

GENERATION OF TEARS...
בְּכִיבֵי אֶזְרָחֵי וְצִוְיֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
...an Eternity of Hope



"Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem" Francesco Hayez, 1867



Unknown, 1943

צוֹם רַבִּיעִי וְצוֹם חֲמִישִׁי.. יִהְיֶה לְבֵית יִהוּדָה
לְשֵׁשׁוֹן וְלְשִׁמּוּחָה, כְּמַעַדִּים טוֹבִים
וְהָאֵמֶת וְהַשְּׂכוּם אֵהָבּוּ (זְכוּרֵיהֶם חַיִּים)

TISHA B'AV

OU LIVE WEBCAST

Supplemental Materials
Presented by Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
OU Israel Center
July 26, 2018

TISHA B'AV

OU LIVE WEBCAST

This program is dedicated by Richard and Debra Parkoff in memory of Richard's parents, Avraham ben Yitzchak Hakohen, *a"h*, and Rochel Bluma bat Yehoshua, *a"h*. It is my privilege to express gratitude to the Parkoffs, who have been enabling this webcast and the excellent webcast of my dear colleague Rabbi Steven Weil to be viewed and heard and repeated by many thousands of individuals all over the world.

There are many individuals to thank for this program. I will confine myself to the names of the leaders of the Orthodox Union: President Moshe Bane and Executive Vice President Allen Fagin; and of the OU Israel Center, President Zvi Sand and Executive Director Rabbi Avi Berman.

I must also thank my dear wife, Chavi, for lifting my spirits whenever I immerse myself in the study of *yiddishe tzoros*, and to my irreplaceable executive assistant, Mrs. Yocheved Goldberg.

I wish to thank Rabbi Neil Winkler, Rabbi Emeritus of Young Israel of Fort Lee, NJ, for once again leading the recitation of the *Kinot*.

Finally, my thanks to all of you for joining me, in person or electronically, as we memorialize the past and travel together along the path toward restoration and repair, toward the *geulah shelemah bimehairah biyameinu*.

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MEMORIAL TRIBUTES TO THOSE WHO PASSED AWAY THIS PAST YEAR

דברי הספד הערכה לאישים שנפטרו בשנה זו, זכרונם לברכה; גדולי תורה וראשי ישיבות
Rav Aharon Yehuda Leib Shteinman הגרא"ל שטיינמן
Rav Yeshayahu Hadari הגר"י הדרי
Rav Yitzchak Dzimitrovsky הגר"י דזימיטרובסקי

Victims of enemy terror
Teachers, writers, and thinkers
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Charles Krauthammer
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ייליל יום שבת... חנכה מר תזעק...

איך נתקו אהלי / ממחנה העברים
אבל יחיד עשי-לך מספד תמרורים.

יצעק מרה מגין / השבועות שבצה
מי ישלים מספר / ארבעים יום ותשעה
ויום נתינת התורה / נאנח על הרעה
ויתאונן במר לבב / יום זכרון תרועה
מי פשעיו יתודה / בנפש נכנעה
ומי יתענה ויצום / ביום הכפורים
אבל יחיד עשי-לך מספד תמרורים.

אוי אמרה סבה / איך אור ספי קדר
ואיכה ההלל / בימי לא נסדר
ושמחת ערבה ערבה / והוד החדס נעדר
והלולב יתאונן / ופרי עץ הדר
ויום שמחת תורה / לא-תאר ולא הדר
ומאה ברכות ביום / איכה לא נאמרים
אבל יחיד עשי-לך מספד תמרורים.

צעקת ראש חדש אב / נשמעה למרחקים
ובכתה התורה / מי מצותי יקים
מתחננה לאל עליון / מתוך בור מעמקים
סב והושיעה אלי / שושנת העמקים
והעלה לעיר מקדשי / כל ישראל חברים.

(נעתקה מתוך מתור ספרדי בכתב-יד מהמאה הי"ז,
ספריה ממלכתית האמבורג, ע"ר. בן-אורי)

קול כחולה שמעתי / בכי מכל עברים
קול גולת ספרד / צועק מן המצרים
כי שדדה אדרתה / בין זאבי יערים
הן לזאת ראשי אקרח / וקולי במרה ארים
בת עמי חגרי שק / והתפלשי בעפרים
אבל יחיד עשי לך מספד תמרורים.

ייליל יום שבת / איך נחים בי שבתו
ובי מראש בינם / ובין אל ברית כרתו
וציצת במר יאמר / לובשי איך פציץ נכרתו
ומילה נאנקת / מולי איך נצמתו
ושח תפלין קושרי / איכה בתפל הומתו
התעללו-בם זרים / נהרגו ביד אכזרים
אבל יחיד עשי לך מספד תמרורים.

