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## WEEP FOR WHAT AMALEK HAS DONE UNTO YOU— LAMENTATION AND MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST IN OUR GENERATION\*

Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein

*“Would that my head be water and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I could weep day and night for the dead of my people”*

The problem of evil in the world has occupied us since antiquity; no other theological dilemma has merited such thorough treatment in the holy writings.<sup>1</sup> It disturbed *Yirmiyahu*, prophet of the Destruction; it led *Yehezkel* to formulate the ways of Divine Providence in directing the world; it caused *Habakuk* to shout out in prayer towards the heavens; it found extensive expression in the poetry of *Tehilim* and in the philosophy of *Kobelet*. *Moshe Rabbeinu* himself is depicted by the *Gemara* (*Berakhot* 7a) as asking God to make known to him His ways in matters of reward and punishment:

“Let me know Your ways”—He [Moshe] said to Him, Master of the Universe—why is it that there are righteous people who prosper, and righteous people who suffer, and wicked people who prosper, and wicked people who suffer?

Contemporary thinkers are plagued no less by the same paradox. Indeed, this is undoubtedly one of the most difficult and agonizing questions that trouble a religious person who observes life and witnesses the wicked vanquishing the righteous and enjoying success in their endeavors.

To a great extent, a believing person can only sense his smallness, his inadequacy in attempting to understand the deepest mysteries; he can only abandon any attempt to understand how God operates and to comfort himself with the

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that this is the only theological problem to which *Tanakh* (with the exception of *Kobelet*) devotes massive attention and upon which it provides multiple perspectives.

sense of closeness and personal attention that often accompanies Man's suffering. Thus, although *Mishlei* presents a simple world—directed at the child who is beginning to encounter the world at large for the first time—in which a person who commits himself to goodness dwells safely and free of fear, while the wicked are cut off from the earth, *Iyov*, immediately follows it as the response of the *Tanakh* itself, repudiating the orderly world that is presented to the youth in *Mishlei*. *Iyov* argues the case of the suffering victims whose world has turned upside down in front of their eyes, who have not merited the tidy, organized system that is folded up in the verses of *Mishlei*. In his world, wisdom has disappeared and there is no room for understanding; man must accept the fact that he is not party to the mechanisms of Divine Providence, and he can do nothing but accept the Divine will. The conclusion of *Iyov* is that man cannot hope to appreciate the workings of Divine Providence in the world, so that the proper attitude is for a human to place his trust in his maker as Master of the Universe. The upshot of this will be an existential relationship between Man and God, not a better understanding of suffering in the world.

All this is true with respect to the suffering individual. Here, the *Tanakh* recognizes the tension between an orderly world in which Divine justice is apparent and a world in which the ways of His Providence are hidden from our human understanding. The situation, though, is different when it comes to reward and punishment on the communal level. The various forms of suffering that afflict society find a clear and consistent message in the Torah, asserting that all the ills that befall the community are the result of sin; they are nothing but the punishment for the sins of the community. The principle of Divine beneficence and malevolence in accordance with the loyalty—or lack thereof—of *Am Yisrael* to its God is articulated in countless verses, regardless of where we open the *Tanakh*. Be it the second paragraph of *Kriat Shema*—“And it shall be, if you will listen diligently . . .”, or the blessings and curses in *Vayikra* or *Devarim*, that outline the principles of God's Providence, the concept of reward and punishment is central to their ethos. If we turn to the Prophets, and the major historiographical passage at the beginning of *Shoftim*, or follow the course of events as they are described throughout the prophetic narrative—the principle that arises from all of these sources is the same: the trials and tribulations of the nation are perceived as Divine punishment for sin. *Yehezkel*, observing from a distance and reviewing the entire development of Jewish history, from its beginnings in Egypt to the Destruction of the Temple in his own times, concludes decisively that the Destruction is the result of rebellion against God while *Yirmiyahu*, sitting in Jerusalem and agonized by the terrible suffering that he witnesses in the war-torn and starved city, declares: “Do not both evil things and good come from the mouth of the Most High?”, and acknowledges God's justice as he cries out from the depths, “We have sinned and rebelled; You have not forgiven.” We find no character like *Iyov* or *Kohelet* who challenges this assertion, nor do we find the prophets indicating that it is better to accept com-

munal suffering as a phenomenon that is impenetrable and incomprehensible to human understanding: it is not an unfathomable mystery, but rather well-deserved retribution that is spread before us.

In light of this, the conclusion must be that there is a difference between the individual and the collective when it comes to dealing with tragic and traumatic events. The suffering individual, perplexed by the blows that seem to incessantly fall upon him will find support and legitimization in Jewish tradition, as have the righteous of previous generations, for his anguished and even blunt quarrel with his Maker. The afflicted soul that questions the bitter fate that has befallen it is not overstepping its boundaries and is not reproached for it. “You are right, God, though I contend with You, yet I will rebuke You: why does the path of the wicked prosper?” *Yirmiyahu* argues with God, demonstrating to us the way of faith. So long as a person accepts the fundamental axiom that God is right, and senses himself as a creature arguing with his Creator, he is entitled to present his claim before the Master of the Universe. The greatest figures of all generations did not hesitate to argue the case of the suffering individual and to demand a fair hearing for him, knowing very well that *Iyov* was not held accountable for his claims and complaints while in the throes of his crisis; on the contrary, he is said to have petitioned God in a proper manner, and it is he who atones for his companions.

