

79th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and
29th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia

Welcome

By the Worshipful the Mayor of Merton
Councillor Gill Manly

Memorial prayer

God full of compassion whose presence is over us, may the souls of our dead who have gone to their everlasting home with the holy and of Your presence.
Source pure on high who shine as the lights of heaven, find the safety and rest denied them on earth beneath the shelter of mercy, cover them in the shelter of Your wings forever and bind their souls into the gathering of life.

It is God who is their heritage.

May they be at peace in their place of rest.

Amen.

אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בְּמְרוֹמִים
הַמָּצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תַּחַת כַּנְפֵי
הַשְּׁכִינָה בְּמַעְלוֹת קְדוּשִׁים
וְטְהוּרִים כְּזוֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ מְזַהְרִים
לְנַשְׁמוֹת שֵׁשׁה מְלִיּוֹן אַחֵינוּ
וְאַחֵיוֹתֵינוּ שְׁמַתוֹ עַל-קְדוּשַׁת הַשֵּׁם.
יְנוּחוּ בְּשִׁלוֹהַּ וּבְשָׁלוֹם שְׁלֵא יָדְעוּ
בְּחַיֵּיהֶם. אָנָּה בְּעַל הַרְחָמִים
הַסְּתִירָם בְּסֶטֶר כַּנְּפֵיךָ לְעוֹלָמִים
וְצָרוּר בְּצָרוּר הַחַיִּים אֶת-נַשְׁמָתָם:
יְהוּה הוּא נִחַלְתָּם וַיְנוּחוּ בְּשָׁלוֹם
עַל מִשְׁכַּבְּם וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

Wimbledon Synagogue Choir – directed by Sarit Aloni

L'khol Ish Yesh Shem (Every Person Has A Name) - Lyrics by Zelda Mishkoysky
Music by Hanan Yovel, Arr. by Sarit Aloni



Image by © Andrew Sutton

Freedom means different things to different people. What is clear is that in every genocide that has taken place, those who are targeted for persecution have had their freedom restricted and removed, before many of them are murdered. This is often a subtle, slow process. The ten stages of genocide, as identified by Professor Gregory Stanton, demonstrate that genocide never just happens. There is always a set of circumstances which occur, or which are created, to build the climate in which genocide can take place and in which perpetrator regimes can remove the freedoms of those they are targeting.

Not only do perpetrator regimes erode the freedom of the people they are targeting, demonstrating how fragile freedom is, they also restrict the freedoms of others around them, to prevent people from challenging the regime. Despite this, in every genocide there are those who risk their own freedom to help others, to preserve others' freedom or to stand up to the regime.

HMD 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. 49 years after the Holocaust ended, 19 years after the genocide in Cambodia, the world stood by as Hutu extremists shattered the fragile freedom in Rwanda, following decades of tension and violence, culminating in the murder of over one million Tutsis in just one hundred days.

'That is when the trouble started for the Jews. Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees.' By Anne Frank, diary entry, Saturday 20 June, 1942 – reflecting back on May 1940 when the Germans arrived in the Netherlands

Read by the Worshipful the Mayor of Merton, Councillor Gill Manly

Freedom is fragile and it cannot be taken for granted. Here are some examples of ways in which the freedoms of people targeted during genocide are restricted, showing how fragile freedom is and how we must not be complacent about it.

In 1933 the Nazis came to power in Germany, and life became increasingly difficult for German Jews. Anti-Jewish legislation was passed, which denied Jews many freedoms and restricted their rights, starting with removing them from certain professions and schools and universities. The Nuremberg Laws in 1935 restricted who Jews could marry and went further than that: they defined anyone who had three or four Jewish grandparents as a Jew, regardless of whether or not that person saw themselves as Jewish. Thus the Nuremberg laws took away people's freedom of religion and freedom to self-identify. On 9 November 1938, Jewish shops and businesses in Nazi territories were attacked and destroyed. The night became known as The Night of Broken Glass. Jewish people were banned from cinemas, theatres and sports facilities.

As the German army swept through and started occupying European countries, Jewish people in those countries often had many of their freedoms taken away: they were forced into ghettos, living in cramped conditions and often doing hard labour for the Nazis or for German industries; they were deported to concentration or extermination camps. Being imprisoned or enslaved is the very antithesis of freedom. And this was simply because they were Jewish.

