

The Shoah Memorial

The Shoah Memorial is both a museum, a documentation center, but most of all a place of memory and commemoration of the Jewish genocide during the Second World War.



The site was inaugurated in 1956, on October 30th, with more than 50 delegations from all around the world. It is located in the Marais neighborhood in Paris, a neighborhood where an important part of the Jewish community lived since the 18th century, a choice that reinforces the symbolic aspect of the site. The purpose of this memorial is to pay tribute to the Jews who were persecuted and deported during the Shoah, and to present the consequences of anti-semitism throughout the centuries. All the archives, all the images and all the documents in this Memorial have been collected through the years, often clandestinely, particularly during the Second World War, thanks to the action of the CDJC (Centre de documentation Juive Contemporaine created in 1943 by Isaac Schneersohn). The purpose of the CDJC was to collect proof of the persecution of Jews to testify and demand justice as soon as the war ended. This objective would be reached a few years later with the Nuremberg trials during which documents archived by the CDJC will

serve as overwhelming proof against the Nazis. It was finally in 1950 that Isaac Schneersohn decided to create this Memorial. But it would take several years before the Memorial was inaugurated because a part of the Jewish community feared that this Memorial would be seen as “an institution focused on the past”. It quickly became important, and was classified as a historical building in 1991. The Memorial has since been further extended, with the wall of names inaugurated by Jacques Chirac in 2005. The Memorial is one of France's most important places of memory of the genocide of Jews during the Second World War.

Three places charged with memory and emotion

Arriving at the Memorial, visitors first enter a silent and solemn interior court, in an atmosphere that inspires respect. Then visitors pass between the wall of names, where the names of all the people deported from France between 1942 and 1944 are inscribed. Visitors thus find the names of 75,847 people, 11,400 of which were children, classified in alphabet order by year of deportation and date of birth, allowing the families of the victims to find the names of their loved ones, and to be able to reflect. The wall is made of stone from Jerusalem, the holy city for Jews. This stone gives the wall a very clear and sober aspect, which accentuates the writing of the names, inscribed in black. Families are also contributing in the evolution of the wall, to rectify incorrect information such as names deformed by the Nazis in their registers. The wall contained so many errors that it was partially destroyed, then rebuilt in 2020 to correct it even better. The wall of names contributes to the duty of memory, allowing us to better realize the number of deported people, but most of all it reminds us of the identity of each of these people, in order to be able to remember them.



Another striking feature of the museum is the Children's Wall, which commemorates the 11,400 Jewish children deported from France during the Second World War. This wall is composed of thousands of photographs of children—smiling, happy—captured before their lives were tragically cut short by the Shoah. Through these images, the memorial chooses to celebrate life rather than focus solely on suffering. Each face is a poignant reminder that these children were human beings—loved, cherished, and full of dreams. The wall's design is symbolic: it does not touch the ground, representing lives that were taken too soon—suspended in time. Each photograph invites visitors to reflect on the injustice and absurdity of these lost futures.



We then arrive at a large, solemn room called The Crypte. This vast, dark space features a large central star with six black marble branches, symbolizing the Star of David, the emblem of the Jewish faith. It serves as the symbolic tomb for the six million Jews who perished without a grave.

At the center of the star burns an eternal flame, and beneath it lie ashes from victims of the death camps, mixed with the rubble of the Warsaw Ghetto. The number six holds deep significance—representing both the branches of the star and the six million lives lost. Behind the flame, on the back wall, are two biblical quotations inscribed in Hebrew:

"Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow." "Young and old, our daughters and sons mowed down by the sword."

These inscriptions reinforce the tribute paid to the victims and the immense suffering endured by the Jewish people. The eternal flame acts as both a symbol of remembrance and a sacred space where the memory of the Shoah's victims is honored.



Le musée rappelle non seulement les atrocités de la Shoah, mais il évoque de façon plus générale l'histoire de l'antisémitisme tout au long des temps et suscite diverses réflexions sur la place des juifs en France. Il rappelle également des moments de tension extrêmes comme la période de l'affaire Dreyfus. Dans ce musée, on peut par exemple trouver une édition ancienne de l'ouvrage dédié à l'affaire Dreyfus rédigé par Bernard Lazare. Il s'agit des investigations menées par le journaliste en 1897 afin de rétablir la vérité sur l'affaire. Parmi les objets émouvants du musée sont présentés des étoiles de David de couleur jaune. Il s'agit d'une mesure de discrimination imposée par l'Allemagne nazie aux juifs des pays conquis, au sein d'un processus plus large de persécution : la politique antisémite du IIIe Reich. Elle sert à assigner, à montrer, à surveiller, à contrôler et à arrêter. En France occupée (zone nord), le port de l'étoile jaune est rendu obligatoire en zone occupée pour tous les Juifs, étrangers et français, de plus de 6 ans par une ordonnance parue le 7 juin 1942. Il est important de rappeler qu'on ne la portait pas à Vichy. Le musée les conditions de vie des Juifs à travers l'histoire européenne, du Moyen Age à nos jours, principalement avec des journaux et des archives historiques.

The Memorial to the Shoah plays a crucial role in raising awareness of the injustices and persecution faced by the Jewish community throughout history. It reveals the profound and ongoing impact of antisemitism on French society. More than a place of memory, it is a call to remember, not only for the sake of the victims, but to educate future generations about the dangers of discrimination, hatred, and intolerance.