חנכה מר תזעק / מי יעלה גרותי
ויענה יום פורים / מי יקרא מגלותי
וחג-מצות יקונן / אוי על שמחותי
איך חמץ יאכל / בימי מגוחותי
ומי יספר נסי / אל פימי בחורותי
ויספד התלמוד / ולבש בגדי שקים
וספרי החכמים / במר לבב נאקים
ובת עמי בכל-זאת / הובאה במחשכים

מי שברך

אותו התקין לומר בעל התוס' יו"ט וי"ע
עקב הגזרות בשנות ת"ח ות"ט עליהם אמר שבא עקב
מיכסול הדיבור בשעת התפילה

מי שברך אבותינו, אברהם יצחק ויעקב,
משה ואהרן, דוד ושלמה, הוא יברך את כל מי
ששומר פיו ולשונו שלא לדבר געת התפילה,
הקב"ה ישמרהו מפל צרה וצוקה ומפל נגע
ומחלה, ויחלו עליו כל הברכות הכתובות בספר
תורת משה רבינו ובכל ספרי הנביאים והכתובים,
ויזכה לראות בנים חיים וקיימים ויגדלם לתורה
ולחפה ולמעשים טובים, ויעבוד את ה' אלקינו
תמיד באמת ובתמים ונאמר אמן.

גבאי ביהכ"ג מתבקשים, להנהיג אמירת ה"מי
שבירך" מידי שבת לפני תפילת מוסף ויהי
רצון שכל הברכות יהולו עלינו

המק ע"י:

מרכז קאליב העולמי אנטונוביץ 20

טלפון 03/5708670

בני-ברק

This year marked the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began on Erev Pesach, 5703 / April 19, 1943, and was finally put down four weeks later on May 16.

A Voice from the Warsaw Ghetto

David Olivestone



Cantor Gershon Sirota

The summer of 1942 saw the deportation of some 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto, and there was little doubt in the minds of those who remained about their terrible fate. Groups of young people, the main one led by 23-year-old Mordechai Anielewicz, decided to resist the next round-up and managed to convince members of the Polish resistance on the other side of the ghetto walls to smuggle in some weapons. In January of 1943, when German troops arrived to round up more Jews for transport to the camps, they found themselves fired upon and had to retreat.

On April 19, when German troops again entered the ghetto, they came under fierce attack. Using all kinds of improvised weapons, the ghetto fighters continued to resist, and it took nearly a month for the greatly superior force of the Germans to overcome them. As David Kopel wrote in *The Washington Post*, “The Germans had to spend more time subduing the Warsaw Ghetto than they did conquering the entire nations of Poland or France.”

Of the Jews still in the ghetto at that point, approximately 13,000 were killed in the Uprising. About half of them were burnt alive or suffocated as German troops torched their hiding places, while the rest perished in the fighting or soon after. The remaining 56,000 were transported to Treblinka or

other death camps as the ghetto was systematically emptied and its buildings destroyed.

One of those who perished during the Uprising was the world-famous chazzan Gershon Sirota (1874-1943). Ironically, and sadly, it was not inevitable that he should have been trapped in the ghetto during its last tragic days. He had been abroad on a concert tour when he received word that his wife was very ill. He rushed back to Warsaw and was there when the war broke out. Although he himself might still have been able to leave, he would not abandon his wife and family and so he was among the 400,000 Jews trapped in the ghetto when the Nazis sealed it in November of 1940.

Sirota was quite possibly the most gifted chazzan-virtuoso in history. He possessed a dramatic tenor voice of great beauty and immense power, with climactic top notes. But it was not only because of his magnificent voice that he excelled as a chazzan. Although he never himself composed, he was a master of improvisation, always remaining faithful to the appropriate *steiger* (musical theme). His congregants were often deeply moved by the emotional intensity of his davening.

One of the first cantors to record phonograph records, Sirota was chosen in 1905, at age 31, to become the Oberkantor (chief chazzan) of Europe’s most prestigious shul, the Great Synagogue of Warsaw. Known also as the Chorshul, but seemingly referred to most often simply as the Tlomackie Street Synagogue, it had seating for upwards of 2,000 and its services were attended by the most prosperous elite of Warsaw Jewry, Orthodox and otherwise.

Inevitably, Sirota was often compared to the leading operatic tenors of his day. Serious music critics would mention Caruso, or other great stars, and “the Cantor from Warsaw” in the same breath. Caruso is said to have once remarked how fortunate he was that Sirota, who received many offers to sing in opera, chose to stay in the synagogue.

