

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Performing Memory

### TOURISM, PILGRIMAGE, AND THE RITUAL APPROPRIATION OF THE PAST

To understand how collective memory works, we cannot restrict our inquiries to tracing the vicissitudes of historical knowledge or narratives. We must also, and I believe foremost, attend to the construction of our emotional and moral engagement with the past. When looking at public discourse, this translates into questions about how the past is made to matter. Framing events, heroes, places as worthy of remembrance and honor is quite different from defining whole historical chapters as a burden to be mastered.

—IWONA IRWIN-ZARECKA, *Frames of Remembrance:  
The Dynamics of Collective Memory*

#### SEEKING MEMORY

THE COMMITMENT to Holocaust memory has increasingly become a concern to a new generation intent on appropriating that memory. The strategies developed for and by these memory tourists for the memorialization of the Holocaust often go far beyond iconic inscription and technological mediation to (almost) the logical extreme of embodiment. Whereas iconic mediations of the Shoah can offer models for representation that establish the symbolic language for remembrance and whereas museums and videotape archiving projects, to a large degree, also attempt to stabilize memory in order to mediate it for contemporary culture, ritual commemorative activities take mediation (and memory) beyond these techniques geared toward preservation and permanence and accentuate the performative, transitive qualities of memorialization. Though they appropriate the stable logics of place so as to ground memory in the concrete and the "real" and to build lasting structures for Holocaust memory, commemorations bring the practice of memory into the present through the activities of those doing the remembering. Thus Holocaust memory becomes a public, social phenomenon. Following the maps established by historians and geographers, survivors and political leaders, the memory pioneers of the next generation negotiate spaces for the production of Holocaust memory that have their own internal rationales. Building on the structures created by religion and ideology as well as by expectation, today's explorers of the landscape of memory proceed far

beyond the constraints established by icons, video frames, and museums to embody the past themselves and find ways *into* the Holocaust. That this may be the same Holocaust those who “were there” may want to find ways *out of* only highlights the difference and importance of the contemporary quest for remembrance.

In this chapter I discuss those ritual strategies and appropriations in the context of one particular case of Holocaust commemorative activity: the March of the Living. Because the march itself has come to dominate the culture of such memory tourism, and because its structure and itinerary are paradigmatic of both the large majority of such tours and the problems and pitfalls of these excursions in their most extreme forms, this analysis well addresses the most essential issues involved in the ritually embodied, commemorative forms of Holocaust memorialization. Indeed, no less an authority than Martin Gilbert, noted British historian, led a tour of Holocaust sites in Europe for his graduate students in 1996, about which he subsequently wrote. Though the book resulting from that experience makes clear that his was an itinerary deeply informed by historical awareness, steeped in archival research into the background of Jewish communities before the war as well as their wartime destruction, it nonetheless reveals the prominence of Holocaust tourism as a way of seeking memory and engaging the past.<sup>1</sup> This mode of memorializing is all the more pronounced in the case of the march, whose underlying religious, ideological, and cultural structures reinforce the construction of memory. In this most highly negotiated and deeply appropriated genre of the contemporary cultural memory of the Shoah we also find more ways in which memory is made meaningful—ways it engenders commitment in the present and to its own future.

I will begin to explore this terrain at the end, as it were—the ruins of Crematorium Chamber II at Auschwitz II-Birkenau, in a place that is framed as original, in starkly religiomythic terms:

We are assembled here again, marching against death, in the march that has no end, on the awful road of death and destruction in Auschwitz. . . . Here, each year anew, the Jewish nation begins its march to freedom, and to its homeland. This is the March of Life, the lives of their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. . . . This is the March of Remembrance, of those who swore to remember and never forget. . . . This is also the March of the Dead, who never stopped marching and still march today with us and accompany us like the pillar of fire that led the Jewish camp in the Bible, today serving as a reminder and as a witness. They march with us today; they will march with us tomorrow and next week; and they will return with us to Eretz Yisrael.<sup>2</sup>

How can we begin to unpack this arresting series of assertions and declarations linking past, present, and future, myth and history? Clearly, as framed by march organizers, the activities of the March of the Living are communally and perhaps cosmically significant. Yet, if we were to follow the late iconoclast Yeshayahu Leibowitz, none of these mythic-memorial constructions would make any difference. According to his clearly singular and idiosyncratic views, the religious significance of historical events depends solely on whether or not such events occurred for religious reasons, under religiously determined circumstances. In this view, "the Holocaust of our generation is religiously meaningless. The Holocaust belonged to the course of the world, it merely exemplified the lot of the helpless who fall prey to the wicked. What was not done for the sake of Heaven, is indifference from a religious point of view. Since the establishment of the state of Israel was not inspired by the Torah nor undertaken for the sake of the Torah, religiously speaking, its existence is a matter of indifference."<sup>3</sup> Thus, not only would the Holocaust fall outside the realm of religiomythic relevance, so too would the foundation of the State of Israel. The ritual-commemorative mode of Holocaust memory, as played out in the March of the Living, stands, as it were, between these two statements. On the one hand, it raises powerful associations with the trappings of tradition and the positive construction of memory. On the other, it demands analysis as to its position in the landscape of religious and cultural responses to the Shoah, questions as to its role in promoting certain ideologies of remembrance. These two quotations will therefore serve as the poles between which I will chart my explorations.

Indeed, ever since the Israeli Knesset enacted the Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Day Law in April 1959 and, two years later, legislated that Yom ha-Shoah vaha-Gevurah (literally, "the day of Holocaust and Heroism") be observed in a Jewish ritual manner (for instance, that it begin at sundown the previous day), ritual commemorative activity around the Holocaust, bounded by these two poles, has grown substantially.<sup>4</sup> That is, despite the non-Halachic (and even idolatrous, as Leibowitz might argue) nature of such commemoration, Jews seem increasingly interested in, rather than indifferent to, marking the memory of the Shoah through symbolic activity, much of it colored by tradition. In 1988 a new form of such symbolic activity was inaugurated: the "March of the Living."<sup>5</sup> The "march" itself is an annual silent walk from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz II-Birkenau on Holocaust Memorial Day, undertaken by a group of international Jewish high school students accompanied by adult educators, survivors, medical professionals, and community leaders, culminating in a

mass commemoration ceremony at the Birkenau memorial; in 1994 (the year I participated) the march involved over six thousand teens from over forty countries.<sup>6</sup> But the march is also much more: all six thousand students who participated in 1994 crisscrossed the Polish countryside in convoys of tour buses exploring the landscape of Jewish memory and history; for the fifteen hundred American students who went and for all other march groups, the March of the Living was the entire two-week expedition to and tour of Poland and Israel that framed the Holocaust Memorial Day walk. On this trip (April 4 to April 18 in 1994) the students generally visit Warsaw and Kraków, Majdanek and Treblinka, and various important symbolic-political sites in Israel, including the Western Wall, Masada, and Jerusalem's Ammunition Hill, in addition to the Auschwitz camps. Throughout the tour of Poland, students participate in (and even initiate) organized and improvised ceremonies of remembrance for the murdered Jews and their destroyed world, while in Israel more ceremonies occur marking and celebrating the Jews' "return into history" in a sovereign state. What kind of memory is established through this activity, and how can we contextualize it?<sup>7</sup>

One can begin to answer these questions by understanding the march on its own terms, as a pilgrimage of memory. I argue that the symbolic behavior of the teenagers throughout the two-week tour must be understood in a religiohistorical context; the rites of remembrance, in all their variety, are symbolic interactions with sacred sites of memory, what Pierre Nora has called *lieux de mémoire*, augmented by traditional and innovative liturgy and explorations into history and ideology.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the superstructure of the entire March of the Living and its itinerary is designed to evoke a strong connection between the student participants and their past/heritage through a Zionist ideology of history that follows the contours of collective, popular memory more than it adheres to strict historical realities: Israeli flags, for instance, are seen everywhere on the tour in Poland, (re)claiming symbolic space for a country that did not exist during the time and history the pilgrims are exploring. But beneath this enforced *communitas* lies a realm of competing discourses about history, memory, and the sacred in which the students, from a wide variety of social and religious backgrounds, actively struggle to find their place. Whether they are traveling the Polish countryside in buses while listening to their *madrikhim* (guides) narrate the "sacred" history of the Holocaust through its various texts, exploring on foot the symbolic geography of memory of the camp-memorials, praying on Shabbat in the only remaining Warsaw synagogue, or observing Yom ha-Zikkaron and celebrating Yom ha-Atzma'ut one

after the other in Israel, each day of the tour is fraught with significance, as identity and experience blend and the participants construct a viable Holocaust memory (or have it constructed) for themselves. Understanding the strategies of symbolic appropriation and expression invoked throughout the march will lead us to a better understanding of the contours of collective Holocaust memory in its most active and embodied construction in ritual performance.

#### THE MARCH OF THE LIVING: PREPARATION AND EXPECTATIONS

Preparation for participation in the march is involved; this is no holiday tour, at least it is not presented as such. Prospective participants must apply, and the brochures warn that not all applicants are accepted into the program. The main concern of the organizers seems to be that the students be mature enough to handle the strong emotional and physical burdens of the two-week tour. After acceptance into the program, participants are mailed a packet of preparatory readings presented as a study guide and created by the Central Agency for Jewish Education in Miami, the first U.S. community to be involved in the march and still the trailblazer for its continued expansion and development (though the march is now administered in New York). The study guide offers basic, easily digestible selections organized into units titled "Danger Signals," "The Persecution Years," "Israel," and "Israel Today" and including excerpts from Holocaust literature, histories, songs, memoirs, maps, and traditional Jewish sources, along with thought questions, exercises, and activities. (A final section of the study guide is mailed out separately upon return to the United States following the march.)<sup>9</sup> Participants are then given reading and homework assignments selected from the guide in the weeks or even months prior to departure. Students living in or near major metropolitan areas (such as Los Angeles and San Francisco, cities whose contingents I studied and accompanied, respectively, in 1994) get together for a series of meetings with one or several of their *madrikhim* to discuss these readings, watch films, hear presentations, and even role-play, while the others prepare correspondence course-style. All this serves to set a tone of seriousness and community, as well as to establish a common background of knowledge.

