

Stand Together

Thought for the Day

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Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 22 January 2020

Even if you're a news junkie, one recent anniversary probably passed you by! Actually "anniversary" isn't the right word, because this isn't an annual event, but one that happens every seven and a half years.

The story of *Daf haYomi*, literally "the daily page", begins in Poland in 1923 when Rabbi Meir Shapiro initiated a programme to study all 2711 pages of the Talmud at a page a day. The idea caught on, and despite the almost total extermination of Europe's Jews in the Holocaust, it continues to flourish internationally, often using podcasts and phone conferences. Last week, the completion of the 13th cycle was celebrated by hundreds of thousands of people in America, Israel, Australia – even Wembley Stadium! It's as astonishing a feat as a million people joining hands to circle the globe!

As we approach Holocaust Memorial Day next week, all this has particular poignancy – despite the Holocaust, Judaism and the Jewish people survive. There's a parable in the first chapter of the Talmud: someone who survives being attacked by a lion will talk about his miraculous escape. But if he's later attacked by a snake and lives to tell the tale, it's the snake he'll talk about, not the lion. More recent memories eclipse earlier ones, however horrific. Yet we must remember, because remembering is the first step towards prevention.

Next week will mark 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz. As the number of people who survived the horrors of the Holocaust dwindles, the rest of us need to step up to testify for them. This year's theme is "Stand Together", a timely reminder that genocide doesn't begin with mass executions but with standing apart from and victimising those who are different. It challenges us all not to forget, not to pass by, but to stand together in solidarity.