Read by Councillor Ross Garrod, Leader of the Council

After the arrival of the Germans in the Netherlands, Anne Frank wrote in her diary:

'That is when the trouble started for the Jews. Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees: Jews were required to wear a yellow star; Jews were required to turn in their bicycles; Jews were forbidden to use trams; Jews were forbidden to ride in cars, even their own; Jews were required to do their shopping between 3.00 and 5.00p.m.; Jews were required to frequent only Jewish-owned barbershops and beauty salons; Jews were forbidden to be out on the streets between 8.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m.; Jews were forbidden to go to theatres, cinemas or any other forms of entertainments; Jews were forbidden to use swimming pools, tennis courts, hockey fields or any other athletic fields; Jews were forbidden to go rowing; Jews were forbidden to take part in any athletic activity in public; Jews were forbidden to sit in their gardens or those of their friends after 8.00 p.m.; Jews were forbidden to visit Christians in their homes; Jews were required to attend Jewish schools, etc. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that, but life went on.'

Anne and her family went into hiding, but they were betrayed and Anne died in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, just three months short of her 16th birthday
Read by Councillor Anthony Fairclough, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

As part of the T4 euthanasia programme the Nazis sterilised hundreds of thousands of people because they were disabled or perceived to be disabled, physically or mentally. Franziska Mikus had her freedom of reproduction taken away by the Nazis, forcibly sterilised not once but twice, simply because she was deaf.

'With a heavy heart I [had] to be sterilised a second time. This was the cruellest thing I ever had to endure. I will never be able to forget that.'

In the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Eric Murangwa Eugène MBE's freedom of movement was shattered after the plane carrying the President of Rwanda was shot down on 6 April 1994. Radio broadcasts demanded people stay in their homes while soldiers crashed down their front doors to find those they deemed 'responsible'. Demanding people to stay home enabled perpetrators to find their target groups.

In 1992, Kemal Pervanić was one of many Bosnian Muslim men incarcerated in the notorious Omarska Concentration Camp. One of his former schoolteachers became his camp guard. Kemal's freedoms were lost: every aspect of his life was controlled, living conditions were appalling and he suffered beatings and deprivations.

Read by Councillor Nick McLean, Leader of the Conservative Group

Perpetrator regimes often deliberately conceal their genocidal actions and mislead those they are targeting, to keep them calm, for example, and to prevent revolts, creating a sense of false freedom among those who are persecuted. The gates at several concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, welcomed prisoners with the now infamous slogan 'Arbeit Macht Frei', literally meaning 'work gives you freedom', but this was far from the reality.

In 1981, having survived the genocide in Cambodia, Var Ashe Houston BEM learned in a letter from a friend that her husband, Virak Phong, had flown back to Phnom Penh in early 1976 with several hundred other Khmer intellectuals. The group had been told that the communist regime led by Pol Pot could use their skills to rebuild the country, but this was not true. In reality, they were imprisoned upon arrival in Phnom Penh. Virak Phong died in prison that year.

Read by Councillor Edward Foley, Leader of the Merton Park Independent Residents Group



Action Protesters in Sudan, © M.Saleh, Creative Commons

Often in genocides, people's freedom of expression is limited and restricted, with state-controlled media ensuring propaganda is fed to the general population. Those who speak out are often imprisoned or murdered.

'The infamous hate Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines was spewing its venom against the Tutsis, blaming them for assassinating the president.' By Jean Baptiste Kayigamba, a survivor of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, now living in the UK.

Even after genocides have ended and societies are rebuilt, survivors making new lives in different countries may not be allowed to express themselves freely as new regimes make accommodations with the past, and when relatives in the home country may still face danger.

Genocide is the ultimate manifestation of violence ending freedom to live. During the Holocaust, six million Jewish people – men, women, children and babies – were brutally murdered in fields, ghettos, concentration camps and death camps. In more recent genocides, vast numbers of people have been murdered purely because of their faith, ethnicity, or other form of identity.

Read by Hannah Doody, Chief Executive Officer of Merton Council

It isn't only those directly targeted for persecution whose freedoms are affected by perpetrator regimes. Vali Rácz risked her freedom and her life to save Jews in Hungary during the Second World War. Despite knowing she would likely be murdered if caught, she built a false partition into a large wardrobe to hide people. She was arrested several times but with no proof that she was hiding Jews, was released.

