

“This song shall speak up before it as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring.” (31:21)

This is the only consolation for a prophecy foretelling Klal Yisrael's slide into a life of sin and rebellion against the Almighty. The Torah might be ignored; it might even be snubbed, but it will never be completely forgotten. Throughout history, there has always been a revival of Torah study following a period when many thought that its end was near. During the Holocaust of World War II, when Europe was burning, there were those doomsayers that said the end of Torah was near. It would die with European Jewry. This was not the case. Those who miraculously survived did not give in to depression and apathy. They realized that they were spared for a reason – to rebuild the Jewish nation, to develop thriving Torah centers that would educate the next generation of observant Jews, to see to it that “it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its offspring.”

Many stories recount the hardship, the emotion, the fear and the ultimate triumph connected with the near loss of our national heritage and its rejuvenation in this country. I feel that one very poignant story, cited by Rabbi Paysach Krohn, encapsulates these emotions. He writes about a Holocaust survivor who traveled from his home in the Midwest to Monsey, N.Y., to witness his grandson putting on Tefillin for the first time. This was a very special occasion for him, one that he did not want to miss.

They went that morning to the students' minyan at his grandson's school. Three generations: a grandfather, survivor of the Holocaust; a son, who grew up in the specter of the Holocaust; and a grandson, an American boy, who was continuing the legacy of previous generations. One can imagine the deep sense of pride and gratitude to Hashem that prevailed that morning. There was a deeper emotion, however, a pent-up emotion that lay dormant for years awaiting the moment when it could be expressed. It occurred as the young Bar-Mitzvah boy took out the Tefillin from its velvet pouch and, with the help of his father and under the watchful proud eyes of his grandfather, recited the blessing with enthusiasm and devotion, as he wrapped the Tefillin on his left arm.

Suddenly, the grandfather's eyes welled up with emotion and burst forth into tears. He did not just cry; he began to sob – loudly. For a few moments it seemed as if the grandfather's weeping was uncontrollable. After a while, he regained his composure and settled down to enjoy the simchah, special joyous moment. The grandson's rebbe took this all in. He cautiously approached the grandfather and said, “This must be a very emotional moment for you. To have survived the horrors of Hitler, to stand side by side with your son and grandson at this momentous occasion, must truly be overwhelming.”

“In a way you are correct, but it was not my grandson who brought me to tears,” responded the grandfather. “It is the sight of hundreds of boys davening together, raising their voices with “Amen,” acknowledging the Almighty with gratitude, love and awe, that brought about my display of emotion. I remember an incident that took place back in 1945, soon after the war. I was one of

the lucky ones to survive the destruction of the Vilna Ghetto. It was Simchas Torah, the festival when we rejoice with the Torah, when singing and dancing reign throughout the shul, when children joyfully dance with their flags. We had a minyan, but – there were no children.

“We finished davening and were about to dance the Hakafos, traditional dance with the Sefer Torah, but – there was no Torah. No children – no Torah. The children did not survive, the Torah had either been looted or destroyed. What kind of Simchas Torah could a group of broken men have without children and without a Torah? We stared at each other in despair as the horrors of the past few years returned to haunt us.

“Suddenly, a young couple entered the shul with two little children, a boy and a girl. The poor girl’s vocal cords had not developed properly, because she had been hiding in an attic for over a year, where she was only permitted to whisper quietly. We all stared at each other incredulously. We did not know who this couple was; we had never seen them before tonight. As they entered the shul, however, we realized that these children were our future. We scooped them up and, with tears of joy, we took turns dancing with them. They were our Hakafos, as we danced clutching these children to our hearts.

“As I look around this yeshivah today, and I see hundreds of living Sifrei Torah, I remember that fateful Simchas Torah. We were uncertain then of the future. We had hope, we aspired, we thirsted, but we did not know if our longing would ever achieve fruition. Today, I cry because I see that we have triumphed. We survived the horrors of the Holocaust, and we have rebuilt Torah in our communities. Today, I cry with joy and gratitude that Hashem allowed me to live to see and experience this moment.”

This grandfather was one of thousands of survivors who feared that spiritual extinction would follow on the heels of the physical calamity that befell our People. They desperately worried that the Jewish nation was spiritually beyond help. It was no wonder that in the aftermath of such a cataclysmic destruction, this feeling was prevalent. Yet, there were those who remembered the pasuk – Hashem’s promise that the Torah will never be forgotten. They toiled with blood, sweat and tears to rebuild the Torah centers of Europe. They undertook to build day schools throughout this country. The thriving educational institutions of today are a living testimony that the Torah will never be forgotten from our midst.