This approach, though, is not available to us as a community, for the sources are clear in spelling out what we should regard as the reason for communal, or national, distress. When we seek to address painful events that befall the community, at moments of shock and crisis when our faith longs to absolve itself in the powers that lie beyond our control and to relegate it all to the infinitely mysterious and unfathomable, the verses starkly confront us. In the midst of our efforts to deal with our cruel situation and its ramifications, the sources offer us no refuge; they demand a fair hearing for Divine retribution and justice, and place the responsibility squarely on our shoulders. The situation is not unfathomable at all: it is crystal clear, and what it means is that God is visiting our sins upon us. Paraphrasing *Tehilim* 139 we may say that although the soul longs to declare, “That knowledge is too wondrous for me, it is too high; I cannot attain it,” it is forced to admit, “Where can we go from Your truth; where can we flee from Your retribution?”

Were this the case only with regard to the events of ancient history, we could comfort ourselves with the knowledge that the interpretation of those events has been delivered through the medium of prophecy and rests upon the authority of revelation, but that we cannot and should not extrapolate concerning our own times. We could maintain our claim that evil and suffering such as we experienced was not open to the easy, simple explanation that “Because of our sins we were exiled from our land,” but rather represented something mysterious and unfathomable. Certainly, we would tell ourselves, all that befell the earliest generations of our people could have been the result of their sins (as the sources

would suggest), but this would teach us nothing about our own situation and our present tribulations.

It should further be added and emphasized that if we were to argue thus concerning all the varied events of the past, we would most certainly feel this way in relation to the Holocaust of the previous generation. In relation to that terrible period, when terror and a profound blackness of evil and insanity descended upon the world, when unparalleled wickedness and cruelty occupied darkened souls and brought the world a plague of slaughter and horror, we feel in the very depths of our being that we can only conclude that mortal man cannot penetrate the primal workings of the world and understand the workings of Divine Providence: “For as high as the heavens are elevated from the earth, so My ways are elevated over your ways, and My thoughts—from your thoughts”. Who could imagine otherwise in relation to the Holocaust? Have we any choice but to stand confounded and grief-stricken in the face of an event so horrendous as to be inconceivable? This was suffering that one cannot bear to describe or to hear of; these were actions of such malice and evil that they are unspeakable. Seemingly, anyone attempting to investigate and explain the Holocaust using the normal spiritual parameters of history is guilty of gross insensitivity and indifference, and fails to recognize the hell that it was. If we are speaking of a different planet with a wholly unique and foreign set of circumstances, then human understanding cannot hope to grasp and explain; we can only accept with surrender, and nothing more.

But if we examine this assumption more closely—and anyone who believes in the Torah has no way to do this other than by looking at the texts—it appears that this is not the picture that they present. The *Tanakh’s* view of the unfolding of history as Divine retribution is not limited to the chronicles of the kingdoms of *Yisrael* and *Yehudah*; rather, the sources address the range of events and situations that are destined to befall the nation of Israel throughout the generations. Aside from the prophecies that concern and apply specifically to the events that occurred during the lifetimes of those prophets, the Torah notifies us that is providing the Jewish nation with the tools to follow the future vicissitudes of its history and states explicitly that these texts come to predict what will happen to us in the course of time—both in the near future and in the distant time to come. This discussion is the focus of two principal sections in the Torah: the list of blessings and curses in *Vayikra* (chapter 26) and in *Devarim* (chapter 28), in which the Torah emphasizes the principle of reward for observance of the commandments and punishment for sin, and the closing sections of *Devarim* (chapters 29-32), which come to guide *Bnei Yisrael* in the future with the passing of Moshe and the conclusion of the Torah. First and foremost in this regard is the song of *Ha’azinu*. This poetic passage—the heritage defined by the Torah itself as a testimony that will accompany the nation of Israel for all generations—reviews the future experiences of the nation and offers guidance in the ways of the world and the paths of Divine Providence throughout history. Indeed, were

we to summarize the lesson of this song, we could say that it presents two spiritual motifs as the motivating forces that move the wheels of history: Divine reward and punishment, on one hand, and desecration of God's Name, on the other. In presenting the course of history to us, the text emphasizes the danger of sin that comes about in the wake of economic success, and the punishment that will follow in its wake.

However, were we to assume that the retribution described in the Torah is not speaking of an anguish and suffering as extreme as the Holocaust; if we did not dare imagine that there were verses describing such a terrible punishment, if we were convinced that they could offer us no tools with which to examine the phenomenon that we experienced in the last generation, the song of *Ha'azinu* bares its message with mighty force. The hand trembles as it writes such words and the heart refuses to believe and accept what one's own hand has written, but the mind cannot ignore the significance of the message that stares out at us from the text:

They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods, and angered Him with abominations.

They sacrificed to powerless spirits, to gods whom they did not know, to new gods that had recently appeared, of whom your forefathers were not mindful.

