

# God, Faith & Identity *from the* Ashes

**The companion discussion guide**  
to *God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes:*  
*Reflections of Children and Grandchildren*  
*of Holocaust Survivors,*

edited by Menachem Z. Rosensaft  
and with a prologue by Elie Wiesel.

# Introduction

*God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes: Reflections of Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors* is not, and was not intended to be, a definitive work. Rather, it is meant to be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue—an interchange of ideas, certainties, doubts, and even never-to-be-resolved mysteries—between the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors who wrote the essays in the book, first with one another within the pages of *God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes*, and then, even more importantly, with the reader. I intentionally write “reader” rather than “readers” because in the first instance this dialogue will hopefully resonate and strike a personal emotional or intellectual chord in each individual who reads the book. And then I hope that the readers individually and collectively will use the diverse reflections in the book to ask themselves their own questions and seek their own answers.

Clearly there is no one response to the Holocaust. Each child and grandchild of survivors has his or her own very individual perspective. One purpose of this book is to highlight this diversity. At the same time, as I read the different essays in the book I was struck by their almost unfailing optimism. What seems to me to unite the diverse contributors—regardless of religious or political orientation—is a conviction that the legacy of memory we have received from our parents or grandparents is a source of strength rather than despondency, and a determination to apply that legacy in constructive, forward-looking ways that might inspire not just Jews but all human beings, especially those whose families have been the victims of genocide, crimes against humanity, or other dire catastrophes. The resilience of the survivors upon emerging from the Nazi death camps and other sites of persecution and oppression and their ability to not just rebuild their lives but also teach their children and grandchildren by example to continue to have faith in humankind is evidence, to me at least, that a dawn follows even the darkest of nights.

I very much hope that this companion discussion guide will inspire the community at large, beyond the descendants of the survivors and, for that matter, beyond the Jewish community, to absorb, confront, and debate the issues, conclusions, and questions posed by the contributors to *God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes*.

Menachem Z. Rosensaft

Editor, *God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes: Reflections of Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors* (Jewish Lights Publishing)

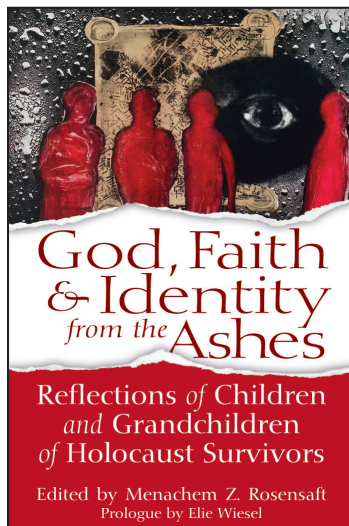
# Discussion Guide

## *God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes: Reflections of Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors*

1. Do you think it possible for survivors or their descendants to contend with life after the Holocaust without faith of some kind—be it in religion, in an ideology, in the future?
2. Many of the contributors conveyed that the survivors in their families felt or strove for a sense of triumph over Hitler after the Shoah. Must victims make sense of history through a sense of ultimate victory? Do you think they can accept what happened to them without the desire for revenge—even the quietest, most passive revenge?
3. Menachem Rosensaft writes that he believes that it was God’s presence or a divine spirit within the victims of the Holocaust “that enabled them to survive with their humanity intact.” Pope Francis, for one, considers this approach “the only possible hermeneutic interpretation.” What do you think? How do you reconcile God and the Holocaust or any genocide?
4. Does faith—or religious practice—outlast history or historical memory? Is including Holocaust remembrance in Jewish liturgy and ritual likely to prove more effective than secular efforts to preserve historical awareness of the Shoah? Do you think Holocaust remembrance should be incorporated into the Jewish religion?
5. Is “the complexity of being Jewish” that Dr. Eva Fogelman highlights specific to the legacy of the Holocaust or all of Jewish history?
6. How does fully engaging with or investing in the Holocaust legacy free Judaism and Jewish identity from it? Does it? Can it?
7. Do you think the identity of second- and third-generation survivors is inherently a Jewish one? Why or why not?
8. The reflections in the “Identity” section of this collection often open with the survivors’ stories—more so than any other section. Why do you think that is?
9. To what extent do Holocaust survivors—or their children, or their grandchildren—have a choice of identity? Are children named after family members who perished inextricably ascribed to the memory of those victims?
10. How does the experience of children or grandchildren of Holocaust survivors compare with that of first- and second-generation descendants of other immigrants? How does the identity of children or grandchildren of survivors overlap with the immigrant narrative?

11. Do you think that *tikkun olam* is an appropriate concluding theme? Why or why not?
12. Must all second- and third-generation survivors carry the responsibility of *tikkun olam*? Do they?
13. Is there any one reflection or story that particularly resonated or stuck with you? Which, and why?
14. Do you feel that there is a narrative missing from this collection? What voice would you have included?
15. Were you surprised by the positive, forward-looking tone of many of the essays in this book?
16. Will we ever be able to truly reconcile ourselves with the horrors of the Holocaust? Is the concept of a “happy ending” realistic or even appropriate after the Holocaust? Is the post-Holocaust narrative—as expressed in literature and film—capable of any such happy ending? Or is the fact that the survivors were able to start anew, rebuild their lives, and start new families a type of consolation that allows us not to succumb to despair?

*About God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes:  
Reflections from Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors*



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Almost ninety children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors—theologians, scholars, spiritual leaders, authors, artists, political and community leaders and media personalities—from sixteen countries on six continents reflect on how the memories transmitted to them have affected their lives. Profoundly personal stories explore faith, identity and legacy in the aftermath of the Holocaust as well as our role in ensuring that future genocides and similar atrocities never happen again.

Remarkable and unforgettable, their reflections will inform, challenge and inspire people of all faiths and backgrounds.

To order copies of *God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes: Reflections from Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors*, contact:

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