

Give ears, O' Heavens, and I will speak... Remember the days of yore... when Hashem will have judged His People, He shall relent regarding His servants. (32:1,7,36)

Two themes seem to stand out throughout *Shiras Ha'azinu*, The Song of *Ha'azinu*. First, *Chazal* refer to this sketch of history as a song. **Horav Gedalyah Schorr, zl**, explains the concept of song with regard to Jewish history. A song implies the concept of harmony. This means that all elements of an orchestra, a musical score with its high and low notes, all the voices of a choir work together in total harmony, creating a perfect and pleasant sound. Likewise, we recognize that all of the elements of the universe fuse together in carrying out G-d's Will. From a historical perspective, we look back and recognize how all of the aspects of the past, present and future meld together into a harmonious blend. What did not make sense in the past is only too clear in the present and must be prevented in the future. The more spiritually elevated one is, the clearer is his perspective. He sees the larger picture.

Second, we see that history has a pattern. Nothing occurs in a vacuum. Hashem presents reward and punishment, but, above all, He never rejects us. Regardless of our ingratitude, our flirting with secularism, and our dabbling in the morally bankrupt society in which we live, Hashem always takes us back. While our ultimate redemption is not contingent upon repentance – it helps. *Shiras Ha'azinu* guarantees our survival and the downfall of our enemies.

The song represents the spirit of the Torah which connects us to Hashem. A song is the expression of one's inner self. While there are those who, in their way of life, have rejected the Torah, its song continues to resonate within them. As long as one has a *Yiddishe Neshamah*, Jewish Soul, he is inextricably connected to Hashem. I believe it was the *Baal Shem Tov* who said, "Man can say he is with G-d; he can say he is against G-d; but he can never say that he is without G-d." Hashem never turns Himself away from us. He merely conceals His Countenance when we sin, but He is always present - waiting for our return.

The following vignettes demonstrate Jewish spiritual resilience even under the most difficult duress and how, regardless one's distance from Hashem, the connection endures. *Horav Ezriel Tauber, Shlita*, relates how a heinous act of cruelty became a springboard for increased faith in Hashem, inspiring even the most assimilated Jews to experience an unparalleled spiritual revelation, allowing them to achieve *Kiddush Shem Shomayim* as they left this world.

The Nazis were not satisfied with destroying the Jews physically; they sought also to devastate the Jewish spirit, to utterly abase it. Their diabolical plan involved a curtain – a curtain that had once been the *Paroches*, Curtain, hanging over an *Aron HaKodesh*, Holy Ark, in which the Torah scrolls had been stored. Embroidered on the front of this curtain were the words: *Zeh ha'Shaar l'Hashem tzaddikim yavo'u bah*, "This is the Gate of G-d, the righteous shall enter therein."

Their goal was to provoke utter shock and despair, to break the spirit within the condemned Jews, hoping thereby that the hapless Jews would renounce their faith at the last moment and turn against their Creator.

They were wrong. On the contrary, the opposite occurred. The sight of these holy words had an unprecedented spiritual impact upon the condemned who were destined to enter the “Gate of G-d.” Some of them were individuals whose souls were dormant during a lifetime of alienation from Torah and *mitzvos*. Yet they suddenly came alive within them. They felt a new strength of spirit, as they went to their final mortal destination amid song and dance. They understood – indeed, they knew – clearly and without a doubt that this gate, the gate to the gas chambers, truly led to Hashem.

Horav Yisrael Meir Lau, Shlita, was asked to speak at a conference sponsored by and held at Tel Aviv University. He would be sharing the podium with a guest of honor from France: Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger. The conference was to take place on the eve of Holocaust Memorial Day. The Cardinal was going to address the topic: “The place of G-d in the Holocaust.” *Rav* Lau was asked to debate the Cardinal. The *Rav* flatly refused.

