



Be the light in the darkness

'We will continue to do our bit for as long as we can, secure in the knowledge that others will continue to light a candle long after us.'

Gena Turgel MBE, survivor of the Holocaust (1923-2018)

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 2021 is **Be the light in the darkness**. It encourages everyone to reflect on the depths humanity can sink to, but also the ways individuals and communities resisted that darkness to 'be the light' before, during and after genocide.

Be the light in the darkness is an affirmation and a call to action for everyone marking HMD. This theme asks us to consider different kinds of 'darkness', for example, identity-based persecution, misinformation, denial of justice; and different ways of 'being the light', for example, resistance, acts of solidarity, rescue and illuminating mistruths.

Increasing levels of denial, division and misinformation in today's world mean we must remain vigilant against hatred and identity-based hostility. Rapid technological developments, a turbulent political climate, and world events beyond our control can leave us feeling helpless and insignificant. The utterly unprecedented times through which we are living currently are showing the very best of which humanity is capable but also - in some of the abuse and conspiracy theories being spread on social media - the much darker side of our world as well.

We can all stand in solidarity. We can choose to **be the light in the darkness** in a variety of ways and places – at home, in public, and online.

1 - Darkness draws in

- a) The darkness of distortion and hate
- b) Emotional darkness

Before every genocide, perpetrators divide society into those considered worthy of human treatment, and those who are not. Distortions are deployed using propaganda and stereotyping to identify and victimise a specific group (or groups), followed by discrimination – often enshrined into law. The darkness leading to genocide also causes deep emotional trauma. For those affected, fear, hopelessness and dread all have a profound and long-lasting impact.

2 - Light during the darkness

- a) Resistance – a light in the darkness
- b) Rescuers – extreme bravery in the darkness
- c) Lighting the way with kindness
- d) Shining light into the darkness

Amid the darkness of genocide, there have always been those who oppose the regime, risking their own lives, homes and communities. Maintaining faith and culture during genocide defies the ambitions of regimes to eradicate entire groups and their culture. Survivors emphasise that any kindness, when surrounded by suffering, indifference, and persecution, is powerful.

For the international community, there is a responsibility to shine a light on situations where people are persecuted and hold those responsible to account.

3 - Darkness today

- a) The darkness of denial and distortions of genocide
- b) Identity based prejudice and hostility today

Denial is one of the common features of every genocide. Often those responsible for genocide will restrict access to physical locations and evidence, and seek to obscure their intentions and genocidal activity. Sadly, prejudice and hostility against people based on their identity continues to hurt people and communities here in the UK, and around the world.

4 - Being the light in the darkness today

- a) Shining light through testimony
- b) Confronting denial, distortion and misinformation
- c) Our responsibility to be the light

This year's theme asks all of us to recognise that the responsibility for genocide education and prevention does not lie only with survivors sharing their testimony. Their experiences hold lessons for all of us and it is vital that we listen to their experiences and become witnesses for them. As distortions and denial increase, facing the extent and nature of the crimes committed to reveal the truth of genocide and genocidal regimes is more important than ever.

Our lights are more powerful when we work together with others. This theme may inspire you to support charities and community groups working to tackle identity-based violence and denial.

Holocaust Memorial Day enables us to remember – for a purpose. It gives us a responsibility to work for a safer, better, future for everyone. Everyone can step up and use their talents to tackle prejudice, discrimination and intolerance wherever we encounter them.

Find out more... Discover resources, activity ideas and background historical information on the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website: hmd.org.uk