

Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart. (28:47)

Simply, this *pasuk* admonishes us for a lack of joy in performing *mitzvos*. We perform *mitzvos*, but without interest, excitement, passion and, most of all, joy. Is this a valid reason to become the victim of all these curses? One would think that observance should be the deciding factor. Yet, we see that indifferent observance is almost worse than nonobservance. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to quote and offer personal exegesis to explain the dynamics of joy and its inherent significance in determining the validity and worthiness of one's *mitzvah* observance. I would like to take a different approach, to suggest that the joy in the *pasuk* is about our demeanor and outlook on life in the present, our perspective on the past, its trials and tribulations. I take the liberty of quoting from an address that the *Bostoner Rebbe, zl*, delivered at an Agudas Yisrael convention.

As a nation, mourning has just not been our expertise. The Jewish nation, as far back as our earliest moments, has acted passively at best in expressing grief. We have understood that it is possible and self-defeating – to mourn too much. While grief is important, and expressing our emotions is cathartic, over expression of grief, getting carried away, is self-defeating.

At the very outset of our history, our Patriarch, Avraham *Avinu*, was confronted with the sudden and tragic loss of his life partner, Sarah *Imeinu*. One of the letters of the Torah's word for "and cry for her," *v'livkosa*, is written smaller, as if to imply that Avraham's weeping was limited. His recognition and acknowledgement of Sarah's greatness, however, did not coincide with his expression over his loss.

Our Patriarch taught us that, while sadly we have much for which to mourn, we take great care to set clear parameters for expressing our mourning. The greatest tragedy since the *churban*, destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*, was *churban* Europa, the European Holocaust, which decimated European Jewry. Our response to the Holocaust should model the manner of mourning that we have adopted concerning the *churban Bais HaMikdash*.

How do we mourn the *Bais HaMikdash* in a meaningful manner? The *Rebbe* explains that the commemoration of the saddest event in our history commences with the arrival of *Chodesh Av*, with a lessening of joy. Noticeably, we are exhorted to diminish our joy – not to discontinue it. The week in which *Tishah B'Av*, our national day of mourning occurs, carries with it more restrictions, but it is only on *Tishah B'Av* that we act like grief-stricken mourners. Our expression of grief, however, is also restricted to the morning, up to *chatzos*, midday, when we return to our regular chairs and put on *Tefillin*, from which we had been restricted in the morning. Apparently, the *churban Bais HaMikdash* does not even warrant a complete day of mourning. How are we to understand this?

The *Rebbe* explains that *Chazal* distinguishes between two means of remembrance: *zeichar*

l'churban, recalling the destruction; and *zeichar l'Mikdash*, recalling the *Bais HaMikdash* in all its glory. *Zeichar l'churban* is a sad remembrance which is usually observed passively. We demonstrate mourning in the manner that: we decorate our homes (leaving a small spot unfinished), celebrate our weddings; and by the way a woman adorns herself with jewelry. We recall that a vital part of our lives – of our history – is missing. We dedicate ourselves to remembering the void left in our lives by what used to be the *Bais HaMikdash*.

Zeichar l'Mikdash is vital, vibrant, alive and active. Whenever we can, we celebrate the reality of what once was, the excitement that the *Bais HaMikdash* generated. Indeed, the same Jew who arises at midnight to mourn the *Bais HaMikdash* also marches around the *bimah* in *shul* waving his *lulav* and *esrog*. He cries in memory of the *Bais HaMikdash* on *Tishah B'Av*, and he dances in celebration of what once occurred on *Succos*. The same people that sit on the floor on *Tishah B'Av* sit around the seder table bedecked with the finest china and silverware. We eat the *korech* in remembrance of what once was, and, likewise, we have the roasted egg and shank bone at the seder table – all reminiscent of the vitality that reigned in the *Bais HaMikdash*. Our happiness is not diminished by our tears, but our tears are not allowed entrance to our seder table. In other words, we remember tragedy, persecution and every form of adversity to challenge our collective nation. However, we remember through a constructive perspective.

It is important to hallow the past by mourning properly at the appropriate times. The rest of the time, we honor those periods of adversity in a positive, determined manner. This is the most important and genuine way to remember. We build monuments of stone, museums to commemorate and perpetuate the sense of loss is counterintuitive, since we are not a nation of mourners. We move on by remembering tragedies in a meaningful manner. We remember with action, by carrying on the legacy of our past. To paraphrase the *Rebbe*, “We remember with symbols other than tears. Our interest is not in burying the past, even with the most lavish funeral, but in satisfying and continuing it.”

Returning to our *pasuk* and the requisite for *simchah* in our lives, I think the Torah is alluding to the manner in which we, as Torah observant Jews, should recall the past, the manner in which we should live every day of our lives: with positivity. We must continue to be active, to celebrate life, to view the past in the context of the glory that once was, and to seek every audience to continue and preserve it.

A group of Jews gathered to “celebrate” the *Pesach seder*. I put quotes on the word celebrate, because this was a unique seder, having being held in the notorious Bergen Belsen concentration camp. A father instructed his son to recite the *Mah Nishtanah* and to insert the words *zeichar*, remembrance, *l'matzah*, and *l'marror*. Since they had no *matzah* or *marror*, they would suffice by remembering what they had once been able to have at the seder. When the child reached the fourth question of *kulanu mesubin*, however, they did not recline. Aware that in the camp they had no possibility of reclining, one person began to weep. Soon the domino effect released the tears from everyone, and the seder became more like *Tisha B'Av* than *Pesach*.

At that moment, the father looked at his son and began to sing softly, “*V’he she’amdah la’avoseinu.*” Within moments, the mood in the room changed and everyone began to sing. Their spirits were lifted, as each one sensed that while the world around them had sunken into a deep, morose state, the knowledge that Hashem would never abandon them gave way to positive emotion. They knew that come what may, at the end of the day Hashem would be present for them. This emotion has bolstered the Jewish spirit throughout our tumultuous history.