You are unmindful of the Rock that begot you; you forgot God Who made you.

And when God saw it He abhorred them out of anger at His sons and His daughters.

And He said, I shall hide My face from them, I will see what their end will be. For they are a fickle generation; children with no faith in them.

They have made Me jealous with a non-god, they have angered Me with their vanities; I shall make them jealous with a non-nation, and I shall anger them with a vile people.

**For a fire is kindled in My wrath and it will burn to the nethermost Sheol; it shall consume the land and its produce and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.**

**I shall heap evils upon them; I shall spend My arrows on them.**

**They shall be sucked empty by starvation and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction.**

**I shall set the teeth of beasts upon them with the poison of the creeping things of the dust.**

**The sword on the outside and the terror within will destroy both the young man and the virgin, the infant and the old man.**

**I said, I shall scatter them to the corners; I shall cause their memory to cease from mankind.**

Let us ask ourselves: were we to try and describe the events of the previous generation in just a few sentences, could we formulate them any differently? Do the above verses not describe most accurately what befell our nation, our brethren, our grandparents?

The ramifications are far-reaching and brutal, emotionally and religiously, for what they tell us is that the decrees of 1939-1945 are the result of Jewish sins. Admittedly—not necessarily the sins of the deceased themselves, but there is no avoiding the conclusion that this punishment was brought about the sins of the generation, or—more precisely—the results of the sins of the generations. In other words, the Holocaust should not be regarded as an event so inexplicable and enigmatic that we can only gaze at it, dumbfounded; rather, it should be attributed to Divine retribution, to the cycle of sin and punishment so familiar to us from the various discussions of it in the Torah.

To the extent that this is indeed the case, there is another conclusion that must be drawn: the Holocaust should not be regarded as a one-time event that deviates from the usual boundaries of Jewish history. Rather, it should be placed within the continuum of Jewish history, with all the suffering that has accumulated throughout the generations. Indeed, it is said of Rav Yitzhak Hutner *zt"l*, that he refused to use the term “the Holocaust” (*ha-shoa*), insisting instead on referring to “the decrees of 1939-1945,” since he did not regard the Holocaust as an aberration that lay outside the framework of Jewish history, but rather saw it as a link in the chain of Jewish history and suffering.

Nevertheless, such an approach—despite its apparent grounding in the Torah—is wholly inappropriate to the situation of our generation. This latter point brings us to the crux of the dilemma that we presented above. It is certainly possible that historical justice and spiritual truth concerning those horrific times are aligned with the approach of Rav Hutner, and that the principles of Divine Providence laid down in *parashat Ha'azinu* apply to every historical event that befalls the nation of Israel—even the most horrendous of them. However, we must draw a distinction between objective historical analysis, which reviews the course of events from the distant and detached perspective of an external observer, seeking to grasp the historical causality that gave rise to the situation that came about (be it from a spiritual, political, economic or any other point of view), and the warm, live contact with the people who personally experienced these events. Any attempt to compare the viewpoint of the distant observer, several generations later who can only perceive the distress and suffering of previous generations in the most abstract way, with that of a person who lives amongst the survivors and daily encounters their scars and suffering, in a tangible and unmediated manner

will immediately reveal the difference in perspective. While the role of a later scholar is to understand and explain the course of history, to learn and teach the lessons of the past, the obligation of the contemporary generation is emotional participation in the sorrow and anguish, of a generation enveloped in mourning. The sense of a common fate, empathy for the survivors, compassion, comfort and mutual help precede any discussion of causes and reasons, processes and theories. Could any mortal with a feeling heart, living among other flesh-and-blood mortals like himself, survivors of death camps and ghettos with tattooed arms and scarred emotions, approach the Holocaust in any manner other than via experience and consolation? Who but a cold-hearted, barren soul could opt for the path of analysis and observation? Although it goes without saying that there is room for an intellectual analysis that undertakes an attempt to understand the events and the underlying historical dynamic, these attempts must be integrated into our emotional and existential encounter with the recent past, not stand independent of it. Weeping rather than analysis, consolation rather than observation—these are the appropriate response of our generation to the Holocaust:

When *Iyov*'s three friends heard of all of this evil that had befallen him, they came—each from his place; *Elifaz* the *Temanite*, and *Bildad* the Shuhite, and Tzofar the Na'amatite, and they met together to come and mourn with him and to comfort him. And they lifted their eyes from afar, but did not recognize him, and they lifted their voices and wept, and each rent his coat, and they sprinkled ashes upon their heads towards heaven. And they sat with him upon the ground for seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him for they saw that his suffering was very great.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, when his suffering is great and well nigh unbearable, the friends do not discourse with *Iyov* about the Divine ways of justice or attempt to solve the problem of theodicy; rather, they sit by his side. The simple human gesture of understanding and empathy is the support that they offer him as they mourn with him and comfort him. Only later, when the discussion of God's justice becomes an emotional need for *Iyov*, will it be appropriate to engage in the attempt to justify the ways of God to man. However, the tragic flaw of *Iyov*'s devoted friends is that they are unable to grasp that *Iyov*'s discourses are the deeply personal struggle of a suffering soul attempting to understand what has befallen it and they are not intended as a learned philosophical discussion. Their response, that addresses the metaphysical issues but is oblivious to their companion's emotional needs, is highly inappropriate.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Iyov*, 2:11.

