

ALICE GREENWALD: MEMORY AND CONSCIENCE

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HOLO: Welcome to the College Commons Bully Pulpit Podcast, Torah With a Point of View. Produced by the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, America's first Jewish institution of higher learning. My name is Joshua Holo, your host, and Dean of the Jack H. Skirball Campus in Los Angeles.

HOLO: Welcome to the Bully Pulpit Podcast. My name is Joshua Holo. I am your host. And it is my great, great pleasure today to welcome Alice M. Greenwald, President and CEO of the 9/11 Memorial Museum to join us here for a conversation about memory and some of the leading American institutions that have to tackle with some of most difficult memories here in the United States. As Chief Executive, Alice Greenwald is responsible for the overall vision and financial well-being, and management of the museum. But she also participated, and really led the process behind the development of the museum, articulating and implementing its vision after 9/11. And working with all the various constituencies that had a stake in this major cultural enterprise of the 9/11 Memorial Museum. So Alice Greenwald, it's really a pleasure to have you. Thank you for joining us.

GREENWALD: It's my pleasure. Thank you.

HOLO: You have had a long career in museums that deal with memory and memorialization. The politics, the values, the goals that are involved in that. And among your writing and your public lectures you've articulated a really interesting distinction that I want to plumb a little bit. What you call the difference between a sight of memory and a sight of conscience. The titles alone are pretty provocative. So, tell me what you mean by that.

GREENWALD: Well, I think of the sight of memory as a place like a battlefield or a graveyard. You know, when you go to Gettysburg you are there. You're remembering what happened there. It is a place where you are surrounded by the history of an event. And when you leave, you leave with that memory. But there are places one goes to where the memory itself becomes a catalyst for either deep self-reflection or a sense of perhaps stimulus for action. And that I think is when a sight of memory becomes transformed into a sight of conscience. One goes to a Holocaust museum and very often now, whether it's in Washington or Yad Vashem, there's a level of meaning beyond the historical event itself. You experience the event. You learn what happened. But there's something that is expected beyond that. So, in the Holocaust Museum you move from the permanent exhibitions into the **(inaudible)** center, and there are examples of other genocidal situations in our own time. And it is meant to provoke a set of questions in the visitor's mind, which is to say genocide didn't stop with the Holocaust. It has continued in our own time. When it's on my watch, what do I do? Should I do anything? How do I stand up to it?

HOLO: Or even now, as things are, does this call me to something?

GREENWALD: Exactly. I remember many years ago, it has to be at least a decade ago, the Holocaust Museum was when the genocide in Darfur was going on. And the museum did an extraordinary thing. They projected images of what was going on in Darfur on the outside of the building. So, the building itself became a witness to genocide, which I thought was maybe the best example of a sight of conscience.

HOLO: Transforming. Although Yad Vashem would argue it's always been a sight of conscience.

GREENWALD: Exactly. And Yad Vashem does a slightly different thing. You know, when you go through Yad Vashem, and it's a very powerful experience, you come in and in the distance you're already hearing *Hatikvah*. Right?

HOLO: Right. That's part of the...

GREENWALD: You hear it.

HOLO: Yeah, it's on the hillside and you...

GREENWALD: Yes, and you move through that winding path of the exhibition. You come out to the end. You're standing on that veranda overlooking the beautiful hills of Jerusalem and now you hear *Hatikvah*. Clearly there is a message intended for you to understand Holocaust history but with a larger perspective.

HOLO: Or a narrower perspective as it were.

GREENWALD: Well, that's – okay. That's another way of putting it. With a very specific intentionality. I do think it's possible for encounters with memory to take on a larger kind of perspective, which is about conscience.

HOLO: Bigger than the memories itself.

GREENWALD: Correct.

HOLO: Do you think that probably all of your peer institutions or colleagues would have the ambition that their sights of memory be, in fact, or become sights of conscience? Is that not the ambition of almost any – Gettysburg, for example. Gettysburg. Did I hear you say that that would be an example of a sight of memory?

GREENWALD: Yes.

