

# CHAPTER TWO

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

Sometimes you wonder how people survive. Or, more to the point, how they manage to keep an upbeat slant to their lives.

I once met an askan, a man active in his community and renowned for his tireless efforts on behalf of the Jewish people. We shared a long car ride, which gave me a golden opportunity to hear a few of his insights in this area. His story enhanced my appreciation of what people like him do for the rest of us and deepened my understanding of their source of strength, and I'd like to share it with you.

Some years ago, this rav undertook to build a Torah institution in a particularly difficult community. People told him Torah adherence would never take hold in that area no matter how much effort he put into it. Our hero was not to be dissuaded. He had seen Torah blossom in other deserts and felt that a Torah institution was just what the area needed. He started with nothing. He took out bank loans, using his own few possessions as collateral, and slowly his vision took shape. An empty building got needed renovations and students began to trickle in, enthused by the rav's considerable ability. Staff was added, and the institution slowly became a fixture in the community.

What takes but three or four lines to write obviously consumed years of the rav's life. It's impossible to put into words the toils and troubles such an undertaking entails. Suffice it to say, aggravation was a constant companion.

As the new community center was being built, the rav's debts were growing. It was his credit on the line, and every expansion of the center's activities added to his financial vulnerability. But you have to understand the mind of a true askan. He wasn't out for personal gain. If his signature on some bank papers could help the endeavor, that's what it was for.

Time passed, and the rav was busy creating new initiatives for the burgeoning Torah center. As the debts grew with his increased staffing needs, the office that was supposed to watch over such things somehow forgot to tell him the gravity of the situation.

One fine spring day, as the rav was preparing for a special family simcha, things came to a head. His oldest son was to become bar mitzva that coming Shabbos and, of course, the whole simcha would be taking place at the institution, which was an integral part of the family by now. The Wednesday before the simcha, a huge van drove up to the institution's door.

"We're from the electricity company. You owe us two thousand dollars, so we're shutting off your

power supply."

There was no talking to them. They had their orders. Bar mitzva or not, there would be no light.

The rav was in shock. He had no idea the office had not paid the bills. What was he going to do?

His mind raced. People are coming for Shabbos. The rebbetzin will be devastated. How will we cope? His mind went into overdrive. First things first: Don't tell the rebbetzin. Protect her. Take care of it yourself.

"Don't tell the rebbetzin" is never a clever move. She heard about the disaster even before the rav got into his car to drive home. When he got there, he found his wife barely able to speak. This was the family's first big simcha. Her entire extended family was coming from far and wide to see the rav and his institution and generally kvell over her nachas. Now they would be sitting in the dark, both literally and figuratively.

The rav called the electricity company. They would settle for two thousand dollars cash, nothing less. If it would be paid that same day, then they might restore the power before Friday, but no promises.

The rav did some fancy footwork, raised the money by phone, ran to his car, glanced back at his hopeful wife and drove off to collect the promised funds.

Finally, he was ready to make his way over to the electricity company. He decided it would be a kindness to his wife to first stop home and tell her in person that all was now under control. When he got there, his daughter, who had just come home from seminary, asked if she could go with him to pay the bill.

They set off, and soon the bill was paid with the hope that the power would be back on in time for the simcha on Shabbos. As the rav returned to his car, he got in, stared at the driving wheel and collapsed. Tears streamed down his face. The burden of the entire day was too much, and he could take no more.

"Why?" he sobbed, oblivious to all else. "Why is this happening?"

His young daughter looked at him in disbelief. "Tatty, you always taught us to have faith. There must be a reason for all this. Maybe it's to turn away an ayin hara, an evil eye. Who knows? You're always the one who gives us strength. Don't give up now."

At this point in telling me the story, the rav looked at me sheepishly. "You know how hard that lesson was for me? But I wouldn't trade it for anything. It's been more than twenty years since that day and, baruch Hashem, I still feel wonderful about what my daughter said." He smiled. "By the way, they turned the electricity back on in time for the simcha."

The second chapter of Tehillim begins, *Why do nations assemble and peoples plot in vain, kings of the*

*earth take their stand and regents intrigue together against Hashem and His anointed? Let us break the cords of their yoke and shake their ropes off us!*

The holy Alshich explains that the nations of the world fulminate against Hashem and His anointed nation because they fear the ultimate coming of Mashiach. They have concluded that instead of opposing Hashem at that time, it would be better to sever the link between Hashem and the Jewish people now, forestalling the redemption altogether. The wicked reason that by destroying our connection with our Father in Heaven, they will never have to face the final reckoning.

When life takes a turn through a dark tunnel, we should remember the light at the end. The darkness is a ploy by the forces of evil to cut us off from our holy Source. The darkness doesn't necessarily come from forces without (although I wouldn't discount the electric company). It can also come from within, from the difficult parts of ourselves we struggle with. No matter what, there are times in everyone's life when we feel stretched beyond endurance.

Comes along the sweet singer of Israel who tells us, *He Who sits in Heaven will laugh. Hashem will mock them.* Then He will speak to them angrily, and in His rage, terrify them. If we persevere and crown our efforts by staying on course, Hashem finds celestial joy in our growth. This is Heavenly laughter. It mocks the naysayers, from without and within, the voices that foresee our failure.

Once we have passed through the tunnel and come out the other side, Hashem will express anger at those forces. The greatest expression of this rage will be to force our enemies to witness the failure of their schemes. That rav and his story put this into a clearer perception and gave me a new insight into the words of this kapitel. As one anonymous saying goes, "People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered. Love them anyway. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway. If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. People really need help but may attack you if you help them. Help people anyway. Give the world the best you have, and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you've got anyway."

Hashem runs the world. It's up to us to do our best while remembering that He loves us more than we love ourselves. He wants what is good for our soul, the eternal part of us. It may be dark at times, and there will be people who try to stop us from doing His will, but take courage from this kapitel and let its message become part of your being.

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