

Harry Klein

## Resistance in the Ghettoes and Camps

*A look at yesterday's past through today's reality*

When the film *Holocaust*<sup>1</sup> was shown on television, millions of people sat tensely, with tears in their eyes, and looked at the images of the horrific suffering and persecutions - bitter moments of Jewish tragedy under bloody Nazi rule.

This film elicited criticism in America and England, to the effect that *Holocaust* has many flaws in its description of the Jewish ordeals and the death factories and gas ovens, failing to sufficiently elucidate the viewer as to "how" such a tragedy could have happened. And these viewers, shocked by the unbelievable scenes, nowadays ask, "Why did the Jews not put up any resistance. Why did they remain passive in face of their destiny?"

We, the *Surviving Remnant*, the eyewitnesses to the pain and suffering, can say the following:

- that Jews resisted when and where possible. Those, who did not live through this path of suffering, could never imagine the circumstances and the consequences, which would have brought even greater and more painful ordeals for the Jews [being] murdered.

The question of why Jews did not put up a resistance is a very painful one - and, once again, we come to the circumstances. Whenever a rebellion did actually take place, it was immediately stifled, because they could not escape. Where would they have fled and whom would they have asked for assistance? "*Vu ahin zol ich geyn*"<sup>2</sup>, when all the doors to liberty were shut? Even those, who could actually have been saved, were also sent back to annihilation, for all the surroundings were infected with antisemitic poison towards every individual Jew - and this was the fundamental motive and the root which led to our great destruction.

The largest armies in Europe, armed from head to foot, could not contain the pressure of the victories on the part of Hitler's military forces. [Yet] the exhausted Jews in the ghettoes needed to put up a resistance with weaponry capable of defeating the Nazi army. The actual fact is, that Jews did, indeed, put up a resistance - a spiritual, heroic resistance. And the "secret weapon" of these wretched Jews was their confidence.

For years, we have been party to the silence regarding the ghettoes and camps in general. We have measured Jewish heroism during the times of Hitler, may his name be obliterated, in the quantity of bombs detonated and rifle shots fired. Our reply to everyone - and to ourselves - are the inexhaustible sources of elevated spiritual heroism in all the ghettoes and camps.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Ref. to the 1978 US four-part miniseries, which explores the Holocaust from the perspective of a fictional Jewish family in Germany.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Yid., "Where am I to go?"; title of a well-known song about the Holocaust.]

Herding the Jews into the ghettos was a premeditated trap and a step towards liquidation. These being the German intentions, with the “final solution” as their end goal, they engineered, through selections, the extermination of European Jewry.

During this fateful period in the ghettos, resistance came through in the traditional Jewish way of sanctifying life under all circumstances. Every day, each long-drawn hour, was a demonstration of the vitality of the Jewish spirit. The fact that a Jewish communal life was maintained under the ghetto conditions is a historic example of the immortal “*ani ma’amin*”<sup>3</sup> motif - the motif of Jewish survival in all eras. From behind the barbed wire fences in the ghettos, the Jews sang “*Zog nit keyn mol, az du geyst dem letstn veg*”<sup>4</sup>, clinging to the belief that the anti-Hitler world and the leaders of the numerous Jewish communities throughout the globe would heed their cries for aid.

Their prayers found no echo. The hallowed martyrs bear no guilt for their passiveness and for the end result. With all due reverential awe towards those to whom Fortune granted armed vengeance and heroically fought the Nazi murderers for the honour of the Jewish people, remaining inside the ghetto was not a bit less heroic, from the standpoint of traditional Judaism, than organising combat units in the woods.

Also, we must not forget to mention the particular role and heroism of the Jewish woman in the ghettos, as has been described by the historians Emanuel Ringelblum and Ber [Bernard] Mark, and the partisan Moshe Kaganovich<sup>5</sup> in their works. The Jewish woman was active in the various forms of the struggle, and made an important contribution to the eventual victory over the Nazi beast. In the times of the War, the whole of Europe was one big Auschwitz, in which the Jews in the camps, ghettos and hideouts put up a resistance to the Nazi foe by their struggle to survive and to outlive him.

We wish to shout out to those who were not there - do not profane the honour of our martyrs! Our brothers and sisters were united in the fight for Jewish worth and humanity, both those who fell with weapons in their hands, as well as the millions who were tortured by the Nazi beasts. The ache has remained with those saved. They are the living witnesses, who bear, in their memories, the *Akeida*<sup>6</sup> of masses of the Second World War - a dark period, during which any trace of Jews and Judaism was so brutally swept away.

In the five years of barbaric Nazi reign, the history of Jewish resistance in the ghettos was sanctified by the permanent, daily sanctification of the Name [of God], with the obstinate, collective wrangle - and these stages of suffering need to be studied by all Holocaust researchers. Those, who try to persuade us that the ghettos could have served as combat positions in a clash against Nazism, are mistaken. It is against the world, which was free and looked on as they burned Jewish children in this bitter and dark era of Hitler, may his name be obliterated, that the accusation of passivity, in not putting up any resistance, must be made.

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: Heb., “I believe”), a short creed based, as is the “Yigdal” hymn, on the Thirteen Articles of Faith formulated by Maimonides. Each article begins with the words “Ani ma’amin be-emunah sheleimah” (I believe with complete faith). (source: Jewish Virtual Library)]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Yid., “Never say that you’re going your last way”; opening words of song composed by Hirsch Glick in 1943, in the Wilno Ghetto, which is also known as “The Partisan’s Anthem”.]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: We have rendered this name as it appears in the various sources.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: Heb., “Binding”; ref. to the Binding of Isaac in Genesis 22.]