HOLO: But surely it's intended to evoke notions of freedom, and slavery, and race, and Americanism, and what our higher ideals are.

GREENWALD: Yes. I think it does all of that. I'm not sure that's the same as a sight of conscience. I think it's about a reinforcement of American values. Maybe some sense of the futility of war. All those young men running into gun shot.

HOLO: Right.

GREENWALD: It's a sense of, you know, one's identity as an American and remembering the Gettysburg Address, and all of what came as a result of that horrific battle. But I don't think you leave Gettysburg and necessarily say, "I'm going to become a pacifist," or "I'm going to become an activist against such and such."

HOLO: Nor does it call you to do so you're saying.

GREENWALD: No it doesn't. It doesn't.

HOLO: It's not an ambition of the...

GREENWALD: And I think there are different – different places address that ambition at different levels of intensity. The Holocaust Museum in Washington is very specifically and very self-consciously about the Holocaust. That's their charge. But from the very beginning, from their charter, you know the original commission report, it was about remembering for a reason. You know that Wiesel quote, you know, "For the dead and the living we must bear witness" that it wasn't just about the past. It wasn't just about remembering, although that's a huge obligation. It was about remembering so that whenever injustice, whenever people are oppressed, as Wiesel said to President Carter at the dedication of the museum, "It is our responsibility to stand up and to speak." So, that's a very self-conscious call to action.

HOLO: And foregrounded and very explicit.

GREENWALD: Yeah.

HOLO: Going back to memory, when we enshrine memory, when we memorialize, it certainly feels like it's almost always contentious and political in proportion to its profile. If it's high profile, it's highly contentious. All Americans know for a fact that the conceptualization of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum was contentious. It was public. And who knows what wasn't public. But it doesn't seem to be, as you yourself indicated in some earlier remarks, it seems to be built into the project. So is memorialization, in fact, always at least political if not downright contentious? And if so, why?

GREENWALD: Certainly, in our time it has become more contentious. We're much more inclusive in the way we engage in the process of memorialization. They are civic projects. They're not private enterprises. You want to involve as many voices as possible. When the 9/11 Memorial project was just beginning, John Whitehead, of blessed memory now, but he was in charge of this process and he created this program called Listening to the City where they had these forums around the city where people could talk about what they wanted. So, there's a sense of engagement and wanting people to be part of the process. But I think the contentiousness comes because these events which we're chronically, whether it be the

Holocaust or 9/11, they are very public historical events that are considered to be owned by a large – either by the community or by all of Judaism, you know, all the Jewry. But these also involve individual, familial loss. When you have a very public tragedy in which you are a very private victim, or a very private person who has experienced a personal loss, it's not a national tragedy. It's a personal tragedy. And I think that's where a lot of the tension comes from is that, 9/11 in particular, people come to Ground Zero who are family members of victims. They have nowhere else to go to mourn their dead. They may not have received remains of their loved one. They have no cemetery. They have an urn. This is where they come. And it belongs to them. This is where they can mourn their dead. And yet, the world is saying, "Well, but it commemorates an attack against the United States, with an attack in New York. You know, we were all victims in some way of this thing." That's a built intention. And the deep emotion that goes along with commemoration of one's personal loss versus commemoration of communal loss is inevitably going to create problems. I think that's where the tension comes from.

HOLO: That makes sense to me. And as you're speaking it occurs to me that maybe that tension exists even within the experience of the individual touched. Meaning that even if one suffers grief, you want other people to care about your grief.

GREENWALD: Yes.

HOLO: And you were so articulate to say that one of the pillars of the method and goals of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum is to connect. When you suffer something terrible, you want to connect with other people. You want them to buy into your pain, validate it. But at the same time, you want to own it completely. And so even before it gets to the wider world as a stakeholder, you yourself as an individual, actually invite that tension because you want them to be a stakeholder.

GREENWALD: I think that's very perceptive actually. We had conversations in the creating of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum with family members. Some of whom were on our committees and on our board. Who, on the one hand, had felt exactly as you've just articulated. That I remember people coming up to me after meetings and kind of grabbing me by the lapels and saying, shaking me and saying, "People have to know what it was like. They have to know what my loved one suffered. Don't whitewash this history." You know, they wanted us to enable others to share their pain.

