

# THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

*by Rabbi Gershon Weiss*

The Passover Haggadah says: "Asher Bachar Banu Mikol Am" -- Who chose us out of all peoples.

The Klausenberger Rebbe was taken as part of a slave-labor group from Auschwitz to Warsaw to dismantle the bombed-out buildings. The work was done at a furious pace and consisted of carrying heavy boulders and beams. Many people died of exhaustion.

One day, while the rebbe and his fellow prisoners were working on top of a building, a tremendous torrent of rain came down on them. Nevertheless, the Nazis drove them mercilessly to continue their work. One of the poor, exhausted, and completely drenched victims exclaimed in pain to the rebbe, "Are you going to continue to say 'You [God] have chosen us' -- and rejoice that we are the chosen nation?"

The Klausenberger Rebbe answered, "Until this day I did not say 'You have chosen us' with the proper devotion. But from today, when I say, 'You have chosen us from among the nations,' I will say it with much more fervor. I'll be infinitely ecstatic."

When the rebbe saw the astonished look on the man's face, he explained to him, "If it weren't for the fact that God has chosen us, then I would also be like the Nazis. It's better for me to be in my situation than to be one of them, God forbid. Happy is my lot!"

The Klausenberger Rebbe related further, "In Warsaw there was a Jew from Lithuania with us whose situation was much better than ours because he was an expert in metalworking, which made him very important to the SS. He was allowed to go around freely, and was given extra food.

One day this man sneaked into my cabin and said, 'I came to discuss with you a point in Jewish law. In my work, I have to violate Shabbat by transgressing Torah prohibitions. I think it is better to be transferred to the group that has to carry the heavy logs and boulders, which is not a Torah

prohibition but a rabbinical decree.'

When I asked him how he was going to accomplish this, he said, 'I have already made preparations to burn my hands with scalding water so that I will be unable to continue my delicate work. Then they will have to transfer me to the other work groups.'

"One has to realize," continued the rebbe, "that carrying the boulders meant certain death. Many were not able to hold out for more than a few days. In vain, I tried to convince him not to put himself into such danger. But he insisted that he did not want to transgress so many Torah prohibitions. With great difficulty I was able to persuade him that as a metalworker he was able to save the lives of many other Jews. Only then did he relent. Certainly seeing such a Jew strengthened in us the joy of 'You have chosen us.'"

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*"THE HOLOCAUST HAGADDAH"*  
*Published by: Targum Press, Inc. <http://www.targum.com>*

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