

About this partnership:

Both the Jewish People and the United States of America are rooted in a quest for greater freedom and human dignity. Inspired by this parallelism, the National Museum of American Jewish History is collaborating with Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and its Rabbis Without Borders program to launch a new initiative, **Sacred Stories: A Living Commentary on the Hebrew Bible and American Jewish History**.

Sacred Stories weaves together Judaism's foundational sacred text, the Torah, with one of the most successful expressions of freedom in human history, the story of Jewish life in America. **Sacred Stories** explores our shared values by linking these two vital and compelling stories through contemporary commentary and 21st century media.

The **Torah** is a central feature of Jewish tradition. Used to refer generally to Jewish wisdom, it also refers specifically to the 5 Books of Moses which makes up the Hebrew Bible. A portion of the Torah text, a **Parsha**, is read on **Shabbat** (Sabbath). The whole Torah is read sequentially over the course of the year. Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest and begins on Friday evenings and ends Saturday night. Many Jews observe Shabbat to emulate God's resting on the seventh day of Creation. The fourth commandment is to keep Shabbat holy which Jews do with festive meals, resting, and learning.



The National Museum of American Jewish History, on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, presents educational programs and experiences that preserve, explore and celebrate the history of Jews in America. Its purpose is to connect Jews more closely to their heritage and to inspire in people of all backgrounds a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish experience and the freedoms to which Americans aspire.



Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership is a think tank, leadership training institute, and resource center. Bringing Jewish insights to a wide American audience, Clal makes Jewish wisdom an accessible public resource. A leader in religious pluralism, Clal builds bridges across communities to encourage diversity and openness. Linking Jewish texts and tradition with innovative scholarship, Clal promotes Jewish participation in American civic and spiritual life, reinvigorating communities and enhancing leadership development.

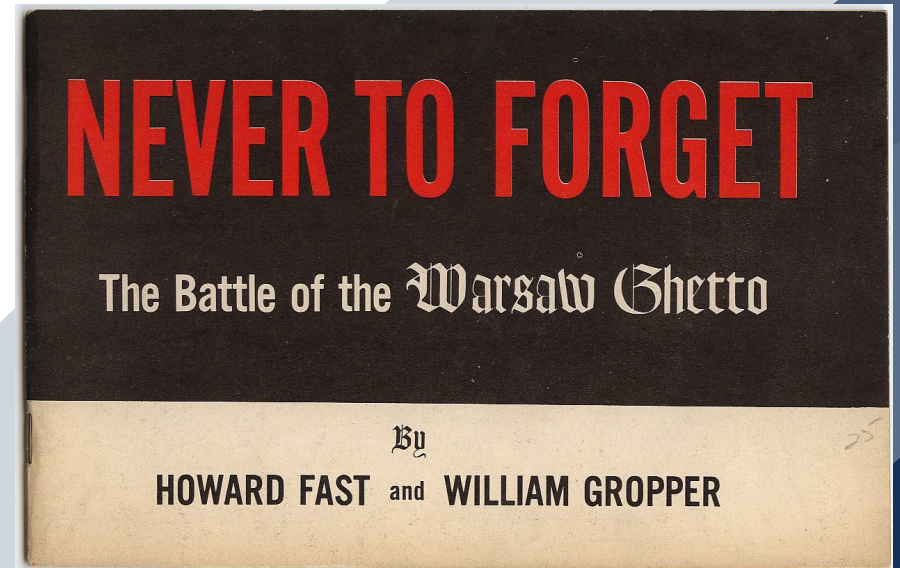
Sacred Stories

A Living Commentary on American Jewish History and the Hebrew Bible

TISHA B'AV JULY 16, 2013

Healing through Poetry

By Rabbi Jason Herman



Artifact:

Booklet, *Never to Forget: The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto*
Howard Fast and William Gropper, New York:
Book League of Jewish People Fraternal Order, I.W.O., 1946
National Museum of American Jewish History

Located in the Surviving Remnant case in the first gallery on the second floor

Healing through Poetry

Sacred Stories **TISHA B'AV**

How do we mourn and express our grief for tragedies? How do we remember them when we are separated from them by large amounts of time and space? How do we speak about, let alone think about, the unthinkable? Jews living in post- WWII America knew their coreligionists in Europe had just experienced the most horrific tragedy in all of human history. Many had family members who perished in the Holocaust.

In the late 1940s, the American Jewish community grew to include survivors and refugees displaced by the Holocaust. Speaking of their tragedies was often difficult – the emotions were too raw and painful. Yet American Jews knew that in order to give meaning to the lives that were lost, and mourn the tragedy, stories would need to be told, and in a palpable way.

“We sing, for even as we mourn, we are hopeful.”

In 1946, novelist Howard Fast joined cartoonist, William Gropper to write, *Never to Forget: Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto*. The book coined the now ubiquitous expression “Never Forget.” *Never to Forget* recounts the story of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising through poetry and illustration. It began to tell a story, to bring to life the souls of the perished, to speak the unspeakable.

The use of poetry to describe tragedy and to mourn it is not new to Jews. Each year, Jews commemorate the Ninth of the Hebrew month of Av, the day on which the first and second Holy Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed, ending Jewish sovereignty for nearly two millennia. It is also a day that mourns and remembers countless other tragedies in Jewish history.

How are the stories told on the Ninth of Av? Through poetry. Beginning with the chanting of the Book of Lamentations in the evening, and continuing with the recitation of numerous mournful poems, called *Kinnot*, during the day, the poetry of the Ninth of Av relates the tragedies of a community's destruction. We say in verse what can't be said in prose.

Poetry gives our words rhythm, and we often pair poetry with song, the medium of hope. We sing, for even as we mourn, we are hopeful. *Never to Forget* ends, “WHEN will our ancient greeting have portent. Peace be unto thee, And unto thee, peace.” Looking to heal, Fast calls forth the past just as does the end of biblical Lamentations, “Return us, O Lord to Yourself, and we will return. Renew our days as of old.”

Rabbi Jason Herman serves as the spiritual leader of the West Side Jewish Center in New York City and also serves as the Executive Director of the International Rabbinic Fellowship. He is a graduate of the Huntsman Program at the University of Pennsylvania and Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School and has previously worked as an investment banker.

ARTIFACT:

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