HOLO: Right.

GREENWALD: On the other hand, these same people would come back to me and say, "I'm not so sure that we want this to be part of a public experience."

HOLO: Right.

GREENWALD: Right. So, you're right. There's a built-in contradiction there. But, you know, as you're asking this question, I'm thinking the way we commemorate has changed over the centuries in terms of public commemoration, not private, public commemoration. And if you

think about the 18th century even it was the general on a horse. You know, you could have hundreds of people die on the battlefield but their names aren't there.

HOLO: You can see them. They're in the middle of the avenues and the...

GREENWALD: Yeah, it's the general on the horse. There was this all encompassing representation of the dead that we're commemorating, which had to do with more of the sort of sacrifice of the individual for this larger idea, this nation or whatever. That begins to evolve, actually, with the Civil War, and the sheer number of dead and the shock to this relatively young nation of the loss of an entire generation. It began to be more personal and personalized.

By the time you get to World War I, naming the dead, naming the dead soldier is an imperative. If you go to the graveyards in Belgium and in Northern France from World War I, rows upon rows upon rows of crosses, some stars, mostly crosses. And where a name is not known, it is inscribed "Known to God." So, this idea that it was not just the body politic that was sacrificing itself for the nation, for the cause, it was individual. You had the world decimated. You know, one out of ten, that was World War I in England. One out of ten men of that generation were killed. And the need to identify each loss became paramount. Move forward even further, obviously, you have Omaha Beach, a very powerful cemetery for the American losses at Normandy. All of those names, now you have names and ages. And it's one of the most emotional things I've ever experienced, they're 18, 19, 21, 18, 17. You're just – it's horrible. But they're all oriented west. Every one of the names is oriented west so they're looking home.

HOLO: Home.

GREENWALD: And it's personal. It's individual. And talk about rows, upon rows, upon rows, upon rows. It's vast. So you get to Vietnam and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. And it's a brilliant memorial. And it's the exact opposite end of the spectrum from the general on the horse. It's not figurative. It's not telling a story, per se. It's a reflective, panel gash in the ground, wound in the earth. And the names of all of these losses. And you see yourself. So suddenly the memorial is both about the dead and about the living. Right? It's – it could have been you. Right? You're standing there looking and you're seeing yourself and you're looking at these names. Very powerful. So that by the time you get to Oklahoma City and 9/11, the names themselves are now the heart of the memorial in a way. And that's where the greatest amount of contention was in our project, in terms of the memorial, was how to organize the names.

HOLO: Oh my. Unfortunately, I haven't been there yet. Although I look forward to it. How did you land...?

GREENWALD: Well, it took years. And in the end, it was a compromise. But family members, many of them, obviously, wanted their loved ones to be recognized as individuals. So understandably members of the first response organizations, the FDNY and NYPD, wanted their loved ones' ranks included with their names. They were there as rescuers. They went in their professional capacity. They died saving other people. Why not honor what they had

earned in their life in terms of their job? Well, you know, you had the families of civilians who would say, “Well if you’re going to do that then I need Ph.D. after this one, or I need MD before that one.” And I mean it became this, you know, how do you distinguish the dead? Very tough. Very emotional subject.

The architect, the designer, Michael Arad, came up with this idea of what he called meaningful adjacencies - where names would be next to other names by virtue of some kind of connection. And that idea evolved into an organization of the names. Originally they were in random sequence. They were not alphabetical, which they still aren’t. And they were not – there was no sort of logic to where they were placed because terrorism is not logical. It’s not alphabetical. It’s random. One person happens to be on the 100th Floor and the other person is on the 38th Floor. If you’re on the 38th Floor you lived. If you’re on the 100th Floor you died. So, the arbitrariness of murder, mass murder was what he was trying – the loss was just so arbitrary. But for the families, it wasn’t arbitrary. It was their loss.