Despite the horrific scenes taking place across Rwanda there were also acts of great bravery. Sula Karuhimbi was an elderly woman who lived alone on a small farm and had knowledge of natural medicines. When the genocide began she hid more than 20 Tutsis in her animal shed and fed them from her small stock of vegetables. When attackers came to her farm she used her reputation as a 'witch' to frighten them off and protect the people hiding, risking her freedom as she did so.

Five students from Munich University and one of their professors challenged the Nazi regime by forming the White Rose group. They asked German people to react to the violence and oppression which were all around them by standing up and fighting for freedom. Although they were successful in spreading their messages, the members of the White Rose group were all beheaded by the Nazis, who wanted to discourage anyone else from fighting for freedom.

Read by Ch Supt Claire Kelland, Borough Commander, Met Police

It is a misconception that liberation from the perpetrator regime means the end of suffering and the start of a free life. Whilst allied liberators freed Holocaust survivors from the physical imprisonment of concentration camps, and dreadful conditions, the prisoners then found themselves alone, often unable to return home, and having to move to a new country, learn a new language and rebuild their lives from scratch. They had to rebuild new lives with the painful absence of family members and friends. Many have described the years post-liberation as 'being physically free, but not mentally free.'

'The first few days after liberation were joyous and yet sad, confusing and bewildering. I did not know how to cope with freedom after years of painful imprisonment.'

By Esther Brunstein - Holocaust survivor

Otto Rosenberg who was persecuted by the Nazis because he was Sinti noted, it was hard to enjoy freedom knowing his family members had been murdered:

'They say: "you have your freedom now, be happy". There was no way I could be all joyful, because I missed my brothers and sisters, always, to this very day. When the holidays came and people celebrated, or the families sat together, that was when this inner thing, this nervous strain came. That was very hard.'

Read by Clinton Walsh, Borough Commander for the Fire Service

Wimbledon Synagogue Choir – directed by Sarit Aloni
Grant Us Peace. Lyrics by Sheilla Hymas-Parry. Music by Sarit Aloni



Holocaust 1941 - 1945

The Holocaust was the attempt by the Nazis and their collaborators to murder all the Jews in Europe. From the time they assumed power in Germany, the Nazis used propaganda, persecution, and legislation to deny human and civil rights to German Jews. They used centuries of antisemitism as their foundation.

With the outbreak of World War Two in 1939 Germany invaded Poland, subjecting around two million Polish Jews to violence and forced labour. Thousands of Jews were murdered in the first months of the occupation. Shortly after the occupation Polish Jews were confined to particular neighbourhoods that came to be known as 'ghettos'. Living conditions in these ghettos were appalling – a deliberate attempt by the Nazis to cause the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews. This approach was repeated across Eastern Europe in other countries occupied by the Nazis.

In 1941, the systematic murder of Europe's Jews began – a plan known by the Nazis as 'The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem'. Death squads called Einsatzgruppen swept Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, killing Jews by firing squad. By the end of 1941 the first extermination camp, Chelmno in Poland, had been established, giving the Nazis their method to continue murdering on a giant scale between 1941 and 1945.

By the end of the Holocaust, six million Jewish men, women and children had been murdered in ghettos, mass-shootings, in concentration camps and extermination camps.

Read by Farrukh Ahmed, Wimbledon Mosque



Genocide in Cambodia 1975 – 1979

The fate of Cambodia shocked the world when the radical communist political party Khmer Rouge, under their leader Pol Pot, seized power in April 1975. The Khmer Rouge ruthlessly imposed an extremist programme to reconstruct Cambodia by creating a 'Year Zero'.

The population was made to work as labourers in one huge federation of collective farms. The inhabitants of towns and cities were forced to leave. No-one was spared: the ill, disabled, old and very young were also driven out, regardless of their physical condition. People who refused to leave, those who did not leave fast enough and those who would not obey orders were all murdered.

Ethnic minority groups were also targeted by the Khmer Rouge's racism, these included ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai people, and Cambodians with Chinese, Vietnamese or Thai ancestry. Religion was outlawed by the regime – half the Cham Muslim population was murdered, as were 8,000 Christians and Buddhism was eliminated from the

Those considered a threat to this new peasant class - including doctors, lawyers, teachers and even those who wore glasses were murdered. One Khmer Rouge slogan ran 'To spare you is no profit, to destroy you is no loss.'