<sup>3</sup> The present article does not allow for extensive discussion of this point; therefore, we shall simply make reference to *Iyov*'s words throughout Chapter 16, and the Mishnah in *Bava Metzia* 59, which identifies the inappropriate reaction of his companions as a lack of sensitivity, rather than as a mistake.



Similarly, the prophet *Yirmiyahu*, who reproved the people and unflinchingly confronted them as he tried to prevent the oncoming catastrophe of the Hurban, reacted afterwards by devoting all his energies to express the anguish and the agony of those who experienced the horrible events. *Eikhah* is not an analysis of the events and its attendant causes, nor is it an attempt to understand the ways of Divine Providence in and of themselves. The entire *megilah* is meant to give expression to the experience of the Destruction and the human perspective that is embodied in the lamentation, mourning, and acknowledgement of God's justice.<sup>4</sup>

A comparison with his contemporary, the prophet *Yehezkel*, living in distant Babylon, far from the scene of the events and with no direct contact with his fellow Jews in *Eretz Yisrael*, is illuminating. *Yirmiyahu* lives amongst the generation of the Destruction, in Jerusalem. Hence, *Yehezkel*, the distant observer who was not a participant in the actual event, is indeed able to engage the elders of Israel in debate as to the reasons and causes of the Destruction, without any insensitivity or apathy to the suffering, since he is not addressing those who experienced the awful events. *Yirmiyahu*, however, cannot allow himself such a discussion, for he lives among the survivors.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now return to *Parashat Ha'azinu*. The stated intent and purpose of *Ha'azinu* (and the other similar sections of reproof in the Torah) is not to share

<sup>4</sup> The approach that we have adopted here is that of Rabbi Nehemiah rather than that of Rabbi Yehudah as expressed see *Eikhah Rabbah* 1:1, "Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemiah disagree: Rabbi Yehudah said: *Eikhah* is meant as an expression of rebuke, as it is written, "How (*eikhah*) have you said, 'We are learned scholars; God's Torah is with us. . .'". Rabbi Nehemiah said: *Eikhah* is meant as an expression of lamentation, as it is written (*Bereishit* 3), "The Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you (*ayeka*)—woe to you (*oy lekha*)". When was the scroll of lamentations recited? Rabbi Yehudah said: It was recited in the days of *Yehoyakim*. Rabbi Nehemiah said to him: Do we cry for the deceased before he is dead?! When was it recited? After the Destruction of the Temple, as we read: 'How the city sits alone. . .'"

<sup>5</sup> It is for this reason that *halakhah* permits the study of the bitter passages in *Yirmiyahu* and *Iyov* on *Tish'a be-Av*, but forbids the study of *Yehezkel*. Although a description of the destruction of the Temple is also found in *Yehezkel*, the *baraita* in *Ta'anit* (30a) which presents a detailed list of the books that may be studied includes only *Eikhah*, *Yirmiyahu* and *Iyov*; *Yehezkel* is clearly excluded. Why should this be so? Because *Tish'a be-Av* is not a day of study, set aside for in-depth research of the causes and reasons for the Hurban; rather, it is a day devoted to feeling and experiencing the pain of the Hurban. Therefore we may study *Yirmiyahu* and *Eikhah*, which express the emotions and experience of mourning in the words of a prophet who lived in the midst of Jerusalem at the time of the events themselves, but we may not study the words of *Yehezkel*, which address the events of the *Hurban* from a more general perspective, and from the point of view of a distant observer.

The inclusion of the Book of *Iyov* in the list of material permissible for study on *Tish'a be-Av*, despite it not discussing the *Hurban* at all, proves that the *heter* is dependent on the experience of mourning rather than on study of the historical event of the *Hurban*. *Iyov* is permitted because it conveys the experience of mourning and dealing with suffering. The inner state of mourning, not historical knowledge, is the crucial factor.



the pain of the nation or to try to console their suffering; rather, its aim is to guide us in the endeavor of analyzing God's ways as He directs our history. The song itself defines this as its goal: "Remember the days of old; comprehend the cycle of the generations". This is a remembrance of the "days of old" in order that we may be able to understand and learn from the "the cycle of the generations." Not experience but observation is the perspective of *Ha'azinu*, a song that must serve as a testimony for *Benei Yisrael*. For this reason, analysis of cause and result based on a panoramic view of events "from above" is clearly the proper approach, rather than an expression of empathy with and consolation for the souls in distress.

