

Teaching the Holocaust

I am a boys' high-school Rebbi. How much time and, if any, should I invest in educating my talmidim about the events and lessons of the Holocaust? Which books and materials would you recommend that I use?

Every *Godol*, *Rosh Yeshiva*, *Manhig Yisroel*, and all of our *Einei Ho'aida*, certainly believe that the *Parsha* of *Churban Europa* should have a prominent place in the curriculum of our educational institutions. Because this era in our history happened only 60 years ago, which is, of course, recent, historically speaking, there are many outlooks as to how it should be taught and how much time should be devoted to it. As a result, a definitive program, accepted by all, has not yet been completely devised.

As a student, I was taught that our *golus* started with the worst *Churban*, *Churban Habayis* continuing with the many other exiles over the millennia, the *Churban* of the Crusades, *tach ve'tat*, culminating, in our generation, the horrible *Churban* that decimated a third of *Klal Yisrael*. We were told of the great loss of *Yidden*, all of them *kedoshim v'tehorim* as they died *al Kiddush Hashem* in an unprecedented way. This last *Churban* is a 'peg', an extremely large 'peg', in all the *Churbanos* that happened to us since *Churban Habayis*. Therefore it was taught in the context of all of our *Churbanos* and observed and commemorated together with *Tisha B'Av* and not commemorated on its own.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab *ZT"L* believed that we should zero in and concentrate on what *Yiddishkeit* has lost, all the *Torah* that was lost, all the *Gedolim* that were lost, the *Yeshivas* that were lost, the way of life of the common *Yid* that was lost, the loss of *hemshech Hadoros*. We should accentuate the greatness, *gevura* and *mesiras nefesh* that our ancestors went through in order to keep *Torah* and *mitzvos* and not dwell on the 'blood and gore'. All of these factors affect our lives and the future of *Klal Yisrael*.

Only as of late was a curriculum developed by Torah Umesorah's *Zechor Yemos Olam* program and a teacher's guide was edited by Rabbi Joseph Elias, the educational director of *Zechor Yemos Olam*. Rabbi Dovid Bernstein, Torah Umesorah's Director of Aish Dos Teachers Institute has brought this Teacher's Guide to many cities as part of a conference on the meaning and purpose of education about *Churban Europa*. Our Seminary was fortunate in hosting this conference twice over the past few years for all teachers in Montreal.

I would therefore advise you to use this program and its references as sources in the development of your own particular program. (May I suggest that you recommend to your students to read "To Vanquish the Dragon" by Pearl Benisch. It is, to my mind, one of the best books written on the *Churban*.)

I know that it is difficult to decide on how much time should be devoted to this very important topic as there are not enough hours in the day to teach every subject that we must teach. However our *mesorah* is that in order to develop a *talmid chocham*, all of their time should be devoted to the learning of *Shas* and *Poskim* as *hafoch bo ve'hafoch bo de'kulo bo*. Every subject is found in *Shas*. Those who do not have a strong identification with *Shas* and *Poskim*, look for a different form to strengthen their identity and therefore use the Holocaust for such a medium. We, who do have *B"H*, a rich heritage with which to identify ourselves, can combine the *Churban Europa* into our entire *Golus Limud* which is constantly woven into our studies i.e. the *Tochacho*, *Taaneisim*, etc.

Let us hope that with the dissemination of the *Zechor Yemos Olam* program, we will be able to establish a balance in our curriculum and bring in this most important ‘peg’ to add to the growth of our students in becoming better *Yidden* who will have the knowledge and understanding of what happened to our nation.

I would like to conclude with the following posuk in Tehillim 78-6: “*l’maan yedu dor ho’acharon bonim yevoldu yokumu v’sapru le’vnehem*”

.Children will be born and they will be told;
they will proudly stand up and tell it to their children,
and their children to theirs,
till they will convey it to the very last generation,
that they all should know

Pray tell how will the *dor ho’acharon* know if we don’t teach?