

## Memorial Day Activity in Honor of Israel's Fallen Soldiers

(From the website of *Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed* – Working and Studying Youth Movement)

### Goals

1. To surface personal feelings and stories pertaining to Memorial Day and to discuss the personal significance of Memorial Day for each student.
2. To encourage students to choose to remember and to relate to people who had fought in Israel's battles, from a humane angle, and by the uniqueness of each and every one of them.
3. That students understand that society cannot exist without the memory of the past, without the choice to relate to past events and to remember those who had perished for the sake of the existence and of the future of the State of Israel.
4. That students get acquainted with the personal story of Haim (Dickie) Lexberger as an exemplary tale of a soldier who fell in the War of Independence, and by the poem that Yehuda Amichai wrote in connection with Chaim Lexberger.

### Activity Plan

**A.** My Memorial Day – reference posters. (About 10 minutes) Three posters are hung up about the room.

On each poster there is a question and place for students' remarks:

1. What do I think about during the siren?
2. Memorial Day for me is ...
3. Someone I know or know about who fell in Israel's wars. Who was he? What did he like? What made him special? When and how was he killed? How do those who lost him feel? (Give the students some time to wander about and put their remarks on the posters)

**B.** Have the posters read in order. (About 20 minutes)

Have the students elaborate and explain why they wrote what they did.

Guiding questions for the discussion: How does Memorial Day affect you? Whom do you remember on Memorial Day? What does Memorial Day mean to you?

**C.** A passage by Berl Katznelson (Appendix A) about memory and forgetfulness (about 5 minutes) is read out loud.

**D.** Discussion: (about 10 minutes)

- Why does society need to remember the past?
- Why do we need to forgetfulness?
- What would be the image of any social system that does not make it a point to remember / forget anything?
- What is Berl's criticism on conservatism and pseudo-revolutionism?
- What is the significance of Memorial Day in the formation of a given society?

**E.** The personal story of Haim (Dickie) Lexberger is read out loud. (About 5 minutes)

Chaim, nicknamed Dickie, was born in Berlin in 1920. Following his older brother, he joined the youth movement and at the age of 14 immigrated to the land of Israel and studied at the Ben Shemen agricultural school.

After graduating, he went to Givat Brenner, where he worked as a driver. In 1941, he joined the Palmach and when the Arab Unit was organized, he was transferred to this unit. There in the Mishmar Ha'emek Groves he met his commander, Shimon Avidan, who later became his commander in the Givati Brigade during the War of Independence. Dickie was one of the soldiers who fought with the Brigade in Italy against the Germans during World War II.

Upon his return to Israel and to Givat Brenner, he was appointed commander of the area and made all the preparations on the Brenner Hill for the approaching war.

Dickie married Tzipporah they had their daughter Ada, at the end of 1947.

During the War of Independence, Dicky was the commander of a company of 16-18-year-old soldiers who were drafted off of school benches and after a brief training period they headed southward to take part in the Negev battles. His faithful assistant was Yehuda Amichai the poet.

At one of the breaks from the war, he set out northwards through the Strait of Egypt and arrived at Givat Brenner to see his daughter Ada for the first time and then hurried back to his soldiers in the South. That same week he led his soldiers in an offensive against the Egyptians in Hulikat (Heletz) in which he fell together with all of the soldiers in his company. Only a few weeks later was the mass grave of the fighters discovered and they were transferred for burial in the village of Warburg. The story of this unit and their last battle was written in the book "In this Terrible Spirit" by Yehuda Amichai.

The character of Dickie, as an individual and a commander greatly influenced the writings of his deputy and comrade, Yehuda Amichai, and accompanied him for the rest of his life.

**F.** The poem 'Also the Fist' is read (Appendix B). (About 5 minutes)

**G.** Discussion: (about 10 minutes)

- What does the poem describe?"
- From where do the soldiers go out to battle?
- What does Amichai want to remember and remind others?
- Why is it important to remember preparation for battle in this way?

**H.** An passage written by David Maltz about his son Rafi, who fell in the War of Independence in the Nebi Samuel Battle (Appendix C) is read out loud. (About 10 minutes)

**I.** Discussion: (about 10 minutes)

- What does the passage describe?
- What does the father reveal about his son?
- How does he mourn his son?
- What is the eternal element of the person he describes?

**J.** Summary

Memorial Day is a day of communion with and of mourning over our soldiers who had fallen in Israel's battles. This is a day on which, it is important to relate to and tell about the fallen, the people they were, what they had loved, what had made them unique. A society is built on the foundations of an existing society and perpetuates it within its historical context. As people who wish to build a better society, it is important that we know how to remember, cherish and honor our soldiers who had perished in Israel's wars.