The students themselves come with a range of educational backgrounds and interests, but most seem to have had some previous interest in the Holocaust, as well as in Israel and in their Jewish communities. Many seem to have heard about the march from friends or in their Jewish

youth groups. Responding to a questionnaire item that asked, "How did you decide to go on the March of the Living? Who, if anyone, or what encouraged you to go?" one student wrote: "I knew I had to go after I heard my friend speak about it two years ago. Even though he only spoke about the torture that went on in Poland, he later told me that it was the best time of his life. I also wanted to see for myself what happened, so I could actually believe it—let myself feel it. I have always acknowledged the Holocaust, but made myself put up a shield for my emotional protection. I feel I am ready to surrender my shield."<sup>10</sup> Another participant had this to say: "I have always been told that visiting the concentration camps and visiting Israel is a necessary part of being Jewish. I did not feel that I was mature enough or emotionally ready to visit Poland, until now. [The] March of the Living was the perfect opportunity for me to remember the Holocaust. It did not take long to get me interested in the program. I was encouraged by *everybody* to go on the trip. I am so lucky to be able to go. And I hope that I will bring back memories/stories for those who were not fortunate enough to be able to go." Taken together, these two responses display both long-standing interest in the Holocaust as well as a certain apprehension regarding its brute reality or lessons, expressed nonetheless in the context of positive expectations. One can read a sense of obligation (even religious obligation) in the second of the two, echoed by one student who wrote, "I decided to go because I believe it is my obligation to see the atrocities first hand." This feeling of responsibility is important, as noted by anthropologist Jack Kugelmass: "For Jews, visiting Poland and the death camps has become obligatory: it is ritualistic rather than ludic—a form of religious service rather than leisure."<sup>11</sup> Participants also voiced a certain insistence that the decision to go was theirs alone and that no one talked them into it: "My mother saw the advertisement in the Jewish Bulletin and encouraged me to call, but I knew I wanted to go and it was my choice"; "I have always been interested in the Holocaust and I have read several books and watched movies, but I have always wanted to see for myself, what my relatives and fellow Jews went through. I think it is important that everyone go see the camps, not just the Jews. No one encouraged me at the beginning to go but after people learned more about the trip, they got excited for me."

A look at some of the participants' expectations and preconceptions is also instructive. When asked, "What do you think of when you think of Poland?" and "What do you think of when you think of Israel?" participants responded in sharply dichotomized terms: "When I think of Poland I think of the color grey, cold weather and cold faces. I think of sadness

and death and what could have been. When I think of Israel, I think of trees, color, and new life. I can see smiles and hear laughter and can imagine people dancing." "[Poland is] anti-semitism, hatred, darkness; [Israel is] happiness, being free, home, beauty." Almost all the respondents mentioned the notion of Israel as a Jewish homeland, and while images of Poland were more varied, almost all reflected a negative impression: "I think of death, bitter cold, racism, and hatred. To be honest, I am frightened about what I am going to see there and how I am going to react. Israel is happiness. Although there is still and probably always will be war there, I can do nothing but smile and feel warm inside when I am there."

Turning to more general expectations, I found mixtures of apprehensiveness and excitement and, sometimes, a curious denial of expectations at all. Responding to the question, "What expectations and concerns do you have for your trip to Poland and Israel? Specifically, how do you think it might affect (1) your sense of Jewishness and (2) your relationship to the Holocaust?" one student wrote, "I expect nothing, but I know that it will change my outlook on humanity and strengthen my faith in *Hashem* [God]." Another wrote: "I think this trip will help me identify with the Holocaust. Make me actually see the truth. I've read so much, but I want to see for myself. I'm scared to find out the truth at the same time, scared of learning something about my beliefs. Scared of being categorized/generalized by people." Finally, two respondents expressed, among other things, concern over their return and the kind of people they would be after the march:

I have been waiting for this trip for months and I can't believe it is almost here. I'm getting very anxious and excited, but also a little nervous. I don't know how I'm going to react when I walk into the concentration camps. But I know that I will meet so many people that will be there for me. After this trip, I will be a stronger Jew and will be prepared to deal with difficult things when I get back. I will also have a personal reaction to the Holocaust, which will allow me to carry on the memories and stories of the 6 million Jews.

I fear that when I see the camps in Poland that I may lose all faith and hope of a good future and peace of mankind. I don't know where my Jewishness will go, it could to non-believer or super-believer. I hope that I'll have a better understanding of the 6 million killed and that I will understand their pain. My main concern is that I have no idea how I will be able to fit back in with my life once I return.

Overall, there is a sense of expectation that the march will instill knowledge that will lead to understanding and an integration of the "Holocaust" into the lives of these teenagers. This integration, it is clear, is

expected to make its bearers inheritors, to a certain extent, of the Holocaust's lasting cultural, social, and religious effects.

#### THE ITINERARY: "SACRED" SITES IN POLAND AND ISRAEL

The pace of the march-tour is exhausting.<sup>12</sup> After a fun-filled, sleepless night of excitement on the plane, our group landed in Warsaw and hit the ground running, so to speak. The first day in Poland was spent exploring the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto and its uprising, largely via the "memorial route" that stretches between the Umschlagplatz (the main gathering place from which many Jews were deported)<sup>13</sup> and the monument designed by Nathan Rapoport. In between, the route included stops at the Mila 18 memorial (at the site of the headquarters of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance), where we recited Kaddish (the prayer, recited in memory of the dead, which attests to God's greatness), and various markers named for specific ghetto figures.<sup>14</sup> Along the way competition with other march groups was sometimes fierce for access to the memorial spaces, especially at Mila 18. That tour culminated in a memorial ceremony at the Rapoport monument for our entire convoy (five busloads of approximately thirty people each) consisting of readings by student participants, *El Male Rahamim* (a prayer in honor of Jewish martyrs), and "Ha-Tikvah" (Israel's national anthem), and interrupted by (then) Israeli minister of education Amnon Rubenstein, who laid a wreath at the monument and said a few words to our group.<sup>15</sup> That evening we drove to Kraków in the numbered buses that were not only the source for our temporary group identity ("Bus 544, over here!") but also the places where we unwound, reflected, chatted, wrote in journals, listened to music, and had briefings about upcoming sites.

The next day we toured both the Auschwitz I camp-museum and the vast remnants of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, in advance of our more ritualized and less exploratory visit the next day, the day of the memorial walk itself. The theme of "seeing with our own eyes," first established almost as soon as we landed and began exploring the remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto, reached the first of several peak moments of expression in the reconstructed gas chamber and crematorium of Auschwitz I, where we gathered after hearing one of the survivors accompanying us, Fred Diamant, tell of "life" in the camp and after visiting the museum exhibits at the camp-memorial. The leader of the entire five-bus convoy, Chicago's Dr. Gerald Teller, spoke to those of us gathered inside the crematorium, framing the focal point of our group's experience for the day thusly: "the



fire . . . burned day and night [here], just like the fire on the altar in the Holy of Holies in the Holy Temple burned day and night. And it was a fire which consumed . . . anything and everything that was in its way."

This powerful, though somewhat misinformed, conflation of the sacred and the profane raises the disturbing connotation of sacrifice to God (recall that the word "holocaust" originates in the Greek translation of the term for the "wholly burnt sacrificial offering" in the Hebrew Bible) and suggests the *Ner Tamid* (eternal light) of the Temple (and the modern synagogue). But it was surely meant to underscore the utter depravity of the Nazi assault on Judaism (and also drew strong associations for the candle lighting to follow). It was, however, heard by only half the group, as the space of the crematorium room could not handle all of us at once. Furthermore, there was also no mention of the *reconstructed* nature of the space in which the participants were being asked to act symbolically.<sup>16</sup> Finally, it was a misinformed statement because there was neither fire nor altar in the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctuary of the Jewish Temple in ancient Jerusalem, which was empty; in any case, only the high priest would go inside that place, and only on Yom Kippur. The sacrificial altar was well outside the inner chambers of the sanctuary.

We can understand, here, something of how the contours of memory can be shaped with little regard for accurate historical, or even symbolic, details. Rather than harshly criticize, though, we can learn from this example how strongly the force of memorialization pulls us into symbolic associations. As if in response to Teller's words, after the *El Male Rahamim* and the *Kaddish*, participants lit memorial candles, placing them in and around the ovens. There was also a student-led ceremony inside one of the barracks at Birkenau, one of many introduced over the course of the trip to ritualize memory. We then went to Kazimierz (the "city of the Jews" just outside Kraków), to its old Jewish square, and visited the Rema Synagogue. At the synagogue one of the rabbis accompanying the group gave a talk in which he reflected on the construction of Jewish community and the transmission of the living Torah through the generations. This talk reflected another interest of the organizers: to balance images of death and life against each other every day, each serving as a reminder of the other. The sense of life, however, was not one of vibrancy but of a fading, barely present reality. The synagogue, for instance, was celebrated as still in use, but when one of its members spoke to us briefly (in Yiddish, through a translator) he was barely comprehensible and obviously very old. The "life" that was presented to us, therefore, in that museum-like, empty (without us) shul in the midst of an ancient cemetery was really

just the reflection of the life that we, as march participants, brought there ourselves, and it strikes me that we took it with us when we left Poland. The balance sought by the organizers, then, was really only a turning inward of the commemoration process, and this would recur throughout the first week of the trip.

The following day, April 7, Yom ha-Shoah, the "March of the Living" itself took place. After short visits in the cold snow to the areas of the former Kraków Ghetto and the Plashow labor camp (the site of much of the story recounted in the film *Schindler's List*, today marked by an imposing monument), we arrived at Auschwitz I and parked among many other buses. As the other groups lined up, we once again listened to Auschwitz survivor Fred Diament, who read a prepared piece in front of the notorious "shooting wall" next to Block 11, memorializing some of his comrades who were involved in camp resistance, one of whom was his brother. This emotional moment concluded with a recitation of El Male Rahamim and the Kaddish. After this the "march" began, led by eighteen participants (selected perhaps because it is the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word *chai*, for "life") bearing the national flag of Israel. They were followed by VIPs and the national contingents in alphabetical order after the Israeli one, with participants instructed to walk silently in rows of six. The "march" proceeded through the Arbeit Macht Frei gate at Auschwitz I,<sup>17</sup> down a road (where police officers kept local Poles from crossing until after we had passed), up and over a bridge crossing several railroad tracks, and down past some residences on the way to the gate at Birkenau.<sup>18</sup>

Marchers broke ranks to photograph themselves at three major sites: the Arbeit Macht Frei gate, the bridge over the railroad tracks (from which, owing to the elevation, there was a good view ahead and behind at the sheer size of the "march" and under which passed several trains, themselves eerie reminders of the mechanics of deportation), and the walkway and railway tracks leading up to the gate at Birkenau. The first and last of these can be understood as mnemonic markers—icons—recognizable sites that, both because of and despite their recognizability, needed to be captured as snapshot mementos to remind the participants that they were indeed there. Additionally, as Marianne Hirsch argues, "the two gates are the thresholds that represent the difficult access to the narratives of dehumanization and extermination," thus reinforcing the need for marchers to "remember" their experience of passing through them via photography.<sup>19</sup> The second of these three sites served as a literal and symbolic vantage point from which participants could view and capture the unfolding commemoration in visual context.

