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## IGNORANCE & AMNESIA – A DEADLY COMBINATION

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As we move further away from the years of the Holocaust we find that more individuals, adults as well as youths, are bereft of any knowledge as to what happened during that dark period.

This was vividly highlighted by the White House spokesman's recent appalling performance in front of journalists. Demonstrating an amazing ignorance about the methods used by Germans to murder Jews he compounded his blunder by referring to concentration camps as holocaust centres. Nobody except the rabidly anti Trump brigade could really claim that Sean Spicer hates Jews. He apologized several times and is obviously distraught at his foot in mouth episode. It does however demonstrate that even the most educated individual can easily fall prey to presenting wrong facts if they have not been exposed to any sort of Holocaust education.

Despite millions being spent on erecting grandiose Holocaust museums and memorials it is glaringly obvious that only a small minority have been exposed to learning about it. There is no doubt that once someone has had the opportunity to visit such a centre and even better having had the chance to speak with a survivor they will understand what horrors were perpetrated and perhaps will henceforth be inoculated against further Judeophobic behaviour.

Until and unless the lessons of the Holocaust are taught in every high school we will witness generations of students growing into adulthood who are completely ignorant of the subject. Those few teachers who travel to Israel and take part in the Yad Vashem educational seminars are only a drop in the ocean. Those few schools who visit centres dedicated to Holocaust education are leading the way but until every school devotes time to the topic we are fighting a losing battle against amnesia and ignorance.

In Israel there is no question that most students are exposed to the subject not just once a year but on many occasions. As the number of

survivors dwindle it is more imperative than ever that knowledge of what happened is transmitted to the next generations. It must be done in such a manner that does not leave an impression that Jewish life is one long procession of persecution. Without diminishing the stark facts that in every generation we face challenges to our existence the end result is that we have survived to rebuild our sovereignty in our country once again. Those students who take part in the March of the Living experience this at first hand. After touring the death camps and the blood soaked places in Europe where now only plaques and memorials mark once flourishing Jewish communities they arrive in Israel in time for Independence Day. From despair and horror to proud Jews celebrating the revival of Jewish independence the contrast could not be greater. Without a doubt it makes a lifelong impression.

What about those however in many Diaspora communities where alienation, assimilation and a lack of Jewish education is rampant? We worry about non Jewish ignorance of the Holocaust but how do we ensure that Jewish teenagers growing into adulthood are also not going to be Holocaust ignorant? There is also the phenomenon of those whose entire Jewish being revolves around the Holocaust to the exclusion of every other facet of Jewish life.

How do we deal with adults who never learnt anything about the Holocaust? Today we witness the Israel haters comparing us to Nazis and this libelous litany falls onto fertile soil germinating into full blown Jew hatred. This is where ignorance and amnesia combine to produce a very toxic brew. We can see its results already in the international community's actions as far as Israel is concerned. Those groups, NGO's and rent a crowd mobs who advocate boycotts and delegitimization are the natural end product of years of ignorance. The real tragic figures are those Jews who are so self loathing that they feel the necessity to condemn their own people.

When Holocaust Remembrance & Memorial Day occurs every year what proportion of the community turns up to take part in the ceremonies? In Israel when the sirens wail and almost the whole country stops in its tracks and stands in silent tribute to the six million martyrs, at least not a single person is unaware of the significance of the moment.

A classic case of how deliberate amnesia combined with self induced denial afflicts politicians in particular became clear this week as Marine Le Pen campaigned in the forthcoming French Presidential elections. She claimed that the French State was not responsible for the war time round up of French Jews, their detention at a Paris sports stadium and then their subsequent transportation to concentration camps. **“I think that, generally speaking, if there are people responsible, it’s those who were in power at the time. It’s not France”** she proclaimed. In one foul swoop she managed to not only absolve the French Vichy Government but also to sow doubts as to whether anyone at all was actually to blame or responsible. This denial of any sort of culpability is music to the ears of all those who deliberately or otherwise seek to absolve the State from complicity in the murder of their own citizens. Until recently the French Railway authorities also denied any responsibility for their wartime co-operation in transporting French and German Jews (my grandparents included) to the death camps.

This year ANZAC Day follows on 25 April. Once again a special commemoration will be held at the Commonwealth War Cemetery on Mount Scopus to honour those Australians and New Zealanders who gave their lives in two World Wars. This year also marks the centenary of the liberation of Beersheba by Australian light mounted troops which paved the way for the liberation of Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks. The ironic twist is that this Commonwealth War Cemetery is in a part of Jerusalem which the New Zealand sponsored UN resolution deems to be illegally “occupied” by Israel.

There can be no bigger example of amnesia and ignorance than this.