IN MEMORIAM – IRENE BLOOMFIELD 1918–2001

REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING: A REFLECTION ON JEWISH EXPERIENCE

Irene Bloomfield

There is a quotation from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (quoted by Michael Jacobs in *The Presenting Past*), which seemed rather apt: 'Time present and time past are both present in the future, and time future is contained in the past.' This quote contains some fundamental truth, which we might all be able to agree with. Because past, present and future are so closely linked, remembering and forgetting play a vital part in our lives.

There is another quotation from one Bahya ibn Paguda (from the Leo Baeck diary, always a source of wisdom), which also seems relevant: 'If not for our ability to forget, we would never be free of grief.' This is, no doubt, a sentiment which many people who were oppressed, maltreated, persecuted or violated may share. We protect ourselves from intolerable pain by forgetting, that is, burying the memories in some deep recess of our minds, from which they can only be retrieved when we are ready, have greater resources or are receiving help through counselling or psychotherapy.

However great the need to forget, repress or deny some experiences, without the facility to remember, we would barely be human. Memory is what connects us to our past history and experience. For the individual the retrieval of lost memories in therapy often helps in the process of integrating past, present and future. For a people or community collective remembering is aided through festivals and ritual. Unlike several previous topics, this is one I chose myself, partly, no doubt, because I am of an age at which the issue of remembering and forgetting, especially the latter, is a matter of increasing concern.

I was very struck by a description in the book *Scar Tissue*, by Michael Ignatieff, in which he describes a son's reaction to his mother's deterioration of memory due to a neurological condition of the brain. I quote: 'I suspected, that the breakdown in her memory was a symptom of a larger disruption of the ability to sustain a coherent image of herself. It was the junction between past and present that she was losing. She was suffering a disturbance of her soul, not just a loss of memory.'

From these reflections I went on to thinking about the part memory plays in our individual and communal lives. The two historical events which have affected the lives of the majority of Jewish people in our time have been the destruction of practically all Jewish communities in Germany and Eastern Europe, and the creation of Israel. The commemoration of these two very different events is of great significance for us, and I would like to show in the rest of this talk some of the effects which remembering and forgetting can have on us. So much of our identity – personal and collective – depends on our remembering. As Jews we place a great deal of emphasis on commemorating important events in our history: failures as well as successes, defeats as well as victories. These have largely been the cement which has kept our Jewish identity alive. The celebration of family occasions enhances the identity of families, the remembering of important events and experiences in therapy strengthens the identity of the individual.

We also use our festivals in this way. The one that is most obvious is, of course, *Pesach*. Jonathan Sacks, in his thoughts about *Pesach*, reminded us that it is because we were strangers in the land of Egypt and therefore know what it feels like, we must refrain from oppressing the stranger; and because we have also known injustice, slavery and murder, we must not do to others what they have done to us. This is the lesson of the *Hagadah*. Sacks went on to say: ‘We were born into exile, forged in slavery, made to suffer brutal oppression, and therefore we must not join the ranks of oppressors or murderers.’ Jonathan Sacks’s article was written just after the Hebron massacre, which he condemned totally, saying: ‘until you have understood that just because you have been victims and therefore you may not be oppressors, you have not understood Judaism at all, however religious you may think you are’. He reminded us that the drops of wine we spill during the *seder* at the mention of the plagues are symbols of the tears shed for the Egyptians who drowned in the Red Sea. The *midrash* says that when the angels began to sing a hymn of victory, God admonished them, saying: ‘My creatures are drowning, and you want to sing?’

It was that part of the lesson that Baruch Goldstein and his rabbi friend, for whom a million Arab lives were not worth a Jewish fingernail, seemed to have forgotten, which goes to show how selective our memory can be.

We know a lot about the selectivity of memory among all those Germans who knew nothing about the atrocities taking place a few yards from where they lived, and about the war criminals who cannot remember anything about what they did, but we have not looked so closely at our own selection of what we choose not to remember, and Jonathan Sacks’s admonition was therefore very timely.

Another aspect of the remembering at *Pesach* and during other festivals, is the ritual as well as the liturgy and the reliving of historical events as we do at

Pesach. This is also a way of maintaining a link with our past, our history, our values, and the events which shaped us as a people.

Frank Hellner wrote recently in 'Judaism Today' in the *JC*:

The wilderness experience was plagued by a series of rebellions. We read how at first our ancestors clamoured for meat to eat. Selective memory had erased the painful experience of Egyptian bondage. Now all they could remember were the idyllic flesh pots of the past: the fish, the melons and the leeks – all figments of their own fantasies. Yet despite their outcry was it really meat they now lacked? After all, it was only a year since they had left Egypt with much livestock, both flocks and herds (Exodus 12:38). Even thirty-nine years later when they approached the land of Canaan the tribes of Reuben and Gad still possessed cattle in great numbers (Numbers 32:1).

While our ancestors certainly had to endure great hardships and deprivations it does not seem possible that lack of meat would have been one of them. Yet it is on this they focussed their obsession. But meat was only symptomatic of other problems, not the cause. Once this craving was satisfied they directed their frustrations elsewhere... To confront the real issues is often painful and protracted. Thus we content ourselves with finding external scapegoats instead of facing internal problems.

One question which arises is whether we have to remain victims or become oppressors and abusers because we have been oppressed and abused, or is there another way? The Bible suggests that we have a free choice. As a psychotherapist I am not sure that we are entirely free to make such choices, but it is also true that not every person who has been abused or tortured becomes an abuser or torturer. Some become helpers and carers. It is remarkable how many Jewish people who were affected by the Holocaust, directly or indirectly, have become psychotherapists, counsellors, aid workers, defenders of human rights and protesters against injustice anywhere. Our festivals and especially *Pesach* are a way of reliving historical events almost like a kind of psychodrama, as if it were happening now. It is a powerful way of maintaining a link with our past, our history, our values and the events which shaped us as people. There are many parallels between the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, failing constantly to live up to God's commandments and rejecting Moses' leadership, and the experiences individuals have to go through when they undertake the journey into their own internal wilderness during psychotherapy.

