

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

The Torah guarantees us that it will not be forgotten. This refers to the Torah in its entirety. It will be with us until the end of time. This assurance has been put to the test during each generation, reaching epic proportions during some of our darkest periods of history. In his *Chayei Olam*, the *Steipler Rav*, *zl*, takes the reader on a journey throughout history, recounting the many challenges that we have confronted: We were hurt; we were exiled; we were persecuted; but our commitment to the Torah remained intact. The Torah has undergone nine exiles: Bavel; North Africa; Egypt; Italy; Spain; France/Germany; Poland/ Lithuania. These countries have served as home to Torah development, its literature and dissemination.

Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, premier disciple of the *Gaon, zl, m’Vilna*, founder and *Rosh Yeshivah* of the famed *Yeshivas Volozhin*, was once *davening Shacharis* together with the *Yeshivah*. Suddenly, he emitted a large sigh and began to cry bitterly for a few moments. Following *davening*, he customarily went to his office where he would spend a good part of the day. Obviously, the students were concerned about his crying. It was highly unusual for the *Rosh Yeshivah* to show such extreme emotion. The students prevailed upon *Horav David Tebel, zl*, author of the *Nachalas David* and probably *Rav Chaim’s* greatest student, to enter the room and ask *Rav Chaim* for an explanation.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explained that Torah has been compelled to journey through ten exiles. It is now in its ninth exile. There is one more – one more place where the Torah will be studied and developed – America: “I fear for the hardships the architects of Torah in America will experience as they confront the various challenges and obstacles in its development. I am afraid of what they will have to endure during this process. And I wonder if they will succeed in establishing a *yeshivah* that will follow in the tradition that has been transmitted to us from generation to generation. Yes, I wonder what image Torah will have in America.”

Be that as it may, the Torah’s journey to America has succeeded, but is it on the hallowed level of pre-World War II Europe? What we must understand is that the Torah we study today in America is the same Torah that has survived generations of exile. Thus, by studying it, we establish and concretize it as an inextricable bond with the generations that have preceded us. Hashem guaranteed that the Torah will never be forgotten. We are part of that Divine promise. Every time we immerse ourselves in the sea of *Talmud*, we maintain the guarantee. How fortunate is one who devotes himself to Torah study – be it full-time or part-time – for he is playing a crucial role in fulfilling Hashem’s promise.

If we peruse history, we will note that it was the promise that the Torah will never be forgotten that has spurred and maintained the growth of our People. After the recent Holocaust, a few Torah

scholars – who themselves were embers saved from the raging fires that consumed most of European Jewry – came to these shores. This handful of dedicated men succeeded in planting the seeds of the Torah renaissance we enjoy today. This is due to the power of Hashem's promise. The *Steipler* writes that this promise was given to us collectively as a nation. In other words, the Torah will not be forgotten from the nation. In order for each **individual** to benefit from, and reap the fruits of this promise, he must attach himself to **the nation**. This means not "once in a while," or on "specific holidays," or "when I am in the mood," but **all** the time.

While it might seem that the above words are addressing those who act like part-time Jews – who saunter in and out of *shul* as they please – they are meant for **all** of us. We do not know how our "participation" in Judaism is viewed from Above. I recently read a story concerning *Horav Aharon Karliner, zl*, which I think is frightening and should give us all something to consider this *Shabbos Shuvah*:

The *Karliner* was standing in his customary place in front of the congregation. It was the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, and the *chazzan*, cantor, began *Tefillas Shacharis* with his rendition of the one word which describes the awesome nature of the holy day: "*HaMelech!* – The King!" This is, of course, a reference to Hashem whom we "coronate" on *Rosh Hashanah*. At the very moment that the *chazzan* intoned this word, *Rav Aharon* fainted!

A few moments went by, and the *Rebbe* came to and continued the prayer service. After *davening*, one of his close students asked him, "What happened to cause the *Rebbe* to pass out?" The disciple understood that nothing "just happens." There is a deep reason and meaning for everything that occurs.

The *Karliner* replied, "The word *HaMelech* reminded me of an incident related in the *Talmud Gittin* 56a. Rabbi Yochanan *ben Zakai* presented himself to Vespasian, the Roman governor, who was in the midst of laying siege to Yerushalayim. The sage greeted the governor with the words, "Peace to you, your majesty. Peace to you, your majesty." Vespasian was taken aback. After all, he was only the governor. He countered, "You deserve to be executed... for if I am king, why have you not come until now to pay homage to me?"

The *Rebbe* continued, "On the Days of Awe, when we proclaim Hashem as King of the Universe, He might respond to us, 'If so, if I am King, why have you not come before Me until now?'"

As an added explanation, the *Karliner* was intimating that even on **their** exalted level of devotion to Hashem, the Almighty might find fault in their awareness of Him during the rest of the year. We think that we are devoted; we think that we attend services in *shul*; we think that we learn properly. What if we are wrong? At this time of the year when introspection is a constant – or at least it should be – we should give some thought to these questions. Are we doing enough, often enough, and with sincere devotion? To be included in the nation's renaissance, we must play an active role in being part of the nation.