, now served as a bridge between the two worlds and made commemoration the cultural setting best tailored to an attempt to tackle the dilemma. The Holocaust commemoration proposals were, in fact, the first collective attempt to shape remembrance of the Diaspora in Palestine.

Mordechai Shenhavi - The Man and His Dream

⁷ See Dina Porat, *The Blue and Yellow Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership and the Holocaust 1939–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 239–262; Yehiam Weitz, “Aspects in the Attitude of the Palestinian Yishuv toward the Holocaust of European Jewry 1942–1943,” Nurith Gertz, ed., *Points of View: Culture and Society in Eretz Israel* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: The Open University of Israel, 1988), pp. 74–85; Dalia Ofer, “Fifty Years After: The Yishuv, Zionism, and the Holocaust, 1933–1948,” Yisrael Gutman, *Major Changes Within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), pp. 463–495.

⁸ Amnon Raz-Krakockin, “Exile amidst Sovereignty—Remarks on ‘Negation of the Diaspora’ in Israeli Culture,” *Theory and Criticism* (Hebrew), 4 (1993), pp. 23–56; Benzion Dinur, “How Zionism Perceives its Fundamentals,” *Zionism Book* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Mossad Bialik, 1939), pp. 12–15; Eliezer Schweid, “Two Approaches toward the ‘Negation of the Diaspora’ Idea in Zionist Ideology,” *Ha-Zionut* (Hebrew) Collection 9 (1984), pp. 21–44.

The idea of establishing a memorial in Palestine to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust was first suggested in the summer of 1942, at the height of World War II. The person who initiated the memorial enterprise and was the driving force behind the effort to set it in motion - an effort that lasted years - was Mordechai Shenhavi, then a member of Kibbutz Beit Alfa in the Jezreel Valley. Shenhavi was born on September 13, 1900, to Rivka and David Alpenbein. His father was a petty merchant who had supported his family honorably in Volochisk, a Russian town on the Austrian border. After World War I, the Alpenbeins, like many Galician Jews, migrated to Budapest and from there to Vienna. Despite poverty and hardship, Shenhavi completed high school at the refugees' Polish gymnasium and joined the Hashomer society, which held Zionist sporting and scouting activities, and Ze'irei Ziyon, a students' association that organized extracurricular studies on Jewish and Zionist subjects. As such, he was privileged to be part of a historical moment in May 1916, when the two organizations merged to form the Zionist youth movement Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir.⁹

On January 2, 1919, Shenhavi debarked at Jaffa port from Odessa as the first member of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir to reach Palestine. In March 1920, after he had been in Palestine a little over a year, Shenhavi was sent at the behest of Joseph Sprinzak to a conference of the Ha-Po'el ha-Za'ir movement in Prague. From there he went to Lvov to take part in the great assembly of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir on behalf of *aliyah* (Jewish immigration to Eretz Israel). In April 1920, as he addressed the Lvov conference while suffering from a severe fever, Shenhavi was momentarily gripped by a strange vision. He suddenly saw himself, as if in a childhood dream, lecturing to a group of young people, in the very same hall, as an emissary from Palestine.¹⁰ This revelation, as he testified years later, was an epiphany in his life and the main reason for his uncompromising struggle to fulfill his other dream in the summer of 1942 - the commemoration of the Holocaust victims.

⁹ Elkana Margalit, *Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir: From a Sect of Teenagers to Revolutionary Marxism 1913–1936* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1971), pp. 18–158. See also memoirs of Yaakov Hourani in Yehuda Erez, ed., *The Third Aliyah Book* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1964), vol. 1, p. 412.

¹⁰ For an autobiographical account of Mordechai Shenhavi's life, see *Testimonies* (Hebrew), Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir Archive, 3-95 1 (1).

When Shenhavi returned from the conference, he went to a labor camp that had been organized for road-building between Haifa and Jedda. In the midst of the construction work, at the tenth kilometer (where the kibbutzim Sha'ar-ha-Amaqim and Yagour would subsequently be established), workers who had participated in Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir training activities, led by Shenhavi and Abba Khoushi, established the Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir Battalion.¹¹ On the eve of Passover in 1921, they then established Kibbutz Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir A in the foothills of the Carmel range. Two years later, on August 11, 1923, the group moved to its permanent location at the foot of Mount Gilboa and became known as Kibbutz Heftsiba (Beit Alfa). In January 1922, members of the Shenhavi-Khoushi group, members of the Dror movement, and others founded another kibbutz. This collective was settled in 1926, and named Mishmar ha-Emeq; Shenhavi joined it in 1928. In 1939, he followed a romance back to Beit Alfa, but six years later he permanently resettled in Mishmar ha-Emeq.

Shenhavi spent most of his time as the representative of this kibbutz in movement and political-party institutions, the Zionist National Institutions, and other bodies. He was a delegate to many Zionist congresses, Histadrut (General Federation of Labor) conventions, and Agricultural Federation conferences, and most of these organizations sent him on missions abroad. In one such case, he was sent to Germany shortly before the Nazi accession to power in order to establish a chapter of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir. The initiative to establish a Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir educational institute was his. He also initiated the founding of the first Ha-Kibbutz ha-Arzi industrial enterprise and edited the movement's newspaper, *Hamitspe*.

He had an especially strong affinity for Jerusalem. He initiated the Yad Vashem Remembrance Authority Law in 1953, and took part in the planning and establishment of the institution. He was a founder of the Movement for Jerusalem and the Jerusalem House of Quality, a gallery above the Hinnom Valley that specializes in applied plastic art. He also helped develop the idea of the Bible House, near the King David Hotel. In June 1981, Mayor Teddy

¹¹ "Kibbutz Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir A," Ze'ev Bloch, *Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir Book* (Hebrew) (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1956), p. 86.

Kollek of Jerusalem honored him for these endeavors by naming him a Distinguished Citizen of Jerusalem.

Mordechai Shenhavi never married. On February 13, 1983, he died at his kibbutz, Mishmar ha-Emeq, at the age of eighty-two.

“The Goal

Remembrance of Our Suffering for Building Our Future”¹²

It was August 1942. Mordechai Shenhavi was living at Beit Alfa and working in the cornfields of the Jezreel Valley. The Nazis were in the midst of deporting some 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the Treblinka death camp. Although the information that reached Palestine about the horrors of this *Aktion* was scanty, it kept him awake at night.

“Then, one day,” Shenhavi reported four years later to members of the Vaad ha-Leumi (National Council),

as I fought myself hard, fearing that my feelings might be mistaken, I saw all those millions in a dream. I didn’t know then that it was six million. Those millions walked toward Zion with monuments on their shoulders. Can you imagine the length of that chain, the faces of those people, carrying the flame of life? ...They chose one place for themselves, lay down the monuments, and placed them there in an orderly or disorderly manner. The monument to their lives, the *monument of testimony*, was established. Do you know what sort of monument was to be erected back then? A kilometer long, a kilometer wide, and a hundred meters high - maybe that would suffice. Who can say that there’s no room to build such a monument?¹³

¹² Position taken by Dr. Y. Mann, a member of the JNF Head Office, in “Yad Vashem— Proposal by Mr. M. Shenhavi to JNF Head Office (September 10, 1942), [concerning] a National Commemorative Enterprise for the Destroyed Diaspora. Negotiations and Discussions Surrounding [the Proposal],” summary memorandum drawn up by Mordechai Shenhavi in August 1946, in reference to the discussions of his proposal to the JNF Executive Board in 1942–1946, Yad Vashem Archive, Administrative Archive (YVA, AM), File IV, p. 5.

¹³ Mordechai Shenhavi at plenary meeting of the Vaad ha-Leumi, May 13, 1946, YVA, AM, File II, Section 14, p. 5.