Just as the Israelites tried to resist Moses and the suffering they had to endure during those painful years of the Exodus, so do most of us resist and defend ourselves against remembering and confronting what has seemed too intolerable. We may cut off from such experiences and the feelings which went with them, so that the memory seems lost. For many Holocaust survivors, that was the only way in which they could go on living, but there is always a price to pay for this

kind of forgetting. Such cutting off may result in emotional numbing and inaccessibility even to those who are closest to them, such as their own children.

Remembering is thus of fundamental importance for us, but it can also be misused or used destructively, making us think how virtuous, powerful, heroic and splendid we are compared to those whom we defeated in battle or those who do not agree with us. I wonder whether that is how many Israelis feel: not only the legitimate pride, of having defeated those who wanted to throw the Israelis into the sea, but also contempt for the defeated Palestinians and a feeling of superiority and triumphalism, very unlike God's admonition of the angels for singing when the Egyptians were drowning.

I now come to the controversial bit and hope you will bear with me. I wonder how good we are at remembering and commemorating those who risked their own lives during the Nazi years in order to save and protect Jews. In recent weeks the *JC* published accounts of some of the forgotten saviours. Let me give a few examples of some of these brave and heroic men and women.

There was de Souza Mendes, a Portuguese *chargé d'affaires* in France, who handed out more than 10,000 visas to Jews before being arrested. He died in disgrace and poverty thirty years ago.

John Henry Weidner created escape routes from Nazi-occupied Holland, Belgium and France into Switzerland. He was the son of a Seventh Day Adventist minister, and his underground network saved more than 800 Jews. With a 5,000,000 franc price on his head, he was captured three times by the Gestapo, tortured and interrogated by Klaus Barbie, the butcher of Lyons. Each time he escaped by jumping off trains, swimming across the Rhine under Nazi fire and diving through a third-floor prison window just before his execution.

There was also Gertrud Wijsmuller, a Dutch woman who dared to defy and confront Eichmann and not only got away with her own life in spite of having been arrested by the Gestapo, but also achieved the miracle of making Eichmann agree to let her take 500 Jewish children out of Vienna, thus organising the first *Kinder Transport*.

There was, of course, also Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews by issuing Swedish documents to them, only to fall into the hands of the Russians who imprisoned and presumably killed him. There was Oskar Schindler, who has now achieved posthumous fame through Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*.

Finally there were the 700 rescuers described by Samuel and Pearl Oliner in their book *The Altruistic Personality*. These are just some examples of the many more who have remained unknown and uncelebrated.

Yad Va Shem is, of course, doing an excellent job of reminding us of many 'Righteous Gentiles', but for those of us living outside Israel there is no special place or time to remind us of those who risked all and often died for us.

Destructive Remembering

We know only too well of the pernicious effects of a distorted, false kind of remembering, of people who are determined to hang on to lies and falsehoods in order to find a target for their poisonous hatred and vengefulness. As Jews we are still being accused of crucifying Jesus, even if it was 2,000 years ago, of murdering Christian children and of using their blood for some perverse ritual; and of conspiring to take over the world and all its banks. It seems that no accusation is too crazy to be believed by millions.

However, many Jews, too, have a considerable capacity to hang on to destructive memories, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, as individuals and as a people.

To illustrate: Naomi, a forty-two-year-old daughter of survivor parents talked of the panic she goes through every morning when she has to get her children off to school. It only occurred to her when she was telling us about this, that she had been in a state of terror herself every morning when she was getting ready for school, because it was her father's custom to shout: '*Raus, raus*', which means 'get out, get out', but is a much more violent expression and one which the SS guards shouted at the Jews in the cattle trains. Naomi's father also used the tone of voice which she imagined the guards might have used. Here we have a clear example of the way in which even the third generation – Naomi's children – can be affected.

A way in which we perpetuate memories of hate was shown in the programme 'Dispatches' on television, in which youngsters from Kiryat Arba travelling on a school bus were singing lustily: 'With these feet I stepped on my enemy, with these teeth I bit his skin, with these lips I sucked his blood. I have not avenged enough, and if not now, when?' It seems obscene, from where I am now, and I would have liked to say that I could never have entertained such feelings of contempt or hatred for anyone, but I have to confess that this is not so. I recall my own passionate hatred of everything German in the early years of the Nazi rise to power and for many years afterwards. There was also an absolute determination never to set foot into that place again. But that was a long time ago. Since then, I have visited Germany on several occasions, mostly for conferences and workshops, and recently by invitation of the mayor of Berlin, and I have made friends with some German people. However, I can still recall what it felt like to be fanatical in my hatred, and it seems therefore that I have not dealt all that well with the fanatic in myself, which is probably why I have such detestation now of everything that smacks of fanaticism or fundamentalism of any sort – political, religious or psychoanalytic.

Another instance of misplaced hanging on to hatred was seen in the hundreds of letters received by President Clinton after the Demjaniuk trial

came up with a 'not guilty' verdict, begging Clinton to intervene and to prevent his release.

Remembrance Day, too, can be used in various ways. The recent celebrations of D-Day during the Second World War were a very poignant reminder of the overcoming of the threat to the whole of Europe, of sacrifices and bravery as well as of losses and tragedies. It was not a glorification of war in the way the Falklands victory seemed to be.

Such commemorations may thus be used in order that we can learn something for ourselves and for society at large. Charles Dickens in *David Copperfield* expounds: 'It is in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence on the present' (quote from *Presenting the Past* by Michael Jacobs).

However, merely recalling events is not enough. The question arises what we do with these memories and how we use them. They can be used destructively, leading to stunted lives, or constructively and positively in order to learn from them and in order to modify behaviour and attitudes which have been harmful to ourselves and others in the past.

Another quote from Dr Frank Hellner in a recent piece in the JC stated: 'Lot's wife disregarded God's warning and could not resist the temptation of looking back at Sodom. This turned her into a pillar of salt. She wanted to embalm the past and not let it go. So sadly there she remains, preserved and petrified in the past.'