Once inside the Birkenau gate, the "march" continued (now to the accompaniment of lists of victims' names read by representative participants) along the tracks until the memorial at the end. Next to the memorial, on the ruins of Crematorium II, a long ceremony was conducted in front of an array of ten Israeli flag bearers standing on top of the ruins. The ceremony, largely in Hebrew, consisted of a series of speeches, readings, and songs (including "Eli, Eli" and the "Partisans' Song") by the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, march organizers, dignitaries, and student participants. It ended with the lighting of six memorial torches, *El Male Rahamim* (as noted, a memorial prayer in honor of the dead modified for a Holocaust context), the Kaddish, "Ani Ma'amin" (a setting of one of Maimonides' thirteen essential principles of Judaism, the belief in the coming of the Messiah), and "Ha-Tikvah." After this, participants were urged to plant memorial plaques (see figure 14), as well as to join those on the "stage" in *davening minha* (reciting the afternoon prayer).

On Friday, April 8, we traveled to Treblinka, at which students conducted a ceremony involving readings, the Kaddish, and a group sing-along of "The Sound of Silence" (with an added verse, written by students, relating to the Holocaust). This was performed around a sculpture made to look like a fire pit in which bodies were burned. Participants were then encouraged to explore the grounds and make rubbings onto paper of some of the thousands of memorial stones.<sup>20</sup> We then drove back to Warsaw for Shabbat, joining many of the other participants; activities included, on Saturday, a walk to and services at Warsaw's only remaining shul, the Nozyck Synagogue, usually almost empty but overflowing with march participants on our visit. This example again shows the organizers' interest in pairing or balancing images of death with the celebration of life; the observance of Shabbat in a former Jewish cultural center now almost completely empty of Jews was surely intended as an oasis of calm in the midst of a veritable memorial sandstorm. But the life we celebrated was once again almost completely the life we brought ourselves: the shul and its few regulars provided only the faint echo of former glory in the desert of Polish-Jewish memory.<sup>21</sup>

The next day, our last in Poland, we drove to Lublin and nearby Majdanek. At the former, we attempted to revive the sleeping ghosts of Jewish memory through Hasidic stories told during our visit to the old Lublin yeshiva building (now a medical college), before moving on to the death camp on the outskirts of town. Our visit there, to perhaps the most emotionally difficult camp-memorial of all, involved a long walk from Wiktor Tolkin's imposing monument at the gate, through the camp's first gas



Figure 14. March of the Living participants planting personally inscribed memorial plaques along the railroad tracks at Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Yom Hashoah, April 7, 1994. Photograph by the author.

chambers, past and through several barracks containing various displays (three of which are filled with shoes that once belonged to camp inmates and transients and were now picked up and touched by the occasional march participant), up to the mausoleum and the adjacent crematorium at the far end of the camp. The former contains several tons of human ash, flecked with bone fragments, held in a huge domed, open, marble bowl.<sup>22</sup>

For our last ceremony in Poland we gathered in the open space between the mausoleum and the crematorium (because another, even larger contingent from Miami was holding theirs at the dome). First forming a circle and then spiraling in toward the center, we listened as Joe Findling, another survivor traveling with our group, provided a moving reflection on memory, family history, and faith, as he recounted his experiences the previous day, when, returning to his boyhood village to say Kaddish for his father, he discovered a plaque placed there by unknown relatives and, hence, a family he never knew he had. That moment is mentioned by many participants in our convoy as one of the most moving and memorable of the entire trip, and we can understand it as a profoundly symbolic passing of the memorial torch, as it were, from one generation to the next.<sup>23</sup> Gathered tightly as a literal and symbolic community, participants found themselves listening to a narrative recounting the surprisingly redemptive power of the memorial quest, made all the more potent by "Uncle Joe's" concomitant provisional reconciliation with God. The tightly packed spiral, with Joe at the center, suggested a radiating outward of memorial responsibility, as well as a palpable sense of hope made stronger by the fact that we would soon be on our way to the land of milk and honey. Following Joe's story, the members of our convoy said the usual prayers, sang "Ha-Tikvah," and returned to the buses. That night we flew to Israel.

In Israel our schedule was both less hectic and less prescribed. We now traveled in individual buses, so that, after a few days, each group had its own program structured around common meeting times (usually meals) or events planned for the convoy or larger groups. The marked change in mood, setting, and structure was symbolized immediately upon arrival, as each participant was handed a snack pack as he or she boarded our newer, more modern buses at the airport. Inside we found refreshing chocolate milk, an apple, and several dates, in sharp contrast to the food served throughout our visit in Poland, where, for example, we never had any fruit.<sup>24</sup> On our first day (April 11), we visited three sites in the north. First, the prestate immigration/refugee camp at Atlit, then the Haifa panorama (at which we sang Shehekhianu, a prayer of renewal, used primarily for expressing gratitude for God's sustaining the Jews and bringing

them to new experiences in the present), and finally Safed, before an evening barbecue and disco-boat ride on the Kinneret. The stop at Atlit served to remind participants that, even though survivors (and the march) had finally arrived in the land of Israel, their trials were not yet over.<sup>25</sup> The message was that the memory of hardship could not immediately be forgotten, though the activities during the rest of the day did much to overshadow this lesson. The following day brought our bus to the poet Rachel's tomb, Tel Aviv, and, finally, Jerusalem. In the evening, we attended a special *erev Yom ha-Zikkaron* ceremony for most march participants in Jerusalem. Here we were taught the meaning of Memorial Day for Israelis in speeches by Israel's president and the father of a soldier killed in the Lebanon War. Naomi Shemer also communicated this message by leading the audience in her own "Yerushalaim shel Zahav" ("Jerusalem of Gold"), the song which won the Israel song festival shortly before 1967's Six-Day War and which, with a few lyric changes, came to be associated with Israel's recapture of Jerusalem's Old City in that war. This song is an emotional trigger with strong associations (for Israelis) with that seemingly miraculous victory.<sup>26</sup>

The next day, April 13 and Israel's Memorial Day, we toured the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, ending at the Western Wall. Arrival at the wall was moving for many of the participants and was heightened when, just then, the second siren of *Yom ha-Zikkaron* sounded. As most everyone in the Western Wall plaza stopped, we too solemnly observed the moment of silence and stillness for Israel's fallen. Don Handelmann and Elihu Katz describe this moment in its general context: "On the appointed minute, and for one minute's duration, siren blasts shriek in every village, town, and city in the land. Human life stands still: people stop in their tracks, vehicles stop in mid-intersection; all is silent, yet all silent space is pervaded by the fullness of the same wail. These sirens also announce crisis and the activation of emergency procedures. The sole difference is not of intensity nor pitch of sound, but of modulation: to announce crisis, the wails rise and fall; to declare bereavement their note is steady and uniform. . . . The sound synthesizes mourning and action, absence and presence."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, our first visit to the Western Wall was structured, I would argue, to serve as a powerful countersymbol to the central commemorative event at Auschwitz: the "March of the Living" walk itself.<sup>28</sup> By participating in the communal national minute of observance at the wall, itself a national shrine and site of remembrance, the participants experienced a more cathartic and constructive ritual of commemoration than the largely self-reflective act of the "march" itself, as students were able to sense more di-

rectly their connection to the people of Israel at "home" in their own nation rather than to the more artificial collective, established by imaginal association and not by actual participation in the context of the "march."<sup>29</sup> That evening, like many Israelis, we took to the streets of Jerusalem to mark the end of mourning and the beginning of celebration in the transition from Yom ha-Zikkaron to Yom ha-Atzma'ut in a festival atmosphere of release all the more pronounced by our experiences in Poland just a few days earlier.

On the next day, Israel's Independence Day, we followed a path marking national celebration as well as commemoration and self-sacrifice. We first visited Ammunition Hill, site of fierce conflict in 1967, and then traveled to the memorial and museum at Latrun, site of bloodshed in 1948.<sup>30</sup> After a lunchtime visit to a paratroopers' memorial, we made our way to the Palmachim army base, where we met up with most of the other march groups (except Israel's and Sweden's) for an evening of food, entertainment, singing, and dancing, in direct opposition, I would argue, to our mass gathering at Auschwitz II-Birkenau. It is significant as well that this gathering was at an army base, symbol of Israel's military might and the best insurance for the philosophy of "never again," from the Israeli perspective. Instead of the pattern of balance established in Poland, where representations of death were offset by somewhat hollow simulacra of life, a new pattern arises in the march activities of Yom ha-Zikkaron and Yom ha-Atzma'ut, in which more complete manifestations and commemorations of life in Israel are set up in contrast to (and perhaps with the intention of replacing) the commemorations of death in Poland.

The following day we awoke early and climbed Masada, where we explored the fortress and discussed its importance for Israeli and Jewish memory and history.<sup>31</sup> After lunch, we returned to Jerusalem for Shabbat, which many participants used to visit with friends and family. The following evening we roamed the Ben-Yehuda shopping area of Jerusalem. Sunday, April 17, our last day in Israel, our itinerary was most significant. We first visited Yad Vashem, stopping only at its Valley of Lost Communities, Children's Memorial, Hall of Remembrance, and various outdoor sculptures.<sup>32</sup> We then visited Hanna Senesh's grave on Mount Herzl, where we had a brief ceremony, singing a final "Eli, Eli," one of our "liturgical" staples, in her honor.<sup>33</sup> Following that, we stopped at the Ben-Yehuda pedestrian mall one last time before going to the Old City for a last look at the Western Wall. After that, we drove to Mount Scopus for dinner and a final ceremony with our entire bus convoy, circling and spiraling once more for some last songs, tears, and words about passing on

what we had learned over the past two weeks. The essential message was that the student participants had now graduated, as it were, to the status of "the next generation of survivors and witnesses." Indeed, a number of participants used this kind of language to refer to themselves after their return. Following our good-byes, we drove to the airport for the flight home.

#### THE JEWISH CONTEXT

By embodying Holocaust memory and ideology through their two-week journey in Poland and Israel, participants in the March of the Living also engage in and embody the very sacred symbols drawn from tradition that contribute to such ideology in the first place. Victor Turner offers some instructive and critical comments relevant to participation, memory, and intensity (what I would call commitment and embodiment):

A pilgrim's commitment, in full physicality, to an arduous yet inspiring journey, is, for him, even more impressive, in the symbolic domain, than the visual and auditory symbols which dominate the liturgies and ceremonies of calendrically structured religion. He only looks at these; he participates in the pilgrimage way. The pilgrim becomes himself a total symbol; indeed, a symbol *of* totality; ordinarily he is encouraged to meditate as he peregrinates upon the creative and altruistic acts of the saint or deity whose relic or image forms the object of his quest. This is, perhaps, akin to the Platonic notion of anamnesis, recollection of a previous existence. However, in this context it would be more properly regarded as participation in a sacred existence, with the aim of achieving a step toward holiness and wholeness in oneself, both of body and soul. But since one aspect of oneself consists of the cherished values of one's own specific culture, it is not unnatural that the new "formation" desired by pilgrims should include a more intense realization of the inner meaning of that culture. For many that inner meaning is identical with its religious core values. Thus social and cultural structures are not abolished by *communitas* and anamnesis, but . . . the sting of their divisiveness is removed so that the fine articulation of their parts in a complex heterogeneous unity can be the better appreciated.<sup>34</sup>

There is certainly some connection effected, during the entire two-week march experience, with the religiocultural core values of Judaism. On the simplest level, this means that virtually all the students who go are Jewishly identified; non-Jews, generally, do not participate (though in the past few years there has been increased interaction with young, mostly non-Jewish, Poles).<sup>35</sup> These teenagers come from a variety of backgrounds in terms of observance and tradition, ranging from the "cultural Jew" who has almost no familiarity with Jewish daily practice to the Orthodox Jew



who prays three times daily. Out of respect for the observant participants (but perhaps for other reasons as well), the march conducts all its activities within a fairly observant context: the students (especially the non-observant ones) were told ahead of time that they would be praying *shaharit* (the morning prayer) in groups every morning during the trip and that both Sabbaths would be traditionally observed. Additionally, all meals arranged as part of the trip were strictly kosher; the food was flown in daily from Israel in a significant logistical operation.