Shenhavi, obsessed by the dream and feeling it his personal responsibility to establish a memorial to the slaughtered Jews of the Diaspora,¹⁴ phrased his ideas and committed them to writing. The title of this rare preliminary document, handwritten, was: “The Idea of Commemorating All Victims of the Jewish Catastrophe Caused by the Nazi Horrors and the War.”¹⁵ Shenhavi’s vision included the following:

- 1) A national park of at least 500 dunams [50 hectares] space, in an important area of rural agricultural settlement.
- 2) The area envisaged is Metsudot Ussishkin [near the kibbutzim Dan and Dafna], not far from the sources of the Dan River....
- 3) A center in Safed: a pavilion on the history of the suffering and the victims. ...
- 4) Dissemination of the idea to create expectations of regular revenue from known arrangements (graves, monuments - plaques, roads and paths, books - inscriptions).
- 5) The following should be provided at the site: a museum, cinema ... a hotel; standardized *memorial stones* should be stationed there.... A special office should be established to gather the material by geographic area - details of the atrocity and the ways the victims fell, along with their names - all this material should be collected in the form of historical writings about the Jewish people. Each relevant country should be given a special area within the general space, commensurate with its geographic neighbors.

Shenhavi also explained how much the infrastructure would cost and suggested possible sources of revenue: the sale of monuments to individuals and communities; planting memorial groves of trees; and inscriptions in the “Book of Records.”¹⁶ A short time later, on September 10, 1942, after the rumors of the mass extermination of European Jewry were confirmed,

¹⁴ “The problem preoccupied me: how to reward a person who was not privileged to have a tombstone after his death; after all, everyone’s entitled to a tombstone.” See “Mordechai Shenhavi Surveys 16 Years of the Yad Vashem Program,” interview of Shenhavi by Yaakov Rabi, *Al Hamishmar* correspondent, unpublished (Hebrew), Ha-Shomer ha-Za’ir Archive, 2.3-95 (6).

¹⁵ YVA, AM, File XV.

¹⁶ This refers to the recording of victims’ names by relatives or others, along the lines of the *Sefer ha-Zahav* (“Golden Book”) of the Jewish National Fund, in which those who pay for the privilege are inscribed.

Shenhavi drew up his plan, “Guidelines for a National Project,” and submitted it as a special project to the Jewish National Fund head office, where he was in charge of special functions. In his nine-page document, Shenhavi argued that, at the end of the war, Zionism and Zionist institutions would encounter daunting problems with regard to the continuation of the national enterprise in Palestine and the assurance of the means to expand it. Accordingly, he asserted, “The JNF needs a new slogan that can be used to generate large revenues.”

A national project should be announced in memory of those who perished in the current war, at the front and, foremost, the victims of the Nazi brutality in all its manifestations. For this purpose, an area of at least 2,000 dunams [200 hectares] in an agricultural region should be set aside and a national park should be established there. The park should include:

1. At the center of the whole project, a building or institution that will contain the names of all Jews who perished or were killed, in whatever country, in connection with the current war and the German hooliganism in their countries. [Handwritten parenthetical note in the margin: “The names of all Jewish soldiers who fought in this war should also be included.”]
2. Pavilions devoted to the history of Jewish heroism throughout the generations.
3. A symbolic cemetery for those who died in exile.
4. A regular cemetery for Palestinian and Diaspora Jews.
5. A convalescent center and hostel complex for immigrants.
6. Children’s hostels, affiliated with nearby settlements, which will take in some of the Jewish orphans from the war and the pogroms. The children who will come on the basis of students’ visas.
7. Hotels, rest houses, and youth hostels.

8. A center for study of the history of the Zionist movement, its fundraising institutions, and the Diaspora, for training of National Institution staff.
9. A hall for large assemblies, conferences, and conventions.
10. Athletic fields and facilities.
11. A photo lab and a central archive of Palestine landscape photos.
12. A museum.
13. A building for the project's executive board.
14. Additional proposals.¹⁷

Since these headings did not divulge the true complexity of the project, Shenhavi expanded upon them and provided further details. He meant to describe the project in a way so as to reinforce the centrality of pioneering settlement in Palestine in Jewish consciousness generally, and as an effective tool for the expansion and intensification of relations with Diaspora Jewry particularly. Thus, he wished to set the project “amidst the bustling life of the highest form of Zionist endeavor”¹⁸ - an agricultural settlement.

Shenhavi had not made up his mind about the location of the project. At that time he thought it preferable to determine the magnitude of the project first and choose its location afterward, although “It is an appealing thought to build it at Metsudot Ussishkin. However, from the promotional standpoint, it may be better to think of the Brandeis connection, in which case the area around ‘Ein ha-Shofet [a kibbutz named for the Jewish-American Justice Louis Brandeis] should be considered.”

Indeed, the new location that Shenhavi proposed was the western Jezreel Valley.¹⁹ Shenhavi envisaged the annual world Olympics for Jewish youth

¹⁷ YVA, AM, File XIV.

¹⁸ Mordechai Shenhavi, internal memorandum to the management at the JNF head office, Beit Alfa, January 10, 1943. Central Zionist Archives (CZA), KKL5/11965, p. 4.

¹⁹ Shenhavi reports that a forest of more than 6,000 dunams (600 hectares) in area had been planted there and that the location had strong advantages: “It is not far from Haifa. The new roads also make it easily accessible from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. It is not even very far from the Jordan Valley and the Galilee. Jews from most countries in Europe and America live in settlements in the vicinity. The investments will also be modest.” He specified the area from

being held at the athletic complex that would be built at the project and imagined how masses of people would gather at the rest house and hotels to discuss the problems of the Zionist movement. However, the centerpiece of the project, in Shenhavi's thinking, would be a "pavilion of the missing."

This building should be monumental. It should express the enormity of the holocaust that we have suffered and give everlasting evidence of our people's will to live [emphasis in the original]. We have to invest [the place] with this sense of expression ... so that the visitor will naturally be led to the idea of Zionist fulfillment, to what is happening in the country, [and] to an understanding and appreciation of the activity of [the JNF and Keren Hayesod]. This explains why the proximity of different types of agricultural settlements is so valuable.²⁰

Shenhavi's main concern, however, was to reassure the directors of the JNF that the "Project" would neither endanger their regular fundraising efforts nor impose an extra budgetary burden on the system. He put forward a calculation whereby if only 3 Palestine pounds per monument were paid on account of only one-fifth of all those who perished (at the time Shenhavi still thought in terms of one million), the total sales revenue would come to 600,000 Palestine pounds. The project would generate an additional 50,000 Palestine pounds in regular annual revenue from a special maintenance fee charged to the commemorators plus 48,000 Palestine pounds from the sale of plots and monuments in the symbolic cemetery and by other means.

To assure a long-term cash flow, it was clear to Shenhavi that a specific fundraising "season" should be stipulated and planted deeply in the public consciousness. For this purpose, "There is nothing better, for all countries, than the month of Elul as the time to remember the departed" (p. 7). Shenhavi did not explain why he chose Elul of all months; we can only speculate. After all, if he envisaged a national-bereavement type of remembrance, then the

Kibbutz Alonim to Qiryat Amal and Sha'ar ha-'Amaqim, to Giv'at Seid to Yoqne'am, and thence to the bloc of kibbutzim 'Ein ha-Shofet, Ramat ha-Shofet, Dalia, Mishmar ha-'Emeq, and Ha-zore'a. Notes on conversation with Dr. Granowski, November 9, 1942, CZA, KKL5/12925, p. 3.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

days of the Omer, the Ninth of Av, or any other fast day associated with Jewish catastrophe could be used. If so, why did Shenhavi seek to memorialize the departed around the time of *Selihat* (prayers for expiation)? The month of Elul (the thirty days before Rosh Hashanah) and the interval between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are considered special occasions for repentance and psychological preparation for the Day of Judgment. The name of the prayers recited at that time, *Selihat*, denotes petitioning for expiation and forgiveness of one's sins and iniquities. The liturgical poems that comprise the *Selihat* include Biblical verses expressing the theme of repentance and the merits of the forefathers that are passed down to their descendants.

