



Hayenu Sham! - "We were all there!" Hineni - "I am here!"

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I am writing this during the time of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In Jewish rabbinical tradition, there are two times in which all Jewish souls were said to have been together. These two times were the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Hayenu Sham!, "We were all there!"

Lately, I have become convinced that there should be a third time and that would be either of the following or both.

Hayenu Sham!, "We were all there!" Our souls were present with those who sought safety from Nazi tyranny but found no place of refuge.

In 1939, the ship St Louis with 1,000 people fleeing Nazi Germany was unable to find any port of safety for its human cargo. The ship was turned away from Cuba and from the United States. The ship was forced to return to Europe and many of those who were on the ship died at the hand of the Nazis.

Eighty years ago on February 24, 1942, the refugee ship the Struma was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine in the Black Sea. 781 Jews and 10 crew would lose their lives. Their desire was to reach the safety of the shores of the land of Israel.

Clearly when the rabbis say that Hayenu Sham!, "We were all there!" they are saying this these historical occurrences are the most important in all of Jewish history and that we as individuals and as a community needs to feel that we were actually a part of these incidents.

Hayenu Sham!, "We were all there!" These people as refugees would have given anything they owned to be taken in by another country, but sadly this was not to be. Such refuge would literally have been lifesaving for such Jews.

Obviously, the difference between the Holocaust and today in terms of saving the lives of Jewish refugees is the State of Israel.

Israel is not only a place of refuge for stateless Jews. Four times, the Israeli Declaration of Independence mentions that Israel is the homeland of the Jewish people, a place wherein Jews can live "a life of dignity, freedom and honest toil in their national homeland."

With this in mind, I have been amazed at the role that Israel is playing in securing the welfare of Ukrainian Jews.

In the weeks prior to the invasion, almost one half of the regular El Al flights were canceled as plane after plane was sent to the Ukraine to evacuate Israelis.

Now as Jews cross the border, they are being met by representatives of the Jewish Agency who direct them to an airport from which they will be flown free of charge to Israel.

At Yemin Orde Youth Village, there are more than 100 Ukrainian and Russian Jewish students. This week, three of the families of these students managed to leave Ukraine. They are now living at the Yemin Orde.

In addition, Israel has sent tons of humanitarian aid, a medical rescue team and has committed itself to absorbing some 200,000 Jews who it estimates are eligible to make Aliyah under the Law of Return.

Let us recall the immortal words spoken by Abraham which God called him. Hineni - "I am here!" (Genesis 22)

Hineni - "I am here!" In this environment, we as Jews should affirm that we are all Zionists and supporters of Israel. Yes, I feel that there is plenty to criticize in terms of Israel. Now however is the time for those in the diaspora to express solidarity with Israel.

Hineni - "I am here!" I am proud to support Israel, a country dedicated to saving Jewish lives, providing Jewish security and creating an incredible Jewish future!

Hineni - "I am here!" Now more than ever, Israel deserves our support. We should do all that we can to make sure that Israel is strong enough to deter those who seek her destruction from even considering doing so. Ukraine's military was perceived by Putin to be so weak that it in effect was not considered by him to be a deterrent.

Presently and in the foreseeable future, the only country in the world which is working to evacuate Ukrainian Jews is Israel. That, my friends, is Zionism and that is, once again, the reason why Israel must not only exist, but thrive.

Yes, I was there. Hayiti Sham. I was there at the Exodus. I was there at Mt Sinai. I was a refugee on the St Louis and the Struma.

But today in solidarity with Israel and as a Jew, I say Hineni - "I am here!"

In times like these, I am proud to call myself a Zionist and an ardent supporter of the State of Israel!

Am Yisrael Chai!