So, you had this built intention. In the end, the resolution, which I think is utterly brilliant, people were organized by the place they were in on 9/11. So if you were in the North Tower working or on Flight 11 which crashed into the North Tower, your name is on the pool around what we call the North Pool, the pool that’s located where the North Tower was. Names are then grouped by company or affiliation, where you were working that day. But they’re not named. It’s not like a directory, a business directory at the site.

HOLO: Right.

GREENWALD: But their name – they’re clustered. And you’ll see Flight 11 named but you won’t necessarily see Cantor Fitzgerald or Marsh & McLennan. But they are all in a group with the company they were working in. Within that group you will have names that are adjacent to one another because of a family request. So, we went to all the families. We asked is there somebody you would want your loved one’s name close to? And there were many families who lost, you know, siblings. Families that lost parent and child. We have incidences where families came back and said, “My loved one didn’t know this person. They were not friends, but on that day they were together. We know that. We had a call. We know that they were together in the stairwell. They died together. We’re going to put their names together.” So there are, throughout the arrangement of names on both the North and South Pool, you have these larger cluster of groupings. All of the first response agencies are identified. And the companies are not identified by company but they’re clustered. Pentagon is all together. The different flights. And then within them there are these remarkable private associations.

HOLO: That’s incredibly powerful.

GREENWALD: One of them, which is just so beautiful to me because it required actually printing an algorithm to figure out how to make all of these requests work. We had, I think, 1,200 requests out of 3,000. Every time you made one adjacency work everything else went out of whack. So, they ended up creating an algorithm to make it all work. There was a firefighter family, FDNY family, the Vigianos, who lost two boys. One was a fire fighter like their dad. The other was an NYPD officer. Now because the configuration of names grouped

people by their association, their affiliation, so logically they wouldn't be together. But the way the algorithm figured it out, John Vigjano, who I believe was the FDNY fire fighter, he is the last name in the FDNY group. Joe, who is the NYPD officer, begins the police group. So they're together but they're still in their respective groups. And it's that kind of thing that you can walk around the memorial. Families will know when they come upon a name why that name is next to another name. A member of the general public may or may not know.

HOLO: For them it looks – it looks random. Wow!

GREENWALD: That's right.

HOLO: I love the layered explicitness that some parties have a different investment that might help ease that inner tension of wanting your private pain also to be appreciated publically, but not too publically.

GREENWALD: But not too publically.

HOLO: There's a story in the names that they have access to that we don't.

GREENWALD: That's right.

HOLO: And yet, we also have access to the grander story and the sacrifice and the...

GREENWALD: That's right.

HOLO: That's very compelling. Kudos on a great solution too.

GREENWALD: Well, it wasn't mine. But we had – I mean a lot of great, great minds on this project.

(Break: Before we return to the Bully Pulpit we want to tell you about other programs on the College Commons platform for digital learning. Beyond this podcast, which is available to the public at large, synagogue subscriptions offer in-depth learning for adults and teens including online courses, live video interviews, and enhanced podcast episodes with text and teaching tools. We look forward to meeting you at CollegeCommons.HUC.edu. Now, back to our podcast.)

HOLO: In researching for this I read that you gave the commencement address to Sarah Lawrence, which I assume was your alma mater.

GREENWALD: It was.

HOLO: And I want to quote it and then ask a question if I may. So you say, "As a historian, I think about the past. But as a parent, I think about the future. We seem to have forgotten the important lessons through rigorous intellectual inquiry, curiosity about the unfamiliar, and non-judgmental openness to the other." I read this and I remembered a conversation I had with my doctoral adviser when we were reading a medieval text which had to do with

slaves. And we all know that the Bible is filled with slavery. He stopped, he said, "I'm not gonna whitewash slavery and say it's a product of its time. Slavery is wrong. It was wrong then. It's wrong now. And that's my judgment." And he was acting as a historian. He was not doing what you're calling to do in this admittedly other context. You're saying non-judgmental openness to the other. So I wrote out this question to you. And I said, you know, aren't we, historians, supposed to be judgmental? Meaning, to pass judgment. Should we in fact be as open-minded about the other, as you suggest, when we think about the present and the future? I'm asking this question in light of, well, the world's changing in weird and unexpected ways. Our notions about the other are being challenged on political and practical levels. Many of us do aspire to the openness and the non-judgmental approach that you advocated 10 years ago. But isn't there a time for us to judge, and especially in your position at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum? It seems like there's a powerful judgment going on.