These two principles, "repentance" and "merits of the forefathers," are two sides of one ideological coin - the Zionist remembrance narrative - that Mordechai Shenhavi sought to structure. Since Shenhavi, one of the founders of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir and Ha-Kibbutz ha-Arzi, represented a revolutionary secular ideology, one would expect to trace the basis of his proposal not to rabbinical reasoning but to tactical and strategic considerations. First, synagogues in the Diaspora customarily used the month of Elul for their fundraising. Inserting an additional appeal to commemorate the victims of the destroyed European communities, he thought, might be received sympathetically. Second, remembrance of the departed victims of the Holocaust at the time of recitation of the *Selihat* should lead Diaspora Jews to "repentance," i.e., to "redemption," meaning *aliyah*. In the Yishuv, in contrast, by linking the *Kaddish* for the victims of the Nazis with the *Selihat*, which Jews recite in expiation of their sins, the Jewish people could build a circumstantial prima facie connection between the dreadful personal (and collective) price paid by European Jews and their "refusal" to heed the voice from Zion that could have saved them. Such a step might prompt Jews to conclude that the secret of redemption lay in *aliyah*. In Shenhavi's words,

For what happened to us and what may yet happen, perish the thought, to the Jews who remain in dispersion, there is but one answer: to lead

the people from the disaster of their destiny to the remedy for that disaster. There is no remedy but to build Eretz Israel.²¹

Thus, Shenhavi wished to use the liturgical calendar to construct the narrative of Zionist memory and to prescribe the ancient theological act of contrition as a response to present events. His proposal to combine the two dates - a “commemorative density” - illustrates his wish to shape memory of *a time of crisis* as a model of a society in which present events are explained by the past.

Shenhavi’s proposal to establish a memorial day for the Nazis’ victims in Elul was, as far as is known, the first of its kind. Thus, it deserves our attention in view of the additional dates that were subsequently proposed. Furthermore, not much later, Shenhavi changed his mind and, like many others, proposed that the memorial day be observed in the spring, on the first day of the Warsaw ghetto uprising.

The JNF Executive Board decided to postpone discussion of Shenhavi’s plan for two months, to the end of November 1942. Although most of the board members considered the commemoration project in Palestine a positive act, some wondered whether the JNF should take on the project or whether other Zionist organizations, such as Keren Hayesod or the Jewish Agency, should do so. Primarily, they were afraid that the main goal of the JNF - purchasing and developing land in Palestine - would be obscured.

Eliahu Moshe Epstein (Elath), then director of the JNF department for educational programs in Anglo-Saxon countries and subsequently Israel’s ambassador to the United States and Great Britain, disputed the economic utility of concentrating so many public institutions in one place - “a national home in miniature,” he called it - and remarked that

the plan is reminiscent of [something from ancient history], the temples around the Acropolis or The Capitol [O]ne can create new life only by means of a living enterprise and not by putting up a slab of stone bearing dead people’s names. It would be a good thing to establish new

²¹ “History of Yad Vashem 1945–1948,” YVA, AM, File LII, YL10–YV/19; M. Shenhavi, internal memorandum to JNF head office board, January 10, 1943, CZA KKL5/11965, p. 4.

settlements for the soldiers who will return from the war and for other immigrants.

In Dr. Y. Mann's view, the project should create "remembrance of our suffering for building to build our future." Therefore, he believed the money to be raised should be invested in buying and developing land for the Jewish national enterprise. As for a symbolic cemetery, he could justify building it not in open territory but in a large hall with a glass roof, so that it could also be used as a tropical greenhouse.²²

On November 21, 1942, the JNF Executive Board convened to wind up its discussions of Mordechai Shenhavi's proposal, and Dr. Abraham Granowski (Avraham Granot), director and chairman of the board, informed the members that he opposed it for two main reasons: (1) he did not see an organic relationship between the proposal and the JNF's single goal - purchase and development of land in Palestine; and (2) the goal was so vast that it could not but become a purpose unto itself. In addition, the chairman expressed concern that "the 'national park' will become a focal point of pilgrimage and one wonders if that would be a forbidden exploitation of the Jewish national calamity."²³

The JNF directors returned Shenhavi's plan to its author and asked him to rework it. Commemoration of the Holocaust victims' names is a worthy cause, they concluded, but the elements of the plan that are not part of JNF's work should be removed, the bereavement component should be downscaled, and the bond between the target population (Diaspora Jewry) and Palestine should be stressed.

The directors had already received a similar project proposal, perhaps the first commemoration proposal that came from abroad. A. Links of Glasgow proposed that for 1,000 pounds sterling (to be paid over two years, interest-free), "the JNF should therefore afford Jews the opportunity of commemorating the dead in a Zionist way."²⁴ The plan was set forth in a letter sent on November 13, 1942, by Leopold Schen, a leader of British Jewry and

²² Shenhavi, summary memorandum, 1946, YVA, AM, File IV, p. 5.

²³ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁴ CZA, KKL5/11965.

an activist with JNF-England, to Eliahu Epstein. The letter, with details on Mr. Links' proposal, was entitled, "A Scheme for Commemorating the Dead and Securing a Zionist Way of Associating the Sacred Event With the Age-Long Desire for Erez Israel." The plan had two sections: recording the names of deceased in a "Book of Life" and construction of a single monument with an appropriate inscription. Furthermore, the JNF should send representatives on "condolence visits," at which time they would present the families with certificates of registration in the Book of Life. Mr. Schen added that the idea had been expanded by one Mr. Posnansky, who broached the idea of building a hall of remembrance in Jerusalem - a specimen of architectural grandeur - in which the names of the donors would be recorded on the interior walls.

Distinguishing War Casualties from Holocaust Victims

On November 22, 1942, the Jewish Agency Executive held a tumultuous meeting on the topic of the Nazis' atrocities against the Jews. The meeting was called after the "Group of 69" - women and children, most of them holders of Palestinian citizenship, who had left Europe in exchange for with German citizens held by the Allies - had given their testimonies. The next day the Executive released an official statement about the systematic murder taking place in Europe and the extermination of millions of Jews. For the first time the Yishuv press carried reports on the deportations and extermination of Polish Jewry. Several days later the directors of the National Council decided, with the consent of the Jewish Agency Executive, to proclaim three days of "alarm, protest, and outcry" on November 30–December 2, 1942. On the first day of mourning, the Asefat ha-Nivharim (the Elected Assembly) met in special session and released a public statement on behalf of the entire Yishuv, urging the Allies and the Jewish world to effect rescue and revenge. The next day municipal authorities held countrywide rallies. The last day was devoted to fasting and prayer. Transport was halted; all work not essential for the war effort was ceased from noon to midnight; and festivities and entertainment events were cancelled.

The three days of mourning were a special event in Yishuv history. According to press reports, about 100,000 people - nearly one-fifth of the Jewish

population of Palestine - took part in processions.²⁵ The statement by the Jewish Agency Executive about the extermination and the three days of mourning were a watershed in the Yishuv's consciousness. It was a dividing line between the first three years of the war, during which the Yishuv was unaware of what was happening in Europe, and the three subsequent years.²⁶ In the opinion of Dina Porat, the statement was similar in status to that of British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in Parliament on December 17, 1942. Speaking on behalf of the Allies, Eden drew attention to the fact that these governments had been apprised of the numerous news items from Europe indicating that the German authorities were exterminating the Jewish people. From the Yishuv's standpoint, the Allies' announcement demonstrated the success of the three days of mourning. Thus, the National Institutions quickly proclaimed an additional thirty days of mourning to mark the catastrophe of European Jewry, from the next day, December 18, to January 16, 1943. December 18 was the tenth of Tevet - a religious fast and, subsequently, by declaration of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, a general memorial day for Holocaust victims whose date of death is unknown. Jews were asked to downscale festivities; journalists and teachers were asked to stress the topic; and special prayers were recited in synagogues. The National Council proclamation stated that "The whole way of life in the Yishuv should express mourning and outrage, as well as a demand from ourselves and of others to save that which can still be save."²⁷ The pronouncedly religious nature of the first three days of mourning and the subsequent thirty-day period, the traditional *sheloshim*, evoked public dissent. Left-wing circles grumbled about the "Diasporist" complexion of the observance, built on fasting and lamentation, and about the spectacle of chief rabbis marching through town, clutching Torah scrolls, as a manifestation of Zionist remembrance. Fasting, they said, was an "expression of weakness"²⁸ that did not coincide with the resurrection of Jewish national life in the homeland. Few viewed the bereavement program favorably, and the organizers, members of the National

²⁵ See for example, *Ha'aretz*, December 4, 1942.

²⁶ Porat, *Blue and Yellow Stars*, pp. 51.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 53, n. 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 54, n. 13.

Council leadership, complained that, despite the efforts they had invested, only “small indications of mourning” were visible.

