

CHAPTER TWELVE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

It's that time of year again, when we Yidden seem to be strangers to all that is going on around us. The rest of the world is either resting from one holiday or enjoying the next bout of merriment. We draw on our hidden Chanuka inspiration until it's time to begin our joyous Purim preparations. In the midst of all this, there is a unique activity that even we join in. It's sale time everywhere. "Fifty percent off our previously extortionist prices," proclaim the signs. (Well, not quite, but you get the gist of it.) People flock from near and far, lines start forming days in advance, and it seems that everyone in the land has been deprived of his basic needs until this very moment. If you are the brave type, you too will join the throngs, money clasped tightly in your hands, seeking to find the bargain that will bring light and joy to your life.

Before you bundle up and sally forth, let me tell you a secret: There are no bargains. Anything worth having will cost as much as always. It's the junk they're unloading, and you will be getting the better end of the deal in every way if you sit home and say a few tehillim.

After much investigation, I have discovered that there are never any sales of your particular shoe size or your exact shirt length. This year's sales racks are full of items such as organic shirts, perfumed handkerchiefs and a cornucopia of outsize yellow jumpers for the menfolk (I am not making this up). In short, it's sale time only for items one would never buy otherwise.

Somehow, you walk into these grabbing festivals, and the frenzy overtakes you. You come to the stores with your list of real needs, but as you surf along the rows of merchandise and realize that what you came for isn't there, you do what any red-blooded consumer is trained to do. You buy something, anything, as long as it's half price. You will never use it, it will lie in your closet for years, but you will buy it "just in case." This little glimpse into the contemporary mind is indicative of a much larger malaise. People really believe that things can be gotten cheaply, that nothing is worth full value and that everyone is entitled to a free ride. Unfortunately, this attitude has found its way into the realm of morals as well.

There is an expression, "No pain, no gain." This used to be a real insight into the truth of one's moral growth, for there's no such thing as a sale on life's basic values. Once they are compromised, they are lost. Sadly, we have become the victims of the smooth talkers of the moral marketplace.

Today even Torah-true believers find it uncomfortable to speak out on subjects that the New Age demigods have encircled with the halo of "political correctness." Our kapitel speaks of such times.

"They spout false ideologies to each other, glibly speaking hypocrisy."

King David begs Hashem to save us from those who have sunk so low that their entire beings are corrupted. Not only do they lie, but they themselves believe these lies. The atmosphere is so corrupt that one doesn't even expect to hear the truth anymore. As the holy Alshich points out, even glib tongues speak in vain. No one believes anyone because everyone knows the other is lying. Each sees through to the other's heart, past his slick tongue.

This doesn't refer only to salesmen of material goods. Just take a look at the world's leaders. The kapitel's next words, quoting the boasts of the corrupted, sound all too familiar: *"With our tongues we will prevail. Our lips are with us who is master over us?"* This is the sad reality of today. Those of smooth lips rule us with their lies.

How did we come to such a state? Where were the good and noble of mankind when it all began? The words of the Sfas Emes concerning Pharaoh's dream reveal the truth in its starkness.

The Torah relates, "And behold, seven other cows came up after them...and stood by the other [fattened] cows...and the [lean] cows ate up the seven well-favored and fat ones" (Bereishis 41:3-4). The Sfas Emes says our Sages' description of the evil inclination's growing control over a person first as a passerby, then as a guest and finally as a master is based on this verse.

The seven lean cows first "came up" after the seven fat cows, slowly and inconspicuously. Then they "stood by" them like guests in their pasture, and finally they "ate them up" altogether. So too the evil inclination approaches man inconspicuously, then confronts him time and again as a guest, until eventually he rules over him and his household completely. This insight of the Sfas Emes is laser sharp. Look around today. What was once seen as beyond the pale is now discussed as the norm. The world reacted to the horrors of world war by becoming more liberal in its thinking. In some ways, this was a good thing. Society had allowed hatred and prejudice to have their way for far too many years. The problem started when the guilt of past misdeeds allowed for blurring of reality.

The barriers of proper behavior that are the building blocks of a civilized society were labeled as constrictive and demeaning. The new order called for no rules except those that each individual wrote for himself.

The lean and scrawny cows sidled up to the well-balanced creatures and whispered in their ears, "Look what you've done the whole world was brought to war." The well-favored cows lowered their heads. "Maybe they are right. Maybe it was our fault." Soon the thin, vacuous cows were taking over the pastures of our minds, our schools and our homes. Finally, the good and well favored were entirely swallowed up, and no one dared say a word.

The madness we see today has reached such proportions that even those who are meant to be moral teachers are found cowering behind the barn, afraid to raise their heads. The mentality of the bargain basement has taken over. Morals are sold cheaply to the masses, yet, like all those bargains

at sale time, they are worthless.

The current scenario was also foreseen by King David. *"Because of the oppression of the poor, because of the sighing of the needy, now I will arise," says Hashem. I will grant the one they dismiss, deliverance.*" The sickness such thinking has caused puts all of us into the category of the poor and needy.

Even in the bastions of the Torah world, we find those who have allowed their borders to become fuzzy. Daas Torah is no longer seen as the bridge to our Creator. Things are whispered that weren't even imagined years ago, because the "lean cows" have swallowed up our hearts. Yet David promises that Hashem will arise to save us if we at least see ourselves as being oppressed and truly sigh to Hashem.

The current problems that plague the Jewish people can find their genesis in the slick tongues of recent years. The connection between Hashem and His people has become a source of contention. The wizards of "real politics" are too embarrassed to tell the world that we are a people of the Torah and that this same Torah charges us with the responsibility of living in Eretz Yisrael in holiness.

Outside the holy land, the same slick salesmanship pervades. The unrest is all about politics and not about Divine truths.

But people deserve more than cheap bargain basement Yiddishkeit. Their souls cry out for the real thing. Witness the thousands of baalei teshuva flocking to the Torah centers of the world. These are the poor and needy whose sighs have been heard.

The kapitel ends, *"You, Hashem, will securely save them from such a vile generation forever. The wicked walk on all sides when the ones they had scorned are exalted among the sons of man."* Our hopes lie only with Hashem. With heartfelt prayer, we will see the day when evil will be put to the side forever.

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