'As a people', Hellner says,

we have long memories and owe to a large extent what we are to what has gone before. We have a moral duty to look back and remember, but there is also a danger on a personal and communal level in lingering too long on the tragedies of the past, in dwelling on the ruins of history rather than building on the foundations of the present. Looking back too much can stunt our potential for growth and healing. For too many Jews, Jewish identity is galvanised only by memories of a tragic past and quoting Mordecai Kaplan: 'If Judaism is reduced merely to an awareness of anti-Semitism, it ceases to be a civilisation and becomes a complex.'

Going back to our communal nonexpression of thanks to those who helped us during our greatest peril – it is, I think, relevant that in therapy the capacity for gratitude is often a very important stage of development of the hurt and damaged individual, and it rarely happens as long as people are overwhelmed and almost totally taken up by their own grief, rage, distress, pain or bitterness. I wonder therefore what stage in our development, as a people, we have reached. Maybe we are still in a state of shock and self-absorption? It is also possible to misuse remembrance in order to punish or persecute not just those who have harmed us, but even their children and grandchildren. We can hold on to our hatred of our enemies and may never let go, because there is some-

thing quite powerful in such hatred; but we forget that it is also destructive and harmful to ourselves and can act like a poison. We see evidence for this in the relationship between Britain and Ireland, Turks and Greeks in Cyprus, Serbs and Croats in the former Yugoslavia and in many other parts of the world. It becomes a split between good and evil, friends and foes, Blacks and Whites, Jew and Gentile, with all the projections of both extremes on to the other instead of any attempt at confrontation of the enemy within – the extremes being the idealisation of our side and the demonisation of the other.

I am reminded here of Norman, a patient whose entire adult life was spent in punishing and getting revenge on his father, whom he perceived as having let him down. I saw Norman when he was forty years old. He had been an able student of English Literature and wrote a thesis which attracted some attention. During his last year at Oxford he fell in love with a fellow student and became engaged to her. He wanted this relationship desperately, but was terrified of the intimacy and commitment and as a result suffered a minor breakdown. He felt that his father did not know how to deal with him in his distress and experienced him as being critical. Norman never forgave his father for letting him down at this crucial time. He opted out of university, never obtained any kind of work which would have used his potential, and for the ten years before he came to see me, had not worked at all, becoming financially almost totally dependent on his father. That was his revenge. He continued to blame his father for his sad life and could never let go of seeing him as the cause of all his bad fortune and himself as victim.

When I pointed out, that *he* had actually become the persecutor, making his father into the victim, he stopped his therapy. (I was Norman's sixth or seventh unsuccessful therapist.) There was of course, rather more to this story than I could give here, but I am using it as an illustration of the destructive use of remembering, unlike the story of another patient, named Leonard (names and some details have been changed). Leonard was around thirty when I first saw him. He was a very severely abused child – abused sexually, violently, sadistically and ritualistically from the age of five. He had buried the memories of this abuse deep within himself and only knew that he lived in a state of almost permanent and abject terror, which made his life into a continuous nightmare. For years he had no idea what the fear was about, and as soon as he got anywhere near it, he shut down or cut off, but a few months before I saw him, he began to have flashbacks, which brought back some memories of being almost suffocated, whipped, spat and peed upon, sodomised, cut and humiliated very brutally, sometimes just by one person, sometimes by a whole group of people.

He is now convinced that he has to face the memories, that he can no longer deny or bury them, or they will destroy his life. Having begun to share his horrendous experiences, the terror has diminished, and he feels stronger. Leonard

has not become an abuser as so many abused children do. Instead he has become a carer, looking after sick children. Whatever the motives for this choice of occupation, he has used his terrible experience as the Bible and Haggadah ask us to do, and the more he remembers of his own past the more determined he is to protect the children in his care and to give them the best care he can.

I have talked a lot more about remembering than about forgetting. Our ability to deny, repress, bury things which are too painful or distressing in some deep layer of our unconscious is a protective mechanism which can be essential for our survival, and we have seen this not only in patients coming for therapy, but also among Holocaust survivors. Sometimes it is the only way to carry on living, but in order to lead a full life it is necessary to integrate the split-off parts of ourselves – and to re-own them.

I would now like to give some illustrations of the way in which people have been able to use even the horrific experiences of the camps positively. John Heimler is one of them. He was in some of the same camps as Elie Wiesel, and in his chapter of the book *Soul Searching* he writes:

Elie felt, he had a mission to put the Holocaust once and for all at the centre of his life, whilst I felt, that I ought to move on towards the future and mankind. I always felt that our Jewish tragedy is not limited to us, but that it was and still is a catastrophe for mankind. If those of us who survived the camps limit ourselves to grieving only over our tragedy, harbouring continuous depression and anger, then we will not do justice to the magnitude of the tragedy and will fail to turn it into a healing experience. That the past must be recorded, taught, spoken about, never forgotten, goes without saying. We have survived 2000 years of persecution, not simply because we remembered the rise and fall of our persecutors, but because subsequently we tried to make sense of what happened to us and tried to turn the negative into something positive.

John Heimler, Bruno Bettelheim, Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel were all survivors of concentration camps who each in their own way turned their horrendous experiences into lessons for themselves and for mankind generally. Each of them went through a phase of despair, hate and rage, but did not get stuck in it.

John Heimler describes an encounter with a young German on a long train journey in which he and the German had to share a sleeper. He got on very well with this young man until he saw his passport and realised he was German, not Swiss as John had assumed. From that moment onwards he froze and could only feel and express hostility. The young man guessed at the reason for John's sudden silence. He asked: 'Did they hurt you a lot?' John nodded. The German said: 'I can see it is even difficult for you to talk to me now, but this insanity must stop somewhere.' John said: 'I know you are not responsible, but

in you I see reflected everything that has happened to me, and yet I believe, that we are both victims of some terrible mistake.' John realised then that if he did not want to become a persecutor himself, he would have to overcome this hate so that he could do things in the present and create something new for the future. He did, in fact, create a new community where none existed before and also became a very special sort of counsellor/psychotherapist, working with the most disadvantaged people in the wider community: the unemployed, the homeless, and people with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia – all those that no one else felt able to work with at that time. In this way he found, gradually, that his hatred vanished. 'Today', he wrote, 'my memories are very much alive, but my hate has gone.'