It was at this time that Shenhavi received the first architectural illustration of the memorial building (see illustration) drawn up for him by his friend Munio Weinraub.²⁹ Since the drawing did not come with explanatory notes, the following description of some of the elements may contain errors. The envisaged memorial building is a round tower situated on a hilltop. It has three parts: (1) a ground floor made of stone arches; (2) above the ground floor, a higher and narrower cylindrical space divided into lengthwise strips with tall, narrow windows, one per strip, in the upper segment; and (3) at the top, a dome with a large round hole in the middle. The interior is simple and almost undecorated. The round floor is embellished with an eternal light in the middle of a Star of David. Between the ground floor and the tower, two staircases lead to a circumferential gallery over the floor at the level of the connection between the two stories. The dome, with its round hole in the middle, seems to have been inspired by the Pantheon in Rome. A clear vertical axis ascends from the eternal light in the middle of the interior and the Star of David to the sky, visible through the dome.

On February 21, 1943, evidently armed with sketches of the building, Shenhavi presented the JNF Executive Board with a revised version of the project. The only important change in the plan was the proposed addition of a “Jewish Soldier Pavilion” at the site. The mingling of Holocaust victims with soldiers in one memorial setting immediately evoked objections,³⁰ even though Shenhavi intended

to separate totally the matter of Jewish soldiers, even those who fell, from the other victims, because here we are also dealing with the living -

²⁹ The architect Munio Weinraub and his business associate, Alfred Mansfeld of Haifa, were involved in this enterprise until the early 1960s. They also drew up the plan for the Yad Vashem commemorative site that appears on the official project pamphlet that the Vaad ha-Leumi published in March 1947, YVA, AM, File L II, YL10–YV/19. Alfred Mansfeld designed the Yad Vashem administration building, the first structure built on Har Hazikaron.

³⁰ “Remarks and Counterproposals” (Hebrew), a position paper presented by Ido Cohen to the committee that reviewed the program at its meeting on April 1, 1943, CZA, KKL5/11965. The minutes of the meeting, recorded by Dr. Joseph Weiss, include the names of members of the “Investigative Committee for Shenhavi’s Proposal” who were to tender their report by May 1, 1943.

to assess the role of Jewish soldiers in America and other countries, their actions, and their heroism.³¹

The proposal to include a memorial pavilion to the Jewish soldier as part of the Holocaust memorial may have been a tactical step, meant to inhibit soldiers' organizations from establishing their own monuments or to induce them to invest financial and political efforts in the "main" commemoration project. From the cultural-symbol standpoint, the combination of Holocaust and heroism carried a message of encouragement and consolation, i.e., their deaths were not in vain.

The design of the monuments to the World War I casualties, which may have inspired Shenhavi, expressed a similar theme. The commemoration culture after World War I portrayed those who had fallen in battle as sacrifices of the community, the nation, creating a powerful nexus between rituals surrounding the fallen and patriotism. Military cemeteries became focal points for pilgrimages, and tombs of the unknown soldier became official national symbols.³² However, the design of the monuments and the ceremonies held near them strengthen the assumption that their original and primary function was to help mourners overcome their loss.³³

Shenhavi wished to identify and commemorate each individual who had perished and to make this remembrance an instrument with which to reinforce the centrality of Palestine for the Jewish people. The purpose of establishing a monument to the Jewish soldier was to give uniformed Jews and their communities the special national pride that (according to Zionist thinking) could be achieved only in Palestine. In this way they could be offered a partnership not only in warfare but also in fulfilling the Holocaust-to-rebirth vision. However, the proposed change was to no avail. Once again the JNF directors rejected the proposal; they had already begun trying to induce the

³¹ Shenhavi, summary memorandum, August 1946, YVA, AM, File IV.

³² George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 10; see also Part II Chapter 5, pp 70-106.

³³ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 95–96.

Jewish soldiers to plant a Jewish Soldiers' Forest at kibbutz Ma'ale ha-Hamishah.³⁴

A National Monument to the Fallen in the Diaspora and a Memorial to the Jewish Soldier

In April 1943, the Nazis in Poland wished to honor the *Führer's* fifty-fourth birthday (April 20) by giving him a special present: the final liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. The operation began on April 19, the eve of Passover. The Jews greeted the Germans with armed resistance, which later would be known as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising - the symbol of Jewish struggle against the Nazis. After the uprising, the National Council declared a general work stoppage "in view of the heroic resistance of the Jews of Warsaw and the last ghettos in Poland and to express the Yishuv's protest against the Allies' total silence."³⁵

In early June 1943, the special committee appointed by the chairman of the JNF Executive Board gave Mordechai Shenhavi its conclusions. Deeply frustrated and pained by the rejection of his commemoration proposal, Shenhavi informed Dr. Abraham Granowski,

I will not accept the killing of the basic idea of the plan by means of the committee's proposals. ... I therefore ask you to return the entire proposal to me, so that I can begin working on the basis of a new theme that must and, I believe, will be found.³⁶

The deportation of more than 430,000 Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz began in the middle of May 1944. Under that shadow, the disputes about how to commemorate and remember the Holocaust were more indicative of confusion and indecision than of resolve and broad consensus. In fact, they

³⁴ Conclusions of the committee appointed by Dr. Granowski to examine Shenhavi's proposal, presented on March 19, 1943, in Shenhavi, summary memorandum, August 1946, YVA, AM, File IV, p. 11.

³⁵ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, June 6, 1943.

³⁶ M. Shenhavi to Dr. A. Granowski, June 8–10, 1943, CZA, KKL5/11965; see also M. Shenhavi, summary memorandum, August 1946, YVA, AM, File IV, p. 8.

actually foiled any action on the subject. Jakob Böhm, writing in *Davar*, raised a new commemoration idea:

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the ghetto uprising in Warsaw, it is my wish and psychological need to propose: a) that the authorized institutions determine that the date of the Warsaw ghetto uprising be considered by our people as a holy date, the anniversary of our martyrs' death; b) that on that day, memorial candles should be lit in every single Jewish home in the world, exactly as they would upon the anniversary of the death of a member of the family; c) that a fast shall be proclaimed on that day; d) that in the Hurva Synagogue in [the old city of] Jerusalem, or in the Great Synagogue in Tel Aviv, or in both, and in our National Institutions, an eternal light shall be lit in honor of our martyrs' souls; e) that on the Tel Aviv shore or in another appropriate place, a commemorative monument be erected to our martyrs in Europe, of a size and form that are worthy of them.³⁷

On April 19, 1944, the first anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, a “Day of Outcry for the Rescue of the Survivors [*She'erit ha-Peletah*]” was proclaimed. Work ceased, and fasting and public rallies took place.

In July, Shenhavi tried again to realize his dream. This time he approached Youth Aliyah in addition to the JNF, so that both organizations would bear the burden and share the revenues, which would be devoted to purchasing and developing land and rescuing Jewish orphans in the Diaspora. The proposal, entitled “National Monument to the Fallen in the Diaspora and Memorial to the Jewish Soldier,”³⁸ was sent to Henrietta Szold, Dr. Abraham Granowski, and Dr. Gustav Landauer. Not one of them responded.

In August of that year, Mordechai Shenhavi turned in distress to the chairman of the Jewish Agency, David Ben-Gurion, and solicited his opinion about the establishment of a pavilion for Jewish soldiers. According to a memorandum that Shenhavi wrote after the meeting, Ben-Gurion thought little of the

³⁷ *Davar*, May 16, 1944.

³⁸ “National Monument to the Fallen in the Diaspora and Memorial to the Jewish Soldier,” December 7, 1944, Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir Archive, 14.3-95 (1).

initiative. He ruled out any possibility of recording the names of the fallen soldiers as long as the war continued but did suggest that the various Jewish communities should do this after the war, along with recording the names of the Jews killed. As for a monument, Ben-Gurion said he was “inclined to think that the most suitable place is Jerusalem.”³⁹ Many agreed with him - *haredim* (the “ultra-orthodox”) and religious Zionists on the one hand, and Mapai and Ha-Shomer ha-Za’ir adherents on the other. Shenhavi continued to resist this suggestion. “We’ve got to stop thinking about the city of Jerusalem as a suitable location,” he insisted to the head of the Yishuv. He still considered the pioneering settlements the most suitable environment, the perfect manifestation of the Zionist “from Diaspora to redemption” message.

