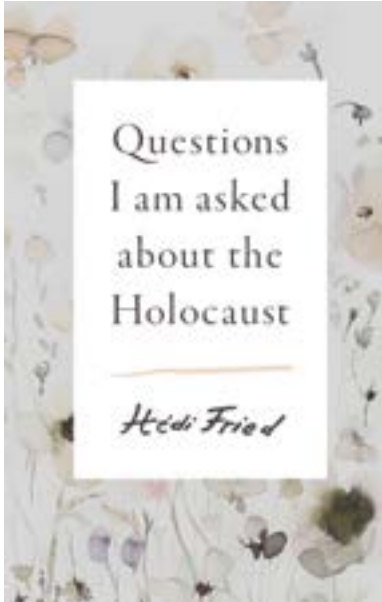


Kritikos

agora reviews

Available online at www.htav.asn.au/agora/reviews



Questions I Am Asked About the Holocaust

by Heidi Fried
Translated by Alice E. Olsson

2019
Melbourne
Scribe
Hardback, 160 pages

Reviewed by Ellen Langmead
Caulfield Grammar School, Caulfield

Questions I Am Asked about the Holocaust by Heidi Fried is an honest and insightful series of responses to questions that the author has been asked over the years about her experiences before, during and after the Holocaust. While all stories from Holocaust survivors hold significant value from a historical point of view, what makes Heidi Fried stand out is her intense awareness of the contemporary world, as well of World War II. She wrote this book as a follow-up, or perhaps as an accompaniment, to her autobiography, *Fragments of a Life: The Road to Auschwitz*, and has also spoken frequently to school children, including presenting to schools with neo-Nazi influences. She writes of how the way she communicates is 'an attempt to portray the people of the past and their living conditions, which contributed to making the Holocaust possible.'

Heidi Fried is clearly a highly intelligent woman with a true understanding of the political and social climate of World War II Europe. Fried grew up in a small town in eastern Europe, which, by its 'return' to Hungary from Romania, caused Fried and her family to fall into 'despair,' but she writes with an awareness of Europe more broadly. She speaks of the Weimar Republic, the concept of 'living space' (lebensraum) and how she feels that colonialism shaped much of what ultimately led to the Holocaust. As a way to 'teach us to avoid historical mistakes,' Fried herself has made a concerted effort to thoroughly understand the 'historical mistake' which saw herself and her sister ripped from their home, their parents and their basic human rights.

Structurally, the book is broken into answers to questions. Some answers are very brief and acknowledge that 'there are some questions that have no answer.' Others are longer and draw the reader into her life and experiences, with all the fear and heartbreak that comes along with that. Though Fried speaks frankly, her writing is not clinical, and the reader is compelled to feel the emotional impact of the words on the page.

Ultimately, this book seems to serve as an impassioned 'call to arms' in which Heidi Fried speaks to the people that come after her, to the youth. She demands that they must 'never get used to injustices' and that 'injustices must be nipped in the bud.' She reflects critically on her own prejudices, being raised thinking that the Jews were superior to the Roma people, and that the Romanian Jews were superior to the Polish Jews. She ponders that it was never fair that her family paid a maid who 'got up early in the morning to make a fire, so that we would not have to be cold.' As new rules and changes were put into place every couple of months, then every couple of weeks, until finally she and her family were bundled onto a train to Auschwitz, Fried reflects that 'there should have been protests.' To the people of today, she tells us that that 'we must fight for our democracy.' This would speak to secondary students today, enabling them to find a connection between the study of an event that has very few living eye-witness accounts remaining, and the current global political events with which they find themselves grappling.