

A seven-day period shall you celebrate to Hashem, your G-d.... And you will be completely joyous (16:15)

Rashi comments that *v'hayisa ach sameach* is not a command, but rather, a promise that we will fulfill the *mitzvos* of celebrating the festival amid joy. *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 71A) derive from here that the joy inherent in our celebration of the festival applies to the last night as well. The commentators question how *ach*, which in Hebrew is used to exclude, is used in this context to include the last night of the *Yom Tov* for joyful celebration. Throughout *Shas*, however, the word is used to exclude.

In a homily rendered following the Holocaust which decimated European Jewry, *HoRav Shmuel Dovid Walkin, z"l*, addressed the question. He offered a homiletic, but practical, approach towards understanding the exception aspect of *ach* with regard to *simchas Yom Tov*. The preceding *pasuk* instructed the Jews to celebrate joyfully with family: son, daughter, male or female servants, the *Levi, ger*, convert, orphan and widow. In other words, it is an exhortation to include the entire Jewish community in festive celebration. What if, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, one has no one with whom to celebrate. What if, as is presently the sad situation, a major part of *Klal Yisrael* had been brutally murdered – is there still a *mitzvah* to rejoice?

Rav Walkin explained that this is exactly what the *Torah* is teaching us. *Ach* means someone, something, is excluded, missing, which was the case following the Holocaust. Despite the loss our people must maintain our devotion to *Hashem*. Our relationship with *Hashem* is founded in deep-rooted love, a love that is transcendent, in that it transcends adversity and defies logic. Even during the Holocaust, many of our people risked their lives to light *Chanukah* candles, put on *Tefillin*, keep kosher and even celebrated *Pesach* with whatever foods they could muster. These were not mere rituals, but declarations of spiritual defiance and deep inner joy. They can bound and persecute us; they can murder us, but, at the end of the day, our Jewish soul remain steadfastly connected to *Hashem* – even in the valley of death.

After losing his wife and eleven children, the *Klausenberger Rebbe, z"l*, famously declared, *Ich hob Gutt nisht farloren in Auschwitz*, "I did not lose G-d in Auschwitz." He rebuilt entire communities and established Laniado Hospital and a number of *Torah* programs. He danced at weddings, rejoiced on *Yom Tov* and radiated in *mitzvah* observance. Was he depressed? Absolutely not! He transformed his pain with love, catalyzing it into transcendent faith.

It has been suggested and indeed, there is every reason to believe that it is true; that the greatest *Kiddush Hashem* of our time was not the martyrdom that took place in the ghettos and concentration camps, but in the courage and resilience that it took to rebuild. Survivors emerged from the ashes, grieving and scarred – but unbroken. When those shattered souls chose life and rejuvenation, they evinced the highest levels of *Kiddush Hashem*. I saw it in my parents and in their friends, all shards of a thriving world with hopes and futures. All shattered – but their hope

continued; thus, they had a future.

They built homes upon the foundations that emerged from the valley of death. They brought light from within the darkness and established their legacy in the families they nurtured. *Torah* was studied once again, each page a triumph over the forces of evil. *Kiddush Hashem* does not only occur when one sacrifices his life to glorify *Hashem*. It occurs when he lives for *Hashem*, when he rises up from the abyss to rebuild. Rather than focusing on the suffering and death, we should concentrate on renewed life and rebuilding.