

# Heart-Breaking Miracle

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

In Vasily Grossman's vast, magisterial novel of World War II, *Life and Fate* he pauses for a moment to speak of the power of music:

*People in camps, people in prisons, people who have escaped from prison, people going to their deaths, know the extraordinary power of music. No one else can experience music in quite the same way. What music resurrects in the soul of a man about to die is neither hope nor thought, but simply the blind, heart-breaking miracle of life itself.*

We can imagine the slaves, recently escaped from the prison of Egypt, at the sea. The biblical song of the sea expresses in an ancient idiom what the novelist tells us. Music expands the world, opens the sky, exists in defiance of confinement or restriction or the narrowness that often holds the human spirit in check. The orchestra in Auschwitz played in complete opposition to the hellish world that surrounded it. For a moment as the notes soared, the musicians' souls felt free. Grossman's novel was repressed by the Soviet Union in his lifetime, but after he is gone we can hear his noble spirit's song. He expresses the majesty bequeathed by music makers throughout the ages — "the blind, heart-breaking miracle of life itself."