

**Bill Moyers Explores The
'Importance Of Remembrance'
With Historian
Yosef Yerushalmi
In The First Of Three
"Heritage Conversations
With Bill Moyers" Airing On
Public Television Channel 10
Sunday, February 16 at 3 P.M.**



In the first of three HERITAGE CONVERSATIONS With Bill Moyers, programs designed to explore key themes which surfaced during the original public television broadcast of the epic series HERITAGE: CIVILIZATION AND THE JEWS, the award-winning journalist interviews Yosef Yerushalmi, professor of Jewish history and director of Columbia University's Center for Israel and Jewish studies (right). This hour-long dialogue between Moyers, appearing with the permission of CBS News and Yerushalmi, will air on public television Channel 10 - Sunday, February 16 at 3 P.M.

Throughout their long history, the Jewish people have surmounted forced dispersions and countless oppressions to maintain a unique continuity of faith and tradition.

This remarkable sense of shared experience linking Jews across the centuries in a common heritage, and the way it has affected the course of Jewish history and the attitudes of the Jewish mind, will be explored in the first of three "HERITAGE CONVERSATIONS With Bill Moyers," airing on public television Channel 10 - Sunday, February 16 at 3 P.M.

The award-winning journalist, who appears with the permission of CBS News, will interview author-historian Yosef Yerushalmi, Salo Baron Professor of Jewish History, Culture and Society at Columbia University, and director of Columbia University's Center for Israel and Jewish Studies.

The "HERITAGE CONVERSATIONS With Bill

Moyers" are a series of dialogues with leading scholars and thinkers, designed to amplify key themes which surfaced during the original 1984 broadcast of HERITAGE: CIVILIZATION AND THE JEWS.

Hosted and narrated by Abba Eban, the Peabody and Emmy Award-winning series HERITAGE: CIVILIZATION AND THE JEWS chronicles the 3,000 year-long interaction between the Jewish people and Western civilization. The nine-part series was a production of WNET/New York.

During the hour-long interview between Moyers and Yerushalmi, taped at New York City's Jewish Theological Seminary, Professor Yerushalmi explains the continuity and commonality between Jews of different eras.

"There is the sense of a shared experience. There is a sense in each generation that its destiny has been, in part, determined by past destinies," says Yerushalmi. "There is a sense that...in the end all of it...is linked together by a thousand invisible links, even if one can only specify some of them at any particular time. There is a sense of recognition."

Integral to this continuity of Jewish history and tradition, Yerushalmi says, is the Biblical command -- Zakhor -- to remember.

"That command was so much a part of the original fabric of Jewish religion from its very inception," Yerushalmi tells Moyers. "At the core, it's not the idea that there is simply one God as opposed to many Gods. It is the nature of this God that was crucial...There was a shift to history. In other words, where does God reveal Himself, and the way He manifests Himself in history, more than in the way He manifests Himself in nature."

"Oh, there are wonderful Biblical verses. The heavens declare the glory of God," continues Yerushalmi. "But the crucial things are how He relates to mankind in the course of history, and how mankind responds to Him. So it's history and memory that become central to this particular faith. And this command to remember becomes crucial, because it did not remain an abstraction, because it was enshrined throughout Jewish liturgy, throughout Jewish ritual. These were the things that preserved the memories."

For Jews, the preservation of their past is made more difficult by the destruction of their physical monuments.

"Frenchmen and Americans have a territory which has its own, shall we say, monuments of memory to constantly remind you," says Yerushalmi. "A Frenchman has Notre Dame de Paris and he has all of the other great cathedrals of France. (But) in the whole of Europe only a handful of medieval synagogues have survived. In other words, the physical Jewish past has been wiped out. So everything really depends, again, as it did at the beginning, on memory, and memory, I need hardly say, is the most difficult and elusive thing to foster and revive."

One such poignant example of a Jew deter-

mined to 'remember' was the young Polish historian Immanuel Ringelblum. In 1939, he was in exile in Switzerland when Germany invaded Poland. Despite the obvious dangers, Ringelblum insisted on returning to his homeland.

"He said, 'If I'm a historian, I must be there when this is happening,'" says Yerushalmi. "And he was there, throughout the period of the Warsaw ghetto. He organized people. He had emissaries in all parts of the city who would report to him daily."

"He perished along with the rest," Yerushalmi continues. "The archive was buried; it was dug up after the war. Now how does one explain this kind of phenomenon? There is no God in these records. There is no divine intervention. There is no divine providence. There is no theology. I cannot help but feel that those ancient commands to remember, that they somehow carry over through the centuries, even into that phenomenon in the Warsaw ghetto."

Even Sigmund Freud, who by all accounts eschewed the religious and cultural trappings of Judaism, still, by his own admission, considered himself a Jew. As did another famous 20th century philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, who had planned to convert to Christianity, only to spend Yom Kippur in synagogue and find that he could not leave his religion, Yerushalmi says.

It is this mythical, mysterious pull and power within many ostensibly non-religious Jews that Yerushalmi addresses.

"Although Jews themselves, who tend to be very self-critical, have a tendency to talk about those once-a-year Jews who come to synagogue on the Day of Atonement, I myself don't disparage this," says Yerushalmi. "Because I know something is drawing them there. What is it? They don't have to. But they go. Is it merely atavism? Is it merely something out of the past? Is it merely because their parents went, or they saw their grandparents going? I don't know."

"All I know is that even once a year Jews on that particularly powerful day, which is the Day of Atonement, with its powerful ritual and its powerful liturgy, that day still has the capacity to speak to and to draw even the Jew who is, shall we say, on the remotest edge of the periphery of Judaism," continues Yerushalmi.

Yet Professor Yerushalmi emphasizes that it is the rich realism of Judaism, and not merely mysticism, which accounts for both the preservation of the Covenant and the incessant dialogue between Jews of different centuries, different nations, and different philosophies.

He particularly points to the multitudinous commentaries which accompany the Jewish Bible. Surrounding the text, Yerushalmi explains, are the commentaries written throughout the centuries. Commentaries not merely in dialogue with the actual text of the Bible, but also in dialogue with each other -- a running discussion and debate carried over the course of Jewish history.

"Jewish history is not only the story of what happened. It is the history of how what happened was interpreted. And so long as there is a sense between the generations of continuity, then it doesn't matter that the interpretations of one age, and the interpretations of another age, will be very different. All of these interpretations become, so to speak, part of the common heritage," explains Yerushalmi.

Professor Yerushalmi cautions that history is not meant to be digested or interpreted quite so quickly. Even now, Yerushalmi insists that the experience of the Holocaust, for example, has yet to be fully internalized 40 years later.

"I think it's a kind of delayed reaction in history that we don't pay attention to," Yerushalmi says. "And I speak now not only as a Jew, I speak as a Western human being. And I believe, Mr. Moyers, that you and I and others do not know and cannot possibly imagine yet what the spiritual consequences of the Holocaust will be on future generations, both Jews and non-Jews."

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