However, the situation of our generation is not that of *parashat Ha'azinu* or of *Yehezkel*; rather, it resembles that of *Yirmiyahu*. As the prophet of the Destruction in his time, who lived in the besieged Jerusalem and viewed the terrible sights that he mourns throughout *Eikhab*, in particular in the spine-chilling fourth chapter, likewise we are the children of the generation that experienced first-hand the horrors of the Holocaust. Just as *Yirmiyahu* knew and lived among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so, too, we live amongst the community of survivors. Our contact with the Holocaust is not—and must not be—based upon historical scholarship and emotional detachment, but rather is rooted in our living among members of the Holocaust generation. Not only the survivors themselves who personally endured the immense suffering of hell upon earth in the satanic kingdom of death, but also the wider circles of society—children of survivors, descendants and relatives, and society as a whole—we all live in the shadow of the Holocaust. Our society reflects a reality in which your rabbi, your next-door neighbor, or your colleague at work might be a "brand plucked from the fire." The possibility that the man across the street may have been a refugee who fled his country of birth without family and friends, leaving behind the world of his childhood in a desperate attempt to escape the murderous forces of evil, or that the woman seated beside you on a public bus lost her entire family in the Valley of Death is a situation that we are all familiar with. Have we not witnessed the *Hazan* on Yom Kippur, a seemingly successful survivor, who weeps uncontrollably as he attempts to utter *Eileh Ezkerah*, (the prayer that recounts the martyrdom of the Jewish leadership in Roman times) or loses his rhythm when he reaches the *Kel Maleh Rahamim* memorial passage in *Yizkor*? Therefore, our attitude towards those events must arise from a feeling and emotional heart, sensing the depth of the pain and suffering, and attuned to the human element. Sensitivity and empathy, not analysis and scholarship, are of the essence. Who among us has not heard survivors' stories, or read hair-raising memoirs written by people still alive? Each and every one of us still comes into direct contact with the memory of the Holocaust as a living, raw wound—whether within our own families or within the public domain. So long as the blood has not stopped boiling, the time for cool, clear, intellectual discourse has not yet arrived.

Therefore, concerning our own generation, we cannot and need not regard the Holocaust from the general historical perspective—whether a history exam-

ined from the point of view of human causality or whether viewed through the spectacles of Divine Providence: “Weep greatly for the house of Israel and for the nation of God, for they have fallen by the sword”<sup>6</sup>—this is the command to our generation.

The conclusions that arise from this are that we must not include the Holocaust as yet another event in the chain of Jewish suffering and martyrdom throughout the generations, as Rav Hutner was wont to do; rather, we must award it unique attention. It should be emphasized that we do not mean by this claim to adopt a position regarding the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a historical phenomenon—whether it was indeed so different from all that came before, that it should be considered as an event *sui generis*, or whether we should seek a common denominator to it and the prior tragedies with which the paths of Jewish history are strewn. Rather, our contention here is that this question is not the factor that should determine the attitude of our generation towards this event. Living in such close proximity to the events of the previous generation, our relationship towards this period must be completely different from that of the other tragedies of the Jewish people. We are in direct contact with those who experienced the horrors of the time—in contrast to our distance from other tragic periods—and in this sense it is certainly unique from our point of view. Thus, even if Rav Hutner’s position is theoretically correct, it should not affect our perspective, since it relates only to the general issue of the workings of Divine Providence in the world, while our own approach must be based on the existential sense of common fate and empathy.

In the summer of 1977, newly elected Prime Minister Menahem Begin paid a visit to the United States and visited my grandfather and teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. In the course of their conversation, the Rav proposed to the Prime Minister that *Yom ha-Shoah* (Holocaust Remembrance Day) in Israel be annulled as a separate day of mourning and be included, instead, within the framework of *Tish’a be-Av*, as is our custom concerning the martyrs of the Crusaders’ attacks upon the Jewish communities of the Rhineland. In support of his suggestion, he quoted from one of the *kinot* (lamentations) that we recite for the victims of the Crusades: “No other time of brokenness and burning should be added” [in addition to *Tish’a be-Av*]; rather, all matters of communal mourning should be included in a single day of mourning.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to

<sup>6</sup> From the *kinot* of *Tish’a be-Av*.

<sup>7</sup> “Would that my head be water”—by R. Kalonymus bar Yehudah (siman 26 in the *Kinot* edition of D. Goldschmidt, published by Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem 5732 (second edition, revised). The full text of the excerpt is as follows:

שימו נא על לבבכם מספד מר לקשרה  
 כי שקולה הריגתם להתאבל ולהתעפרה  
 כשריפת בית אלקינו האולם והבירה  
 וכי אין להוסיף מועד שבר ותבערה  
 ואין להקדים זולתי לאחרה  
 תחת כן היום לזיתי אעוררה  
 ואספדה ואילילה ואבכה בנפש מרה

me that the State acted correctly in not accepting the Rav's proposal. In our generation, it is indeed fitting that a special day be set aside as a dedicated day of remembrance for the Holocaust. While the time may come when it will indeed be appropriate to adopt the Rav's approach and to include *Yom ha-Shoah* within the framework of *Tish'a be-Av*, as long as the wound is still fresh and has not yet healed, we cannot integrate commemoration of the Holocaust with our mourning for the other tragedies of Jewish history whose memory is more distant and remote.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, returning to our point of departure with regard to the problem of Divine reward and punishment, we cannot ignore our particular historical situation with respect to the the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, if our coping with the Holocaust is a purely intellectual and theological issue, the distance of generations does not affect the question in any way, and both approaches that we presented at the outset—acknowledgement of God's justice in light of our sins and iniquities, or attributing our situation to the ways of Divine Providence, far above our comprehension (“For as high as the heavens are elevated above the earth, so are My ways elevated above your ways, and My thoughts—above your thoughts”), remain. As we have explained, the literal text seems to point in one direction, so that any attempt to adopt the alternative will be forced to address the verses that we quoted and to explain them in light of their approach. Nevertheless, both alternatives are uninfluenced by our distance from the events.

