

by Yvette Nahmia-Messinas

A distinguished team of architects, interior designers and curators are completing the work of reshaping, expanding and adding to Yad Vashem's current facilities. The new building of the International School for Holocaust Studies and the new Archives building are nearing completion and will be officially opened to the public in October 1999. The construction of the new Entrance Complex and Visitors Center, *Mevuah*, is in process. The design of the new Historical Museum has been drafted and a model of the Hall of Names has been built illustrating the Hall's interior.

Towards the end of their tour of the new Historical Museum, visitors will enter the Museum's Hall of Names. The Hall of Names' purpose, as Director Alexander Avraham points out, will be to store the more than three million names of Jewish Holocaust victims currently in Yad Vashem's files and hopefully all six million names and short biographies on Pages of Testimony. The information stored on Pages of Testimony will be accessible through computer terminals situated in a room adjacent to the main section of the Hall of Names, as well as in the new Learning Center.

Dorit Harel, of Harel Designers, who worked closely with Moshe Safdie, architect of the Historical Museum, and a team of Yad Vashem professionals consisting of Avner Shalev, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate; Alexander Avraham, Director of the Hall of Names; Yehudit Inbar, Director of the Museums Department; and Professor Yisrael Gutman, Yad Vashem's Chief Historian, explains the structure. The Hall of Names has three sections: the *Genizah*, the hall of Memory, and the computer database access area. The *Genizah* and the hall of Memory constitute the building's main part.

In the hall of Memory, two cones form a continuum of space; one cone is directed downward, towards the ground, the other cone is directed upward, towards the sky. Faces of victims will appear on a background of Pages of Testimony and will be superimposed on a glass frame on the cone reaching upward. In contrast, the surface of the 11 meter-long cone reaching to the ground will be crude, consisting of the rock and earth revealed at the excavation.

The cones face opposite directions. In the circular space created in their center, an elevated platform will be situated from which viewers will be able to see the victims' faces. Interpretations of this memorial space vary. It is seen by some as a memorial candle whose light is eternal. Others perceive it as a well set deep in the ground, from which the victims' cries are echoed and their faces reflected. No matter how many different meanings the structure has to different people, one thing is certain; this space will evoke powerful images within the visitor.

Encircling the area where the two cones meet, is a ring-shaped area that forms the *Genizah*, that will house the original Pages of Testimony. Visitors will not have direct access to this area, but will be able to see it from the platform. In an adjacent room, visitors can conduct name searches. The *Genizah* can represent a symbolic cemetery for the victims deprived of a grave and a tombstone. The deceased person's name, place and date of birth and death, traditionally carved on marble, will be written here in ink on the Pages of Testimony, fulfilling the sacred work of burying, at least symbolically, the Holocaust's six million Jewish dead.

# Architecture of Memory

*The model of the new Hall of Names structure*

