

He also showed love to peoples, all its holy ones are in Your hands; and they were brought in at Your feet, He would bear Your utterances. (33:3)

In an alternative exposition of this pasuk, Rashi says that the love that Hashem demonstrated is a reference to a time in which Hashem manifests endearment to the nations of the world. He shows them a smiling countenance when He delivers Klal Yisrael into their hands. Nonetheless, “all its Holy ones are in Your hands.” Despite this g’zar din, difficult decree, against the Jewish People, its righteous ones and its good ones have cleaved to Hashem, never once doubting Him. Hashem, therefore, guards them. These deeply committed Jews accept Your decree with love and joy, declaring: Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehillas Yaakov, “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov.” We held on to it, and we will not abandon it!

These powerful words have been uttered by Jews throughout the millennia as they accepted Hashem’s edict and went to their deaths amid pain and affliction – but with joy and song on their lips. In a letter to his son, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, describes the last moments of the kedoshei Kelm, martyrs of Kelm. He vividly portrays their acceptance of the decree that their executioners would be the Nazis, but, despite the bitterness of this terrible g’zar din, they swallowed it as a sweet elixir. He writes, “How did these giants of the spirit, strong of heart, and symbols of truth, leave this world? I remember from days gone by, how on Simchas Torah all of the rabbis would parade out into the main square and dance through the streets with all of their strength. They would raise their voices in song, and, with passion and fervor, they would sing the words, Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu, ‘How fortunate are we and how good is our portion!’

“Forty years later, the destruction of European Jewry took place. When the Nazis entered Kelm, the rabbis and their families gathered in the Bais HaTalmud, the Yeshivah which was the focal point of this Torah community. They began to pray and pour out their hearts to their Heavenly Father. They supplicated Him for mercy, but, regrettably, the Gates of Mercy were closed. The decree had been given. They must accept it. Outside, the evil murderers were waiting to perform their task. They brought every man, woman and child into the center of town and proceeded to march them through the city to its outskirts. They cursed and beat them. Expecting to witness a group of broken, distraught, wretched people, the Nazi fiends were shocked and angered by the

Jews' response to their terror.

“Who can imagine the reaction of those noble souls at that fateful moment? With fortitude-filled hearts, emboldened spirits and impassioned joy in being able to fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem’s Name, they went forward, heads upright with pride, singing and dancing – just like on Simchas Torah – only with greater fervor. They sang, Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu, “How fortunate are we, how fortunate are we to be Jews.” This is how they went to their deaths: singing with joy, proud to be Jews, exalted with the opportunity to give up their lives to sanctify Hashem’s Name.”

Rav Dessler then addresses a question that gnaws away at the individual who does not understand the depth of their mesiras nefesh, self sacrifice. What was gained by their act of self sacrifice? Had they died as a result of gezeiras ha’shmad, decrees made for the specific purpose of apostatizing Jews, there would have been benefit from their deaths. They would have been defiant, refusing to become baptized, demonstrating that they would rather die than convert. Thus, they would have manifested their unyielding commitment to Hashem. In this circumstance, however, the Nazis could care less about them. In fact, even if they had wanted to convert, it would have made no difference. The Nazis wanted the Jews dead – subject closed. There was no room for discussion or negotiation. The Jews were not granted any choice. They were to die, regardless of their commitment.

Men of integrity, people who comprehend the truth, understand that the challenge is not to be able to triumph over forced baptism or to choose death over life as a gentile. The true challenge is much more difficult. It is not before whom one sanctifies himself, it is how one goes to his death. If in his heart there is a sense of peace and calm, an exalted feeling of rapture and ecstasy in the knowledge that he is uniting with the Almighty, then he has achieved the ultimate plateau of mesiras nefesh. This is an achievement of the highest order, because it is emes b’levavo, truth in one’s heart, absolute truth without embellishment. As we live through the chevlei Moshiach, birth pangs of the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, we strive to achieve such a level of personal integrity whereby each of us sanctifies Hashem’s Name – in his heart.