He refused because it was a *chillul Hashem*, a desecration of Hashem’s Name. Cardinal Lustiger had been born a Jew, apostatized himself and converted to Catholicism. His mother had perished in Auschwitz. As a lad of fourteen, the young Jean-Marie knowingly and willingly baptized himself. Thus, the Jewish boy, born Ahron Lustiger, became the Catholic Jean-Marie Lustiger.

One can imagine that the Chief Rabbi’s decision caused a furor in a country not unused to political commotion. The *Rav* felt that a university, albeit secular, but yet under Jewish auspices, in a Jewish state, could do better than select an apostate guest of honor to commemorate the Holocaust. Yet, the secularists felt the *Rav* owed the country an explanation.

The next day, Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Chief Rabbi spoke at the Great Synagogue shortly prior to reciting the *Yizkor* memorial service. He said, “Hitler gave us six-million reasons to recite *Kaddish*, but following Lustiger’s path would mean that there would be no descendants left to recite *Kaddish* for those who perished. At their darkest hour in history, Lustiger turned away and defected from his people. At a time when they needed maximum encouragement, he cowered under a cross. He went as far as to choose a lifestyle that would not permit him to raise a family, insuring that no one would remain to recite *Kaddish* for him.”

Now that I have presented how far astray this man had swerved from the Judaism of his ancestors, I will share with the readers a little secret about this apostate. On those days of the year when Cardinal Lustiger has *Yahrzeit* for his father and mother, he removes his Catholic cloak, dons an ordinary suit and hat, and goes to a synagogue in Paris to recite *Kaddish*! This may scream of hypocrisy, but I think it indicates once again what is part and parcel of our glorious history: A Jew is inextricably bound with Judaism. There is no exit strategy. We are one with Hashem. We cannot

and may not judge those who have left the fold, became alienated or assimilated, or are just plain lost. Hashem does that. He is the Judge. Our purpose is to never give up on a Jew – because Hashem never does.

Throughout the generations, from father to son, we have passed on the torch of Torah tradition. The *Shiras Ha'azinu* guarantees that we will endure as a nation, due to our connection to the Torah. During the most bitter times, Jews have continued to study the Torah. When times were troublesome and persecution reigned, we held back, but as soon as we were able, we immediately planted the seeds of the next generation. **Rebbetzin Tzila Sorotzkin, a"h**, was one of the leading *mechanchos*, educators, of the nascent *Bais Yaakov* movement. She was also a Holocaust survivor whose exploits during those tragic years were legendary. She remarked, "In all of the six years of the war, I cried only once. I was in the most horrible camps. I lost my entire family. I was left all alone in the world, bereft of family, broken in body and spirit – but I did not cry. I returned to my hometown and found a ghost town – not a living soul remained – yet, I still did not cry."

She was told to go to Lodz where the refugees were gathered. Perhaps she would find someone there, a relative, an acquaintance. With her last bit of strength, she traveled to Lodz, in the hope of finding someone she knew. Walking through the streets as twilight approached, she suddenly heard sounds which she recognized – coming from one of the windows. She followed the sounds up to a second-floor ancient apartment. In the darkness she made out a group of young boys with *payos*, all sitting around a table. At the head of the table sat an elderly Jew, wearing a baseball cap. The children were chanting the *Aleph Bais* to the familiar *niggun*, tune, which she remembered from her youth! She immediately began to cry, and then she passed out. A few moments later, she was revived.

"What happened to you?" they asked. "Can we help you? Who are you? Perhaps we can give you something to eat." Slowly she recovered and replied, "This is the first time I have cried in six years, but I am not crying from pain. I cry from joy. I wandered far and wide until I reached Lodz; finally I see Poland as it once was, I see it in its original glory. And if, after all that we have endured, after all of our suffering, little boys with *payos* are sitting around a table with an elderly teacher teaching them the *Aleph Bais* – then no one can defeat us. Let me catch my breath. Let me savor the moment. I feel fine. These are tears of joy – not of pain."