Victor Frankl, another survivor of some of the smaller camps, where most of the exterminations took place, describes in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* how even people who had come to the end of the line, having decided that the only way out for them was to commit suicide, could be persuaded to change their minds by being reminded that, whilst they might feel that there was nothing more they could expect from life, there were still things expected of them. For one it was the child waiting for him in a foreign land, for another the book he had begun and which only he could complete.

Another group who turned horrific experiences into positive living is described very beautifully in the recently published book, *The Hidden Children*, by Jane Marks, who has personal accounts of over twenty children who had to live in hiding during the war. Most of their stories are moving beyond words and incredible. They hid in sewers, cupboards, attics, barns, woods and sometimes in convents. Some of them were no more than five years old, but they had to become adults overnight. In 1991 1,600 met together in New York City and spent three days talking with each other and sharing their extraordinary stories of survival. Many, according to Nicole David, who was one of them, were still 'emotionally in hiding'. There were many questions, such as: was it really safe even now to reveal their Jewish identity to the world, or would it be helpful to remember and tell their stories?

Henryk writes: 'Many of us went on to live normal lives, and having lost years of schooling nevertheless went on to colleges and entered professions such as doctors, lawyers, therapists, social workers, nurses. Others became teachers, writers and artists.'

Leon describes how the extraordinary ability to size up a situation instantly, which he had to develop as an eight-year-old during his years in hiding, served him well as an adult when he walked into his home carrying the payroll from his factory. 'There was a big guy ready to hit me with a lead pipe. Bang, he brought the pipe down on my head, but I moved so fast, the blow was cushioned. I fought him and chased him down the street. I ended up with bruises,

but thanks to my very fast reaction, I was once again the clever, little boy, out-smarting the bully who wanted me dead.'

Nicole David writes:

Some 1,600 of us from around the world together broke the silence about how we survived Hitler's killing machine. Some were still afraid to admit that they are Jews because of real or feared anti-Semitism. Some have only recently discovered their true identities. Those who survived depended on the goodness of others who risked ostracism and their lives.

We came to realise the importance of other people hearing our stories. The barrier was broken at last. No longer would we remain silent and ashamed to speak of our past. Though the war had been over for nearly fifty years, we had remained in hiding... but now we could face the dawn of a new day. It was a week-end of miracles and healing.

Nicole ends her story with these words: 'The inspiring accounts of the hidden children preserve for history the courage and resource of the hidden as well as of those who rescued them. They symbolise for me the triumph of good over evil.'

They also emphasise very poignantly why forgetting and remembering are so very important in our lives.

I would like to end as I began, with a quotation from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*: 'Time present and time past are both present in the future, and time future is contained in the past.'

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TRIBUTES AND MEMOIRS

IRENE'S WORK IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

*Gaby Glassman**

Irene was my friend and colleague over the last twenty years.

In this tribute to her, I will be focusing on her work in the Jewish community. She was active both in London and in Prague, and notably with survivors of the Holocaust and refugees from Nazi persecution and their descendants.

Irene's life was a continuing demonstration of the qualities of courage, determination and independence of thought. Her early years illustrate this well – particularly when, at the age of fourteen, she refused to give the *Heil Hitler* salute at her Berlin school and consequently was expelled. Around the same time she insisted on entering a Jewish shop in spite of the *Sturmtrooper* on the

* Gaby Glassman was born in Holland as the daughter of Holocaust survivors. She is a registered psychologist and a BACP registered counsellor. In her private, North London practice she sees clients individually and, since 1989, has led second-generation groups.

door telling her it was forbidden. He could not understand how the striking, flame-haired, Aryan-looking teenager could be a Jew, let alone wish to identify with Jews.

Irene continued her education in Sweden until, at the age of eighteen, she was able to come to England on a domestic permit, but she spent the war years in the Middle East. The experiences of these years gave her a lifelong concern for people's suffering. On her return to Britain she worked during the day and studied psychology in her spare time, later becoming a psychotherapist and group analyst.

Irene devoted much of her professional life to University College Hospital in London, working as a psychologist for the National Health Service. She found new challenges in areas that had hitherto been untouched and also, for many years, taught counselling to rabbinic students of the Leo Baeck College. She was delighted that her pioneering approaches were recognised through the award of a Fellowship by the college.

Together with several rabbis, she established a Jewish counselling service – the Raphael Centre. Its success was due to her vision that recognised that for clients to have their issues accepted and understood it was vital for them to be seen by a Jewish counsellor or psychotherapist. She recruited highly experienced colleagues as therapists and they donated a few hours a week to work with Jewish clients on a voluntary basis.

Under the auspices of the Leo Baeck College and the Raphael Centre, Irene helped to organise an annual lecture series on topics relating to the interface between Judaism and psychotherapy. She spoke often at these events and wrote about the topics as a frequent contributor to *European Judaism*.

Irene was ahead of her profession. Mental health professionals in the United Kingdom, who worked with Holocaust survivors and the second generation, had worked in isolation, not recognising this background as one which required a special approach. In 1983, Irene and I attended a talk by Professor Dr Shamai Davidson, a psychiatrist from Israel, who spoke about his work in this area. It convinced Irene that there was another and more productive way to help these clients. Her willingness to pass on her skills and vision ensured that her insights became available not just among the circle of professional associates in the Raphael Centre, but also more widely.

In 1987, as the Clinical Director of the Raphael Centre, Irene was invited to the then fairly recently established group of Children of Jewish Refugees, the ACJR. Her description of the issues she had encountered in her work resonated with these members of the second generation. They began to realise that they were not the only ones struggling with such problems and that the issues had not arisen because of something they had done. In Britain at that time, talking about the experiences of growing up in the shadow of the *Shoah*

was largely avoided and any traumatic effects on the second generation resulting from their parents' experiences generally were denied. Not long after her talk, Irene facilitated two discussion groups for ACJR members interested in exploring these issues further.