GREENWALD: There's two different things here. First of all, that referred in the context of the speech to a statement made by Anthony Kennedy at my son's commencement at NYU the year before. Where he implored the graduates to see the humanity in people who were different from them.

HOLO: Yes. Yes.

GREENWALD: And that's what that is specifically referring to in the Sarah Lawrence speech.

HOLO: Right.

GREENWALD: I want to be absolutely clear that at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum we are unequivocal in our position of judgment that mass murder is wrong. The perpetrators were misguided and criminal in their action. There is no excuse whatsoever for what happened on 9/11. There is no justification for it at all. I say that unequivocally. So, that's a judgment. What I am calling for, however, is to be wary of forgetting the humanity of the people we don't understand. 9/11 was not a tsunami. It was not a natural disaster. It was perpetrated by human beings against other human beings. As abhorrent as it is and was, and as unacceptable as it is and was, it obliges us as human beings to step back and say, "Why did they do that?" What's behind this? Because they were human beings who have will. They can choose to act.

HOLO: They were sentient.

GREENWALD: Yes. They didn't do this blindly. They knew exactly what they were doing. Most of them knew exactly what they were doing. They knew they were going to be on a suicide mission. Not all of them, I think, knew exactly the details. It was well choreographed. But certainly, Muhammad Atta knew exactly what was going to happen. Bin Laden knew exactly what was going to happen. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed knew exactly what was going to happen.

So, you have people who are human beings, who are family members, have children of their own have wives or multiple wives if they're – who live like we do. They love. They eat. They aspire. They study. And yet, this was acceptable to them, to behave in this way. I need to understand that. And maybe in the effort to understand how human beings can make that kind of choice, how evil is actually possible, maybe that brings me to some form of enlightenment. Not to give an excuse. Not to rationalize it. Not to excuse it in any way, shape or form. But to say, I have to understand this because it's telling me about my own humanity.

In the 9/11 Museum where we end up at the end of the historical narrative, we stop the chronology with the closure of Ground Zero at the end of the recovery. But we don't close the exhibition there. We leave you with these questions, these big questions that come out of 9/11. One of the questions is, "How should I remember?" Part of it is, what kind of memorial do you build? But the bigger part of that question is looking at the way people responded to 9/11 with gestures of such profound human goodness in the face of such profound human degradation and evil that you have to stop and say to yourself, "Okay, I'm a human being. Obviously human beings, we know this from time and memorial, have the capacity to do horrible things to one another." We've seen it since Cain and Abel. And it hasn't gotten any better. It's gotten worse.

So that's a part of who I am as a human being, part of what I'm capable of. The other part of what I'm capable of is what people did on 9/11. You know, the colleague who would not abandon his co-worker and friend of 30 years who happened to be a quadriplegic. And he wasn't going to leave that office and leave his friend behind. He stayed. Okay. He was named by President Bush as a hero four days after 9/11 in the National Cathedral service because it was such an extraordinary gesture of compassion and empathy and loyalty. And that man happened to be a Jew, Abe Zelmanowitz, who stood by his friend, Ed Beyea, and would not leave.

People came to Ground Zero from literally all over the world after 9/11 and said, "What can I do?" There's a podiatrist, a Dr. Goodian, who left his practice, came down to St. Paul's Chapel where the recovery workers would have their respite. They would rest and have meals before going back onto the pile. And he came there. He thought, well these guys are in these boots, they're standing on a burning pile of steel. The boots are literally melting on their feet and I'm going to give them foot massages. I'm going to help their feet so they can get back out there. He stayed not one day, he stayed for nine months. While the recovery was on he came every day. He gave up his practice. He suspended it to do that work.