By late 1944, the entire world became aware of the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis in the extermination camps, as well as of accounts of resistance in ghettos and concentration camps. The cry “We shall never forget” was heard from all directions, yet it was difficult to realize the ideas for commemoration. The National Institutions explained this in various ways: the war was not yet over; financial resources were limited; the Yishuv was fighting on two fronts (Europe and the Middle East); and the “negation of the Diaspora” ideology had now resulted in profound confusion. Be this as it may, there was no one in Palestine to take up the task of commemoration. The JNF Board effectively shelved Shenhavi’s initiative.

Surprisingly, the JNF leaders re-discussed Shenhavi’s proposal in February 1945, this time at their own initiative. What prompted them to do so? Apparently, it was a report about a new commemoration plan on the agenda of the World Jewish Congress in the United States, which assigned the project to the Jewish Agency. In November 1944, for the first time since the beginning of World War II, the World Jewish Congress convened a world convention to discuss what could be done for the survivors in Europe. Two members - Baruch Zuckerman, head of the WJC Organization Department, and Dr. Jacob Helman, the WJC representative in South America, were assigned to draw up plans for the implementation of the conference resolutions and submitting them to the next meeting of the World Jewish Congress. On

³⁹ “Memorandum of Mr. Shenhavi’s conversation with Mr. Ben-Gurion,” Jerusalem, August 21, 1944; *ibid.*

February 3, 1945, the two men presented their plan to the WJC board and added a commemorative initiative of their own:

In Everlasting Remembrance

1. A monument should be erected on Mt. Carmel in memory of our innocent martyrs.
2. The finest Jewish architects and sculptors and the most important artists should work up the program for this everlasting memorial.

The memorial should include the following departments:

- a) a special room with the names of all the martyrs on sheets of parchment; b) a special room with a gas chamber ...; c) a special room with a deportation railroad car; d) a special room with an artistic representation of a mass grave; e) a special room dedicated to the ghetto battles; f) special rooms for each country where the Holocaust took place, in which all documents pertaining to the Holocaust should be gathered...; g) a special room with the names of non-Jews who rescued Jews; h) a special room for study of the Holocaust period, with an appropriate library; i) a special room for prayer ...; j) a *beit midrash* for Torah study; k) a special room containing special record books with the names of all donors....⁴⁰

The two men also suggested that “anyone who considers himself a part of the Jewish people” should donate a brick to the great memorial. The plan called on the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency, and Jewish religious institutions to declare a permanent day of mourning and “to make pilgrimages to the memorial on that day. The most appropriate day is the Jewish date that corresponds to April 19, 1943,” the day when the Warsaw ghetto uprising began.⁴¹ The proposed leaders of Project Everlasting Remembrance were Dr.

⁴⁰ The document was written in Yiddish; the English translation is based on a translation into Hebrew by Baruch Zuckerman himself, “The Yad Vashem Idea,” *Gesher*, 4:2 (July 1958), pp. 70–79. For the Yiddish original, see “Le-zikhroyn oylem,” New York, February 3, 1945, YVA, AM, File XIV.

⁴¹ Their proposal for a “day of mourning” on the anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw ghetto uprising was presumably influenced by a decision of the Jewish Labor Committee on the first anniversary of the uprising, April 19, 1944, to declare that date “a *yizkor*

Chaim Weizmann, Dr. Stephen Wise, Rabbi Isaac Herzog, and Prof. Albert Einstein. Zuckerman and Helman presented their proposal to Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who endorsed it immediately, and the three collectively presented it to Dr. Stephen Wise, who greeted it with “boundless enthusiasm.”⁴²

How can this initiative be explained? Why did they propose that the monument be built in Palestine, of all places? Apparently it had something to do with the situation of American Jewry at the time. In 1945, Arthur Hertzberg argues, American Jews preferred to “bury” the Holocaust as it was reflected in Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz.⁴³ As American Jews, Hertzberg continues, they wished to feel part of victorious America and not to be identified with the victims or the piteous survivors. They sought acceptance by the Gentiles, and not confrontation. Given this background, the Zuckerman-Helman proposal may be construed not only as an act of support for Palestinian Zionism but also - and perhaps chiefly - as a wish to distance the memory of the “Jewish disgrace” from their own surroundings. They had come to appreciate the symbolic meaning of the new life that the Statue of Liberty and the buildings of New York City had given their parents, who had fled from pogroms in Czarist Russia, and perhaps they wished to create a similar symbol for Holocaust survivors at the gates of the Promised Land.

Once it was decided to present the plan to the General Zionist Council at its meeting in London in August of that year, the JNF National Committee hastened to meet and discuss the matter. Again, however, the committee found it hard to choose an appropriate way to structure the memory of the Holocaust. Everyone agreed that Zionist fulfillment was a form of commemoration and that the construction of “memorial villages” was a suitable way to proceed.⁴⁴ At that point Mordechai Shenhavi’s patience ran out. He demanded vehemently that the JNF publicize his proposal, because

[remembrance] day for the heroic Jewish casualties of the operation,” *Mishmar*, April 19, 1944.

⁴² Zuckerman, “The Yad Vashem Idea,” p. 72.

⁴³ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 291.

⁴⁴ See, for example, remarks by three members of the JNF Executive Board—Pinhas Leon, Yosef Chertok, and Mr. Haezrahi—at a meeting of desk chiefs, February 19, 1945. M. Shenhavi, summary memorandum, August 1946, YVA, AM, File IV, p. 5.

other proposals had been made public while his remained in the shadows. Otherwise, he threatened, he would publicize it himself.

Up to that point he had refrained from publicizing the plan, despite his extensive connections with the senior leadership of the Yishuv, due to a technical restriction imposed by Dr. Granowski, the chairman of the JNF Executive Board: "Until the JNF accepts or rejects it, [the plan] will remain secret and I [Shenhavi] will not be entitled to disclose it to anyone." Thus, from 1942 to 1945 the Yad Vashem idea was discussed only in within the JNF.⁴⁵

Mordechai Shenhavi was concerned mainly by a report in *Ha'aretz* the previous week that contained details of a commemoration plan that had been proposed by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The statement was released at the initiative of the university's treasurer, H. M. Schneersohn, at the end of a conference on the issue. According to the statement, the university's board of governors had decided to set aside part of its land on Mt. Scopus for the construction of a "Diaspora memorial"; an action committee had already been set up and had received a donation of 1,000 Palestine pounds from a wealthy former citizen of Łódź. The plan envisaged:

a large building, 25,000 square meters in area, at an estimated cost of 100,000 Palestine pounds. It will include a large lecture hall, a museum of the remains of Jewish culture, an archive of writings, paintings, photographs, and printed matter, a collection of memorabilia of everything that remained after the destruction of the European Diaspora, and a dormitory for immigrant students from the Diaspora. The building will function as a center for research on the history of European Jewry. This enterprise should serve as a symbol for the whole world and the time to build it has come.⁴⁶

In the meantime, the Allied armies were wresting most of Europe from the Nazis. By the early spring of 1945, the end of the war was in sight. Indeed, in the second week of March, the Yishuv institutions again called for the rescue

⁴⁵ Shenhavi to Yaakov Rabi, YVA, AM, File XIV, p. 3.

⁴⁶ "Diaspora Memorial on Mt. Scopus," *Ha'aretz*, February 12, 1945. The report also appeared in *Hatzofe* and *Haboker* on that same day. The donation was announced by a group of former Polish Jews who had come together at the time. See also CZA J1/6449.

of the *She'erit ha-Peletah* and announced a week of mourning, ending with a fast, in memory of the victims. On April 24, 1945, two weeks before Germany surrendered, the head-office executives of the JNF and Keren Hayesod held a special meeting in Jerusalem and signed a bilateral agreement to cooperate with Diaspora Jewry at the end of the war. Shortly afterward the two organizations issued a joint manifesto urging the Diaspora to mobilize

for a special project of thanksgiving, a project of rescue, building, resurrection, and redemption! ... Jews who have miraculously survived the horrors of physical and spiritual annihilation—only if they mobilize at this historic moment for a creative, redemptive enterprise will they justify the miracle that they have experienced ... Eretz Israel is ready. By order of [Divine] Providence, it was miraculously spared from the inferno so that it could fulfill its historical role: to rebuild the battered Jewish people. It stands strong. It awaits the grand act of all the Jewish masses wherever they are.⁴⁷

In Shenhavi's opinion, this joint initiative was the *coup de grace* for his plan. Moreover, he knew for certain that the leaders of the Yishuv had received additional commemoration proposals. One was a detailed scheme that a Mrs. S. Dostrowski had presented to Joseph Sprinzak on February 27, 1945:

The memorial monument [will be built] on a spacious plaza and should stand in a garden. It will be shaped like an arch, in the style of the Old City walls. Its walls will resemble the stones of the Western Wall. There will be two rooms, one in each pillar of the arch. They will have walls of marble, so that relatives of those murdered may engrave their names. Inside, there will be arrangements for memorial candles and so on. On a set day each year, as determined by the Vaad ha-Leumi, schoolchildren will hold a ceremony at the monument ... A general orphanage will be built in and near the garden where the remembrance arch is located ... The orphanage will be a way-station of sorts, where children will receive

⁴⁷ Manifesto from executive organs of JNF and Keren Hayesod to American and Canadian Jewry CZA, KKL5/12925.

a clean bed, clothing, food, and placement arrangements. The orphanage and the monument will be a project of the women of Palestine, a nonpartisan national project.⁴⁸

Yad Vashem - Commemorating the Destroyed Diaspora

The May Day festivities in 1945 were preludes of sorts for future parades of victory over Nazi Germany. Sixty thousand Jews paraded in New York:

considering themselves orphaned and responsible for the fate of the Jewish survivors ... [it was the] largest [demonstration] of all, both in terms of number of participants and in terms of its manifestations on behalf of Palestine ... in an effort to assure immediate unrestricted *aliyah* and the declaration of Palestine as a Jewish state.⁴⁹

The next day Shenhavi rephrased his ideas in ten crowded pages under the heading “*Yad Vashem Foundation in Memory of the Lost Jewries in Europe - Outline of a Plan for the Commemoration of the Diaspora.*”⁵⁰ This marked the first use of the now-familiar name “Yad Vashem” in reference to a Holocaust commemoration project. The name had been suggested to Shenhavi by the director of the JNF Religious Affairs Department, Rabbi Moshe Burstyn, in late 1942, but Shenhavi had preferred not to use it until this occasion.⁵¹

The following day, May 3, Leibl Goldberg of Kibbutz Yagour published an appeal in *Davar* to “avenge the anonymity” of the Holocaust victims and, with it, a demand to the public:

⁴⁸ CZA, J1/3610/1. This file contains additional proposals that were submitted to members of the Vaad ha-Leumi.

⁴⁹ *Davar*, May 2, 1945, p. 1.

⁵⁰ “History of Yad Vashem 1945–1948,” YVA, AM, File LII, YL10–YV/19.

⁵¹ Mordechai Shenhavi, remarks at the first session of the Fifth Council of the Yad Vashem Directorate, January 17, 1960; YVA, AM—Proceedings of the Fifth Yad Vashem Council, p. 27 (file unmarked). Notably, since the beginning of the century, it had been a widespread custom in the new neighborhoods of Jerusalem to affix dedication plaques on the walls of buildings that were donated for charitable purposes. The inscriptions on the plaques began with a quote from Isaiah 56:5: “I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name [Heb.: *yad va-shem*] better than sons and daughters ... which shall not be cut off.” The name Yad Vashem comes from this source.

A book of testimony and remembrance should be produced! [... It] should have 22 volumes (corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet). Every family should receive a memorial book including the people whom they had recorded. It should be an everlasting document, passed down from child to grandchild and from grandchild to great-grandchild. Their memory will never be blotted out! The book of testimony and remembrance shall have two goals: a) everlasting historical documentation and b) a political and legal aim. [Remembrance of] what Amalek did should be passed on to posterity with all its martyrological palpability. Its political value, however, lies in the tangible basis that it will create for our demands: Look what they did to us.

At long last, on May 25, 1945, Mordechai Shenhavi's plan was published in *Davar*⁵² under the headline "A Monument and a Name [Yad Vashem] in Memory of the Lost Jewries (Outline Plan)." This time Shenhavi expressed all the elements of his previous proposals in one full, inclusive, and broad concept. Following are the main points, edited in a way that the reader may more easily grasp the depth and scope of Shenhavi's concept.

Background. Now that oppressed Europe has been liberated, all the horrors of the devastation and destruction are coming out. Does the enormity of the disaster not require appropriate expression of pain and bereavement on the part of the Jewish people and every individual Jew? ... *The number of our fallen has climbed into the millions! Millions with neither a grave nor a monument.*

Goal. Let us build an everlasting memorial - a teacher and guide for future generations, a signal and a warning to us, and a statement of conscience and duty to the world around us. This everlasting memorial will preserve the memory of each individual victim and allow every Jew to consecrate the memory of the victims dear to him.

⁵² The quotations that follow are from "Yad Vashem—Memorial Enterprise for the Destroyed Diaspora," the plan that Shenhavi presented to *Davar*, and not from the version that appeared in the newspaper.

Place. In the nascent Eretz Israel, the center of the national revival, the nation shall build an everlasting memorial to its destroyed communities and its members who were killed and exterminated, to its heroes who fought its war, a war of honor and valor, the likes of which we had not known heretofore. ... *This everlasting memorial can and should be built only in the place where the Jewish national pulse is felt. Only Eretz Israel knows how to host and safeguard this national asset.*

Developers. Those national elements that are toiling to effect the national rebirth. Our national and public institutions, the national funds - these will be the core. In the periphery shall be immigrants' organizations, survivors from specific communities, various institutions, Histadrut-affiliated movements, and communities here and in all Diaspora countries.

Builder. The builder of "Yad Vashem - Memorial Enterprise for the Destroyed Diaspora" will be given the task of coordinating and carrying out the project. The project activities shall be limited to a specific period (five years). During this time the builder will have to carry out "general registration" [of names of victims] and the activities surrounding the "special landmarks." He will prepare all the plans for the project, implement them with the full consent of the Funds, and apportion the revenue among the four categories of activities in accordance with a predetermined formula. Revenue from the project shall be used: a) to set up the memorial project; b) to acquire and develop land; c) to receive immigrant orphans from the Diaspora; d) to bring over and settle the war refugees.

Commemoration buildings:

1. *A Hall of Remembrance*, where all remembrance books⁵³ and "special landmarks" shall be placed *It should be a monumental building ... a center around which institutions and projects shall be built to provide additional avenues of moral support for the nation and give Eretz Israel greater influence over the Diaspora.*

⁵³ The "remembrance book" was to include a list of exterminated communities and individuals, a record of destroyed public and cultural property, and a list of Righteous Among the Nations. Shenhavi also recommended the inclusion of two additional memorial records: for immigrants who had perished en route; and for resistance fighters; *ibid.*, p. 5.

2. *Related projects.* Let us note several of them: a) a pavilion for the history of Jewish heroism throughout the generations, especially in respect to the uprisings of the ghetto heroes; b) a central archive for Diaspora history ...; c) an archive for the history of Eretz Israel in all periods, especially that of the Zionist enterprise ...; d) a museum and library; e) a center for study of Diaspora and Zionist history; a center for the training of National Institutions' staff and emissaries to the Diaspora; f) an auditorium and grounds for large conferences; f) a synagogue to meet the needs of religious visitors; and g) hotels and youth hostels.

3. *Millions were murdered without leaving a trace. A special Monument to the Unknown Victim shall be built in the Hall of Remembrance in memory of these anonymous victims; it shall become the emblem of the entire commemoration project.*

We shall place such a memorial, patterned after that in the Hall of Remembrance, on every mass grave and on individual graves in every country in the devastated Diaspora. This standard memorial will symbolize the tortuous, brutal path that millions of our people plied. It will serve as an unvarying manifestation of the Jewish people's resolve to remember its fallen and its martyrs. In every Jewish cemetery worldwide, the Jewish community shall erect a Monument to the Unknown Victim to commemorate victims from this era. It shall become a custom at funerals to stop the procession beside this symbolic tomb for a few moments, in order to pay respects to the memory of the Jewish martyrs. Once this custom becomes rooted as a standard practice in the Diaspora and in Palestine, it will serve as a unifying symbolic framework for the Jews' profound feelings

Remembrance Day. A "Warsaw Ghetto Day" shall be declared as a day of remembrance and a celebration of heroism. On that day the Yishuv and delegations from all Diaspora countries shall participate in mass pilgrimages to the Hall of Remembrance. Mass graves in the countries of [our] suffering and the Jewish cemeteries shall also be sites of pilgrimage on that day. Memorial services shall be held at the Monument to the Unknown Victim - and there shall be one symbol that unites the

entire nation in memory of that bitter era and the lesson that the ghetto fighters taught us ... [Remembrance Day] shall enhance the memory of the fallen until it becomes an enduring bond between the Jewish people and its destiny, and it shall serve as an important foundation on our people's path to building its country.

