

And I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service. (6:6)

V'hitzalti eschem mei'avodosam, “And I will rescue you from their service” means that the Jewish people will no longer be slaves to the Egyptians. No longer slaves? Throughout our tumultuous history, we have been subjugated to the most demeaning and brutal forms of slavery – and then murdered. *Horav Chaim Keller, zl*, wonders how our people, who were treated worse than animals by the Nazi murderers, were able to recite, *She'lo asani eved*, “That He did not make me a slave.” If that was not slavery – what is?

In a *shmuess*, ethical discourse (*Peninei Daas*), *Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl*, explains that the Jewish People personify *malchus b'soch avdus*, monarchy/royalty amidst slavery. In other words, regardless of our circumstances, whether we are sitting in a palace surrounded by unimaginable luxury and comfort or subject to the heinous persecution of the Nazi fiends – we remain *bnei melachim*, princes, royalty. Every Jew, regardless of his station in life, possesses *ginunei malchus*, impeccable princely deportment. Royalty is not a position, but rather, a characteristic, an attribute that bespeaks the inherent aristocratic bearing of every Jew. The Jew might be under the whip – but he remains a king, in contrast to the animal who is inflicting pain on him.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that one of the most glorious monarchical moments in our history was when Shlomo *Hamelech* reigned amid great pomp and circumstance. Shlomo's position as king never changed – even when it was diminished to the point that he reigned only over his walking stick! Nonetheless, he was a king (*Sanhedrim* 20b). He never gave up being a king. We, likewise, have never lost our royalty. It is not about how we appear to the rest of the world, how they view us, whether we live in a mansion or in a dilapidated bungalow: We are monarchs.

The hostilities that have existed, the battles we have waged with other nations, were not nationalistic, combative engagements, but rather, a conflict between light and darkness, between right and wrong, good and bad. We will never stoop down to the level of the miscreants who have throughout history attempted to manipulate and eventually destroy us. We are kings representing light – the light of Hashem and His Torah. They are the antithesis of everything that is pure and holy. When we left Egypt, we became a *mamleches kohanim v'goi kadosh*, kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We must live up to this standard of behavior.

The primary prerequisite for maintaining ourselves on such an exalted level is *emunah*, faith in Hashem. Without faith, everything else has little meaning. Faith is why we perform *mitzvos* and live as a Jew is supposed to live. Faith gives meaning to life. At no time did the attitude of faith shine forth, despite our being surrounded by – and subjected to –overwhelming adversity, more than on the *Yomim Tovim*, festival celebrations, in the concentration camps where six million of our brothers and sisters were systematically murdered. The cruelty and brutality our brothers suffered cannot be described in mere words. Nonetheless, they never reneged their Jewish identity. It went

beyond pride. Many Jews lived and died by another standard. The following is a short excerpt from the Warsaw diary of Chaim Kaplan, from the book "Scroll of Agony." (Chaim Kaplan was a writer and educator who was murdered in Treblinka in 1942. He kept a diary of life in Vilna during the early years of terror. He was able to smuggle out his notebook and give it to a friend. Ultimately, the diary ended up at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Originally written in Hebrew, it was later translated into English. "Scroll of Agony" is a remarkable, poignant first-person testimony of the persecution which our people sustained; yet, they prevailed in spirit and soul.)

"*Simchas Torah* in the midst of sorrow, the festival of joy. This is not a secular joy, but a 'rejoicing of the Torah,' the same Torah for which we are murdered all day... but we have not shamed our eternal Torah. This was not a raucous celebration, but an inner one, a heartfelt joy, and, for that reason, it was all the more warm and emotional. Everywhere, holiday celebrations were organized, and every prayer group recited the blessing over wine. The *chassidim* were even dancing, as is their pious custom. Someone related to me that, on the night of the festival, he met a large group of *chassidim* on Mila Street, and they sang holiday songs in chorus out in public, followed by a large crowd of curious people and sightseers. (Imagine) joy and revelry in poverty-stricken Mila Street. When they sang, they reached such a state of ecstasy that they could not stop."

This testament, as so many others, gives voice to the extraordinary, indomitable faith of our people. Our faith is our identity, an identity which does not allow for the concept of *avdus*, slavery, to be given a foothold. Our faith grants us the fortitude to stare pain and even death in the face, yet retain a stalwart sense of ecstasy in the knowledge that we are serving Hashem. We will never again be slaves. We are *bnei melachim* serving in the *ligyono shel Melech*, the King: We are serving in Hashem's army.