

Sharing: An Offering
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Testimony: Sam Goetz

Like bread broken and laid before me, Samuel Goetz offers his Holocaust testimony. In his video, Sam acknowledges that while the memories are painful, it is “so necessary and so important to share these experiences . . .” *Share*. That is the word he uses. He does not offer to “tell” his story or to “recount” it; he offers to share it.

Sam understands that sharing can be both a gift and a burden. From 1928 to 1939, Sam shared a peaceful life with his parents and brother in Tarnow, Poland. Then, in November 1939, on the first anniversary of Kristallnacht, Sam shared in the horrors of Nazi antisemitism as German civilians wearing swastika armbands and shouting “Juden raus” forced his family from their apartment and held a gun to his head. In 1940, Sam shared his mother’s despair when efforts to smuggle his older brother out of Soviet territory failed. On June 22, 1941, a day after Sam’s bar mitzvah, Germany violated its nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, and Sam shared in the hope that Nazi oppression in Poland would end. But over the next few weeks, he had to share in the Jewish community’s disappointment when that did not happen.

When Sam was fourteen, his parents were deported to Belzec and killed. Not long afterward, Sam was sent to Plaszow and then to Gross-Rosen. In those concentration camps, Sam shared in the pain of beatings, the fear of gas chambers, and the dangerous, backbreaking work of clearing rocks from a tunnel construction site. For a while, though, he was also able to share hope for the future with Willie, a boy who worked in the tunnels alongside him. In January 1945, Sam entered Ebensee. A few months later, on May 6, 1945, the first American tank pulled up to the camp gates, and Sam shared the exhilarating joy of freedom.

Now, 75 years after his liberation, Samuel Goetz offers to share his memories with a generation that knows the Holocaust only through history books, with those who wonder how the Holocaust could have happened and with those who deny it ever happened at all. But sharing is two-sided. It involves both giving and receiving, partaking and participating. When Sam says, “I feel the need to share these terrible experiences with you and many others so it is not forgotten,” it is my choice whether or not to accept his offer.

Am I strong enough to partake of Sam’s offering?

The choice is not simple. Sharing Sam’s memories means acknowledging that I have a role to play in the story of the Holocaust. It means recognizing my own responsibility to truly hear the survivors, to learn from their testimonies, and to defend against hatred and injustice. I choose to accept Sam’s offering and allow his memories to motivate and guide me. Through my own life, I will share the lessons of Sam’s testimony and the testimonies of all Holocaust survivors.