



The Asper Foundation

HUMAN RIGHTS AND HOLOCAUST STUDIES PROGRAM

Memorandum for Personal Responsibility



First they came for the Communists,

But I was not a Communist

So I did not speak out.

Then they came for the Socialists

And the Trade Unionists,

But I was neither,

So I did not speak out.

Then they came for the Jews,

But I was not a Jew

So I did not speak out.

And when they came for me,

There was no one left

To speak out for me.

– Pastor Martin Niemoeller

German Theologian

1892-1984

THE ASPER FOUNDATION

Then they came
for the Jews,

But I
was not
a Jew

So I did not speak out.

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND HOLOCAUST STUDIES PROGRAM

Memorandum for Personal Responsibility

Dear _____

We are pleased that you have participated in The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program (www.humanrights.asperfoundation.com). When we launched this program in 1997, it was to tell the youth of our nation about the Holocaust, the story of degradation, denial, humiliation, hatred and ultimately, genocide. Before his untimely passing in 2003, Dr. Israel Asper, Founder of The Asper Foundation (www.asperfoundation.com) and a passionate believer in the importance of this program, described one of the missions of The Asper Foundation as being “to promote the education of Canadian youth in the history of human rights and the Holocaust in order to disseminate knowledge, raise the moral and spiritual questions of these events in human history and generate change for the benefit of society.”

The word Holocaust literally means “massive destruction by fire.” It has come to signify the murder of six million European Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during the period January 30, 1933, when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, to May 8, 1945 (V-E Day or Victory in Europe Day), the end of the Second World War in Europe. For the first time, an entire people was targeted for annihilation by a government whose vision was their systematic destruction. Almost two thirds of European Jewry perished because of government-sanctioned prejudice based on ignorance, fear and misunderstanding. The Nazi death camps, engineered to efficiently carry out the “Final Solution” stand as the archetype of genocide in human history.

The Holocaust teaches us a great deal about human nature and society. The lessons we have learned are universal, applying to other examples of prejudice and hatred. Recently, new insidious terms such as “ethnic cleansing” have come into our daily vocabulary to identify the atrocities in Kosovo and Rwanda. Current history speaks of terror, cruelty and more importantly, indifference. The use of poison gas against civilian populations in Iraq, world terrorism, apartheid in South Africa, the Pol Pot Regime in Cambodia, the Armenian genocide, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sudan, Rwanda, the tribal butchery engulfing much of Africa – the list goes on – are all glaring examples of events of cruelty that continue unabated. We see that humanity continues to hate and destroy.

Therefore, we ask you not to be indifferent. You need to question why the Holocaust happened and why other abuses of human rights continue. How do you address one of the greatest injustices of our time when “revisionists” assert that the Holocaust never occurred at all? What can be done to stop human rights abuses from reoccurring? How do we preserve freedom and democracy for all?

...cont'd

History teaches us that indifference results in paralysis and compliance and that resistance can change the tide of events. The history of the Holocaust shows that the majority of European peoples and nations can be faulted with indifference and even at times, collaboration with the Nazis. The records of Canada and the United States are not unblemished either. However, there are many documented reports of individuals and an entire nation who took great risks to save Jewish lives. Raoul Wallenberg and Wladyslaw Bartoszewski are examples of individuals who took **personal responsibility** and were not indifferent to the atrocities around them. The rescue of Denmark's 8,000 Jews serves as an example of an entire nation that mobilized its resources to rescue its citizens. Indeed, all of Denmark's Jews survived while those of every other German-occupied nation were decimated.

As part of **our** personal responsibility, the Asper family has taken on the education of Canadian youth through this national initiative. The Asper Foundation also plays an essential role on the international stage on issues related to freedom, democracy and human rights. We are continually analyzing and developing a number of initiatives related to these subjects. For example, we make scholarships to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem available to anyone wishing to pursue their education in this field(s) of study.

The single most ambitious of the initiatives being developed is the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (www.humanrightsmuseum.ca) which was inspired and motivated by the extraordinary impact of The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program. The Asper Foundation is the founding member of a consortium comprising private and public institutions that spearheaded the establishment of the Museum as a Canadian national Museum in March 2008 which is projected to open in two to three years. The purpose of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights is to explore the subject of human rights, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, in order to enhance the public's understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others and encourage reflection, dialogue and action.

We believe that your participation in this program is one of the most important educational experiences that you will have as a young adult and we trust that you will pass on the message of the Holocaust, the need for respect and the preservation of human rights for all peoples. You cannot understand the enormity of the horror of the Holocaust until you have studied the individual cases. We encourage you to continue your education on this subject.

By signing this Memorandum, we hope it will enable you to remember our past, so you can make a difference in the future. Hence, we urge you to uphold with us one of the most important lessons of the Holocaust, that of personal responsibility for the world community.

Dated this _____ day of _____

David Asper



THE ASPER FOUNDATION

Student

We are all witnesses,
messengers.

He who listens to a witness,

He in turn
becomes a
witness.

— Elie Wiesel



THE ASPER FOUNDATION

The Asper Foundation

Founders, **Dr. Israel Asper**, OC, OM, QC (1932–2003), **Babs Asper** (1933–2011)

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Vice-Chair, **Leonard Asper**

President, **Gail Asper**

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