Although Irene and I were a generation apart, there was something that bound us together. Our first joint clinical project was called *Mi Dor l'Dor*, the Hebrew for 'from Generation to Generation'. Each of us had gained experience conducting second-generation groups and Irene suggested we run joint groups for the two generations. We worked on the problem she had identified – that of communication between the generation of Holocaust survivors and those born after – and developed the concept of intergenerational groups, with the two of us as the group leaders, ourselves representing the two generations. Each group contained parents and children who were not related to each other.

In the *Mi Dor l'Dor* groups, parents would talk openly to other people's children about what they had found so hard to talk about to their own. It was a revelation for many of the first-generation parents to learn that other people's children were interested in hearing about their Holocaust experiences. Their own children had been too afraid to ask questions, apparently, as it emerged, for fear of upsetting their parents. Survivors did what they thought was best, but this was not necessarily what children were looking for then or appreciated later. Parents were surprised to find that children born after the Holocaust believed that they too had suffered, albeit differently. We conducted four intergenerational groups over a period of four years and helped to open up the communication between the generations in the groups. In many cases, that stimulated and nurtured communication within families. We heard heartwarming stories of survivors' last years being enriched through their newly found ability to relate. Some fulfilled a deeply held wish to revisit their place of birth and to show their children and grandchildren what had been meaningful and formative for them.

Irene's first visit to Prague took place in 1993, when she, together with two colleagues from the Group Analytic Society in London, led a training weekend for Czech group therapists. When, two years later, Helena Klímová asked Irene if she would be willing to work on a project 'Families after Holocaust' under the auspices of the Tolerance Foundation, it was a challenge that resonated with Irene's life and interest. I was honoured and delighted to accept Irene's invitation to help her.

Her involvement with the Tolerance Foundation, now called the Tolerance and the Civil Society in Prague, was an encapsulation of the democratic values she stood for: to facilitate open discussion and exchange of what previously had been taboo and to encourage *free* choice and *personal* responsibility. The ability to express one's beliefs, particularly one's Jewishness openly,

without risking the wrath of authority (Nazi, Communist or any other) was for Irene a *sine qua non*.

She was able to bring to the group the realisation that it was permissible to discuss experiences under totalitarian regimes and the impact these had on people's Jewish identity. At this time it was so soon after the political scene had changed that some group members were fearful that previous conditions might be reimposed, as they had on earlier occasions. Nonetheless, Irene created a safe environment that fostered acceptance of the fact that these experiences were formative influences that could be broached. This whole process was all the more remarkable since, during Irene's own analysis – and also that of her contemporaries – these all-embracing facets of their lives had been left unexplored, although they were the predominant influence which drove both their professional interests and their concern for the well-being of others.

Because of its nonauthoritarian nature, Irene saw the group analytic approach as a valuable tool for the work with survivors of trauma and persecution. She was delighted to witness the growth, in every sense of the word and in such a relatively short time, of the groups. It also gave her a great deal of satisfaction to see for herself the continuation of Jewish life in Prague, the proof that neither the Nazis nor the Communists had 'won'.

Irene had a full life in the service of helping others. She will be remembered most as a kind, understanding and approving mother figure. Through her sensitivity to people's needs and her exceptional ability to listen, she made it possible for many to articulate untold suffering in a way that they could comprehend. She enabled her clients – and her friends – to gain a deeper awareness of their capabilities and motivation. Her writings, including those that have yet to be released, will provide an enduring memorial. But her living legacy will be the regard and deep appreciation of her clients, her students, her colleagues and her friends.

OUR IRENE

*Helena Klímová**

There will be more people indeed, more competent than myself, to recall Irene Bloomfield's therapeutic, literary and scientific merits. Let me mention, however, how Irene is remembered by her group in Prague.

The first time I met Irene it was in the autumn of 1993. At that time Irene, together with Sheila Thompson and Kevin Power, came to Prague, on behalf of the Group Analytic Society, to facilitate the first group analytic workshop. For us, the Czech psychotherapists, it was a great event. From that time our interest in group analysis grew and became organised. Finally, in the spring of 2001, the first Czech group analysts were certificated, again with the assistance of Irene Bloomfield. Thus, the birth and growth of the Czech group analytic movement was framed by Irene's first and her last visit to Prague.

However, there were many more visits in the meantime...

In 1993 we not only admired Irene's group-analytic skills, but some of us enjoyed, too, her closeness to our concerns: she, too, was interested in human rights, and she, too, had a Jewish background.

At that time we were starting (under the umbrella of the nongovernmental organisation Tolerance) the psychotherapeutic project which we named 'Families after Holocaust' and we invited Irene to take part. To our joy she not only accepted but the next time even brought with her her long-term colleague Gaby Glassman.

So, from 1995 Irene and Gaby would come once or twice a year, to facilitate our workshops, to give lectures to a larger audience and, in general, to support, refresh and inspire our souls.

However, who were the 'we' whom Irene used to meet?

We were the group of therapists who in their personal or family anamnesis were carrying the imprinting of the Holocaust. This experience, in many of us, for decades stayed suppressed and unspoken. Even for us, despite our numerous previous professional trainings, the influence of the two totalitarian regimes in succession and the habit of inner censorship were difficult to overcome.

It was under Irene's guidance that step by step the unspoken has become revealed and shared in the group. The previously forbidden emotions became

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liberated and our inner freedom grew. Thus we became still more able, too, to give, especially to our clients of the project 'Families after Holocaust'.

Irene for us represented both the art of free dialogue and the generation of Jews who in our country practically no longer existed. We had grown up without aunts and grandmothers and missed them so much. There were no large families and usually there was no intimate dialogue. The family items, the personal items, the intimate matters, stayed unspoken about. Many of us longed to meet Jews one generation older in order to meet the living culture, to feel the roots, to find and to love the nonexistent family members.

Irene started to be experienced by us as our spiritual mother. This cannot be explained further.

We were planning to celebrate our tenth workshop in the autumn of 2001 and had been working together already for seven years. However, the sad news arrived. Then at our regular monthly meeting we gathered as a group. Spontaneously we started to remember. We realised how fond we were of Irene. Every person associated in his/her own way.