However, it is not only the purely philosophical issues but also the existential aspect that must have a significant role in our response. After all, even Voltaire—not a figure generally considered to be a great *tzaddik*—did not react as he did in the matter of reward and punishment on the basis of some abstract theoretical knowledge about catastrophes of the past, and did not attack the defenders of Divine Providence until he encountered tragedy in his own times. For our purposes, a person who sees things from a distance of generations and is prepared to acknowledge that the generations may have sinned, is not the same as a person who is being asked to claim that his predecessors and neighbors suffered, or

<sup>8</sup> Clearly, in our present reality—in which the secular public has a most powerful sense of mourning over the martyrs of the last generation but does not feel the same way with regard to the Destruction of the Temple and the exile of the *Shekhinah*—this suggestion, were it to be implemented, would bring about a situation in which *Yom ha-Shoah* would overshadow *Tish'a be-Av*, causing the mourning over the Destruction and the other themes of the day to be pushed aside. In general, I believe that this suggestion was proposed out of a lack of familiarity with the way in which *Yom ha-Shoah* is commemorated in Israel, and its place in Israeli reality.

<sup>9</sup> It should also be pointed out that *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot* also adopted this approach: they established an entire period of mourning during the days of the Omer for the martyrs of their times, and did not suffice with *Tish'a be-Av* (concerning the connection between the mourning during *Sefirah* and the martyrs of the Crusades, see the overview of Prof. D. Sperber in his book, *Minhagei Yisrael* [part I, pp. 101-111]).

are suffering, because of those sins. Just as distance in time (and place) dulls our sensitivities towards the pain of others, so does intense closeness sharpen it. So long as we are still busy comforting the sufferers and sharing their anguish, this proximity carries the blessing of empathy with it—but it may tempt us to weight the scales, since we are affected by the suffering and close to the sufferers. Once more, I repeat the thesis presented above—this is not our mission at this point in time. A person who is close to the events cannot and should not sit in historical judgment over the generations with whom he lives; rather, he should sense their pain.

To formulate the idea differently, we must distinguish between the individual and the community. Since we are still close to the event, our attitude is not directed toward an historical development relating to the nation as a community, but rather toward the suffering of individuals, as private people. What concerns us most should be not the ups and downs of the relationship between the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* and His nation, but rather the fate of individuals. “Mourn alone as for an only child,” *Yirmiyahu* instructs the generation of the Destruction at that time, and in a generation in which fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, sons and daughters are weeping, this is the proper and natural course to follow. When the victims have names and faces, when they are related to us, our weeping is directed towards and focused upon individual men and women who are known to us, not towards the history of the community as a community.

It should also be emphasized that this is not merely an emotional issue; it is a fundamental principle in the system of reward and punishment. Even if the texts teach us that it is sin that brings punishment upon the community, the individuals who are stricken partake in that suffering as part of the punishment of the community; their own personal righteousness or personal stature are not taken into consideration. Thus, even assuming the textual assertion that, “I said: I shall scatter them to the corners; I shall cause their memory to cease from mankind,” arises from, “When God saw it He abhorred them out of anger at His sons and His daughters,” this says something not about the individual, but rather about the community. While a community is admittedly composed of the sum of its individual members, it must be clear that judgment is passed here not on the single generation, but rather on all the generations that have collectively reached their fill of sin. Thus we, as those who are close to the event, must relate to the individual sufferers who are familiar to us, rather than the cumulative generations; therefore, addressing the Holocaust from the historical point of view of *parashat Ha’azinu*, and the prophetic perspective of sin and punishment that it provides, is neither the proper nor the appropriate frame of reference for our generation. We are not sitting in judgment over individuals, placing the yoke of guilt upon them. The approach presented in the song of *Ha’azinu* is not meant for the generation of the sufferers’ or their children. The task of integrating the spiritual perspective of *Ha’azinu*—the testimonial song that was

handed down to guide us throughout the generations—and other similar texts into our collective memory, must be assigned to other future generations that will be more distant in time and less emotionally engaged. Our generation will have to remain faithful to the needs of our unique circumstances.

## II

Thus far, we have addressed past and present in terms of our attitude towards the Holocaust. Let us now turn our attention to the future. First, however, let us look at *Eikhab* in order to draw upon the principles that may assist us in this task.

