Questions to Ponder:

1. Does humor subvert or deepen our understanding?
2. Should the Holocaust be the subject of humor?
3. By making a joke, are we suggesting the subject of our joke is irrelevant?
4. Does a Holocaust comedy have to be funny?
5. Are some types of humor or comedy “appropriate” and others not? (e.g. slapstick, trashy, low-brow, one-liners, etc.)
6. Does “Holocaust etiquette” (Terrence Des Pres) require us to treat the subject “delicately and soberly”?
7. Does it matter who delivers the humor and who the audience is?
8. “Who has the right to tell Holocaust jokes?”

Films

- Adam Resurrected
- Jakob the Liar
- Inglorious Basterds
- Life is Beautiful (Italian)
- Train of Life (French)
Gallows Humor

- Last ditch attempt at humor by the condemned
- Used to express hope and resilience by victims

Role of Humor

“I tell you it is an ugly and mean world and only to spite it one mustn’t weep! If you want to know, that is the real source, the true cause of my constant good spirits, of my, as it is called, “humor.” Not to cry out of spite! Only to laugh out of spite, only to laugh.”
- Sholem Aleichem

Humor helps us bear the burden of tragedy.

Humor has the ability to shock and make us uncomfortable.

As author Henry Bulawko asks in his anthology of Jewish and Israeli humor, “If Jews were deprived of the power to laugh at their own distress, what would be left of them?” and a Yiddish proverb states “laughter is heard farther than weeping.”

“The dominant theory of humor is the Incongruity Theory. To find something funny, according to this account, is to enjoy some incongruity in it. Jokes, for example, typically lead our minds along path A, and then at the punch line, send them off onto path B. Our train of thought is derailed, and if we enjoy the mental jolt, we laugh.”
- John Morreall