

“Only through studying history can we grasp how things change; only through history can we begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and only through history can we understand what elements of an institution or a society persist despite change.” (Peter N. Stearns George Mason)

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Yad Vashem suggests two main purposes of survivor testimony:

1. Historical record-

“....Therefore, they set themselves the goal of eliminating every Jew on whom they could lay hands and obliterating all evidence of the crime. Given this intent, the fact that the surviving Jews were able to speak of what happened, recount those who did not survive, and tell their human experience is of great power and importance”.

2. Humanizing the victims-

“...However, since the Holocaust was a composed of a series of atrocities inflicted by people on people, and a matter of great moral and ethical significance, it is crucial that the human experience of the victims be told in the "first person so that it may be at least partly understood. Here it is proper to note the importance of learning about the human aspects of people in categories other than the Jews, such as rescuers, bystanders, collaborators, and perpetrators. This, however, requires separate discussion”.

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“No more dramatic evidence is needed for the dominant place of history in ancient Israel than the overriding fact that even God is known only insofar as he reveals himself “historically”. Sent to bring the tidings of deliverance to the Hebrew slaves, Moses does not come in the name of the creator of Heaven and Earth, but of the “God of the fathers”, that is to say, of the God of history: Go and assemble the

elders of Israel and say to them: The Lord the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to me and said: I have surely remembered you..."(Exodus 3:16). When God introduces himself directly to the entire people at Sinai, nothing is heard of his essence or attributes, but only "I, the Lord, am your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). That is sufficient. For here as elsewhere, ancient Israel knows what God is, from what he has done in history. And if that is so, then memory has become crucial to its faith and, ultimately, to its very existence. (Yerushalmi)

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A king marries a princess. He gives her a ketubah (marriage contract). In that ketubah he describes, in great detail, how her every need will be taken care of. Furthermore, he commits himself to always taking care of her, and never forsaking her. Soon afterward the king leaves to fight in a war. The princess eventually needs to go to town for

supplies. The local neighbors approach her and ask her where is the King, does she not realize that he is gone, and not coming back? As time goes by, this continues, and the locals become more aggressive in their persecution of the princess. Eventually the princess becomes despondent, beginning to be convinced that the words of the locals are indeed the truth. The King has forsaken her; she is on her own. One day there is a knock on the palace door. The princess opens the door, and lo and behold it is the King. The King is shocked to see the princess. He says, "My princess, I am quite frankly surprised to see you, I thought that you would have given up on waiting for me a long time ago. Where did you get the strength and courage to wait for me?" The princess responds, "Indeed I was afraid that you would never come back, and subsequently, I became despondent. However, I looked at the ketubah you left me. In it you describe your commitment to me. How you would always care for me, look after me and never leave me. It was

that ketubah that gave me strength to persevere". The sages point out that this parable symbolizes the plight of the Jewish people in diaspora. The princess refers to the Jews, the King is G-d, the neighbors are the nations persecuting nations throughout history and the ketubah is the Torah. (Medrash Rabbah,Eichah)

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