

“He also showed love to peoples, all its holy ones are in Your hands.” (33:3)

In an alternative explanation, Rashi explains that even at a time when Hashem demonstrates endearment towards the gentile nations who persecute the Jews, Klal Yisrael's righteous ones remain true and continue to cleave to Hashem. They overcome the challenge to their faith as a result of their strong commitment to faith in the Almighty.

The extreme devotion and commitment exhibited by the Klausenberger Rebbe, z.l., during the Holocaust years is legend. Regardless of the success of the Nazi's, the Rebbe's religious fervor never waned. He refused to eat anything that might not be kosher. During his entire stay in the Warsaw Ghetto, the Rebbe's diet consisted only of dry bread and unpurified water. Occasionally, someone would find a small onion for him – or a morsel of tasteless food. Consequently, the Rebbe's physical state weakened. Yet, the Rebbe refused to submit. He could hardly carry out his daily labor load due to his weakened condition. A number of his chassidim would stand near him and assist him in carrying the large bricks that were part of his work order.

Throughout the workday, the Rebbe wept bitterly. As he cried, he whispered over and over, “Why should the nations of the world say, ‘Where is your G-d?’” The Rebbe did not cry over his own trials and misfortune. His only concern was over the chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name, that occurred.

One day, when the labor group was standing on the roof of a building, a sudden rainstorm struck. Despite the driving rain and gusts of wind, the Nazi fiends ordered the hapless Jews to continue working and to finish their jobs. The work was practically beyond human ability.

One prisoner could no longer handle the physical abuse. He turned to the Klausenberger Rebbe and screamed, "Are you still so happy to be a member of the Chosen People?" The Rebbe responded with sincerity, "Now, when I will say Atah bechartanu, You have chosen us from all of the nations, I will concentrate even more than before, and I will rejoice without limit. The words have a new meaning for me. If not for the fact that Hashem chose us from among the nations of the world, we would be oppressors just like them. Better I should remain an oppressed Jew than become like one of them. How fortunate am I to be among the Chosen People!"

The Rebbe would relate the following incident to demonstrate the level of commitment evinced by the Jews of that period. One of the workers in the Warsaw Ghetto was a Lithuanian Jew who was an expert locksmith. Because the Nazis needed his skills, they gave him more freedom and better meals than the average person. One day, this Jew approached the Rebbe with a halachic question;

"In my capacity as locksmith, I am compelled to work on Shabbos. I cannot take it any longer. I would much rather switch to carrying heavy loads, because then I will only be desecrating a Rabbinical prohibition on Shabbos."

The Rebbe asked, "How will you go about facilitating this switch?"

The man explained, "I will burn my hands, so that I will no longer be able to work with locks." He stood confidently in front of the Rebbe, awaiting his answer.

The Rebbe was acutely aware that those who were involved with carrying heavy loads collapsed after a few days from utter exhaustion. Thus, he told the man, "I do not advise you to switch jobs. You should not place yourself in such danger."

Yet, the man would not be swayed. "I do not want to transgress so many Torah prohibitions," he exclaimed.

It was only with great difficulty that the Rebbe was able to convince him that in his present position he had the opportunity to help many Jews and save them from starving to death. Saving another Jew's life takes precedence over Shabbos. Mi k'amcha Yisrael!, "Who is like Your People, Yisrael?"