Some might see this as curious. Why enforce even a rudimentary sort of religiosity—possibly creating additional concern and tension for some participants—in a setting that already threatens to overwhelm through its symbols, imagery, and historical associations? One possible response to this is commonsensical: “The Holocaust is so laden with religious symbolism and associations that it evokes and strengthens a sensitivity to the religious tradition and the Jewish people. Death naturally evokes religious associations.”<sup>36</sup> Though true, this statement does not really speak to the phenomenon of religiosity in extreme situations. “Celebrating the memory of the dead” does seem to involve the use of religious symbols, but we still need to understand more about the connections between the two.

In particular, we must consider the notion that the Holocaust, as an eruption of radical evil in the space of human history, represents an encounter with the “absolute.” We can approach this encounter in terms of thinking about sacred space and place (recall chapter 4). According to the late historian of religions Mircea Eliade, “A sacred place is what it is because of the permanent nature of the hierophany that first consecrated it. . . . The hierophany therefore does not merely sanctify a given segment of undifferentiated profane space; it goes so far as to ensure that sacredness will continue there. *There, in that place*, the hierophany repeats itself. In this way the place becomes an inexhaustible source of power and sacredness and enables man, simply by entering it, to have a share in the power, to hold communion with the sacredness.”<sup>37</sup> Ignoring for the time being the theoretical incompatibility between Eliade’s essentialism and my more “constructivist” approach, we may still benefit from an understanding of the symbolic potency of Holocaust territories. If we consider that the events of the Holocaust may have permanently “sanctified” the sites of mass death visited by the marchers during their week in Poland, then we can better understand not only the pull toward commemoration in these places but also the tendency toward the use of religious symbols.

At the same time, one should be careful not to misinterpret this “sanctity” so as to avoid straying into the dangerous and anti-Judaic territory in which the events of the Holocaust are understood as redemptive sacrifices to God. Rather, one must understand the “sanctity” of these places, and the hierophany manifested there, as inverted, radically negative. The “sacred” with which we have communion is a very different kind of sacrality from what we are normally used to dealing with in the history of religions, but it is powerful and inexhaustible nonetheless. And this might help explain why religious practices and symbols seem to find a natural connection to Holocaust commemoration: especially at the sites of the destruction, the invocation of symbols may provide a necessary defense against the almost gravitational pull of nihilism and despair inherent in the black holes of the death camps, offsetting chaos and providing needed structure. Both memory and religion have this in common; each chronotopically condenses time and space into the mythic, setting certain “sacred” areas off from the rest of time and space and making them suitable for commemoration, so that, as Jack Kugelmass argues, “memory culture has typically conflated time into the few short years of the Holocaust, and place into a few of its principal camps of extermination—Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Majdanek.”<sup>38</sup> In this way, the territory is made ripe for religious activity.

These religious arrangements may have been necessary for the success of the trip (simply put, it is easier for nonobservant Jews to eat kosher food than it is for observant Jews not to, notwithstanding the possible compromise on the nonobservant Jews’ ideals). In addition, Kugelmass has argued, in a more general context, these often unfamiliar, “self-sacrificing . . . practices contribute to [such marches] ‘time out of time’ quality. Their very liminality suggests to participants that what they are experiencing is important.”<sup>39</sup> I would go even further, arguing that these arrangements also served to reinforce a sense of community in the participants; many came not only from a variety of backgrounds but from a variety of locales, and they knew few of the other participants before the march. Some moderate enforcement of traditional Jewish practice, then, on a generic level, served to integrate everyone into one temporary, functioning Jewish community (a mobile “shtetl,” as it were), which subsequently served as a support network for the difficult and emotional stages of the trip. Such communal identification also reinforced a vibrant link between the march participants and the Jewish past(s) they were exploring and helped establish a real sense of Jewish peoplehood.

Furthermore, creating a sense of community may also be understood as a powerful response to the very reality of the Shoah and the necessary

qualities of its commemoration: "Holocaust Day . . . commemorates the horrific destruction of European Jewry, a terror that in explicit Nazi intentions towards the whole of European Jewry was utterly indiscriminate and totally final. More abstractly, the Holocaust signifies the disconnection from one another of all vital values, the uncoupling of all essential relationships, the dismemberment of all community and collectivity, of social body and human body, leading inevitably to the denial of humanity and to death. Through its absolute negation of the human, the Holocaust is ramified disorder on the cosmic scale. For Jewry, it is the experience of the extinction of cosmos, of primeval chaos."<sup>40</sup> In this light, each symbolic activity during the march period which helped create a sense of community by reconnecting participants also helped, in no small way, to reestablish the order of the cosmos, to engage in temporal and spatial mythic reconstruction. This is a remembering on a grand scale, especially in the rituals of Yom ha-Shoah, most of all in the "March of the Living" itself. For example, the march participants, congregated at Auschwitz I, began their three-kilometer silent walk to Auschwitz II-Birkenau in 1994 with the playing of Kol Nidrei by Yaacov Strumza, a survivor living in Israel who had been for two years the first violinist of the Auschwitz orchestra. The Kol Nidrei melody is an emotional trigger for many Jews, who recognize it from the Yom Kippur liturgy as a haunting prayer sung by the cantor at the beginning of the services marking the Day of Atonement (though many Jews would be hard-pressed to identify the meaning of the prayer's text). Indeed, several participants commented on how that melody brought them into focusing on the ritual act on which they were about to embark. Thus, Kol Nidrei has significant associations with the "tradition" for many Jews whose own observance may not involve anything more than Yom Kippur.

Following this, a shofar was blown by two different men to signify the beginning of the "march"; this act also has powerful associations, specifically with the High Holidays and the opening of the gates of heaven, and generally and traditionally as the Jewish call to assembly and to action since biblical times. In addition, all the commemorative ceremonies (except, of course, those on Independence Day) during the trip included the lighting of memorial candles, the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish, as well as various prayers such as the El Male Rahamim and the Ani Ma'amin. These all provided a constant and increasingly familiar liturgy to which the participants could turn again and again throughout the course of their commemorative journey. Here, liturgical language works in a powerful way; it is one of the essential elements of commemoration.

As Paul Connerton argues, such language is a "form of action."<sup>41</sup> The central properties of liturgical language, he continues, are the performativeness and the formalism of ritual, together contributing to the success of commemoration as a ritual activity.

Furthermore, I would suggest that not only do the ritual activities of the march contribute to a viable sense of community during the trip, calling to mind a sense of "tradition," but the collective ritual activities also serve to reinforce that sense of "tradition." Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff attribute that reinforcement to the formal properties of ritual. These formal properties, for the authors, include repetition, acting, stylized behavior, order, evocative presentational style and staging, and the collective dimension.<sup>42</sup> Altogether, a certain mutually interactive quality exists in the use of traditional Jewish symbols and forms for the ritual activity during the March of the Living: they both help sustain a connection to the community and tradition, and they in turn contribute to the definition and celebration of such a tradition and community.

Finally, many of the ceremonies (certainly all the major ones) also included (and often ended with) "Ha-Tikvah," the Israeli national anthem. This last point, however, suggests the merging of the "purely religious" with the national and political in the Jewish context of the march, to which I will return below.

#### THE LITURGICAL-COMMEMORATIVE CYCLE

The March of the Living trip takes place at a specific and significant time of the year, linking itself symbolically to both the traditional Jewish calendar and the modern Israeli one (which are already necessarily linked): "YOM HASHOAH and YOM HA'ATZMAUT are two of the most important days in modern Jewish times. By taking part in these special events, you will share unforgettable moments in Jewish history and bear witness to the undying spirit of the Jewish people."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, reflection on the significance of the timing of the trip and the days of civil and religious commemoration it incorporates (as well as reflection on those days' histories) tells us much about the meaning and message of the March of the Living, which goes far beyond the choice for Yom ha-Shoah vaha-Gevurah as the day for the "march" itself.

In discussing the Israeli government's choice of the twenty-seventh of the Hebrew month of Nisan as the day marking the public commemoration of the Holocaust (and thus setting it apart from strictly religious days of public mourning for national catastrophes such as the ninth of Av

and the tenth of Tevet), James Young effectively summarizes the day's significance:

Pulled from both the middle of the six-week [Warsaw] Ghetto uprising and the seven-week Sfirah [the counting of the omer, a period of semimourning in Jewish tradition], this day retained links to both heroism and mourning. Coming only five days after the end of Passover, . . . [the day] extended the festival of freedom and then bridged it with the national Day of Independence. Beginning on Passover (also the day of the [start of the] Warsaw Ghetto uprising), continuing through Yom Hashoah, and ending in Yom Hatzma'ut, this period could be seen as commencing with God's deliverance of the Jews and concluding with the Jews' deliverance of themselves in Israel. In this sequence, biblical and modern returns to the land of Israel are recalled; God's deliverance of the Jews from the desert of exile is doubled by the Jews' attempted deliverance of themselves in Warsaw; the heroes and martyrs of the Shoah are remembered side by side (and implicitly equated) with the fighters who fell in Israel's modern war of liberation; and all lead inexorably to the birth of the state.<sup>44</sup>

In this context, recall Avraham Hirschson's words from the "stage" of the crematorium ruins naming this site as the origin of the Jewish nation's "march to freedom, and to its homeland." The resonance with the exodus paradigm is pronounced.

