

CHAPTER NINETEEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

"Hashem! Intimate Father and Friend of the Jewish people! You are my life's treasure. Your Presence is the wealth of my being; there is nothing of value other than You. How poor is the rich man who lives without You, despite all his earthly riches!

"Why do you people chase empty treasures? Why do you strive to amass fortunes of earthly value? Put aside for a moment your illusions of treasure; forget for the while their false security. See what you have really collected: a mound of soul-distressing spiritual squalor."

So opens a most moving appeal by the saintly Piaseczna Rebbe, zt"l. It is actually frightening to read these words, spoken with such emotional pain. He goes on to cry out to us all,

"Why do you not pity your own lives, which are slipping away with your delusions? How can you be so foolish as to live in the castles in the air, filling your lives with earthly pleasures or selfish honor? Don't you see how you are wasting your lives with false hopes, empty joys and pipe dreams?

"What a shock to your souls and what agony that first step into the beyond which awaits you after death will be. You will run to find solace in your earthly securities, pass the time at your usual diversions. How horrified you will be! For pieces of metal and paper money, for these I have sacrificed my life? How I have ruined my soul!"

The Rebbe spoke thus because, as a true shepherd, he wanted only to save his flock. This brilliant master of our people, who was so brutally taken from us during the Holocaust, was speaking to the committed Jews of his generation. He called out with such pain to the good Jews of his times, Jews who might have been learning daf yomi and davening three times a day. He knew full well to whom he spoke, and he didn't mince words.

The Rebbe understood the human mind. He made his plea knowing that the mind of a person works at many different levels. There are so many different agents working within a person's consciousness, each one dragging him in another direction. This is the focus of his message. There will come a time when we will feel so lost that we will ask ourselves in overwhelming confusion, Will I ever find myself?

Are we, living in today's super-modern generation, any better? Have we learned any lessons from all that has occurred between then and now?

All around us is this same chaos of the soul. Our abundance of material wealth makes it an even

more difficult life-challenge to keep in mind where we should be and who we really are.

But there is a way forward. There is a path that can lead us to a clearing even in a world cluttered with fantasy.

Kapitel 19 speaks of Hashem's flawless exactitude in creating the world. Everything is so perfect, each creation has its own specific niche, that any observer must stand amazed at such monumental wisdom.

The heavens relate the Creator's glory, and the firmament conveys His handiwork. Day following day makes a statement of His strength, and night following night inspires us to see His wisdom. David marvels at how the comings and goings of day and night what we call the natural order of things bears witness to Hashem's creativity.

The Heavens do not speak or talk, for their voices make no natural sound. The heavens don't have to make an audible announcement of their existence. The message is so enormous, it is easily felt by the soul.

"The orbit of their praise extends over the globe, and their message extends to the ends of the earth. In this world of noise and distraction, we are meant to catch our breaths and gaze at the heavens, to realize that the greatness of Hashem is far beyond our mortal comprehension and the noise of the street. While we may be deluded into thinking we can create wealth and perform wondrous deeds, nothing comes close to Hashem's majesty. The heavens we see bespeak this truth.

Are we really willing to allow all the hubbub of this foolish, vain world to distract us from the truth? More to the point, will such an attitude not come back to haunt us?

I once read an illuminating parable. Three nomads were making their way through the desert on camels. In the heat of the day, they suddenly heard a heavenly voice calling out to them, "Get off your camels!"

The petrified fellows quickly slid off their mounts.

"Prostrate yourselves on the ground!"

They did so with a shudder.

"Fill your hands with the dust of the desert and remount your camels. Proceed to your destination, but don't open your hands!"

They hurriedly did as the mysterious Voice had commanded. After hours of difficult riding, they reached the next oasis. On their arrival they opened their hands and discovered that instead of sand, they were holding jewels.

"Oh," they lamented, "if we had only known, we would have taken so much more of what we thought was worthless dirt!"

This life is very much like a desert, empty of real values. We travel through it, and every once in a while we are lucky enough to clearly hear the Voice that constantly calls out from the heavens above. We are told to do Hashem's will, His mitzvos. We do so with half a heart, for our minds are often preoccupied with other matters. Eventually, we will reach our destination and realize that each moment was really a potential jewel. Then we will bitterly regret our foolishness.

There is but one way to clear our spiritual heads, and that is through Torah. The kapitel tells us, *Hashem's Torah is flawless; it breathes life into the soul. Hashem's precepts are trustworthy, and make fools wise.* Even broken and simple people such as ourselves can be restored through the Torah's light. Every person can find clarity if he seeks it through the words of Hashem. This means that each of us is capable of spiritual growth through the Torah's healing message on condition that we put forth the effort. By sleeping through a shiur, we won't find salvation. There must be an uncluttered corner in our minds that accepts the reality and learns Torah with sincerity and simplicity that stirs our soul.

There is so much Torah available today, but unfortunately we are often afraid to be seen as seekers. We prefer to follow others and so never really communicate or seek our true point of need. Although we find ourselves learning, it may not affect us or fill us with the joy it should. This doesn't have to be our fate. *Hashem's precepts are truthful and just, bringing happiness.* If we are serious and honest in our quest, we will find true happiness.

The kapitel continues, *Sincere fear of Hashem endures forever.* Reb Chanoch Henoch of Alexander explained, "Only if a person's fear of Hashem is sincere will it endure." The Kotzker Rebbe added, "If the fear of Hashem endures, then we know it is sincere." We see from here that sincerity, purity of heart, and fear of Hashem have a symbiotic relationship. To achieve such a state, we have to accept that Torah must become our essence.

This is so hard in a world full of distractions, but the kapitel gives hope here as well. *Who sees his own mistakes? Cleanse me from those concealed from me. Also, from evildoers and their influence, spare Your servant; do not let them control me.* King David leads us in turning to Hashem for His watchful help. When we accept that every reality is in the Torah, then we allow Hashem into our daily lives.

So here we find the answer to the Piaseczna Rebbe's plea. Hashem has given us the wherewithal to leave behind this valueless, material world. Through seeing the greatness of His creation, we can find our way. This takes courage, but that strength is waiting for us in the Torah. Through its words, the fear that His awesomeness arouses will be enduring and lead us to real purity.

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