Read by Judith Freedman, Wimbledon District Synagogue

Genocide in Bosnia 1995

In July 1995, with the back-drop of the ongoing civil war, Bosnian Serb troops and paramilitaries led by Ratko Mladić descended on the town of Srebrenica and began shelling it. Around 8,000 Muslim men, and boys over 12 years old, were murdered in Srebrenica.

Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia into six states, Bosnia declared independence in 1992, which soon descended into civil war. The independence was resisted by the Bosnian Serbs who saw their future as part of the 'Greater Serbia'. Bosnia became the victim of the Bosnian Serbs determined for political domination, which it was prepared to achieve by isolating ethnic groups and, if necessary, exterminating them. The Bosnian war resulted in the death of around 100,000 people, and the displacement of over two million men, women and children.

Where do the displaced go when genocide ends? How can individuals and nations assist those refugees who have survived genocide but no place to return? In Bosnia, thousands of Muslim refugees found sanctuary in Europe, while others returned home. However, there remain villages in Bosnia that are impossible for Muslims to return to even now.

Read by Imam Nasim Bajwa, Ahmadiyya Muslim Association

Rwanda 1994

In 100 days in 1994 approximately one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered in the Genocide in Rwanda. The genocide took place following decades of tensions between Hutus and Tutsis, and a recent history of persecution and discrimination against Tutsis.

On 6 April 1994 the plane carrying Rwanda's President was shot down. Extremist Hutu leaders accused Tutsis of killing the President, and Hutu civilians were told by radio and word of mouth that it was their duty to wipe out the Tutsis.

Despite its colossal scale, this genocide was carried out almost entirely by hand, usually using machetes and clubs. The men who had been trained to massacre were members of civilian death squads, the Interahamwe. The State provided support and organisation – politicians, officials, intellectuals and professional soldiers incited the killers to do their work. Local officials assisted in rounding up victims and making suitable places available for slaughter.

Tutsi men, women, children and babies were killed in their thousands in schools and churches. Frequently the killers were people they knew – neighbours, workmates, former friends, sometimes-even relatives through marriage.

Read by Alison Wallace, Wimbledon Quakers

Darfur 2003 – present day

Darfur is a region in the west of Sudan, bordering Chad, in north-east Africa. Before the conflict, Darfur had an ethnically mixed population of around six million black Africans and Arabs.

In 2003, a civil war began in the region between the sedentary population of black African farmers and the lighter-skinned nomadic Arab population. The Sudanese Government has supported Arab militia – the Janjaweed – who have destroyed hundreds of villages and murdered thousands of people. These atrocities have been condemned as genocide by the International Criminal Court and several governments around the world.

The war has led to the deaths of between 200,000 and 400,000 civilians, although estimates vary greatly, and this figure could be much higher. International peacekeepers, aid agencies and the media have struggled to keep accurate records or find accurate information. Up to 2.6 million people are still displaced in Darfur. They have been forced to flee their homes to makeshift refugee camps in Darfur or Chad run by international aid agencies.

Read by Sundaramma Maheshwaran, Shree Ghanapathy Temple



By Ravensbourne School

For some survivors, post-genocide freedom remains always vulnerable to being snatched away. Denial and distortion follow all genocides, and are on the increase where countries attempt to reshape their past. Holocaust distortion and antisemitism (anti-Jewish hatred) have been present since the end of World War Two and remain prevalent today.

Leon Greenman built a life in the UK after surviving Auschwitz, only to suffer an antisemitic attack on his home in London in the 1990s.

Antoinette Mutabazi did not feel free to return to her home village after the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda when she heard that a perpetrator had been released from prison and had returned to the village.