These important symbolic links are expressed differently by Handelman and Katz, who note that the week between "Holocaust Day" and "Remembrance Day" corresponds to the traditional Jewish period of mourning immediately following death, *shiva* (literally, "seven"). The authors add that, "following the exemplar of biblical creation, the arithmetic unit of seven is thought to sign completion, closure, and unity. Implicitly, in this instance, the seven days between Holocaust Day and Remembrance Day, and the implication of this number for the completion of a basic duration of mourning, may point to the closure of the diaspora chapter of Jewish history, in accordance with Zionist visions of the period."<sup>45</sup> This astute observation shows how the spacing of these key commemorative dates recapitulates a traditional sense of the rhythm of time, reproduced in the Jewish week, culminating in the peak day of the Sabbath. This, the authors suggest, constitutes a pulsation that goes beyond merely structuring the week, "for this rhythm of temporal pulsation is deeply embedded in numerous units of time in Jewish culture. The pulsation may be described as a beat or impulsion from lower to higher, from ordinary to extraordinary."<sup>46</sup> One could go further: if there are seven days separating Yom ha-Shoah vеха-Gevurah from Yom ha-Zikkaron, there are eight marking it off from Yom ha-Atzma'ut;

if seven is a number representing completion and culmination, eight (as in the marking of time for a boy's *brit milah*, or circumcision ceremony) traditionally represents a higher, more spiritual level. Here, the rhythm of eight days marks the attainment of a new level of being, a new order of awareness (parallel, it might be said, to the beginning of a higher octave in Western musical notation).

Understanding these rhythms, then, allows us to understand more fully the dual quality of both sacred and secular time on which this particular commemorative sequence feeds. Handelman and Katz argue that this temporal progression is "accepted as natural and appropriate by Israeli Jews. . . . It is a statist version of modern Jewish history, but one of cosmological, temporal harmonics that are embedded in Zionist ideology."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, this version of history and ideology also recapitulates a familiar paradigm in a secular but "no less mythic" framework, as Saul Friedländer contends, for selecting the twenty-seventh of Nisan works "to reinsert the Holocaust into an historical series of Jewish catastrophes and to suggest a mythic link between the destruction of European Jewry and the birth of Israel—i.e., catastrophe and redemption—which, in turn, give a new dignity to the Jews of the Diaspora, as victims or survivors."<sup>48</sup> In other words, the mythic link of catastrophe and redemption works in a classically cosmogonic fashion, offering a narrative explanation for how the world (in this case, the State of Israel) came to be, fully in line with Zionist mythology.

Though some religious patterns and paradigms may be maintained here, the choice for the date of Yom ha-Shoah itself was far from traditional. For example, Tisha B'Av (the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av) had long served as the great commemorative sponge for all Jewish tragedy: the idea of creating a new day of mourning in the calendar was considered "presumptuous" in the traditional attitude, as Irving Greenberg notes, so that commemoration of all tragedy was subsumed under the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple. "Perhaps it was just as well that this conclusion was reached, for otherwise the Jewish calendar might have become one mass of never-healing wounds, each day sporting the stigmata of yet another community massacred, another collective martyrdom. Still, the net result was that the rabbinic tradition that had so powerfully articulated a partnership model for covenantal living had now turned into an ethic of theological as well as historical powerlessness."<sup>49</sup> This important point suggests that what contemporary rabbis did not realize as they were looking for a way to commemorate the Holocaust was that, beyond the possibility that it was too great to be assimilated into

Tisha B'Av, such assimilation would continue the ethos of powerlessness so many in the emerging state were trying to surmount.

Similarly, Greenberg comments on the tenth of Tevet, the date traditionally associated with the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem which led to the destruction of the Temple and which has been adopted as the official religious day of mourning for those Jews whose death dates are not known. Selecting it as the possible date for Holocaust commemoration "reflects the idea of incorporating the newest tragedy into the chain of tradition without introducing any halachic innovation. This decision affirmed that the destruction of the Temple remains the paradigm and acme of Jewish tragedy." But Greenberg notes as well that, among other problems, this decision was also clouded by an ulterior motive of strengthening what was a weak and marginal fast day.<sup>50</sup>

Such traditional alternatives and challenges to what became Yom ha-Shoah continue to crop up. Greenberg cites Rabbi Pinchas Teitz's suggestion in 1984 to set the date for commemoration according to the anniversary of Hitler's death, itself seemingly preset to fit into the Jewish calendar. Hitler's suicide was on the seventeenth of Iyar, the eve of the Lag B'Omer holiday, "which is already a day of semirejoicing, breaking the gloom of the Omer period."<sup>51</sup> Another alternative date is suggested by Michael Strassfeld, author of the popular *Jewish Catalogues* and an opponent of the twenty-seventh of Nisan as the date for Yom ha-Shoah because of its close proximity to Yom ha-Atzma'ut. Strassfeld would prefer to see no connection between the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel (against prevailing Zionist readings of history and memory), and he also rejects the assimilationist theology of the fast days because those are observed traditionally as atonement for sins. He would set the date of Holocaust commemoration on the sixteenth of the Hebrew month of Heshvan, corresponding to the tenth of November 1938, or Kristallnacht. "Heshvan also seems appropriate," Strassfeld argues, "for it is the only month of the year without any commemorative days. The rabbis called it *marheshvan*—'bitter Heshvan.' Heshvan-the-bitter is also, according to tradition, the time of the biblical flood when all humans and animals were destroyed except for those in Noah's ark. After the flood, God promised that He would never again destroy the world and placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of that promise. Yet it is still within the power of human hands to destroy the world. . . . Heshvan is the darkest period of the year, the moment before any sign of life appears, a time of death and decay."<sup>52</sup> Such alternatives indicate that many people are uncomfortable with the twenty-seventh of Nisan as the date for the commemoration of the Holo-

caust. That discomfort is not surprising, for the date is really a compromise that both accepts and rejects others' interpretive paradigms for commemoration (such as the heroic or the theological); it is a negotiated date by committee that accords some respect to a variety of models of interpretation. Yom ha-Shoah is fixed here on a "'broken' date (drawn from a broken paradigm)," as Greenberg puts it, affirming the "broken" (but nevertheless still applicable) character of Jewish theological (and commemorative) thinking after the Holocaust and as such reinforcing the human role in maintaining the covenant.<sup>53</sup>

That human role involves the active commemoration of history via religious forms and symbols in the context of a carefully planned progression of dates, which resonate successfully with mythic paradigms of catastrophe and redemption and effectively contextualize the commemoration of the Holocaust. Greenberg would have us keep the tension between catastrophe and redemption in mind, arguing that the "State of Israel is not a reward or a product or an exchange for the Holocaust; it is a response. . . . Yom Ha'Atzmaut is neither recompense for nor resolution of the Holocaust. The two orienting events confront each other in unrelieved dialectical tension. As long as memory and faith exist, they will continue to cast their shadow and duel for dominant effect in the mind and heart of Jewry and of the world. The two days are forever twinned, without softening the tension between destruction and redemption and without betraying the character of either event."<sup>54</sup> Though Greenberg's point is an admirable ideal, it is more likely that the Zionist narrative is too strong *not* to overcome that crucial tension. Therefore, it is not difficult to see the wisdom of the timing of the March of the Living: more than a mere Holocaust commemoration, the entire two-week journey is structured and organized calendrically to coincide with and encourage active participation in a symbolic-mythic journey from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, and from exile to redemption in Jewish national sovereignty in the State of Israel.<sup>55</sup>

#### MEMORIAL PILGRIMAGE

It is the way the teens are encouraged to *participate* in this symbolic journey that encourages me to think of it as a pilgrimage, albeit a contemporary one. Consider the language used by Rabbi Peretz Wolf-Prusan, one of the leaders of the San Francisco Bay Area bus on the 1994 March, as he spoke to participants on the way to the area of the former Warsaw Ghetto from the airport on our first day in Poland: "There are three great



pilgrimages the Jews would take in biblical times: Pesach, Shavu'ot, and Sukkot. And we would pack in from all the parts of Judea, Samaria, the south, and head off towards Jerusalem. And that ceased, of course, after the destruction of the Temple. We still remember why we made those pilgrimages. That's what you're doing right now; you're making a pilgrimage. There are only two new holidays in the Jewish calendar since Talmudic time: Yom ha-Shoah, this Thursday, and Yom ha-Atzma'ut, the week after. We are actually taking part in a pilgrimage, to recover memory and to find out who we are and where we're going." But his view is also supported by the march literature itself, as in the introductory message by president and founder Hirschson to the informational pamphlet *To Know and to Remember*, published by the march organization in Israel: "We are going on a pilgrimage to the 'Valley of Death,' to stand there and remember the dead in the very same places they were murdered, to cherish their life, to mourn their death, and to say 'Kaddish' over them, because their death turned our people into orphans."<sup>56</sup> These two descriptions are instructive: the latter emphasizes the importance of place in the pilgrimage quest and focuses on the aspect of mourning and loss central to at least the first half of the march experience. The former places emphasis on sacred time and, in light of the previous discussion, resonates well with the historical, theological, and mythic paradigms of catastrophe and redemption, even as it expresses the contemporary commemorative need to emerge from the shadow of the destruction of the Temple. I find Rabbi Wolf-Prusan's notion of the collective need to recover memory (implying that it was once lost) through ritual to be both powerful and thought-provoking.

The most common context for Jewish pilgrimage is that of the visit to a saint's—or some revered person's—tomb, understood as a meeting point of the divine and earthly realms wherein symbolic and sacred power lies.<sup>57</sup> Here worshipers will also invoke the merit and sanctity of the dead, just as Jews often invoke that sanctity verbally in speaking about the dead, saying *zikhrono livrakha*, "his memory shall be a blessing." I would maintain that the March of the Living invokes the same kind of sentiment and symbolic dynamic in visiting the landscape of murder in Poland. But much more is involved. First, there is a structural similarity between the march and pilgrimage as it has been classically defined. Victor Turner has described pilgrimage as a liminal or liminoid phenomenon, comparing it with the liminal phase in rites of passage as described and analyzed by Arnold van Gennep, a phase in which one is separated in space and time from normal social structures and their constraints: "The

peripherality of pilgrimage shrines and the temporal structure of the pilgrimage process, beginning in a Familiar Place, going to a Far Place, and returning, ideally 'changed,' to a Familiar Place, can be interestingly related to van Gennep's concept of the rite of passage, with its stages of separation, margin or limen, and reaggregation. The liminal stage, when the subject is in spatial separation from the familiar and habitual, constitutes a cultural domain that is extremely rich in cosmological meaning, conveyed largely by nonverbal symbols. Liminality represents a negation of many of the features of preliminal social structures, and an affirmation of another order of things, stressing generic rather than particularistic relationships."<sup>58</sup> For Turner, this liminal sense of being "betwixt and between" established modes of existence and behavior leaves pilgrims with a sense of freedom and creativity and allows for a sense of "communitas," a "spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings."<sup>59</sup> I have already pointed out how the Jewish context of the trip helps the participants establish a sense of community; here I would add that the pilgrimage aspect reinforces this sense. As in the classically described pilgrimage, the participants undertake an arduous journey to a "faraway place" invested with symbolic (and perhaps sacred) significance and return to their normal lives and structures changed. Perhaps this is something inherent in the journey—a quality the march organizers have capitalized on. Young writes, "We must . . . recognize that this awful place [Auschwitz] remains sacred only in the great distance between it and ourselves, between its past and our present. The site retains its symbolic power over us partly because we don't live here, because we must make this pilgrimage to memory."<sup>60</sup> In going there (rather than bringing its objects over "here," as at the USHMM), we engage the past on its own terms.

