

On Wednesday 15th April It was Yom Ha-Shoah

I think it appropriate, even if a couple of days late, to do something to remember those who were murdered, and those who survived.

First, though, I would like to tell a story. Years ago, in a bookshop, browsing at random through the shelves, as one does, I picked up and read a paperback that told the tale of some who had passed through that pit of deep darkness that was the Holocaust, the Shoah. I cannot remember the name of the book. But I have always remembered one of the stories. It was about a survivor: a woman, who had passed through the dark place, the habitation of cruelty, that was Ravensbrueck. I can't recall her name. But I remember what she did. Years after the war – how long after, I don't know – she went back to the ruins of the camp, and she went into the ruins of one of the gas chambers, or one of the ovens, and there in that epicentre of evil she sat down, and took out her siddur, the Jewish prayer book. She opened it to the beginning of the Tehillim, the Psalms; and then she began to read. She read them aloud, all of them, from the first – “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly...” – all the way through the last, the great shout of joy and praise that is Psalm 150.

Can you imagine her? Can you see her, hear her voice?

Now, let us take up the book, and say Tehillim.

We shall begin with Psalm 23, adonai el-roi, The Lord is my Shepherd, as set by Leonard Bernstein in the Chichester Psalms. In counterpoint to the soloist the choir sings verses from Psalm 2, “Why do the heathen rage?” Unfortunately, the clip I would have liked to share – Daniel Reich in Jerusalem in 2008 – cannot be embedded; however, if you go to youtube

and google 'Daniel Reich' "Psalm 23" "Chichester Psalms" you should find it, and when you hear it you will know why it was my first choice.

So, here is a very different version: Leonard Bernstein conducting – irony of ironies – a Polish soloist in Warsaw in 1989.

And now let us hear a meditation upon part of Psalm 42: Kir ahal ta'arog – "As pants the hart for flowing streams...". Sung by Brooklyn rabbi Moshe Hecht.

Psalm 121, sung by Yosef Karduner – Shir La ma'a'lot. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills; from whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the LORD who made heaven and earth...".

Psalm 130: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD: Lord, hear my voice...". Sung in Hebrew by Haim Israel.

And, finally, Psalm 150. Yes, Psalm 150. If she, that survivor of Ravensbrueck, could find the voice to say that great shout of praise, there, in the ruins of the gas chamber, we also must find the courage to say it with her. "Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary. Praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet...[that is, the shofar, the ram's horn.]...". This

particular version, like all the others I have chosen for today, is in Hebrew, sung by one Yitzchak Fuchs.