**Machon  
Ha'Chagim**

Kibbutz Institute for Holidays  
and Jewish Culture



Haim (Dickie) Lexberger

## **Appendix A**

We were granted two powers: memory and forgetfulness. We cannot do without both of them. If the world had nothing but memory, what would have been our fate? We would bend under the burden of memories. We would become slaves to our memories, to our forefathers. Our face would not be more than a replica of past generations.

Yet if forgetfulness would take complete hold of us, would there have been a place for culture, for science, for self-awareness and mental vitality?

Dark conservatism wishes to deprive us of the power of forgetfulness, and the pseudo-revolutionism views every past memory as "the enemy". But if the memory of humanity lacked precious items, lofty trends, memoirs of periods of growth and efforts exerted towards freedom and bravery, it would not be possible for any revolutionary movement to rise. We would have rotted in our poverty and in our ignorance and we would have remained slaves forever.

From the "In the Test", Berl Katznelson



## Appendix B

'Hulikat – the third Poem about Dickie  
In these hills, even the oil-drilling towers  
Are already a memory. Here Dickie fell  
He was four years my senior and served as my father  
in times of trouble and distress. Now I'm older than him  
by forty years and I remember him  
as a young son and I am an old and grieving father.

And you who only remember faces,  
Do not forget the outstretched hands  
And the feet that run lightly  
And the words

Remember that also the path to the battlefields  
Runs through gardens and windows  
And children playing and a dog barking

Remember and remind the fallen fruit  
Of the leaves and the branch,  
Remind the hard thorns  
That they were soft in the spring,  
And do not forget that the fist, too  
Was once an open hand with fingers



## Appendix C

... Now, with the days of the war, when so many of our sons are fallen, with their perishing so simply, in a simplicity that is not at all simple, with courage that flashes with a desire for life, we pursue and search diligently every mark and sign that they leave behind. We are particularly eager for a written word, an intimate word that will allow us to penetrate their inner world, which seems so different than ours, so closed off to us. Now I had, by a terrible circumstance the merit to read Rafi's most intimate letters to his girl. Also, many letters of youths who fell in battle have been made public. And it turns out that in fact we had made a big mistake in making known that the boys are such and such, dry, hard, selfish, without feeling. It turns out that it was only their outer shell that we had encountered and considered so different than ours, this shell that had grown and covered them while living a life of simplicity, of nature and labor, and with us, the excessive socialism of co-education. In their hearts, in their depth, the same human being dwells, the same human point that would thrive perhaps more forcefully and more beautifully under conditions of natural life, work and simplicity. What thirst for love, for beauty, for human warmth is found in Rafi's letters. It turns out that all the talk and all the racket about the great riddle of "our youth," to penetrate its special world, to discover, etc. – all these things are groundless. They exist – in all places and at all times –

A M-A-N. The shells alter, the clothing is changed, yet in essence, man shall remain – man. Eternal human beings, with all their longings and pains, will all their bemoaning and the distress, and also the human pleasantness and goodness. The human spark is located in the corner of a heart. And the heart flutters forever and ever.

... The sharpness of the blow, of the pain, severs – time and again. Every day the pain is renewed. And the terror and madness in a thought that is not yet feasible, is in no way acceptable.

... the twittering of a bird that entails the purity of the world, the clarity of dawn when a day is born, which sows hope in the soul of man and a remedy in his heart, now awakens in me a sharp pain leading to a shriek. Because his heart, the heart of my son, shall no longer quiver tenderly when it is heard. His heart shall no longer pound in a soft hope to its joyous sound.

... We were seated, listening to the musicians playing at an orchestra concert. We listened with pleasure. And suddenly I was pierced by the pain and the madness in the mind and in the heart: all this without him. He is gone, gone. I wanted to scream loudly and bitterly into the crowd that filled the lot, to the stage where they sit and play, and play.

My son, Rafi, I have been spending entire days over your letters preparing them, making them fit for the public domain. I know you would not agree to this. That you would rebel against the exposure of your intimate world. It is certainly a weakness that we maintain – but you ought to forgive the desire to save that little spark fire from your soul that has lit you and has died down in our face – woe, it has faded forever.

And your letters are nothing but scrolls and scrolls of your soul – hot, clinging, fiery and singing themselves.





# Machon Ha'Chagim

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Your last letters, not long before your fall, sung the renewed love song. The wonderful dream of love, which the angel of pure wings shall cling to his heart and shall ascend upwards with. The last days, in your last letter, you had a painful nostalgia—you had a great passion over the human, the living, the warm, the loving. About the human heart. You twisted yourself, with the tasteless, with the torn, with the ruined, with the sealed and with the blocked. You also knew the hollow of a sling – between impurity and holiness. The Temple of God you had wished to build for yourself, over which you had struggled.

My son, my son Raphael.

Father