Some would downplay the potential for change in the interaction with sacred power that I would argue is built into this "pilgrimage." Kugelmass, for example, contends that those who go on such trips largely express through such "secular ritual" their identities as American Jews.<sup>61</sup> For Kugelmass, this self-confirmation of (American) Jewish identity is "secular" rather than "religious" because it does not conform to more traditional patterns of Jewish religiosity. But we have already seen how powerfully the march activities invoke religious symbols and forms and how religious the basic structure of Holocaust commemoration is, and therefore downgrading march activities to the level of secular ritual is missing the point. Kugelmass may merely be trying to maintain an artificial distinction between national (read "secular") and religious elements within

Jewish culture, which are not so easily separable, especially when considering the complexities of Jewish identity. Rather, as we well know, religious and national elements are constantly intermingling and feeding off notions of peoplehood, the land, and the Torah. As such, the notion that Jewish secularity can be split off from Jewish religiosity is suspect.<sup>62</sup>

The marchers, then, are not simply confirming (or reconfirming) their (American) Jewish identity but are involved in a process of creating and defining that identity, returning, postliminally, to their social structures with a new status in their "community." For the likeness between pilgrimage and rites of passage is also evident here: the student participants on the March of the Living are, I would argue, actually being trained and prepared for their entrance, upon return to the United States, into adult American Jewish society, with all its responsibilities. The march, as I understand it, effects a transformation in its participants as it seeks to change them from schoolchildren with no profound investment in the Jewish community and its future to adults who are active participants in that future. Indeed, one of the Miami-based founders of the march, Gene Greenzweig, makes the startling suggestion that in twenty years, "ninety percent of Jewish leaders from all over the world will have been on the March of the Living," so that the vast majority of these future leaders "will have a common memory."<sup>63</sup> The participants are encouraged to return to the States and report on what they have seen and experienced,<sup>64</sup> to represent Israel positively to others, and to become full members in what has been described as an American Jewish civil religious community.<sup>65</sup> Of course, there is a significant amount of tension and contradiction in this view, but it parallels the contradictions inherent in American Jewish identity. It is the qualities of civil religion that, I suggest, are the driving forces behind much of the meaning of the march/pilgrimage.

Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya have argued that the "objective of civil religion is the sanctification of the society in which it functions" through three main expressions: integration, legitimation, and mobilization.<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Woocher expands on these modes of sanctification: "Civil religion integrates, legitimates, and mobilizes by producing in its adherents the sentiment that the society or group is tied to a sacred order, that its history and activity point beyond themselves to a higher realm of purpose and significance. Thus, the members of the society are induced to support its endeavors, to protect its unity, and to find meaning for their own lives through identification with the collective's ventures." Civil religion seems uninterested in the transcendent (though divinity is often invoked in its rhetoric), since its "focus and locus" are in political

and civic institutions that provide a “‘meta-ideology’ for the political community in a sacred key.”<sup>67</sup> But it nonetheless remains reliant on the articulation of myths and rituals for the success of its processes of integration, legitimation, and mobilization. Thus it taps into the traditional memorial patterns described above by Friedländer and also links contemporary Jews to Judaism’s traditional religious paradigms. Civil Judaism’s first central myth, for instance, “is the story of ‘Holocaust to Rebirth,’ the retelling by American Jews of the two most significant Jewish events of the twentieth century . . . so as to make them a paradigm for Jewish history and a continuous inspiration for Jewish action.”<sup>68</sup>

This story is nothing more than the “catastrophe and redemption” paradigm invoked throughout the march (indeed, inherent in its very structure and timing, as I have discussed); as a central myth of the American Jewish civil religious worldview, it effectively allows American Jews to insert themselves into a “sacred” narrative to which they remain largely marginal. The insertion is somewhat problematic, and Woocher recounts Jacob Neusner’s criticism of this essential myth as “respond[ing] to the ambiguous and ambivalent character of American Jewish existence by projecting a process of death and redemption in which the American Jew can vicariously participate. . . . For Neusner, the myth of ‘Holocaust to rebirth’ is a veil which American Jews place between themselves and the daily reality of their lives, at once profoundly functional in sustaining Jewish group commitment and activism (primarily in defense of Jewish survival), and deeply dysfunctional in deflecting American Jews from the task of creating a mode and myth of Jewish religious existence faithful to their own chosen condition.”<sup>69</sup> The point is well-taken, for it is the dysfunctionality of the participants’ American Jewish identities which the march ultimately reinforces. Nonetheless, such a myth is very effective not only in integrating American Jews (like the marchers) into one community (supporting the discussion above) but also in helping them legitimate their worldview (as expressed in the ideology of the march) and mobilize their activities (as in the march participants’ new sense of responsibility and purpose upon their return to the United States).

Indeed, the key findings of an unpublished sociological study (funded by the March of the Living) of past participants indicate that the March of the Living has had profound long-term, positive effects on marchers’ Jewish identification, attitudes toward Israel, and social responsibility, reflecting several of the central tenets of the American Jewish civil religion as described by Woocher.<sup>70</sup> Such activities as the March of the Living are not new in the realm of American Jewish civil religious undertakings.

The march owes some of its success to the precedent of “missions” such as the United Jewish Appeal’s Young Leadership Programs, which, like the march, take American Jews through Eastern Europe and then to Israel, though they are not structured to coincide with the commemorative calendar in the same powerfully symbolic manner. Woocher provides an excellent summary of the ideology and success of such “missions,” which is equally applicable to my discussion:

Missions work. They transform mildly supportive individuals into dedicated contributors and activists, and committed workers into driven leaders. Like all good rituals they are artfully manipulative, playing with the emotions, overwhelming mind and body with a flow of sensations. But they work primarily because they are enormously effective *mediators* of the fundamental religious myth and experience of civil Judaism. Critics contend that missions present a distorted picture of Israel, and in one sense that is probably correct. Yet, they are brilliantly successful in presenting the Israel of civil Jewish mythology, in all its confused profusion of meanings: the Israel of strength, and Israel threatened; the bold, new, technologically sophisticated Israel, and the Israel of ancient Jewish tradition; the Israel which is exotic, and the Israel which is “home.”

The American Jews who go on a mission are experiencing a ritual of anti-structure and *communitas*. Removed from their familiar surroundings, they are thrown together on a bus in enforced solidarity. They are enveloped in the story of a nation built on the ashes of six million dead, rising like a phoenix, struggling at once just to stay alive and to be a beacon of hope for the world. And they are told what they must do once they return to their “real world” to maintain the unity they have come to feel and to continue to share in the destiny they have glimpsed unfolding. It is a ritual of unique power, a rite of passage which leaves few untransformed.<sup>71</sup>

As rituals, these commemorative pilgrimages are therefore *mediative* in providing the structure for the personal experience of contemporary mythology and ideology. Applying a typology developed by Don Handelman, the march experience can be characterized not only as an event-that-presents or re-presents the lived-in world (an event that acts as a mirror of social realities) but also as an event-that-models that world (what I would call an embodiment). This teleological event, in working through its own built-in contradictions, effects transformations in its participants, who in turn seek to have an impact on society at large.<sup>72</sup> I wonder if this is also another version of the iconic mode of memorialization, in that it provides a distilled, symbolic model for effective engagement with the past. In this view, the construction of memory (and identity) in the March of the Living not only reinforces (and is reinforced by) a particular Zionist worldview but also contributes to the ongoing reconstruction of that worldview.

## PLANTING: ISRAEL AS THE CENTER AND GOAL

But before accepting this characterization, we may want to get a better sense of the true center and goal of the march these "pilgrims" undertake. First, consider one genre of symbolic activity undertaken in various forms by the participants: planting. As I have already mentioned, Israeli flags are very prominent, especially during what appears to be the central event of the trip, the "March of the Living" walk itself. Israeli flags, large and small, crop up everywhere, most notably in a tableau that establishes the backdrop for the long commemoration ceremony at Birkenau at the end of the "march." The stage here is the ruins of one of the gas chamber-crematorium complexes, on which ten flag bearers plant themselves for the duration of the ceremony, behind the speakers' area. This symbolic planting and (re)claiming of territory is reflected and magnified in perhaps the most striking ritual, ceremonial, and symbolic act of the march, wherein the participants, who have been given small wooden plaques and told to write on them the names of family or loved ones who perished in the Holocaust (or, if there are none or the names are not known, then something suitably commemorative), are told at the end of the Birkenau ceremony to go around the camp and plant these plaques anywhere they like and make of the camp a symbolic graveyard, a field marked with specific individual names and messages of commemoration to replace the vast unmarked landscape of generalized mass horror and indeterminate memories (see figures 14 and 15).<sup>73</sup>

The planting of plaques, in turn, has been reflected in Israel on all past marches in the planting of new trees in a specially marked March of the Living forest, further reinforcing the motif of passage from darkness to light established by the march itinerary. Tree planting is a common act of commemoration in Israel, as Amos Elon observes: "In vast afforestation areas many thousands of trees are annually planted and marked in the memory of lost communities and of individual victims. . . . In previous ages, religious ceremony and prayer would have served as mourning, but in Israel, tree planting and building have always been acts of faith."<sup>74</sup> Dara Horn, a student participant in the 1992 march, whose journal excerpts have been published in book form by the American march organizers as a handy promotional and informational guide to the experience, also reflects on this theme: "Today, on Yom HaZikaron, we are planting trees. Almost every tourist who comes to Israel ends up planting a tree, since it's a national project to build up the land, so I've planted trees here several times before. But this time, it meant so much more to me. . . . This was

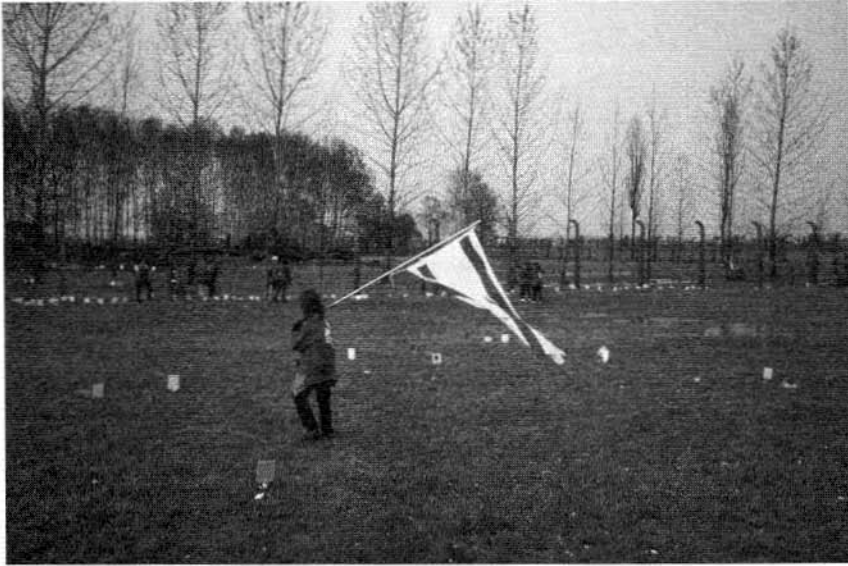


Figure 15. March of the Living participant walking with an Israeli flag in a field marked with memorial plaques, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Yom Hashoah, April 7, 1994. In the background is one of the camp's intact barbed-wire fences and, beyond it, the ruins of Crematorium III. Photograph by the author.

my way of remembering, of giving back something living."<sup>75</sup> (In 1994, trees were not planted because it was a year of *shemitta*, a biblically mandated year in which fields must lie fallow. Not planting does, however, reinforce the trip's strong identification with Jewish practice, and in any case, participants were to receive certificates saying that trees eventually would be planted in their honor.) Of course, such symbolic activity helps reinforce a certain sense of symbolic Jewish (and Israeli) sovereignty over the terrain covered by the march: students "march with unfurled flags, as if we've come to conquer Poland," former Israeli education minister Shulamit Aloni said in the fall of 1992.<sup>76</sup> Also, only in Israel is anything "planted" that will live on and grow in the landscape. The flags and plaques "planted" in Poland are not alive and do not live on past the march. This practice reflects the wish of march organizers, in my opinion, to downplay any suggestion that Jewish life is truly viable in Poland, even today in the face of such life's tentative resurgence.

