



# Our Power of Choice

Rabbi Eliezer Silver, a leader of American Jewry in the 1940's, was the president of the Vaad Hatzalah, the committee established during the Holocaust to rescue Jews from Europe and to help the survivors.

A short time after the war ended, Rabbi Silver arrived at one of the Displaced Persons (DP) camps. He organized a prayer service and invited one of the survivors to participate. This man adamantly refused to take part in the prayers, explaining his position by way of the following story:

“In the camps, there was a religious man who had somehow managed to smuggle in a siddur which he gave other prisoners to use. At first, I admired him for his courage and compassion for others, but I soon found out the rest of the story: This man would “lend” people this siddur in exchange for food, thus taking advantage of them in their weakened state. Starving Jews would hand him their last morsel of bread in exchange for a few minutes with his siddur. If this is the way Jewish people act, I will never open a siddur again!”

Rabbi Silver listened to this story, thought about it for a moment, and responded gently:

“My dear Jew, I understand how you must

be feeling. It is difficult to judge a person in such horrific circumstances, and you are correct that he should not have used his siddur this way.

But I have only one question for you: Why do you focus on the man who used his siddur to take food away from starving Jews? Why not focus, instead, on those starving Jews who were willing to give up their last piece of bread for a chance to pray from a siddur? And, now, how can we not continue to do that for which they were willing to sacrifice their lives?”

I don't think it's a coincidence that I heard this story for the first time this year. Because even after we have come face to face with absolute evil, we can still choose what to focus on, how to respond, and how to interpret events.

We can easily point to the mistakes made (on October 7), the horrific slaughter of innocents, oversights and failures yet to be analyzed — all the horrors of that Simchat Torah. Or, instead, we can choose to focus on the triumph of the human spirit, on the will to carry on, on the outpouring of love and caring, and on the incredible faith and strength that have emerged since that day. ■

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