

# A Few Readings

Contributed by [Tessa Shlaer](#)

Source:

## Hope for a Jewish Sanctuary in Israel

They marched us down the length of Pozohony Street, toward the Margaret Bridge and that was when we understood they were bringing us to the edge of the Danube, where they would shoot us and leave us to die under the ice. When we arrived at the foot of the bridge, a Soviet reconnaissance aircraft appeared out of nowhere over our heads. The death march stopped, and there was a moment of chaos while the Nazi guards sought refuge in the entrance to buildings and shot their sub machine guns skyward. Mother and I were standing next to a small public toilet of metal and painted green and mother pushed me inside. 'Pretend you're peeing' she said. I stood there frozen with cold and fear, but I could not pee; when you are thirteen years old and frightened you cannot pee. The Soviet plane had meanwhile disappeared and the march resumed. Not a soul noticed that mother and I had remained in the toilet. Half an hour later, not a single person from the march was left alive. This was a key moment in my life, the moment that defines me more accurately than any other – more than anything I ever did, more than any place I ever visited, more than any person I have ever met. Not because I was spared – every survivor has his own story or a private miracle – but because I had nowhere to go....in this big wide world there was not a single place for a Jewish boy of thirteen whom everyone wants to kill. So we went back to the ghetto. Years later on a trip I took to Budapest with my son Yair, we took a walk and found ourselves, without planning to, at the Margaret Bridge. We strolled along, chatting merrily when suddenly I stopped and, shaking, pointed at something ahead of us. At first Yair could not understand what it was that I was pointing at, but there it was: the public toilet that made of metal and painted green. We stood there, two grown men, hugging and crying and stroking the green walls of the public toilet that saved my life, while the Hungarians who passed us on the street did so with caution, convinced they were looking at two lunatics. 'My boy,' I said once I was calm enough to speak, 'it was in this place, without my even knowing it that I became a Zionist. It is the whole Zionist idea in fact, The State of Israel is a problematic place, and we'll always have our arguments with it, but this is the very reason it was established. So that every Jewish child will always have a place to go.' I hope that Yair understood. I am certain that he did not forget. -Yair Lapid, Memories After My Death

## This Year We Are Slaves

What do these words mean?

We are slaves because yesterday our people were in slavery and memory makes yesterday real for us.

We are slaves because today there are still people in chains around the world and no one can be truly free while others are in chains.

We are slaves because freedom means more than broken chains.

Where there is poverty and hunger and homelessness, there is no freedom; where there is prejudice and bigotry and discrimination, there is no freedom; where there is violence and torture and war, there is no freedom.

And where each of us is less than he or she might be, we are not free, not yet.

And who, this year, can be deaf to the continuing oppression of the downtrodden, who can be blind to the burdens and the rigors that are now to be added to the most vulnerable in our midst?

If these things be so, who among us can say that he or she is free?

## What Happens to Them Happens to Me (Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham J. Heschel)

**Leader** Prejudice is like a hydra, a monster which has many heads, an evil which requires many efforts to overcome. One head sends forth poison against the people of a different race, another against the people of a different religion or culture. Thus the evil of prejudice is indivisible.

**Group** Human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God. Without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social stagnation.

**Leader** What is called for is not a silent sigh but a voice of moral compassion and indignation, the sublime and inspired screaming of a prophet uttered by a whole community.

**Group** The voice of justice is stronger than bigotry and the hour calls for that voice as well as the concerted and incessant action.

**Leader** I have personal faith. I believe firmly that in spite of the difficulties of these days, in spite of the struggles ahead, we will and we can solve this problem. I believe there will be a better America.