The structure of the book is quite clear and can be readily analyzed in accordance with its alphabetical schematics and some additional considerations. For our purposes, we need not dwell on the differences between chapters one, two, and four on one hand, and chapter three on the other; suffice it to note the distinction between the first four chapters and the fifth. Needless to say, no special literary scholarship is needed to discern that the final chapter deviates from the alphabetical structure of the rest of the book, and thus stands apart. This clearly indicates that the subject matter of chapter five is different from that of the previous chapters, but the change requires an explanation. The key to understanding the difference lies in the chronological framework of the Book, which undergoes a significant transition between the alphabetical chapters and chapter five. The beginning of the book finds the prophet lamenting his encounter with the terrible reality in the wake of the Destruction. The first chapter does not describe the events of the Destruction themselves; rather, it speaks of the situation that prevails in the land in their wake: the roads to Zion that are now desolate, the city that sits alone like a widow, abandoned as one who is loathed, the children of *Yehudah* exiled in their destitution and slavery—all of these images convey the situation soon after the Destruction—whether five or ten years later, or a mere six months or year after the event. In extrapolating to our situation, the situation in chapter one parallels that of the refugee of 1946-7, reviewing the destroyed European Jewry that had lost its glory; its paths desolate and empty of those who used to frequent them.

The *megilah* then proceeds to return back in time to describe the actual events of the Destruction (chapters two and four, with chapter two focusing on the destruction of the Temple and the land, and chapter four lamenting the human suffering), and the acknowledgment of God's judgment (chapter three). Common to all of these chapters is the focus on the events of the time—whether in descriptions of the events themselves or in the grappling with the ways of God's Providence from the point of view of that generation. As emphasized at the beginning of chapter three, **"I am the man who has seen afflic-**

tion by the rod of His anger: He has led **me** and brought **me** into darkness, not light. Surely He has turned **against me**; He turns His hand against me all the day”.

In chapter five, though, there is a seismic shift in the literary time-frame: we are no longer in the period of the Destruction, or even close to it; we now find ourselves very distant, on the time-line, from the events of the Destruction. The Destruction is no longer perceived as a sudden catastrophe and a fresh wound, but rather as a memory from the distant historical past. The lamentation is no longer over the reality in which the contemporary victim of the Destruction finds himself; rather, the panoramic view of the prophet gathers up many generations and moves us telescopically into the future historical situation that is destined to come. The descriptions of chapter five speak of distant events, focusing on the long-term results of the Destruction, “Our fathers sinned and they are no more, and we have suffered for their sins.” This is the situation that chapter five deals with, and therefore it opens with a call to memory; “Remember, O God, what befell us.” The time-frame is no longer a first-hand eye-witness account, but rather a memory of the past and the description of the situation is in keeping with that framework. It is no longer an emotional, traumatized record of shocking events that requires the limiting authority of a rigid alphabetical structure to impose control upon powerful emotions; rather, it is a general statement about the situation that has been created. This is the reason for the abandonment of the alphabetical framework, for this chapter is not uttered in the white heat of the moment, but rather in circumstances to which the lamenter has already become accustomed and to which he is reconciled; at this stage, the text no longer needs the strict alphabetical control to conquer and channel the emotional outburst into literary vessels. The conclusion of the chapter (and of the *megilah*) emphasizes the prolonged reality of exile and the ongoing consequences of the loss of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*: “Why will You forget us forever, forsaking us for so long? Restore us, O God, to You—and we shall return; renew our days as of old, unless You have utterly rejected us and are very angry at us.” The weeping makes way for memory and sighing.

If, up to this point, we have emphasized the weeping and anguish that have dictated the attitude of our generation towards the Holocaust for the past fifty years, a certain change in perspective with respect to the future is inevitable, and it is proper that we prepare ourselves for it. In a society in which the survivors and the mourners are living amongst us and the influence of the Holocaust on family life is so tangible, the proper reaction and attitude are as described above. But as the years pass and time goes by, this situation will inevitably undergo a transformation. On one hand, there is a new generation whose immediate impressions arising from unmediated contact with the event are considerably weakened; at the same time, the number of survivors is gradually diminishing. We pray that the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* lengthen the lives of the survivors living amongst us for many years, but it is clear that the day will come when genera-

tions will be raised lacking any personal familiarity with either the victims or the survivors. Already today, the organized trips to Poland are a clear indication, not only of the geopolitical changes of the last two decades, but also as to the discrepancy in the immediacy of the encounter with the Holocaust in private and public life in Israel in contrast with previous years. There is also a clear sense that the official commemorations of *Yom ha-Shoah* and the accompanying sense of public mourning are undergoing a quiet but discernible evolution, expressing more introspection and less unmediated encounter and mourning than in previous years. The literary landscape reflects the same processes. Alongside—or in place of—personal memoirs that were the lion's share of *Shoah* literature in the past, there is now a shift towards historical and documentary works.

The conclusion that arises from the above is that to a small but recognizable degree, a process of transition from chapter four to chapter five has already begun. We are undergoing a paradigm shift from a generation of mourning and anguish to generations of memory and understanding. We need neither lament nor applaud this development, but rather understand that it is taking place and prepare ourselves accordingly.

