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A theme of this year's remembrance is **Now More than Ever** and it was suggested I might speak of the wave of antisemitism that is sweeping the world **post Durban1, post Gaza, on the very eve of Durban2**, which starts tomorrow.

Those are **bad things but to put them in perspective** one would have to speak also of the good that has been achieved and that I believe far outweighs the bad –

How under the leadership of survivors,

- the Shoah has become a cornerstone of modern ethical consciousness, not just for Jews but for all humankind, enlarging memory and deepening conscience and responsibility, making a most particular story universal
- How great museums have been created all over the world that perpetuate research and remembrance of the Shoah
- How antisemitism and Shoah denial is condemned, even criminalized, by many nation states and governments, including countries that were involved in the Shoah
- How testimony has been gathered on an unprecedented scale, using the most contemporary technologies, evidence that will survive and be the subject of study and research long after there are not only no living witnesses, but none any longer alive who lived when there were still witnesses among us.

... ..

But that last thought has prompted me instead to try and speak, in this place and in this company, about some things that are more intimate – but not less important.

The Baal Shem Tov said:

*“Forgetfulness leads to exile.
While remembrance is the secret of redemption.”*

As most of us present here today know, however, in one way or another, remembrance or knowledge of events of the Shoah can itself produce a kind of exile –
And redemption, after the Shoah, can never again bear a simple meaning of joyful liberation.

When I was asked to speak today, in the presence of survivors and the families of survivors, I felt unqualified to do so. But one can only speak from the heart on this subject, and out of one’s own experience, so that is what I shall try to do.

My father’s parents left Russia at the end of the 19th Century. It is true their departure was preceded and influenced by a wave of pogroms. But their journey eventually took them, by difficult stages, **far from Europe**, to Drom Afrika, **where my mother’s parents** had arrived, at about the same time, straight from England.

When the Second World War came, my parents volunteered for service in the Eighth Army, my father as a sapper officer, and my mother as an army nurse. **My earliest perspective on that War was therefore** their experiences in the North African campaign, at Tobruk, El Alamein, in Cairo, and then during the Allied advance into Italy, followed, after the Italian armistice, by their marriage in uniform in the Rome synagogue.

Through my uncle, Cecil, I heard something of the formation after the War of the Israeli airforce and my future father-in-law, Bernie Friedland, spoke, sparingly, of his experiences under fire and the injuries he suffered in the War of Independence.

These were all narratives of challenge and adversity, certainly, but they were told by people who were well-fed at the time and bearing arms. They were far removed from the ghettos and killing fields of Europe and Russia.

I do not know the name of any blood relation, on either side of my family, who suffered or died in the Shoah.

It is a puzzle therefore, and I cannot really now remember or explain, how it came about that, by my earliest teenage years, an awareness of the Shoah had so penetrated my consciousness that it cast a shadow, and still does, during many of my waking hours and even in dreams.

Survivors have told me on more than one occasion, and I believe it to be true, that no-one who did not experience these terrible things can ever fully know or understand what it was like. The survivors, the witnesses of the Shoah, have a unique moral authority.

But the number of our precious survivors grows less year by year. Most of those who were selected for work, and therefore most of those who survived the camps, were aged between 18 and 40, which means that the youngest of those are today aged 82 and the oldest past 100. There were child survivors too of course and they are younger today. But there will come a time, not too far off, when there will be no more among us with direct memories of the Shoah.

There is some relevance therefore on an occasion like this in considering how others, like me, who have no direct memories of such horrors, become engaged in the act and duty of remembrance.

I do not think that my early awareness of the Shoah came about through books, films or photographs.

- I read and saw a little in those early years, and it shocked me, but it was not until later, at university, that I began to read widely about the Shoah, later to be augmented by some study at Yad Vashem.
- It goes without saying that research into, and knowledge of, the history and facts of the Shoah is important and that the revisionists must be fought on the field of reason. And what is unique about the Shoah must also be analysed and explained by such means.

But it is also true, as Elie Wiesel for one reminds us, that there is a big difference between knowledge and understanding

- In my own experience, the most important things about the Shoah have not been conveyed, are probably not conveyable, by books or discursive reason.
- As a child, I had a violin teacher in Johannesburg who was a survivor. He never said anything to me or in my presence about his experiences. But sometimes, in the middle of a lesson, chin on pad, I would catch him, out of the corner of my eye, gazing out the window or across the room and his eyes would fill with tears. Even as a shallow child, I felt his inexpressible sadness and it entered my soul.
- We have all had such powerful epiphanies of feeling and understanding, glimpses, for as long as the soul can bear it, into unutterable fear, pain, loss, abandonment, sadness and, yes, also into despair (which I shall say something more about shortly).
- It is what grips us, and brings tears into our eyes
 - When we contemplate photographs like those taken by perpetrators at Auschwitz that Lili Jacob fortuitously saved
 - When we think of the father directing his little son's eyes skywards as they stand on the edge of the pit
 - When we hear the bitterness with which a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising still speaks, decades later, at Lochamei Hagetaot
 - When we read the poems and narratives of survivors or a midrash like the following by Elie Wiesel:

Separated from husband and son, father and brother, a mother and her daughter walk together. The little girl, 8 years old, wonders where they are going. We are going, says the mother, to the end of the world. The little girl says: "Is that far mother, because I am very tired." "So is everyone", says the mother. "Even God?" asks the little girl. And the mother answers: "I don't know. You will ask him yourself."

The little girl who asked a question about God as she moved to the end of the world also had one for her older brother. "Will you remember me too?"

He answers: "I have forgotten nothing. I will tell that you were only eight, that you had never seen the sea or been to a real wedding, that you never hurt anyone."

She says: "I want you to remember also how I loved my new winter coat, and Shabbat, and God."

He says he will; he will speak too.

The little sister has two more questions:

"When you speak of your little sister leaving you like that, without a hug, without a goodbye, without wishing you a good journey, will you say it was not her fault?"

"It was not your fault."

"Then whose fault was it?"

"I shall find out. And I shall tell. I swear to you little sister. I shall."

What happens to us when we think and feel these things I do not fully understand. But it has something to do with our common humanity and it offers hope, I believe, that deep feeling and remembrance will continue even when no direct living memory remains.

Adapting something Norma Rosen said of Cynthia Ozick's work, moments of insight and feeling like those I gave examples of allow us to "enter...into a state of being that for whatever reasons makes porous those membranes through which empathy passes, or deep memory with its peculiar 'thereness'", so that the veil of night and fog lifts somewhat and "we can move, so far as it is given to us to do so, into the pain ... of the Shoah. "

I said earlier that reason and the study of history are also necessary, to establish and maintain the uniqueness of the Shoah, what was distinctive about the Nazis' murder of Jews and also, it must not be forgotten, of Gypsies. This audience will be familiar with those reasons so I will not revisit them. The Shoah was an evil that has no equal anywhere in history.

Emile Fackenheim had good reason therefore to characterize the Shoah as an epoch-making event.

- For Fackenheim, an epoch-making event is more than an important historical event. It is a unique event that makes new moral demands, not only on Jews, but on all mankind, and alters in radical ways the way that human beings perceive the past and the future.
- Previous epoch-making events in Jewish history were the Exodus from Egypt, what happened at Har Sinai, and the destruction of the first and second Temples. How a person responded to each of those events defined what it meant to be Jewish in those days.

The only other epoch-making event Fackenheim identifies in our modern history was the re-establishment in our day of Israel as a Jewish state.

Much has been said about the connection, and absence of connection, between these two events, but it can hardly be doubted that there is some connection or that, between them, they do supply strong tests of what it means to be authentically Jewish in our times.

The challenge of the Shoah to Jews in our time, whether they are religious or secular, is what Fackenheim called the 614th commandment – not to grant Hitler a further posthumous victory.

If that is unpacked, it includes at least the following moral imperatives for an authentic Jew in our period of history:

- We must not forget the victims of the Holocaust
- We must affirm the sacredness of life over death, with the further consequence that we must reject collective and individual suicide;
- We must have hope for the world, that a second Shoah will not be allowed to happen to anyone, anywhere, ever again;
- And we must survive as Jews, raising Jewish children.

I have not mentioned Fackenheim's injunction not to despair of God. These are deep matters that I have no answers to. Wiesel said: *"If I am asked do I believe in God after Auschwitz, I would lie if I said yes."* And he added: *"I would also lie if I said no."*

But whatever one's state of faith and belief after Auschwitz, the moral duty to fight despair seems clear. "Fight" is an appropriate word, because we see around us in 2009 that the forces of hatred and antisemitism are still at work in the world and because despair is not easily vanquished.

But for the sake of the little eight year old girl, her sisters and her brothers, her parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins, her unborn children,
 we must,
 we do,
 we shall,
 remember,
 and tell,
 and fight despair,
 and survive, with love and with tears.

Those duties are reinforced by the moral imperative or challenge that arises from the other epoch-making event of our modern Jewish history, the rebirth of the state of Israel. And the imperative and challenge arising from that event, which in a sense embraces all the others, is Am Yisroel Chai.

It is in this sadder and wiser sense that we understand and acknowledge the truth of the Baal Shem Tov's words:

*"Forgetfulness leads to exile.
 While remembrance is the secret of redemption."*