Sirota traveled extensively, giving concerts across Europe and America, and he was the only one of Europe’s great cantors not to eventually accept a position in the USA. Thus it was that when the fateful telegram arrived telling him of his wife’s illness, it was to Warsaw that he hurried home. ▶



Warsaw’s Great Synagogue on Tlomackie Street

When the ghetto gates snapped shut, there was no escape. According to Cantor Samuel Vigoda, in his book *Legendary Voices*, Sirota “succeeded in sending off pleas for help” to his American concert managers and to others, desperately seeking affidavits for himself and his family so that they could obtain American visas. But it was to no avail.

Inside the ghetto, the Jews attempted to maintain as much normalcy as was possible under the harsh and oppressive conditions. There were many musical and cultural programs, and Sirota gave concerts, some in the Tlomackie Street Synagogue building, consisting of both liturgical pieces and operatic arias. He also led services.

In his diary entry for September 21, 1942, Hillel Seidman, who was transferred out of the ghetto before the Uprising began, relates how the Jews were able to daven on Yom Kippur despite the fact that they were forced to work on that day. In one workshop, says Seidman, Gershon Sirota conducted the service. Even if his voice had diminished with his advancing age, on this occasion there was no holding him back. The gabbaim tried to get him to lower his mighty voice in case the Germans would hear them, but he was too rapt in the prayers to take heed.

In order to protect Sirota from being drafted for a forced work assignment, he was given a uniform by one of the semi-official Jewish organizations. According to Jonas Turkow, in his book *This Is How It Was*, “The heart hurt as one looked at the ageing world-honored Chazzan Gershon Sirota, masquerading in order to protect himself from the danger of being captured by the Germans.”

In testimony she later gave to Yad Vashem, Miriam Preiss-Feigenbaum relates how on *Erev Pesach*, April 19, 1943, the day the Uprising began, she joined the Sirota family in the bunker where they were hiding at 6 Wolynska Street. This resourceful woman even brought along a chicken that she had obtained from a friend outside the ghetto. The friend threw it over the wall at a prearranged location where the Jewish policeman on guard was open to taking bribes to look the other way. According to Preiss-Feigenbaum, Sirota’s wife had already died a month earlier, apparently from natural causes. But still with him in the bunker were one of his sons, a daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren, as well as his single



The Tlomackie Street Synagogue in ruins

daughter, and two or three other individuals. She stayed in that bunker for only three days before moving to another location, but she was aware that Gershon Sirota and most of the others at 6 Wolynska Street perished there on April 27, the last day of Pesach, when the bunker was torched.

In his journal entry for April 27, the infamous General Jürgen Stroop, sent by Himmler to suppress the rebellious ghetto, notes that “Today, a total of 2,560 Jews was apprehended in the former Jewish quarter and 547 of them shot. An undetermined number of Jews perished, as usual, in the fires or when the bunkers were blown up.”

Among the “undetermined number of Jews” on that day were Gershon Sirota and his family.

Stroop was ruthless and utterly cruel. He gave instructions that the ghetto was to be emptied and its buildings razed, and did not rest until his goal had been achieved. When it was all over, he had killed the great chazzan and all the heroic Jews who had dared stand up to him. Now, on May 16, as a grand gesture of victory over the Jewish revolt, he blew up Sirota’s beloved Great Synagogue on Tlomackie Street.

Prior to his own execution for war crimes in 1952, Stroop took obvious delight in describing the scene to an interviewer:

“What a marvelous sight it was. A fantastic piece of theater. My staff and I stood at a distance. I held the electrical device which would detonate all the charges simultaneously. . . . After prolonging the suspense for a moment, I shouted: Heil Hitler and pressed the button. With a thunderous, deafening bang and a rainbow burst of colors, the fiery explosion soared toward the clouds, an unforgettable tribute to our triumph over the Jews. The Warsaw Ghetto was no more. The will of Adolph Hitler and Heinrich Himmler had been done.” (Kazimierz Moczarski, *Conversations with an Executioner*, New Jersey, 1981.)

The will of the Nazi leaders may indeed have been done. But the voice of Gershon Sirota lives on through his many recordings, a magnificent voice that continues to inspire the Jewish people today as it did until it was brutally cut off, just 75 years ago.

(Abridged from my article in The Jerusalem Post Magazine, April 20, 2018. www.jpost.com/Magazine/A-voice-from-the-Warsaw-Ghetto-551197)



SS General Jürgen Stroop (center) inspects the damage to the ghetto



Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman
Photo Credit: Yaakov Naumi/Flash90



Rav Yeshayahu Hadari
Credit: David Weinberg



David Wyman
Credit: Times of Israel



Aharon Appelfeld
Credit: www.commeuneorange.fr



Charles Krauthammer
Credit: Fox News

Dr. Leatrice Rabinsky
Credit: www.chuh.org

The Death of Righteous Men Is Equivalent To the Burning of the Temple

(Masechet Rosh Hashanah 18b)

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