

CHAPTER TEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

The tenth verse in this kapitel describes the wicked: *Pretending to be harmless, he overpowers the downtrodden.* The Kobriner Rebbe explained this type of evil person with a parable.

An old mouse sent her son out to search for food with a strict warning to beware of enemies. The young mouse met a rooster and hastened back to his mother in great terror. He described the enemy as a haughty being with a comb that stands up.

"He is no enemy of ours," said the old mouse, and she sent her son out again.

This time he met a turkey, and he came running home even more frightened than before. "Oh, Mother," he said panting, "I saw a great puffed-up being with a deadly look."

"He is also not our enemy," replied the mother. "Our enemy keeps his head down and appears exceedingly humble. He acts smooth and is soft-spoken and friendly. If you meet him, beware!"

With this pithy tale the Rebbe shared with us a great truth concerning our most formidable enemies, a truth more clearly evident today than ever before.

Our world has become totally enmeshed with secular values to the point that these new strictures are the religion of the day. The culture of our times tells us that nothing is sacred and the only reality is that which the individual yearns for. How did things come to such an impasse? When did things go wrong?

In truth, there was no one catastrophic event that changed the way the world views things. The decay we see today was introduced drop by drop. Slowly, over a period of time, things began to change. Technology made it possible for events and ideas to reach ever-growing circles.

Some saw this as a great boon for mankind. No longer would the masses be left in darkness. The light of technology would give everyone the opportunity to become an equal partner in society.

It sounded grand, but it was a false premise. The reality was that with each advance new and slicker salesmen arose with one goal in mind to get the innocent bystanders of society to part either with their money or with their ability to think independently.

This process is called "the dumbing down of society," and it is part and parcel of where our world is headed. If we take notice, it becomes obvious that each new breach of moral borders comes with a specific agenda that enriches or enhances some power-seeking group.

There was a time when a civilized community had limits that all held sacred. If one crossed those borders, he did so with the knowledge that his actions were not in keeping with the standards of his friends and family.

While in the world at large, which lacks the truth of the Torah, there was never a formula for perfection in terms of human behavior, there were universally accepted codes that stood for the lofty aspirations and hopes that lie within the human heart. These have been destroyed because, simply and bluntly put, it's better for business if everyone strives to obtain more and more materially. That's what consumerism really is – using and using to the point of abusing everything in sight.

Thus the spiral that started with what seemed to be altruistic intent has sucked the world into a vortex of fear and greed. We fear being seen as failures in a materialistic way, and we find that, no matter what we do have, it can't assuage the hunger for more.

This is the enemy the Rebbe described. Our greatest foe is not the dangerous monster baring his fangs; it's the insipient salesman who wants only to give you more and more goodies.

Let me share an example of this with you. The great advances we have witnessed in the field of medicine will make anyone with sense feel encouraged. Diseases that were once incurable are now swatted away with a few pills. We seem to be living longer and in better health. All this wondrous magic flows from those friendly folks in the laboratory who seem to be able to whip up almost any concoction needed to cure mankind's ills.

That's all well and good, but there is a downside to all this.

Even in our cozy Westernized democracy, one must question certain practices that may well be putting us all in danger. It is common knowledge that the huge pharmaceutical companies offer incentives to the medical practitioners who prescribe their products. After all, they are the ones who end up actually selling the goods. Did you ever ask your doctor if he receives material benefit from the manufacturers of that expensive new cure he just prescribed for you?

I won't elaborate further on this subject, although it can fill an entire book. I just want to show how the wrong values that have taken over so much of the world's outlook can be introduced so innocently.

I can hear you already: "Well, this is all about the outside world, but what relevance does it have for the Torah community?"

The answer, my dear friends, is "Plenty!"

How many heimishe Yidden find it impossible to make a simcha because of the outlandish expenses that have become the norm? Once on a time Jews offered to share in friends' and neighbors' simchas by hosting a sheva brachos for the young couple. A few friends would join together for a simple meal that was richly spiced with that most valuable of ingredients – true Yiddishe joy. Now

there are many who are embarrassed to host such occasions. They feel they can't afford the extravagantly catered events these meaningful affairs have evolved into. There is almost no difference between the expense of the wedding itself and the following seven days of celebrations. If this isn't the stealthy march of materialism into our world, then what is?

Our kapitel does not start off with any particular salutation. Perhaps this is because its timeless plea needs no specific setting. King David is calling out to each of us who feels trapped by the smooth-talking enemies that surround us. *The wicked man arrogantly pursues the poor, entangling himself in schemes of his own making.* We are all poor at one level or another, and we all need Hashem's support in order to persevere and escape the relentless trap of our most dangerous enemy.

In secular society today, the route to success and fame seems to be just as David put it: *The wicked man congratulates himself on fulfilling his personal desires, and the brazen robber pats himself on the back for blaspheming Hashem.... He says to himself, "Nothing bad will happen to me or any of my descendants." His speech is full of insincere pledges while in his heart lurk evil schemes and sin.*

What can we hope for? David tells us this, too: *Hashem is King forever and ever!* We must use David's words for our own painful needs. They reach out to that essence that is the only true answer. Our Creator was, is and always will be. Nothing can change this truth.

You heard the personal desires of the humble poor, Hashem. Remove worldly concerns from their hearts so they can turn to you. Then listen to their entreaties that You dispense justice for the orphan and the downtrodden, so the wicked will no longer terrify people on earth. Hashem will always hear our soul's plea if we don't give in to the enemies around us, especially if we don't succumb to the enticements of those who disguise themselves as our friends. Then we will feel the comfort of Hashem's strength, and we will no longer be terrified or unsettled.

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