

The Weeping Kapo

I recently read a poignant story which, unfortunately, provides a sad commentary on the human condition and the nadir to which some people descend. In the slave labor camp of Plashuv, a Jewish prisoner was aroused one night by a conversation between two kapos. These kapos were concentration camp police who were "selected" from among the Jewish prisoners themselves to carry out the orders of the Nazis in expediting the final solution. Their survival was dependent on proving their fidelity to the Nazi beasts in carrying out heartless acts of cruelty against their own brethren.

That there was always a steady supply of recruits, for this malevolent work is truly an unfortunate page in our history. The Jewish prisoner who was suddenly awakened listened to the following conversation between two kapos on duty.

One of them was crying, to his comrade's astonishment. Cruelty was part of their lifestyle, and whatever sentiment they might have had was long gone. Tears were an expression not commonly found by a kapo.

"Why the tears? What happened?"

"Do not ask.. Something occurred today that shook me up terribly," he responded.

"I do not understand you. What could possibly move you? I escorted my own father to his death, and you watched as your mother was shot to death . What could possibly bring you to tears?"

The weeping kapo, amid brokenhearted sobs, answered, "Today was different than anything I have ever experienced. I was taking an old chassid to be killed, when suddenly he stopped and looked me straight in the eyes and said, yes, we deserve this horrible punishment. We truly are guilty and warrant this fate. If one Jew is capable of leading another Jew to the slaughter, then something is very wrong with our nation, and we, have to answer for it - even with this punishment! Whenever I think of that old man's words, I tremble with disgust and loathing."