An interesting series of discourses is being produced here. The territory that the marchers "cover" over the course of their two-week journey (a discovery of the landscape of memory and suffering in Poland, contrasted with a discovery of the landscape of joy and redemption in Israel)

is "covered" by flags, trees, and plaques in the process. But this (re)covering of the landscape is ironically meant to effect a recovery of memory (that marchers never had to begin with) and a *discovery* of the land with which the marchers are truly meant to affiliate, the place where what has been planted can really grow (and thus cover over the ground): Israel. This *discovery* and discovering can also be construed as ambivalence resulting from the disjunction of (in this case) American students playing out a Zionist ideology of history.

All this supports the argument that Poland—especially Auschwitz—is not the real center of the march experience. Surely, the broadly defined March of the Living itself is significant, especially as an exploration of the physical and symbolic landscape of suffering of the Holocaust (although I am skeptical as to how much of the terrain is truly explored on the trip). But together they define an anticenter, a place of radical negativity whose association with Jewish life exists only in history and memory,<sup>77</sup> stopping here would leave the pilgrimage unfinished and the Holocaust "unresolved." Rather, it is in the progression through what is now configured as a peripheral (but still relevant) place to the "center out there" which is Israel that the full context of the pilgrimage is established.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Miami organizer Miles Bunder asserts that the March of the Living is really a two-week Israel experience, with Poland as the preparation. This discovery of the "true" center of the march occurs complete with various kinds of rewards (the food is better, for instance, and there is—or at least was—a greater sense of freedom for the participants)<sup>79</sup> and even cathartic, carnival-type celebrations: first, a disco frenzy on a boat on the Sea of Galilee on our first night in Israel and, then, the wild and crowded real carnival of the streets of Jerusalem on the eve of Independence Day. These activities conclude the tour (in terms of its mythic temporal itinerary) and allow participants to perform and inhabit memory in a manageable (rather than an unmanageable) way.<sup>80</sup>

#### MEMORY TOURISM

How can the March of the Living be characterized and contextualized? Sociologist Erik Cohen has analytically distinguished five main modes of tourist experiences and compared them with pilgrimage as it is traditionally conceived. While modern mass tourism generally seems to be the exact opposite of pilgrimage, a closer analysis of a broad spectrum of its modes reveals some striking similarities, most notably in the fifth and most serious of the modes he identifies: the existential, in which the



tourist's visit is "phenomenologically analogous to a pilgrimage." Moreover, as for Zionist Jews, that center may not be merely an elective spiritual one (the main defining characteristic of the existential tourist) but can be a traditional one. Such traditionality is defined by historical and spiritual roots and attachments, so that the visit has the sense of a homecoming, albeit often only a temporary one.<sup>81</sup> This is certainly the attitude of many of the March of the Living tour participants, who, as they make their pilgrimage across time and space, ritually commemorate history and its transformation through memorial activities. At the journey's end they find at least a temporary authenticity in Israel and in their perhaps paradoxical identification with it, even as their identities as American Jews are also reinforced.

But, as cited above, Jack Kugelmass would call the March of the Living a secular ritual, one of many "rites of the tribe" that are clearly distinguished from the traditional ritual of pilgrimage by their "relative cosmological shallowness," "their largely ethnic rather than religious basis," their "sociopolitical" as opposed to cosmological framework, and their tendency toward the spectacle, which relegates the transcendent to secondary importance. These characterizations do not fully apply to the March of the Living. Though Kugelmass's observations concerning these "rites of the tribe" are cogent, useful, and often insightful, I maintain that the March of the Living, though it is certainly a spectacle, is a unique phenomenon with a serious and far-reaching religious and cosmological basis. Furthermore, I am wary of a view that separates the sociopolitical from the cosmological so cleanly, for even traditional rituals surely have sociopolitical characteristics. Certainly, these "secular rituals do not comply with traditional forms but rather appropriate them and in part invent whole new meanings," but it is the *way* these forms are appropriated that is especially interesting and deserving of study. Many of those forms of appropriation have already been discussed; Kugelmass provides one possible summary: "By evoking the Holocaust dramaturgically, that is, by going to the site of the event and reconstituting the reality of the time and place, American Jews are not only invoking the spirits of the tribe, that is, laying claim to their martyrdom, but also making past time present. And in doing so they are symbolically reversing reality: they are transposing themselves from what they are currently perceived as—in the American case highly privileged, and in the Israeli case oppressive—and presenting themselves as the diametric opposite of privilege, as what they in fact were. And it is this image of the self that remains central to the American Jewish worldview."<sup>82</sup> In this view, the March of the Living would be

understood as a commemorative act that generates and supports a self-identity that feeds on the historical image of Jews as powerless, thus reversing time and space.

But continued attention to the modes and manner of symbolic appropriation in the March of the Living suggests, following John Eade and Michael Sallnow, that this pilgrimage features a "realm of competing discourses"—both positive and negative. We can perceive these competing discourses on several levels. One is the frame of the experience itself. Thus, as Erik Cohen argues, the existential tourist mode (and, by analogy, pilgrimage) "is particularly amenable to falsification. The tourist, expecting the ideal life at the centre, is easily taken in; he is helped, as it were, to become a 'starry-eyed idealist.' Like traditional pilgrimage centres, centres of 'existential' tourism are advertised and embellished; tours through 'existential tourist space', like traditional pilgrimages, are staged." This may, however, simply be a result of the unmediated nature of "unprocessed experience"; the March of the Living, like any pilgrimage, may simply demand an interpretive frame. Kugelmass observes: "Of course there is in such travel to re-created places and moments in history something that seeks a reality more real than the real. Events witnessed on television, for example, are much easier to accept than those we witness firsthand: unprocessed experience generally lacks a dramatic structure to make it meaningful. Without the authoritative voice of the narrator, experience seems to lack legitimacy."<sup>83</sup>

The March of the Living is certainly staged and placed firmly within a Zionist interpretive framework. But the Zionist narrative of history is only the most overt of its symbolic appropriations; beneath that, I would contend, are a variety of discourses and strategies of appropriation brought to the march by the participants themselves and, at times, at odds with the official discourse. For example, the Mourner's Kaddish, repeated at almost every ceremony on the trip, may have meanings for the nonpracticing Jews on the march which are very different from those it has for the more religious participants. The former may develop here a profound connection between the Holocaust and a largely unfamiliar prayer, whereas the latter may connect the repeated performance of a familiar prayer immediately to their everyday practice. Or, in another example, we might ask what the significance is of the widespread "early planting" (before they were instructed to do so) of plaques at Birkenau by students uninterested in (or perhaps unable to understand) the long recitation in Hebrew of the official discourse of the event from the "stage."<sup>84</sup>

The competition for access to memorial spaces found at Mila 18 and at Majdanek can extend even to the individual participants of one commemorative ceremony, who may be engaged in a variety of activities and discourses at the same time. As Eade and Sallnow argue, "a pilgrimage shrine, while apparently emanating an intrinsic religious significance of its own, at the same time provides a ritual space for the expression of a diversity of perceptions and meanings which the pilgrims themselves bring to the shrine and impose upon it. As such, the cult can contain within itself a plethora of religious discourses."<sup>85</sup> But this kind of internal dissonance may reflect nothing more than the nature of ritual in general. Barbara Myerhoff suggests that "ritual is full of contradictions and paradox. Most paradoxical of all, by selecting and shaping a fragment of social life, it defines a portion of reality. The very act of consciously defining reality calls to our attention that, indeed, reality is merely a social construct, a collusive drama, intrinsically conventional, an act of collective imagination. Rituals are not only paradoxical intrinsically, they are built out of the paradoxes suggested by their symbols. They cope with paradox by mounting the mood of conviction and persuasion which fuses opposing elements referred to by their symbols, creating the belief that things are as they have been portrayed—proper, true, inevitable, natural."<sup>86</sup> Thus, the march seeks to make it seem perfectly natural that Jews should gather on Yom ha-Shoah, walk silently in solidarity from Auschwitz to Birkenau, and participate in a long ceremony of remembrance on top of the ruins of a crematorium complex, all the while downplaying the inherent paradoxes of such commemorative acts: the ahistorical (re)claiming of "sacred" space with Israeli flags, the celebration of largely Israeli identity and an Israel-centered worldview (a central paradox of the American Jewish civil religion) by a majority of non-Israelis, even the explanation for the "march" route itself—organizers claim that the "march" follows the same route taken by "so many of our brethren" to their deaths, and many participants find a strong connection to this, even though it is highly unlikely that more than a small number of Jews (relative to the number of Jewish Auschwitz victims) were actually marched to their deaths from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz II-Birkenau.<sup>87</sup> The March of the Living, as an ideological and religious experience, is an excellent example of commemorative performance in which the desire for memory has outrun the need for history.