The public, educational preparation that is required involves a dual process. Firstly, before we become altogether distanced from direct contact with the horrific past, and before the sense of loss dissipates, it is appropriate that as much of it as possible be preserved, and that it be contained in vessels that may be transferred to the generations to come. Every single one of us is obligated to sense and experience the times in which we are living; to regard the Holocaust as a filter through which we view—on the existential level—the reality of our lives, and as a consciousness that constantly accompanies our communal and personal lives, and to convey this perspective to the younger generation. As long as we are still living in such close proximity to the generation of the Holocaust, we must try to live the event, to experience it, and not just to meditate on it. Clearly, a great, difficult and painful privilege belongs to those who still have the strength to convey their personal experiences from the Holocaust years to the next generation, whether in writing or orally. However, even those who may be considered the “second generation” (not necessarily the direct descendants of survivors themselves, but anyone who grew up in a Jewish community, in Israel or in the Diaspora, as the second generation after the Holocaust) has an obligation to pass down to the next generation the immediacy of the suffering and the mourning.

Secondly, there is the transition to mourning for all future generations. A most central foundation of our Jewish and halakhic world view is the sense of shared fate with previous generations, not only on the general, communal level, but also on the personal level. As stated above, *Eikhah* eternalizes the human suffering of that generation, rather than focusing only on the Destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Divine Presence. *Hazal* continue this approach in the *midrashim* concerning the Destruction of the Second Temple and the city of



Beitar, by recording for future generations the details of the human torments of their generation; following their example, the *Ba'alei ha-Tosefot* instituted prayers and customs of mourning for the victims of their own time. The mourning practices during *sefirah*, combining the mourning for martyrs from different periods, are a faithful expression of inter-generational emotional and existential closeness. Just as a Jew living in one place is meant to feel the pain of another Jew who lives far away—whether it be an inhabitant of Jerusalem seeking the welfare of his brother in Iran or Argentina, or whether it be Jews living in distant isles, concerned about their brethren in Israel (or anywhere else)—the same principle applies to Jews who are distant from us in time. Just as the barrier of place does not obstruct the fraternity that exists between Jews throughout the globe, so too, time should not come between them. Admittedly, it is more difficult for a person to feel this way; after all, we say to ourselves, the martyrs of the past would have been dead for several hundred years anyways, no matter whether they were slaughtered by accursed savages or whether they lived in peace and tranquility. Hence, it is difficult for us to mourn their death. However, this is nothing more than the human inclination towards callousness, routine and psychological laziness; a sensitive soul feels and knows that lives that were prematurely cut off will never realize their potential, even if time immemorial has passed since then. The tragedy of a bride and groom who were never able to consummate their love, of parents who never merited raising their sons to Torah, or of boys and girls who were never given the chance to experience the world and its bounty—remains a tragedy forever. Lives that were cut short remain frozen in time forever. Judaism teaches us to shed tears for them and to experience their pain as that of brothers who do not allow time to come between them.<sup>10</sup>

This obligation also applies to the martyrs of the past generation. Their memory, and the memory of their suffering, dare not fade from our descendants for all generations. The Rav may be right; a day may come when the mourning of the Holocaust will be integrated into the framework of *Tish'a be-Av*; or it may

<sup>10</sup> Obviously, a person who has some consciousness of painful human tragedy will not regard the prohibitions of the “three weeks” (*bein ha-metzarim*) or *sefirah* as a halakhic “headache” that must be borne, or seek various loopholes to get around them. Rather, for him these are days when he has no desire for any joy or celebration. Just as we do not regard the limitations imposed on *Yom ha-Zikaron* for fallen I.D.F. soldiers, or on *Yom ha-Shoah*, as a “decree” imposed by the Knesset, but rather experiences these days as times when we do not dream of engaging in certain types of behavior because the sense of mourning is real and palpable, so, too, a person who is sensitive to historical tragedy feels the same way on days set aside for mourning over the suffering of previous generations. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that if the mourning customs prescribed to be followed during *sefirah* were applied to a shorter time period, they would be more effective and better focused. In the long term, over many generations, such a long mourning period does not work in favor of the message that it tries to convey.

be that a more particular commemoration, similar to the *sefirah* model, will be more appropriate for future generations. Either way, the mourning must be preserved for all generations. It is not our intention, within the framework of this article, to make any practical suggestions or to recommend any particular model, but rather to emphasize and clarify the need and obligation to mourn that is incumbent upon us and all future generations. This shall require documentation of the suffering and torment in the lives of those who suffered, and the transition from the first and second generation to the future, more distant ones to follow. Not only history books are needed, but also personal accounts and memoirs in the printed and film media. We must preserve for future generations not only learned lectures that debate historical causality and analyze testimony, but also personal literature and lamentations.

The upshot of this is that our generation is one of transition, and it faces an important challenge: the challenge that arises from the transition from weeping to memory, while preserving the mourning and the connection to the generation of the survivors. The greater the extent to which we are able to couch their stories and memories in modes that are capable of carrying their messages to future generations, the more successful we will be in conveying our experiences and consciousness to future generations, who will not know have personally known the survivors, the better we will be able to pass on the feelings of loss and anguish over a generation that was cut off to the sons and daughters of a generation that is flourishing—to that extent we will have fulfilled our holy obligation towards those martyrs. By joining the acute memory of their bitter fate to our historical memory that accompanies us from time immemorial, from the “days of the world and the cycle of the generations” to the introspection which *parashat Ha’azinu* obligates us, we may hope to discharge our duty towards them and thereby find favor in the eyes of God and man.