The comprehensive plan that Shenhavi submitted at this stage accurately expressed the principles of his Zionist creed. In this respect it was essentially no different from his original proposal to the JNF - except for one notably unique detail: the document indicates that Yad Vashem is to serve as a means and not an end. Better equipped by his years of experience and numerous conflicts with various Zionist organizations, Shenhavi understood that only an independent umbrella organization, operating with the joint consent of all the National Institutions and for a limited period of time, could establish the memorial complex of which he dreamed.

In early June 1945, the National Council Executive Board convened at the initiative of Joseph Sprinzak ("the comrade who deals with Diaspora affairs") for special consultations on the question of establishing a Holocaust memorial. Sprinzak feared that the profusion of commemoration plans already published would make the Yishuv less able to carry out any of them. Sprinzak made it clear that, because the forthcoming conference of the General Zionist Council in London in August "is really beginning to come together, we have to work out some sort of conclusion in the matter by then ... to go there with something organized in hand, so we can discuss the American initiative. The chairman, David Remez, took a resolute stance:

It seems that we ought to assume, as a point of departure, that any Diaspora memorial that we're going to build should be centered in Jerusalem, because that will make it lasting. ... This means we're talking about Mount Scopus. ... Perhaps afterward one can add ideas in the field, in rural settlements and various places. ... A book of remembrance should be kept in the tower of remembrance on Mount Scopus, with a page per person, and a copy of it should be sent to the family.... One of

the ideas brought up on this issue was the thought of an emblem in the form of a European field ... not only for the collective, and not only for individuals, but also in memory of the communities. ... The memory of the war casualties, the volunteers, and the standard-bearers may be stationed at its center.⁵⁴

Thus, Remez proposed a new concept, different from Shenhavi's. First, he chose Jerusalem and not an agricultural settlement region as the "almost certain" location. Second, he spoke of a "European field" design as a transition to Eretz Israel. Third, his view of the project focused on the memory of "war casualties," not "unknown victims."

Several participants in the meeting expressed commemorative ideas, but the most novel one came from the Jewish National Fund: a large settlement project that would express "the restoration of wasteland as a contrast to destruction, the giving of new life, and the resurrection of the dead."⁵⁵ The main points of the plan were afforestation, readying of land for settlement - 5,000 hectares in each case - and the establishment of thirty communities. Most of the communities would be named for the victims in Europe; the others would be named for soldiers from the Yishuv who fell in the war, Jewish soldiers who gave their lives in the service of Allied armies, ghetto fighters and partisans, murdered Jewish children, would-be clandestine immigrants who failed to reach Palestine, the fallen of the Haganah, and Jews who had been killed in the various rounds of Arab violence in Palestine.

Watchtowers shall be built in the forests and they will also be used to exhibit material and items related to the memory of those for whom the forests will be planted. The towers will be uniform and tailored to their special purpose. The estimated investment is 4.25 million Palestine pounds.

⁵⁴ Introductory remarks by David Remez at "Consultation on the Question of Establishing a Diaspora Memorial," meeting of the Vaad ha-Leumi, June 4, 1945; YVA, AM, File II, Section 14.

⁵⁵ Yosef Weitz, "Schematic Proposal for Diaspora Commemoration Enterprise by Afforestation," June 4, 1945, CZA, KKL5 12925.

Thoroughly enraged, Shenhavi went to JNF chairman Granowski and warned him that “not only does [the plan] fail to do its job - commemorating the horrific period that the Diaspora endured - but it may inflict failure on the JNF itself.”⁵⁶ After the commemoration proposals became public knowledge, the National Council also received a response from the *haredim*. The heads of the Jerusalem burial society proposed the following:

The central memorial to the hundreds of thousands of brothers and sisters who were not privileged to have a Jewish burial should be located on the Mount of Olives, a location of sanctified lineage. The martyrs’ ashes, brought from the Diaspora, should be buried here. Tens of thousands of Jews in Eretz Israel will be drawn to this shrine year after year, to commune with our martyrs’ memory, to pray for their souls, and to further the memory of the great national catastrophe.⁵⁷

Shenhavi, hoping to present his plan at the conference in London (although, ultimately, no organization sent him), went to the trouble of preparing a detailed description of his Hall of Remembrance:

A closed, round hall. At the center is the Monument to the Unknown Victim. There is a mosaic floor in memory of the children. Up to a given height, the walls are lined with wood or similar material. Frescoes and mosaics are laid over the lining. The hall is divided into twenty “memorial chambers,” one for each country. The memorial chambers contain boards with victims’ names. The names, in the form of small plaques clustered on a town-by-town basis, are mounted on the boards. Each board has more than 1,000 names, making it into a mass memorial of sorts. The boards are suspended; a particular victim’s memorial plaque can be taken down if necessary. The diameter is about 50

⁵⁶ “Commemoration of the Diaspora,” June 13, 1945, Ha-Shomer ha-Za’ir Archive, 14.3-95 (4).

⁵⁷ Communication from the Keneses Yisroel Kehillas Yerushalayim burial society to the Vaad ha-Leumi of Keneset Yisrael, July 12, 1945: “Re: commemorative monument to the fallen Diaspora [Jews],” signed by Yisrael Bradki, secretary, and A. H. Zwebner, chairman; CZA, J1/3601/1.

meters = 1,800 square meters of floor space. The height is 18 meters and the [circumference] is 200 meters ... The monument is 30 meters long.⁵⁸

For the design of the Monument to the Unknown Victim, Shenhavi noted the artist Bornstein's proposal: "A recumbent monument. A large, inert stone with an inscription. At the front, an eternal light. The light from the dome is focused and falls on the monument only."⁵⁹

In case this plan was rejected, Shenhavi prepared an alternative:

Instead of a closed hall, it has one open facade. At the center is the Monument to the Unknown Victim, with the "commemoration chambers" for the countries arrayed on either side of it. It is built into the mountainside. All along the facade (250 meters) is *a colonnade 10 meters wide that connects to a 25,000 square meter plaza*. The plaza is surrounded by a wall 4 meters high. The wall should be illustrated with frescoes that tell the story of the Holocaust period in all its aspects. In this plaza, at least 30,000 people should be able to take part in each ceremony.⁶⁰

However, the status of the plan changed after it entered the public domain. It took on a life of its own. For a short time Shenhavi tried to keep it "his," but others treated it as they wished and eventually forgot even to credit him for the idea. The General Zionist Council, convening in London in August 1945, decided to appoint the National Council to the task of commemorating the Holocaust in Palestine. The conference resolved that the memorial should be designed in such a way as to stress "the location of its hub - Jerusalem. The project, which will expand to the entire country, will include memorial forests and schools for child survivors."⁶¹

⁵⁸ Letter from Mordechai Shenhavi to Franz Lederer, July 27, 1945, YVA, AM, File XV.

⁵⁹ Memorandum on Shenhavi's meeting with Mr. Bornstein of Bezalel Academy, June 17, 1945, Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir Archive, 14.3-95 (6).

⁶⁰ Shenhavi to Lederer, July 27, 1945, YVA, AM, File XV.

⁶¹ Summary of resolutions pertaining to Yad Vashem, meeting in London, August 15, 1945, Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir Archive, 14.3-95 (6).

From then until the State of Israel was established, the Vaad ha-Leumi of Knesset Yisrael was directly responsible for all aspects of Holocaust commemoration. Although Shenhavi was appointed to the Yad Vashem committee that the National Council set up, the committee was chaired by David Remez; he set the agenda for the commemoration of the destroyed Diaspora Jewish communities.

Epilogue - “We Shall Build Not *on* the Ruins of the Diaspora but *of* Them”⁶²

The commemoration proposals that have been surveyed above were conceived by Jews who were identified with the Zionist movement. The idea of building a memorial to European Jewry as a “landscape of memory” in Palestine is consistent with the collective responsibility for the Jewish future that the movement had assumed. At first the initiatives to shape the collective memory of the Holocaust were put forward as private proposals that were submitted to public organizations and the National Institutions. However, when the proposals were actually presented to the executive bodies of the Jewish National Fund, Keren Hayesod, Youth Aliyah, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, it became obvious that there was a deep and fundamental gap between the individual commemorators’ dreams and the vision of the leaders - those who would in fact shape collective memory.