Attention to these issues, then, highlights rituals as "dramas of persuasion," as Myerhoff states. In this sense, rituals "must be convincing. Not all the parties involved need to be equally convinced or equally

moved. But the whole of it must be good enough to play. No one can stand up and boo. Not too many people can shift about in embarrassment, sigh or grimace. . . . [A]ll must collude so as not to spoil the show, or damage the illusion that the dramatic reality coincides with the 'other, out-there reality.'<sup>88</sup> As drama, the "March of the Living" walk, as well as many of the commemorative acts throughout the two-week tour, is certainly persuasive, especially as it assists in the integrative, legitimating, and mobilizing processes discussed above. But looking more carefully at the competing discourses beneath the ideology of the organizers, we begin to see gaps and ruptures in the persuasive process, subtle (and not-so-subtle) challenges to the hegemonic discourse of the march. These range from personalizing plaques at Birkenau to bringing home earth from Poland as a souvenir, to devising one's own method of commemoration, and even to wandering off during the long and largely unintelligible ceremony at the end of the "march." Though the ritual commemorative activities of the March of the Living surely invoke Jewish traditional symbols and forms, they simultaneously challenge those structures in a variety of ways in a process of ritual commemorative construction that, as Catherine Bell argues, "can . . . renegotiate the very basis of tradition to the point of upending much of what had been seen as fixed previously or by other groups."<sup>89</sup>

What does this say about memory? Attention to the multiple and even conflicting discourses and strategies of commemoration invoked during the March of the Living brings us back to James Young's interest in exposing the "fundamentally interactive, dialogical quality of every memorial space." Here, as I suggested in the first chapter of this book, it becomes necessary to speak not of a memorial's "collective memory" but of its "collected memory." Young adds: "By maintaining a sense of collected memories, we remain aware of their disparate sources, of every individual's unique relation to a lived life, and of the ways our traditions and cultural forms continuously assign common meaning to disparate memories." Interestingly, Young observes that such ritual construction of memory may be self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing: "At some point, it may even be the activity of remembering together that becomes the shared memory; once ritualized, remembering together becomes an event in itself that is to be shared and remembered."<sup>90</sup> The shared aspect of ritual may help explain the success of the March of the Living in fostering a greater sense of Jewish identity in its participants. Here, memory is ultimately self-reflexive, creating a new discourse for memorialization dependent on ritualized engagement and embodiment.

## HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATION: TIME, SPACE, AND MEMORY

The historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith asserts that "ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention" and that "place directs attention," so that sacrality is perceived as "a category of emplacement."<sup>91</sup> For Smith, it is the attention to place that generates the sacred, and commemoration would be seen as another form of ritual emplacement. Eliade, on the other hand, focuses more on the temporal realm: "In religion as in magic, the periodic recurrence of anything signifies primarily that a mythical time is *made present* and then used indefinitely. Every ritual has the character of happening *now*, at this very moment. The time of the event that the ritual commemorates or re-enacts is made *present*, 're-presented' so to speak, however far back it may have been in ordinary reckoning."<sup>92</sup> Following this view, commemorative remembering would be understood as ritual re-presentation. Both views are valid and theoretically useful, especially in combination with each other. But, curiously, while both approaches seem overly concerned with ritual *presence* ("emplacement" in the former, "re-presentation" in the latter), they seem to overlook the presence of the very ritual actors who, in no small measure, make the sacred happen.

For it is the ritual *interaction* with space and time, made sacred by that interaction, that defines the March of the Living as a powerful Holocaust commemoration, specifically, as a memorial pilgrimage. And it is in the ritual engagement with sites of memory, with mythic time, and with other actors creating the commemoration that Holocaust memory is constructed and a community of memory is established. Maurice Halbwachs, as I discussed in chapter 1, had already noted that any kind of memory is irreducibly social and, moreover, that collective memory reconstructs the past in light of the constraints of the present.<sup>93</sup> In this light, the March of the Living is simply an extreme example, helpful in calling attention to the nature of Holocaust commemoration activities and, thus, the ritual inscriptions of memory. There are, of course, many different kinds of Holocaust commemorations (whose full analysis falls outside the scope of my book): synagogue services, film presentations and discussions, mass ceremonial gatherings, even cultural performances and individual observances. All these, even private commemorations, serve to connect actors to the community, the past, and the tradition, in the context of present-day concerns.

In chapter 1 I also observed that some critics believe Halbwachs did not go far enough in considering how commemoration works. Paul Connerton,

for instance, finds Halbwachs's work lacking in specific attention to the ritual actors and their performances.<sup>94</sup> Connerton's project is to understand "how societies remember" (the title of his book); he argues that commemoration can be achieved only if we bring recollection and bodies together: "One might not have thought of doing that because, when recollection has been treated as a cultural rather than as an individual activity, it has tended to be seen as the recollection of a cultural tradition; and such a tradition, in turn, has tended to be thought of as something that is inscribed. . . . [A]lthough bodily practices are in principle included as possible objects of hermeneutic activity, in practice hermeneutics has taken inscription as its privileged object."<sup>95</sup> In other words, we must pay attention to the active components of memory construction carried out by real people, in real places and at real times.

For Connerton, therefore, social memory depends on commemorative ceremonies, which in turn depend on ritual, bodily performances, as well as the simple "facts of communication between individuals." But these facts are more than telling stories; the "master narrative" of a ritual is "a cult enacted" so that the "image of the past . . . is conveyed and sustained by ritual performances." Thus, Connerton distinguishes ritual activity from mere narrative; commemorations are especially interesting for him because their reenactments (or enactments) of the narratives of past events "do not simply imply continuity with the past but explicitly claim such continuity" (we might think here of the organizing narrative of Auschwitz inmates being marched to their deaths from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz II-Birkenau at the heart of the "March of the Living").<sup>96</sup> They can lay such claims to continuity because the bodily strategies of commemoration of which they consist (Connerton calls them "incorporating practices") are an effective system of mnemonics. These mnemonics depend on their existence through their performance and their acquisition in a manner often unconscious of that performance.<sup>97</sup> In this view, commemorative ceremonies are self-perpetuating and nonreflective, insuring their own continuation, constructing and maintaining memory, and resisting debilitating criticism. Thus, commemoration helps create, revise, and sustain tradition through the bodily, ritual activities of its actors; Holocaust commemoration, in this view, brings the past to the present through the incorporating practices of the people doing the commemorating, producing ritually enacted narratives and thereby creating culturally viable memories for all the participants.

As I discussed in chapter 1, James Fentress and Chris Wickham have also responded to Halbwachs's work critically. Much of what they have to

say is compatible with Connerton's conclusions: they too are concerned with the individual actor left out of, or rendered passive in, Halbwachs's observations.<sup>98</sup> They define commemoration as both "the *action* of speaking or writing about memories, as well as the formal re-enactment of the past that we usually mean when we use the word. Within this social perspective, there is an important distinction between memory as action and memory as representation; remembering/commemorating considered as a type of behaviour, and memory, considered cognitively, as a network of ideas." Again, the emphasis on memory as activity here is instructive, setting commemoration apart from cognitive representation. For Fentress and Wickham, social memory is memory articulated (not necessarily in speech), conceptualized, and transmitted, not only through narratives but also as guides to social identity. Most important, the authors remind us of our own often forgotten presence in the commemoration process: "It is we who are remembering, and it is to us that the knowledge, emotions, and images ultimately refer. What is concealed in models of memory as a surface whereupon knowledge of experience is transcribed is our own presence in the background. Whatever memory may be as a purely neurological or purely epistemological object in itself, we can neither know nor experience our memories unless we can first 'think' them; and the moment we 'think' our memories, recalling and articulating them, they are no longer objects; they become part of us. At that moment, we find ourselves indissolubly in their centre."<sup>99</sup> This supports a view that bears repeating, expressed by Yosef Yerushalmi and already cited in chapter 1, which I find most applicable to Holocaust commemorations: "whatever memories [are] unleashed by . . . commemorative rituals and liturgies [are] surely not a matter of intellection, but of evocation and identification. . . . [W]hat was . . . drawn up from the past was not a series of facts to be contemplated at a distance, but a series of situations into which one could somehow be existentially drawn."<sup>100</sup>

Commemoration is highly mediated; there can be no "pure" ritual experience here, certainly not in a carefully orchestrated six-thousand-person pilgrimage through Poland and Israel, but not in any other kind of Holocaust commemoration either. Commemorative activity depends on various narrative (religious/ideological) frames, on symbols, on ritual forms. Therefore, Edward Casey refers to commemoration as "remembering-through": "through this very vehicle, within its dimensions, across its surface. For the past is made accessible to me by its sheer ingrediency in the *commemorabilium* itself. It is commemorated therein and not somewhere else, however distant in time or space the com-

memorated event or person may be from the present occasion of commemorating. . . . *Through* the appropriate *commemorabilia* I overcome the effects of anonymity and spatio-temporal distance and pay homage to people and events I have never known and will never know face-to-face." Thus, "remembering-through" creates connections to the past, overcoming ruptures in space and time, even mixing and re-creating space and time, in a process that we recognize, in the context of Holocaust commemoration, as reinforcing a sense of Jewish peoplehood. Here we arrive at a deeper understanding of the *communitas* effected by commemorative ritual activity, which overcomes "the separation from which otherwise unaffiliated individuals suffer. Still more radically, commemoration suggests that such separation is a sham."<sup>101</sup> It is exactly that kind of powerful sense of affiliation, I would argue, that is at the heart not only of the march agenda but of all other forms of Holocaust commemoration as well.

For Casey, the memorialization achieved by commemorative ritual effects "lastingness," the peculiar temporality of memorialization he prefers to call "perdurance." This is the "enduring-through" of the interpretive encounter that is tradition, what Casey calls a "*via media* between eternity and time."<sup>102</sup> In other words, such rituals as Holocaust commemoration ceremonies help establish a special kind of temporality through which memory is articulated (mediated); it is through this form that memory overcomes the obstacles of human time and space, effectively establishing viable symbolic connections and reconciling past, present, and future. Thus, commemoration allows the past to endure not only into the present but through the present on into the future as well, the result being that the past never really ends:

Freud would have described such a situation as one of "deferred action" (*Nachträglichkeit*): by being commemorated, what might otherwise end altogether, come to a definite close, is granted a delayed efficacy. In this respect commemorating enables the past not just to evanesce in the present but, more crucially, to traverse the present on its way to becoming future. It is as if the very delay in discovery or recognition—or in simple appreciation—empowers the past to gain an increased futurity. As Freud remarks of deferred happenings generally, the effect seems to exceed the cause, contravening the Aristotelian-Cartesian assumption that there must be at least as much reality in a cause as in its effect. Such is the force of commemoration when it is fully and freely enacted.<sup>103</sup>

Holocaust commemoration here, as a particular way of constructing Jewish memory, is powerful indeed, sustaining itself through the incorporating



practices of its actors, who (re)connect themselves to Jewish history and tradition (and to each other) and, through their participation in a memorial process of cultural inscription that effects perdurance across time and space, not only make the past present but also make it last into the future. Kugelmass finds that these rites, in this way, create a certain kind of meaning: "In part a meditation on the past, and in part a scripted play about the present, the rites I have described are also rehearsals of what American Jews are intent on becoming or, perhaps more accurately stated, intent on not becoming. How ironic. Poland, relegated to the past by American Jews, has suddenly emerged as a stage upon which to act out their future."<sup>104</sup> In the end, the memory constructed through the March of the Living, which, I have argued, tells us more about the present than about the past, ends up virtually exceeding the constraints of re-presentation in the present and propels its participants, and us, into the future. What is left behind, what is forgotten, as well as the value of such forgetting are the subjects of my concluding chapter.