

# CHAPTER 3 - PART 1

*by Rabbi David Sykes*

The connection between the souls of Jews of all generations and the Book of Tehillim is very well-known. Even though a lot has been written and said about this subject, it seems impossible to fully fathom the depth of this connection and to give it true expression.

The Tehillim book, or, as they called it in a term of endearment, "the Tillimel", accompanied a person from the cradle and did not leave him until his final journey. This closeness, which continued throughout one's entire life, turned the Tehillim into a friend. As is the way of a trusted friend, and as is the way of friendship in general, a friend is needed at all times, including times of joy, when the heart swells and seeks to burst. Above all, however, friendship is urgently needed in times of trouble or misfortune, God forbid.

A person's trusted friend in a time of tranquility and joy can be a true friend, but the value of a friend who is there for a person in his hour of need cannot be weighed in gold. The Book of Tehillim was and is the friend of the Jew at all times, at every hour, but we feel its true warmth and close friendship in a time of trouble, God forbid.

The word "Ashrei", "happy", is written in the Book of Tehillim twenty times. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha said, in Midrash Tehillim, that these twenty appearances of the word "Ashrei" were intended by David to counter, in advance, the twenty times the word "Woe" would be written in the Book of Isaiah centuries later. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha added that it was about these mentions of the word "Ashrei" that David said, "May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be accepted before You," that they be established and engraved for future generations....

The "Woe" of the prophet Isaiah, who foresaw the destruction of the Temple in his prophecies, was a cry of brokenness and pain. He foresaw the oncoming calamity in its full severity, and the terrible suffering it would bring down upon the nation of Israel. From the groaning of his heart came forth the calls of "Woe", which expressed the depth of his pain. Countering them, King David came and instituted the twenty mentions of "Ashrei" in Tehillim. He gave the Jewish people a strong staff to lean on, which would support them when those troubles and misfortunes would come upon them. King David, who lived centuries before both Isaiah and the destruction of the Temple, prophetically prepared the remedy before the blow was to come. He prepared a supporting hand, a helping and assisting hand, which is always found close to a person in his time of pain: Tehillim, both as a preventive remedy before the trouble comes, and as a remedy for the soul in a time of trouble.

The Jews took the remedy with them and used it. They swallowed it with thirst, and kept their souls alive through it. Even when Jews went to their deaths in the many difficult circumstances of their exile, verses of Psalms were always whispered on their lips. And, recently, in the great calamity that Hitler, may his name be blotted out, brought down upon them, when they went out to the work camps and the death camps, to the gas chambers and the crematoria, the Book of Tehillim, its chapters and verses, raised the Jewish stature so that it not be forgotten even at the last moment.

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