Věra was touched by Irene's gentle, almost helpless appearance: 'Like a tiny bird, like a little sparrow...' (in Czech these are words of love)... 'yet, at the same time, she was so strong'.

'What was the source of her strength?' demanded Vladimír. 'She seemed to be lacking any physical needs, and yet, we could rely both on her physical presence and her professional wisdom. Wisdom – this is the right word!'

Lucy expressed the wish to be the same sort of therapist as Irene was, the therapist who radiated trust and love. With Irene she felt safe and secure: 'I used to allow myself even to regress to my childish feelings and habits – so, whose "bad girl" can I be now?'

Jana, Renée and Martin repeatedly expressed their amazement, which was caused by Irene's modest, reserved countenance and the inner warmth, strength and forthcoming kindness she radiated.

'I used to come to get support from Irene', said Dana, 'I am very cautious about my time schedule, but to meet Irene was always my priority.'

For seven years Irene was a meaningful part of our lives and she contributed to our personal transformation and growth. Věra, Martin and Hana decided to travel to the places where their families originated and these pilgrimages were both painful and nourishing. We were regaining our ability to face our spiritual heritage.

'In the previous times I used to live in hiding all the time', said Hana, 'I was hiding and I was mourning – probably like my mother? But now, I feel my life has a new meaning which is – survival!'

I am sure Hana named the transformation which is now experienced by many of us. In our survival – Irene is surviving with us.

THE WORLD OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING

*Louis Marteau**

In this section I would like to present the enormous influence Irene brought to the Christian world of counselling and psychotherapy. In the 1960s there was grave suspicion of any emphasis on the unconscious, no doubt as a reaction to Freud's apparent emphasis on sex and aggression, as well as his seeming condemnation of all religious belief as a use of mythology to escape reality. It may also have been seen as an attack on the fundamentals of morality and the whole concept of sin. Those Christians who were prepared to enter this arena were liable to be seen as somewhat threatening to the basic Christian moral ethics.

I had been drawn into the field from my experience in mental hospital chaplaincy and it was for this reason that I found myself attending an international conference on mental health in 1968. Here, in my clerical garb, I found myself standing in a queue at the canteen beside a little lady who began to ask me who I was and what I was doing there. We took our meal and carried on the discussion. This was the beginning of a thirty-year relationship with Irene and her support in so much of the birth of analytical thought and work in the Christian field.

In 1971 I founded the Dympna Centre, which was dedicated to work with 'religious' folk who were only able to accept an analytical examination of their lives within the safe setting of a religious foundation. Irene offered to give her time freely to supervise the whole task. I gradually gathered about thirty counsellors of differing Christian religious denominations, to which were added three rabbis. Irene then helped me both with the training and with the supervision. If I was the 'Father' of the Centre, Irene was truly the 'Mother'.

Other Christian centres also began to appear, mostly without such an obviously religious background as the Dympna Centre. But it began to be seen that we now needed to have a national organisation to oversee the work and encourage the religious bodies to accept the work. Thus we brought into being the Association of Pastoral Care and Counselling (APCC). Once again Irene became the 'Mother' of this organisation. Perhaps the very fact that she was Jewish, and thus not a member of any of the Christian denominations, enabled her to bring to it a realistic sense of objectivity and thus retain its focus on the work at hand – the understanding and pastoral care of the troubled individual.

Eventually the Association joined up with the British Association for Counselling. However, at the same time APCC continued as a distinct section. It was this section that began to organise international conferences. These took place in

* Reverend Louis Marteau is the founder of the Dympna Centre.

Switzerland, Holland, Germany, and then moved behind the Iron Curtain into East Germany and Poland. Much of the organisation and international contacts were made through Irene. I still retain the vivid memory of our visit to the concentration camp at Majdanek, outside Lublin in Poland. The lines of wooden huts were still there but a massive stone gateway had been built at the entrance. We arrived there and stood at this entrance and Irene and Rabbi Danny Smith moved through the gateway and began walking down the lane between the huts. The Christians stood transfixed for a few moments as if only Irene and Danny had the right to enter. However, we then began to follow them. Eventually we gathered together at the furnaces and Danny began to recite *Kaddish*.

Here I need to clarify the qualities that Irene brought to the Centre. Her painful personal experience in her early life in Germany and Israel had, I feel, left her with a deep dilemma with regard to any form of religious or political faith. She had experienced the manner in which such beliefs could bring the direst of political and personal damage to individuals and to society. At the same time she was also convinced that without faith life had little meaning. I always felt that she was searching for that faith and yet unable to give herself specifically to any full personal commitment.

Because of this she was able to accept the specific faith of any individual as a given, and important, element of that individual's life without judgement and work with the person within that context in an accepting yet objective manner. Not only was she able to do this herself, but the very manner of her supervision helped the group to work within such an objectivity, which was essential in such a group as the Dympna Centre.

In her supervision she was exacting in a professional manner, but the iron fist was in a very warm and padded glove. There was never a sense of 'put down' but rather an invitation to further exploration. Working with me in joint supervision we were able to disagree, in the sense that we sometimes found differing emphases in the way in which we saw the problem or in which we might consider working with the client. These differences were accepted by both of us within a very easy relationship and with the realisation that we were often working with less than certainty. It was also a help to the group's ability to see that we were dealing with an art form as well as a science. There were so many occasions in which the personality of the counsellor was also of importance to the manner in which the client might be helped. There were times when they might have to rely on their own initiative; at this time she would have no hesitation in confronting me if she felt strongly on the matter, and I would be able to accept it.

I will always be convinced that the Dympna Centre could never have achieved the status it gained if it had not been for Irene. The group did not merely include a variety of Christian and Jewish religious individuals but it

was also the case that many had come from different schools of psychology and analytic training. Yet they bonded and gained from the difference.

