

Hashem, it is He Who goes before you; He will be with you. (31:8)

Hashem never leaves us. He listens to our prayers. The reply that we receive may not be what we are seeking, we have no question that Hashem has listened. During our periods of travail, when we think that we are alone - we are not. He is there sharing in our pain. Sadly, some people have great difficulty coping with pain, to the point that they become overwhelmed with despair and give up hope. They forget that a loving Father in Heaven guides the world, and whatever occurs is by His Divine decree. While it is understandable to feel anxious, to lament, to grieve, despair reflects a lack of faith. A Jew believes in Hashem and knows that He listens to us. While this may not erase the pain of loss, it does make it somewhat easier to bear.

A Holocaust survivor who had lost his entire family immigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* following the liberation. Depressed and dejected, he turned to the *Chazon Ish, zl*, hoping to receive *divrei chizuk*, words that would hearten him, because he had descended to a point where he felt that his *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, had waned terribly, and, worst of all, he no longer cared.

The *Chazon Ish* listened to his tale of woe and related the following story to him. A woman ran a lucrative business without any assistance from her husband. One day, she took a large amount of money with her and traveled to the large wholesale market to purchase wares for resale in her shop. Unfortunately, she somehow lost her money pouch. She was frantic, so she immediately went to the *Rav* of the city to announce publicly that anyone who found a money pouch should return it forthwith to the *Rav*. After a while, a man appeared at the *Rav's* home and claimed that he had found the money pouch. He felt that because it had been some time since it was lost, the owner of the bag had surely despaired of its return. Hence, it belonged to him, according to the principle that once an owner gives up hope of the return of a lost item, the finder may keep it.

The *Rav* was not certain how to rule with regard to this case, because the man's claim to the bag of money was not without merit. He decided to present the question to the *Kovner Rav, Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, zl*, for his ruling in the matter. The *Kovner Rav* ruled that the money should be returned to the woman, as the money did not really belong to her. As long as she is married, her possessions belong to her husband. Thus, whatever money she had was her husband's money. Since he was unaware that it had been lost, he could not be *meya'eish*, give up hope. The wife's *yi'ush* was worthless, because it was not her money.

"Having said this," the *Chazon Ish* said, "it is no different in your situation. You may not/or cannot be *meya'eish*, despair, over your situation, since your life and mission in this world is not under your control. You were sent here by Hashem to live out your life and serve Hashem by glorifying His Name in the world. You do not 'own' yourself. 'You' belong to Hashem, and He has not given up hope on you."

Hope is not optional for a Jew. It is part of our DNA. We believe in Hashem, Who has never forsaken us. Rather than focus on the negative, we should look back on the positive. *Kaveh el Hashem*, hope to Hashem, is the only way for us to live. It is through the medium of hope that we have been able to pull ourselves up and out of the muck of despondency, to emerge stronger with renewed faith in the Almighty. A well-known story (of which a number of variations abound) characterizes Jewish hope and resilience during the worst moments in our collective history. *Simchas Torah* is meant to be a joyous festival, filled with dancing with the Torah, celebrating our relationship with it. In Auschwitz, this joyous holiday, like so many others, was far from joyous. People were in pain; people were suffering from fear; people were dying. They had no one with which to dance. On *Simchas Torah* night, an elderly Jew – a Jew who had lost everything – every member of his family had been murdered, still had one thing that kept him going: hope. He walked over to a young boy and asked, “Do you know the *Shema*?” The young boy answered, “Yes. I know the *Shema* and much more.”

“The *Shema* will do,” the man replied.

At that moment, the man called to the others on the block, “*Rabbosai*, it is *Simchas Torah*, the time to dance around the Torah and sing.” The man lifted up the boy as the Torah is lifted and embraced him the way one would embrace the Torah. The other Jews danced around the old man with his “Torah,” the young boy who represented the future of the Jewish People. They danced and wept tears of hope, not despair. This is who we are, and this is why we continue to survive. We are all here on a mission. As such, we continue until that moment that we can say, “Mission accomplished.”