Most of the private commemoration proposals focused on memorializing the victims as a way of preserving the past. The discussions at the executive level of the institutions centered on commemorating the Holocaust and adducing the lesson to be learned from the historic event. Thus, even if no one disputed the merit of inserting Holocaust remembrance into the Zionist narrative, questions about the location and function of this remembrance remained unanswered.⁶³

Robert Bellah argues that memories that surface in public consciousness in the context of an actual crisis originate in the multigenerational social

⁶² Shenhavi, January 10, 1943, CZA, KKL5/11965.

⁶³ For a discussion of the Holocaust remembrance issue at that time, see Dalia Ofer, “How and to What Extent Should the Holocaust Be Remembered? - Holocaust Remembrance in Israel’s First Decade,” Anita Shapira, ed., *Independence - The First Fifty Years* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1998), pp. 171–193.

experience.⁶⁴ The case before us corroborates this argument. The commemoration ideas presented in this article demonstrate plainly that the severe crisis evoked by the Holocaust in the consciousness of the Yishuv did prompt the developers of memorial initiatives to reexamine the “bank” of Jewish remembrance mechanisms. One such developer stated as much: “In vain I searched our modern lives for a way to express national pain and, in spite of myself, I turned to the forms that our forefathers had used to do the same.”⁶⁵

The proposals of Leib Goldberg of Kibbutz Yagour and Idov Cohen of the JNF Executive Board had this quality, as, in a certain way, did Mordechai Shenhavi’s proposal. Shenhavi wished to restructure the religious duty of individual remembrance (reciting *Kaddish* and erecting a tombstone) into an ideological (Zionist) duty to create a collective memory of the Holocaust in Palestine. The memorial days that the Yishuv leadership declared - days of fasting and protest - also fit this pattern.

As a rule, collective Holocaust memory in the Yishuv was apparently constructed as a model of the society and as a manifestation of the ancient decree of Jewish destiny: “The oppressor, the Amalekite essence that exists in all generations, fights justice, fights us, and aims not only to exterminate us but also to obliterate the mark of God from the face of the universe.”⁶⁶ Ultimately, however, “By order of [Divine] Providence, [Palestine] was miraculously spared from the inferno so that it could fulfill its historic role: to rebuild the shattered Jewish people.”⁶⁷ Those who perished in the Holocaust are the “desert generation”; the survivors and those living in the Yishuv are heroes and the builders of the renewed “promised land.”

Although Diaspora Jews who joined the Yishuv subsequently shared one “Zionist present” - even if they immigrated at different times - they fostered different ideological visions and were aware of two types of “past”: individual and collective. While their individual past was shaped by the cultural and geographic landscape and the Christian or Moslem environment of their

⁶⁴ Robert Bellah, *Broken Covenant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 141.

⁶⁵ J. Böhm, letter to the editor, *Davar*, May 16, 1944.

⁶⁶ Remarks by the poet David Shimoni at conference of writers, July 12, 1942, *Moznayim* (Hebrew), 14 (1942), p. 373.

⁶⁷ CZA, KKL5/12925.

countries of origin, their collective past was molded by the landscape of Palestine and by their descent from the Biblical Israelites. Their Jewish identity was determined by their being links in the chain of generations that preserved a unique culture (the temporal dimension); their Zionist identity was shaped by the daily lives that they led as natives and builders of Eretz Israel (the spatial dimension).⁶⁸

Due to the revolutionary nature of Zionism, the two types of past were not equal in cultural status. Most immigrants at that time were young and unattached. In fact, they divorced themselves from all interrelations with their individual pasts. Their affiliation groups - youth groups, kibbutzim, political parties, and the Yishuv at large - became their “home,” a surrogate of sorts for the families and communities that they had left behind in the Diaspora. Thus, the natives of the Yishuv, unlike their European-born parents, were raised to have one past only: an old-new past. For this reason collective memory was preferred over individual memory in the formation of the “constructed memory of the past” through which both identities, the personal and the collective, would be defined.

This insight is also reflected in the struggle to choose a location for the Holocaust commemorative site. On the surface the struggle concerned the supremacy of the Yishuv and Palestine as structures of collective Holocaust memory for the nation and for history. Mordechai Shenhavi’s concern about the possibility that individuals or organizations would establish memorials in Europe prompted him to propose a mechanism - Yad Vashem - that would commemorate the Holocaust in Palestine. It would be the spokesman of the Jewish people and thwart the formation of separate commemorative projects.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The strongest example is probably the fact that on the graves of the casualties of the Israeli War of Independence and of the state’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, instead of the date of birth, the person’s year of *aliyah* (immigration to Palestine) was inscribed. For an expanded discussion, see Zeli Gurevitz and Gideon “The Land of Israel: Myth and Phenomenon,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* X (1994), pp.195-210.

⁶⁹ Mordechai Shenhavi remarked, “Some of them wish to commemorate a specific Jewish community (Austrian, Czechoslovakian, etc.) and the Bund and others of similar ilk propose to build a monument at the site of the Warsaw ghetto.... Both intentions are perceptibly dangerous. The former will fragment the Jews’ ability to express their tragedy in a united voice. The Bund’s proposal attempts to shift the Jewish center of gravity back to the heart of the Diaspora—Warsaw.” “National Monument to the Fallen in the Diaspora and Memorial to the Jewish Soldier,” December 7, 1944, Ha-Shomer ha-Za’ir Archive, 14.3-95 (1).

For those who considered the Holocaust a part of the past that should convey a lesson about the present - a model of society - Jerusalem (the holy city and the crux of Jewish remembrance) was the commemorative venue of choice.⁷⁰ Those who, in contrast, structured past events as a model for society preferred to establish the Diaspora memorial in the Jezreel Valley (one of the most sanctified areas in the Zionist civic religion⁷¹), because “in the Valley we view ourselves and our destiny through the prism of the new reality there.”⁷² As long as the sociopolitical situation was constructed as a time of crisis, the developers of memorial ideas and members of the establishment adhered to both attitudes. Over time, as the situation changed, and hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors came to Israel, a debate emerged over the shaping of memory of the time of crisis. The differences between those with personal recollections of the Holocaust and those who shaped its collective memory became more sharply defined. Subsequently, Holocaust consciousness in Israeli society underwent quite a few changes and reversals.

Translated from the Hebrew by Nafatali Greenwood

Source: *Yad Vashem Studies*, XXX, Jerusalem, 2002, pp. 297-336.

⁷⁰ “Eliahu Epstein—as for the proposal of including a symbolic cemetery in the project, after all, most Jews will expect it to be established on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem and not in the [Jezreel] Valley”; Idov Cohen in response to Shenhavi’s proposal of April 1, 1943: “The appropriate place [for the memorial project]: it seems to me in the vicinity of Jerusalem, but one should not rule out ... the Lake Kinneret area, the Mount Carmel area, or the Galilee,” CZA KKL5/11965; “Mr. [Ben-]Gurion: The most appropriate place is Jerusalem,” summary memorandum by Shenhavi of his meeting with Ben-Gurion, August 21, 1944, Ha-Shomer ha-Za’ir Archive, 14.3-95 (1); “Mr. Haezrahi: The center that will put together the list of all heroes from all countries, who fought against Hitler, were murdered or fell, should be in Eretz Israel, in Jerusalem, and they should be commemorated by building a village.” Meeting of desk chiefs, February 19, 1945, M. Shenhavi, summary memorandum, August 1946, YVA, AM, File IV, p. 13.

⁷¹ For discussion of the “civil religion” concept generally, see Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 168–169. Concerning Zionism as a civil religion, see Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁷² Shenhavi’s use of the expression “our destiny” refers to Jewish life in the Diaspora, as he writes explicitly in the excerpt quoted: “The blow we suffered originates in our very national fate, which was occasioned by the lack of land and a foothold.” Memorandum to the JNF Executive Board, January 10, 1943, “History of Yad Vashem 1945–1948,” YVA, AM, File LII, YL10–YV/19.