I feel that the atmosphere of the group is best seen in our staff party at Christmas. Rabbi Smith's wife was on the piano, an Irish Franciscan was playing the fiddle, a Scots Jesuit was leading the singing, when someone asked me whether we should not have a Christmas carol. I consulted another rabbi and his reply was simple – 'My *Yiddishe* Mamma'!

IRENE

*Lionel Blue**

A friendship was breaking up and a black hole had opened up before me. I must have looked it too because at the conference a woman told me to see her at the therapy department of a London hospital. Which I did, being desperate.

I warned her that I was bitter and angry. 'We're alone in the building,' she said calmly. 'But I'm not frightened of you. And you're only frightened of people doing to you what you want to do to them' – which was true. After that I saw her regularly for twenty-five years as a therapist and friend until she died a few weeks ago suddenly whilst working. Was she religious? Well, it depends what you mean by religion. If religion is honesty, integrity and compassion, she was. If religion is rituals, revelations and hierarchies, she wasn't.

I stayed with her because if the kingdom or the image of God is inside you, then trying to know God without knowing yourself turns you into a fanatic worshipping your own hang-ups.

I also caught courage from her. At Paris I jumped by chance into a carriage full of Arab guest-workers, as Jewish and Moslem guns were blazing in the Middle East. When I told them I was a rabbi they passed me a gun-shaped sandwich of Arab bread – 'Very kosher,' they said to me kindly. Thanks to God and Irene my paranoia had passed its sell-by date.

At her funeral someone read this story from her childhood in Nazi Berlin. Aryan Germans were one day warned off Jewish shops but Irene insisted a young Nazi let her enter. 'I'm Jewish, not Aryan', she said, 'so I'm allowed.' He couldn't believe her because she was slim, fair-haired and freckled. 'Poor young man', she wrote, 'he didn't know Jews, only the Nazi stereotypes of them.' She didn't hate him...

I learnt from Irene that badness covers madness and to avoid stereotyping other classes, countries and genders.

As a child I thought we British never stereotyped anybody. We didn't have to because we had won the war, for a long time single-handed. We were always courteous, kind to animals and well mannered though much put upon. Working on the Continent I got a shock. To many French we were a perfidious lot who stole other people's empires and wanted to keep Europe apart so that we could divide and rule. We were hypocritical about sex, money and ambition.

* Rabbi Lionel Blue, 'Thought for the Day', 3 September 2001.

To many friendly Dutch we are dishonest to others and ourselves about sexual diversity and painless dying. Our nice manners were camouflage for our suppressed aggression which emerged at football.

Stereotypes are dangerous – just bad substitutes for thinking. Here is an incident from Irene's Berlin. A Jew reads gloomily a Jewish news-sheet about new restrictions and arrests and any consulate which might still give visas. He then sees a friend reading *De Stuermer*, the Nazi anti-Semitic newspaper. 'How can you read such dreadful lies?', he whispers. 'O', said the other. 'The news makes me so sad I could cry but here I read that we Jews run the world, control the Bank of England and even Roosevelt is just a Jew called Rosenberg and I feel so much better.'

IRENE BLOOMFELD

*David Freund**

During the summer, we were greatly saddened to learn of the death of Irene. I do not think any of us who attended Irene's talk will forget that sunny afternoon, some fourteen years ago, in Jackie Sheridan's flat in Swiss Cottage. She spoke about the characteristics, both historical and personal, general and particular, of our post-*Shoah* generation. In a way, for most of us, she described ourselves to ourselves for the first time.

Her gently-spoken thoughts with her soft German accent, made all the more telling by her quiet delivery, came as an immense wave of revelation. Today, we tend to forget how these ideas broke like a bombshell in an environment of almost deafening denial and avoidance. Irene initiated two pioneering discussion groups, drawn from our members, in which we explored the qualities we held hidden then and hold more openly today. The programmes were to become landmarks for us all – dramatic, cathartic, insightful and beneficial in so many ways. The ramifications were immense and profound. I recall one of our members unexpectedly and sadly suffered a fatal heart attack while commuting to work during an ambulance strike. Though not directly related to the deep impact of these discussions, it does convey something of how very difficult the path of discovery was for us all in a context of virtual silence in relation to the disaster which had reigned on European Jewry.

Irene was for many years Clinical Director of the Raphael Centre, a network of therapists who bring special skills to counselling the needs of the Jewish community, particularly in relation to our recent history. This is how we knew her best.

At her eightieth birthday it was revealed what a varied and active life Irene had pursued both professionally and personally: from working in the Health Service for many years, developing interreligious dialogue, lecturing at the Leo Baeck College, being part of the British Army in Palestine, to mountain climbing in Scandinavia and the Himalayas, to walking in London and seeking out unusual restaurants. Her friends who attended her celebration were drawn from many walks of life.

Now, at this time the vast subject of the Holocaust has become mainstream and has virtually usurped the public and private spheres of Jewish cultural life in one form or another. Associated with this has grown a tendency to profes-

* Obituary in the *Newsletter of the ACJR* (Association of Children of Jewish Refugees), November 2001, Issue No. 181.

sional careerism and opportunism, which has added a quality of blandness to the work produced. By contrast, Irene was always deeply dedicated in a modest, unselfish and generous way, which gave her an authenticity with which to approach the immense subject of the Holocaust and a personal tenacity in dealing with it.

We held our discussion groups in her flat in Maida Vale, with its interior composed of carefully selected and placed furnishings and paintings. Her home became a place of sanctuary, of peace and tranquillity, which we all appreciated. Her distinctly continental teas belied her Charlottenburg, Berlin, upbringing and background.

There is not the space to cover all that Irene has meant to our organisation in life and in her contributions. We can say that she was an anchor, a platform, a person of great integrity, and almost an archetypal figure who assisted us in gaining our identity and our understanding of it.

She will always be missed, and her legacy will endure as friend and guide. We thank her for this gift.

A TRIBUTE

*Danny Smith**

Irene was my teacher and friend and I miss her. She was also a friend and a teacher to many people in a huge variety of settings. Among her appointments she was: Principal Psychotherapist at University College Hospital, Trainer at the Dymrna Centre, Director of the Raphael Centre, Lecturer at Leo Baeck College, Supervisor at the Westminster Pastoral Foundation, Fellow of the British Association for Counselling, and President of the Association of Pastoral Care and Counselling.