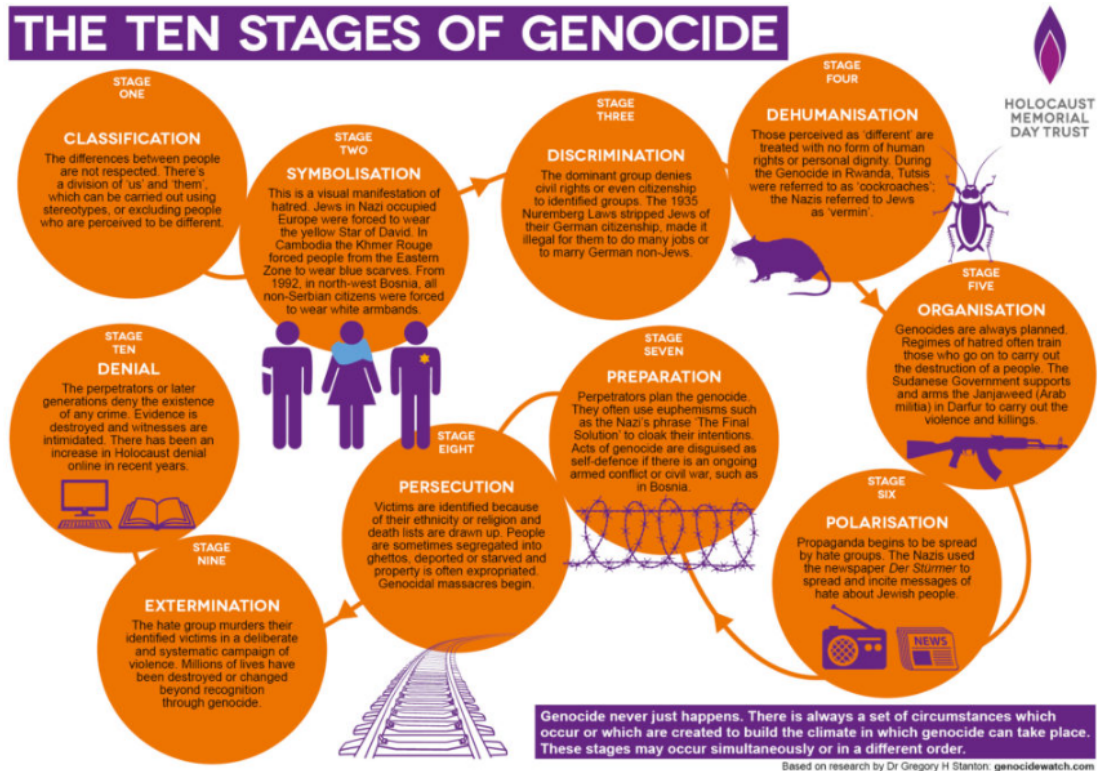
Today many people in western democracies take freedoms for granted – this HMD, we can reflect on how these freedoms need to be valued, and on how many people around the world face restrictions to their freedoms to live, worship, work and love freely.

For example, Uyghur Muslims in China are facing forced relocation to Xinjiang province, 're-education' that threatens to eradicate the Uyghur culture, and other limits to free expression, free movement and freedom of worship.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh, having escaped religious persecution in Myanmar.

Conflict is still ongoing in the Darfur region of Sudan. Survivors of the genocide, now safe in the UK, are terrified for the safety of their family members still in Darfur, and scared to speak out publicly in the UK lest their family members' lives are threatened.

