

# The Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs



## Thematic Questions to accompany the Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs

A) **Home** – *The idea and/or the reality of home plays an important role in the definition of one's identity.*

- List some of the characteristics that are usually associated with home.
- What images and memories does the author associate with his or her hometown/country? What feelings does he or she have about home?
- Once the war broke out, how was the author's sense of home disrupted in his or her town or community?
- What attributes of home does the author now find in Canada? Is there a connection/continuity between how the author felt about their past home and how they feel about his or her new home?

B) **Dehumanization** – *At some point in the genesis of genocide, the target group is dehumanized, which is then used to "legitimize" inhumane treatment.*

- Try to identify elements of propaganda in the memoir that demonstrate Nazi ideology and the way it portrayed Jews and advocated their mistreatment (use of words, racial theory, idea of a "mission" of the Aryan "race," comparing Jews to such non-human creatures as animals, insects, etc.)
- How did these elements legitimize the systematic dehumanization of Jews?

C) **Survival**

i. Outside help

- Did someone or several people help the author survive? How? What words would you use to describe these people's behaviour? Did they believe in the dehumanized image of Jews? Why not?
- Why do you think that these people were willing to risk their own lives to offer assistance?
- To what extent did luck play a role in this author's survival?

ii. Jewish resistance & agency

- How did the author resist the dehumanization process set in place by the Nazis and their collaborators? Identify some activities that allowed him or her to resist physically, intellectually or culturally.
- Was the author able to remain hopeful? How? If he or she did lose hope, how did he or she manage to regain it? What kept the author going?
- Every story of survival has a decisive moment where making a choice or going in a certain direction – even unconsciously – changes the outcome. What "magic" moment made the difference in this author's survival?

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#### D) Family

- Did the author create a sense of attachment to anyone within his/her respective situation? (while on the run, in a camp etc.) How did this help them survive?
- Did he/she reunite with any family members after the war? Did that help them cope with the trauma they had experienced? If no reunion happened, how did the author deal with the loss of their family? How did they recreate a sense of family and/or a sense of belonging?

#### E) Trauma

- What traumatic events did the author experience?
- What different forms of loss did the author suffer?
- What did the author do to nurture resilience to survive?
- To what extent do you think that writing a memoir can contribute to coping with trauma?

#### F) Canada

- What did the author know about Canada before arriving?
- What were his or her first impressions of Canada? Did they feel welcomed?
- Have you ever found yourself in a new and totally unfamiliar situation/location? How did you establish yourself? What contributed to your development of a sense of home?

#### G) Memoir Writing

- How did the author come to write his or her memoir?
- Do you think that knowing that others will read about and learn from their experiences helps the author deal with their pain and loss?
- Have you ever written about painful events in your life and shared your writing with others? What was that experience like?

#### H) Memoir Reading – Your experience as a reader

- Was it your first time reading a memoir?
- Which chapters/parts of the memoir do you remember most vividly?
- In what ways has the author's experience of certain historical events made you more familiar with them? Which events in particular?
- We often connect with authors on an emotional level as we read their stories. What do you think this personal connection contributes to our understanding of that time in history? How does it add to an approach to the events that is purely "objective" or scholarly?
- How do you think the experiences narrated by the author are significant for our present time? Is there a specific message the author would like to convey?