

Chapter 2 - Antisemitism, the Holocaust and Home

Workshop- Personal and National Home

Part 1: Processing the Video

1. Each participant will write down:
 - One thing in the video with which they agreed and identified.
 - One thing with which they did not agree.
2. Share responses in a circle.

Part 2:

1. Ask each participant to write down what the concept of “home” means to them. Then divide into pairs and share your responses.
2. Write the following question on the whiteboard: “What makes a place feel like home?” Discuss the question together and list the answers on the board, for example: security, a sense of belonging, comfort, warmth, familiarity and so on.

Part 3:

We will now get to know a Jewish girl not unlike yourselves who lived in Budapest at the beginning of the 20th century. Her name was Hannah Senesh. Hannah Senesh is best known for her courageous actions and tragic death during the Holocaust. Fortunately, she left behind a diary and a collection of poems that allow us to learn about her thoughts, feelings and ideals.

Distribute an information sheet about Hannah Senesh and her work.

You may also listen together to the song Eli, Eli.

2. Read the following quotation by Hannah Senesh:

“There is only one place in the world to which we do not drift, nor immigrate, but rather return home- the Land of Israel.”

Discussion:

- What do you think of Hannah Senesh's statement? Do you agree with it?
 - How is this idea connected to her decision to parachute into Hungary during the Holocaust in an attempt to rescue members of her people?
 - Is the Land of Israel still a home for the Jewish people today or was this idea more relevant in Hannah Senesh's time?
3. Return to the ideas written on the board about what makes a place feel like home.

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Discussion:

- Is it important for the Jewish people to have such a place, a place they can call home?
- Does that place necessarily have to be the State of Israel? Why or why not?

Conclusion

The State of Israel was established in order to serve as a home for every Jew in the world. Despite all the difficulties and challenges that we experience, Israel must fulfil this purpose and remain a safe, secure and welcoming home for all Jews.

Hannah Senesh

Hannah Senesh was born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1921 to a liberal Jewish family. She attended a Christian girls' school, while also participating in Jewish studies classes and youth activities at her local synagogue. When she was elected to the school's literary council, she was prevented from taking her seat because of antisemitic discrimination.

As antisemitism spread throughout Hungary, Hannah became a committed Zionist. In 1939, she immigrated to the Land of Israel. She studied for two years at the Agricultural School for Girls in Nahalal and joined the Working Youth Movement in Kiryat Haim. There, she was selected to help establish Kibbutz Sdot Yam. During this period, she also served as an instructor in the movement's local branch. A few months later, she moved to Kibbutz Sdot Yam, near Caesarea.

In 1943, Hannah volunteered for the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) and joined a group of Jewish parachutists who were to be sent into Europe as part of the Allied struggle against Nazi Germany.

On 15 March 1944, Hannah Senesh and three fellow parachutists were dropped into Yugoslavia near the Hungarian border, where they joined a local partisan unit.

In June 1944, Senesh crossed the border into Hungary and was captured by Hungarian soldiers. Her mission was to assist efforts to rescue Jews from Nazi persecution. She was imprisoned in Budapest, her birthplace and subjected to harsh interrogation and torture. Despite this, she refused to betray her comrades or seek clemency.

She was brought before a Hungarian military court on charges of espionage and treason. Before the trial was concluded, she was executed on 7 November 1944 at the age of 23.

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Hannah Senesh kept a diary until her final day. It was published in Hebrew in 1946 and remains one of the most important personal testimonies of her life and ideals.

"I want to believe that what I have done and will do is right. Time will tell the rest."

"I do not remember whether I have already told you that I am a Zionist... I feel that now I am consciously Jewish, with all my heart. I am proud of my Judaism, and my goal is to immigrate to the Land of Israel and take part in its building... One idea occupies me constantly: the Land of Israel." - Budapest, 1938

"Today is my birthday. I am eighteen years old. One idea occupies my thoughts constantly—the Land of Israel. There is only one place in the world to which we do not drift, nor immigrate, but rather return home: the Land of Israel." - 17 July 1939

"Yesterday, I felt a powerful and painful sense of pressure. I could have cried. It seemed to me that two paths lay before me: to pursue my own personal happiness and ignore the injustices around me, or to devote my strength to a difficult and demanding struggle for the things that I believe are good and right.

It seems that the choice is not truly mine. Certain qualities within me determine my path, even though I am fully aware of the hardship and suffering it may entail. Yet do I possess the strength and the ability to accomplish all that I aspire to? And is what I aspire to truly right? God, if You have placed a fire within my heart, grant that I may burn away all that deserves to be burned away in my home, in the House of Israel. And if You have given me eyes to see and ears to hear, then also grant me the strength to act, to comfort, and to uplift.

Let these words not remain mere rhetoric but become the mission of my life.

To whom are these words addressed?

To the good that exists in the world and to the spark of that goodness that exists within me."

Eve of Rosh Hashanah, 1941

