

Chasing Shadows

Hugo Gryn with Naomi Gryn

About the Book

Chasing Shadows is the memoir of Holocaust survivor Rabbi Hugo Gryn which follow his life from his happy childhood and prosperous family life in Berehovo in the Carpathian mountains (then in Czechoslovakia, now in Ukraine) to his experiences in Auschwitz-Birkenau and as a slave labourer during the Holocaust.

About the Author

Rabbi Hugo Gryn (1930 – 1996) was a Reform Rabbi, broadcaster and interfaith dialogue campaigner. After surviving the Holocaust he came to Britain where he served as Rabbi at the West London Synagogue for 32 years and was a regular contributor to Thought for the Day and The Moral Maze. Hugo Gryn first spoke about his experiences of the Holocaust in 1978 as a reaction to Holocaust denial.

Naomi Gryn is the daughter of Hugo Gryn and a writer, broadcaster and documentary film maker.

Discussion Questions

Please note that some of these questions will act as spoilers for the book.

1. do you find it strange that Hugo and his mother did not stay together after arriving home in Berehovo? Does this opinion change as you read more of their life stories and learn of their experiences?
2. what sense of Jewish community and family life do the first 7 chapters offer? It is a common feature of Holocaust survivor memoirs that escape to safer countries has been delayed or cancelled in order to care for relatives, particularly older relatives (see also Night <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/for-adults/books-for-adults-night> by Elie Wiesel). Is this a sacrifice you can understand? Does our hindsight make this choice seem less or more understandable?
3. why would Hugo not forgive Imre for being the first to die?

4. what are the possible reasons for Hugo resurrecting his dead brother Clem?
5. do you agree with Hugo's assertion that Jews had 'a moral and a physical responsibility to resist, if needs be, with violence'?
6. what is your opinion of Hugo's father's opinion that 'You cannot live three minutes without hope'? How did he find the hope necessary to survive in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Liebrose?
7. what are the shadows referred to in the book's title?

You can use HMD resources to find out more about life in the concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau <http://www.hmd.org.uk/genocides/life-in-the-camps/>, the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau <http://www.hmd.org.uk/genocides/liberation-ofauschwitzbirkenau/>

Also experiences of survivors Freddie Knoller <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/survivor-stories/holocaust-testimony-freddie-knoller> and Kitty Hart-Moxon <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/survivor-stories/holocaust-testimony-kitty-hartmoxon>.

The HMD Education website <http://education.hmd.org.uk> uses the story of Hugo Gryn <http://education.hmd.org.uk/case-studies/hugo-gryn> as a basis for a number of lesson plans and activities suitable for primary, secondary and post-16 students across different subject areas.