Irene was a brave pioneer who journeyed into the no man's land between various cultures and disciplines. She became a bridge between many seemingly opposed or separated groups. She led me into some fascinating and unexpected encounters.

Irene was not religious in any institutional sense, but she had faith in life. She did not have faith in religion but she had faith in the redemption of the human soul. She believed that human beings could be saved, and that the human condition could be improved. She helped people become deeper, kinder and wiser.

I first met Irene thirty years ago when she and Dr Wendy Greengross set up a course at the Leo Baeck College to train rabbis in pastoral care and counselling. It was pioneer work in those days. In fact all of Irene's life has been pioneer work, and she was the pathfinder for many new ventures.

I asked her advice about where to train as a counsellor. I was surprised when she recommended the Dymrna Centre because it was a Catholic centre. In fact the Dymrna Centre provided excellent training for people of various religious backgrounds. The founder and director was another pioneer and close friend of Irene, Father Louis Marteau. The centre had a Catholic father, but it also had a Jewish mother. Irene and Louis worked wonderfully well together, and did not hesitate to disagree with each other in public, although it was always with sincere fondness and respect. They showed the trainees that there were at least two valid ways of being good counsellors, and that every one of us could develop our own way as long as we were true to ourselves and to the patients.

I heard Irene deliver many lectures, including one on 'religious stereotypes', which I think was delivered in Poland at an international interfaith

* Rabbi Daniel Smith is the Senior Rabbi at Edgware & District Reform Synagogue.

meeting between clergy and psychologists the day before we visited Maidanek concentration camp. She recalled an incident when she was a young girl in Germany, and her words tell us something of her of her character and motivation:

Many Germans who lived through the Nazi period had never consciously met a Jew. Their image of Jews was based on the propaganda with which the population was brainwashed at the time. As a child growing up in Nazi Germany I remember some strange incidents in this connection. There was a day when Jewish shops were boycotted. I decided I would have my own small demonstration. I tried to visit as many Jewish shops as I could. The Nazi guard outside a well known Jewish store stopped me and said: 'You mustn't go in there, it is a Jewish store.' When I said: 'That is just why I am going in since I am a Jew', the SS man looked thoroughly confused and said: 'But you can't be.' I did not conform to his stereotype of the pictures he had seen in his papers. My hair was more red then, and I had even more freckles than I have now.

Irene was physically and intellectually brave and courageous. In her youth she went as a pioneer to Israel, and helped clear swamps despite the malaria which she contracted. Incidentally, during that time, Irene was temporarily jailed in Israel by the British authorities after another 'small demonstration' of her own. Irene remained connected to Israel, although she became very critical in recent years, and particularly critical of the mistreatment of Arabs and the inequitable treatment of nonreligious Jews. Irene was always fiercely opposed to injustice regardless of its source, and had a keen sensitivity for victims of stereotyping, and she was ready to support the scapegoats.

During the Second World War Irene became a volunteer nurse, which led to further training that enabled her to become an effective therapist. In the decades that followed she gained recognition as an outstanding therapist and trainer.

We decided it was time to set up a Jewish Counselling Centre modelled on the Dymyna Centre. Irene suggested that I become the chairman of this endeavour, and I agreed on the condition that she took the role of Clinical Director. She was the key person in setting up the Raphael Centre and maintained it for many years, largely running it from her home. The counsellors and rabbis would meet there for supervision and for very real guidance and support.

I keep calling Irene a pioneer. She would be surprised to know that I also thought of her as a prophet. Traditionally the role of the prophet is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Irene believed that people could learn, change and grow, so it was appropriate for them to be given warning, direction, guidance and counselling.

Irene also gave incredible comfort, support, healing and confidence that made people feel that they could be loveable and effective. The word 'empowerment' has become a cliché in counselling circles, but it well describes Irene's

gift to others. She helped many rabbis and other clergy in their personal and professional lives. She supported nuns and priests, pastors and bishops, as well as doctors and medical students, and others who suffer from unrealistic stereotypes and projections.

When the first rabbis' support group was set up in Britain, it was natural for Irene to be the facilitator. People often project aspects of idealised parents upon the rabbi, doctor, teacher or other authority figure. Equally people may demonise these authority figures. Irene knew how often rabbis themselves unconsciously accept these projections and feel unworthy or bad. It is so easy for a rabbi to feel inauthentic and inadequate compared to a fantasy 'real' rabbi who is all-knowing and perfect. Irene helped prick these unrealistic fantasies, while at the same time helping us value the reality of our life and work. She helped us see that we could provide an honest, good-quality service relevant to a world that was hungry for religion to be presented in a truthful and humble way. The fantasy rabbi might be on regular intimate terms with God and can therefore speak with total conviction knowing the absolute truth, but we are not like that and most of our congregants would not be helped by a rabbi like that.

Irene managed to let the rabbis be human and taught us that we were not doing anyone any favours by trying to be superhuman. She helped many professionals do their work better, as they came to understand that human weakness and vulnerability are not signs of failure but the very tools that allow for success.

Irene continued to be involved in pioneer projects after her official retirement. She worked with groups of second-generation Holocaust survivors in Britain. After the collapse of communism in Czechoslovakia she regularly travelled to Prague to work with brave psychotherapists who provided healing in that damaged society. Wherever the pain was thickest and the work most difficult, that is where you could see this small, intrepid woman of courage. She was a beacon of light and hope in a wounded and sometimes ugly world.

Irene could also have fun, and she enjoyed a little danger. Her holiday activities included trekking, horse riding, sea diving, swimming and snorkelling. In very recent years she became frail and some of her physical courage deserted her. She became less confident in her travels, but she was truly blessed with some very good friends who accompanied her and helped her continue her work and leisure activities.

Irene had depth, honesty, gentleness, firmness, humour and an abundance of understanding and compassion. She shared these gifts with all kinds of people. The memory of this righteous woman is a continuing blessing to all her students, patients and friends.