So what is it in us, as human beings, that on the one hand we can be horrific and murderous and on the other hand we can be empathetic and generous and self-less? 9/11 is a case study in the best and the worst of who we are. We give you several examples of people who did unusual things after 9/11 in commemoration of loved ones, or in general just to commemorate the event. And the best story I can tell you is this amazing woman who was a principal in Lower Manhattan, Ada Dolch. On 9/11, she was principal of Leadership & Public Service High School which was located about two blocks south of the World Trade Center. Her school was a polling place for the Mayoral primary so she had neighbors coming in. It was the second day of school. And you had kids coming in like, "Where's my homeroom?"

You know, and she'd sort of go up to, you know, floor three. She's got her walkie-talkie in her hand and she's directing people here and there. And at 8:46, this student runs in from the street hysterical that a plane has just hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center Tower. And she calms this young person down and says, "Okay, the authorities are going to be here. The first responders will be here. You go up to your classroom. It's going to be okay." Within seconds of doing that, she starts to get alerts on her handheld radio from security. High schools in New York are vertical, they're not horizontal. And the security guards are saying to her, "Kids are standing at the window. They are seeing things they should not see. We need to close school." And she's like, "I'm not closing school. I've got the people voting downstairs, you know. We can't close school." She hemming and she's hawing and she doesn't know what to do. And the second plane hits and she goes into overdrive. And she evacuates the school. She closes the polls, sends the neighbors home and gets 600 students and teachers and has to, on her feet, figure where she's going to take them because normally in an emergency their mustering site is the World Trade Center. She can't go there. So, she goes south. She goes down to the Battery. And while they're down there the collapse happens. And she's still responsible for all of these children. And long story short, she makes sure that all of the kids are buddied up. Everybody either gets to New Jersey or they get home safely. Everybody is accounted for. What she doesn't tell anybody that day is her sister, Wendy, who worked at Cantor Fitzgerald on the top floors of the North Tower, she will say that she remembers at that moment, when she's evacuating the school, saying, "God, you have to take care of Wendy. I've got to take care of these kids." And, you know, Wendy did not survive. This was a tragic loss. Aida tried to figure out how she would commemorate the life of her sister. So how does a principal and educator choose to commemorate the life of her sister? She finds a group that builds schools. And with this group they build a school in Herat, Afghanistan named for her sister. We have a photograph at the end of the historical exhibition in the Museum of Ada Dolch in a headscarf, surrounded by boys because it's a boys' school. It's Afghanistan. But it's named for Wendy Rosario.

And you think about that for a moment. Aida is a New York City school principal. She doesn't have a gazillion dollars. She doesn't have the wherewithal. She figured out a way to do what she felt was the right way to commemorate. You build forward. You educate. That that was her solution for who she was.

It makes you stop and think, "If she can do something like that, what's stopping me from doing something like that?" Not that everybody's going to go out and build a school, but we have the capacity to do any number of things as human beings. In the end, it's our choice what we do. That, in a way, is the message of the 9/11 Museum. We're not going to stop terrorism. We try our best. And thank God our intelligence and our law enforcement have been amazing in the aftermath of 9/11. We have not had another incident like that at all. We've been protected. It's to their enormous credit. But as Margaret Thatcher used to say, "They only have to be right once. We have to be right every time." It will happen. We will not be able to prevent it. Evil will happen. Human beings will continue to do horrible things to other human beings. The only thing we have control over is how we respond to it. And that's the measure of our humanity. And that's really what this is about.

HOLO: Bringing us back to the beginning of our conversation, that's what makes the 9/11 Museum a sight of conscience.

GREENWALD: Correct.

HOLO: Well, I have many more questions but we won't have the time to ask them. So, I'm going to thank you very, very much for a wonderful day, a great interview.

GREENWALD: Thank you. Pleasure.

HOLO: It's going to be very, very fascinating for our listeners. So thank you very much. It's really been a pleasure.

HOLO: You've been listening to the College Commons Bully Pulpit Podcast, produced by the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion. We hope you enjoyed this podcast. And please join us again at CollegeCommons.HUC.edu.

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