

A Joyous People?

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

I know of many descriptions of the Jewish people: talented, beleaguered, stiff-necked, enduring — but rarely "joyous." Most people don't say: "Jews, now there is a happy people!" Our holidays reinforce this. On Pesach we celebrate leaving slavery — to go to a desert. On Purim we rejoice because we were not killed. Not exactly gleeful.

But Judaism really is built on joy. *Simcha*, joy, flows from the realization that we are filled with blessing. *Emunah* means faith but the more characteristic Jewish term is *bitachon* — trust. We do not trust that things will always be good, but that God has given us the resource, the strength, the depth of soul to meet whatever happens. There is deep joy in the acknowledgment of good fortune and the promise of overcoming.

Many years ago I recall hearing an army spokesman say that when he enlisted his commanding officer conducted a test. He put a black dot on a white wall and asked everyone what they saw. They answered, "a black dot." No, he said, you see a vast white wall and a tiny black dot. Don't look at life that way. Don't miss the blessing for the single thing that seems wrong. Judaism is realistic; we do not hide from the darkness. That is why we celebrate the many facets of light with gratitude and with joy.