Read by Tony Molloy, Chief Executive, Merton Connected

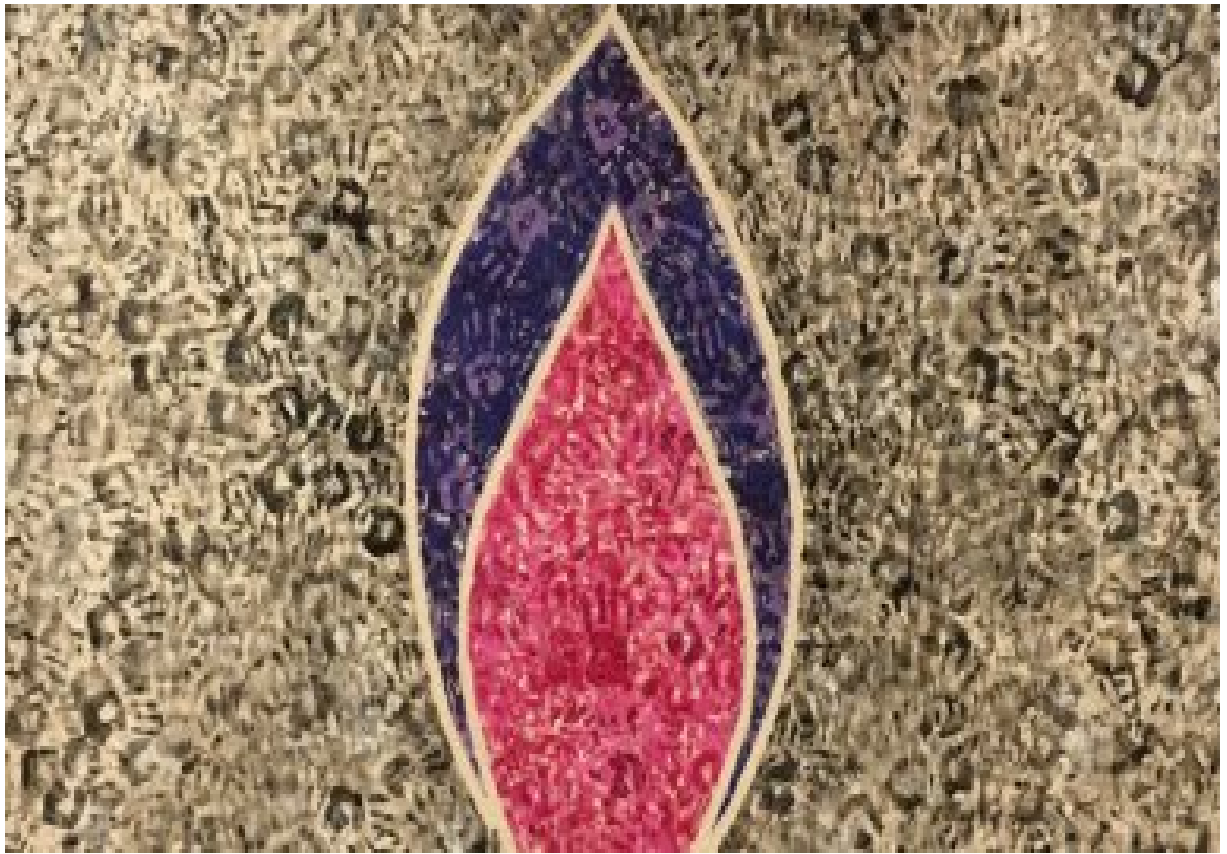


Wimbledon Synagogue Choir – directed by Sarit Aloni

Eli Ata - from Psalm 118, Melody by Rabbi Schneur Zalman, arr. by SaritAloni

DO NOT ASK, BY AVRAM SCHAUFELD

Do not ask
How did you survive?
Because this is a question that causes me pain
and brings back memories...
I know that you mean well and are sympathetic
and would like me to talk to your youth group
or your son who is writing a paper on the Holocaust
and I could help him with the subject which is part of his exams.
You add with a smile, that no amount of reading is the same
as talking to a survivor.
From your eager expression I can guess
what you expect me to tell him.
About our bravery and how our faith in God
helped us to survive.
I lie and say I am too busy
that I have other commitments
and quickly take my leave and turn away
So that you cannot see the hurt in my eyes
Do not ask me why...



WHAT IF IT WERE ME? – BY NAOMH HANNON

I was walking through the park one day,
Pottering about in my usual way,
When I saw two surly youths staring at me,
Two surly youths, with a boy, pinned to a tree.
The youth called out, 'You got something to say?'
I bent my head low and went on my way.
But something stopped me, a sound, helpless and weak.
It got louder and turned into a shriek.
I stopped in my tracks, 'Who would help me?
What hope would I have were I pinned to a tree?'
I could now hear their taunts and jeers,
With words so foul that they burned my ears.
I turned on my heels and strode back to the tree.
Where the two boys stood, staring at me.
'It's wrong and disgraceful, what you have done here.
It's behaviour like this that spreads violence and fear.
Everyone's different; no two are the same,
To judge someone 'inferior' is cause for shame.
This isn't a game to share with a friend,
It's up to everyone to make racism end.'
The youths sulked off and I noted with glee,
That the boy was smiling, smiling, from under the tree.

Read by Patrick Lyster-Todd - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender + representative





Cambodian Genocide survivor story by:

Sokphal Din BEM

Wimbledon Synagogue Choir - directed by Sarit Aloni
Ani Ma'amin - Traditional Jewish melody, arr. by John Leavitt

Concluding prayers

**Rabbi Adrian Schell, Wimbledon District Synagogue
&
Reverend Nigel Stone, St Mark Church Mitcham**



Wiener Library – Life in the camps



Image from Waging Peace's collection collected by Anna Schmitt



If we don't save our history, it will perish

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