

# CHAPTER TWENTY

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

"Now sing it again, a little slower and with more gefeel."

So went a summer day's music lesson some forty years ago. We were all bachurim spending the summer months in a boys' camp in upstate New York. During the long hot Shabbos afternoons, we counselors were allowed time together for an hour of singing and plain shmoozing. That particular Shabbos found us sitting around a table full with the prerequisite bottles of cola and opened packages of peanuts. We were singing away in our regular, boisterous, slightly off-key yet exuberant way, when the camp's director passed by. Overhearing our fast-paced version of a particular niggun, he couldn't stand the decimation of what was to him a beautiful, soulful tune. Hence the lesson we received one I never forgot and hopefully never will. He taught us how to bring the entirety of our neshamos into what could have simply remained a chassidic ditty. The words were simple enough, yet needed deeper understanding.

What was the song, you must be wondering. Literally the words meant "One, two, three" I told you they were simple. They were sung in Yiddish, but that doesn't necessarily bring more meaning to them. Rather, it was the way you said them that made the difference. The melody was both lively and soul stirring, and like all Yiddish music, it held more than mere words.

The camp director was an older Yid who had seen more than his fair share of tzaros. He had spent his teens in the concentration camps and had lived through events that would sear the entirety of anyone's existence. He sat down with us and started to sing our nigun with such heart that one could barely recognize it as the same revved-up frolic we had earlier rendered.

"Da de dum dum oy teda da da eintz tzvei drie." He slowly sang the song, letting it build up, take on more speed, and bring out even larger amounts of neshama. Soon we were all holding hands, standing up and dancing in our places. Tears of joy, of release, of longing were seen in every eye. "Eintz tzvei drie" it was so simple, so bittersweet, yet so personal. Each felt his own unique needs in its swaying tempo. We sang together, and at the same time, we were each flying in our own cloud.

Now, some forty years later, that same special nigun runs in the soundtrack of my heart. Whenever I feel a certain elation, I find its simplicity flooding back. "One, two, three" it still does the trick. It still takes me that one step above the mundane.

This week it really played itself in my mind while I was at a wedding.

Wait a minute, you may wonder. What is unique about a wedding? After all, rabbis go to weddings all the time. It's one of the perks of the job. In truth, every wedding is a bit like that simple nigun: "One, two, three." Each affair has basically the same simple ingredients. It is what the participants make of it that defines it, and for this Jew, this wedding held a myriad of joys. It was the culmination of a whole series of such affairs, and as such, it rang forth in my mind with a special clarity. The chasan had been a university student who had spent some time in our community. He was from what must be one of the smallest Jewish communities in all Europe, yet his involvement in anything to do with Yiddishkeit had always been astounding. He had become the focal point of an entire group of students, many coming from entirely secular families, and had been the example of true Yiddishkeit to many of his peers. After a while, a solid chevra had formed, and this group was now entering adulthood and marriage. Each one became engaged to a frum partner, and each wedding was celebrated with shared joy. Now it was this young man's turn. His kalla is just as committed to Yiddishkeit as he is, and together I know they will build a home worthy of the kiddush Hashem we all aspire to.

When I saw this young man come to the chuppa dressed in a kittel, grasping scraps of tefillos in his hand, he represented to me the greatness of the Jewish soul. Here was the answer to all the naysayers who bemoan the future of our people. True, the secular world does rip away many of our finest with its vacuous promises of fun and success, but at the core there are these spiritual heroes who come ever closer to Torah. Like the melody says, "One, two, three" simple, but so deep. Words could never find the wholeness of this truth; it can be found only in a song.

Our kapitel tells us this in its own way. *He will remember all your offerings, sacrifices and even the ashes, forever.* No generation had given more of itself than the one that witnessed the Holocaust. Every family was touched; each had its own burnt offerings and special sacrifices. Yet from such a brokenhearted people we have seen the building of a new world, a world that can turn away from the secular glimmer of gold and seek out Hashem instead. Yes, Hashem has remembered and given us nachas beyond all expectations.

*May He fulfill your desires and bring your plans to fruition.* Because our Gedolim gave us hope, we desired that which we see today. Since our dreams revolved around Torah, our yeshivos and seminaries grew way beyond all expectations.

*We will rejoice over the victory You send and raise aloft our banners in the name of our God. May Hashem fulfill all your requests.* Our banners are the next generation. We try to raise them with humility, in the knowledge that this is Hashem's way of delivering us from the grasp of the mundane and cruel world that surrounds us.

*Some rely on chariots and some on horses, but we will evoke the name of our God.* There are those who proclaim that we can only survive by embracing the trappings of the coarse society around us. They see loyalty to Hashem as ludicrous in these times. In answer, we show them the fruits of such

loyalty our young, and their hopes and aspirations.

*They have bowed down and fallen, but we have risen and stand firm.* Those who worshipped the falseness of this materialistic world have unfortunately been crushed under the weight of their wayward goals. The many who have seen the truth of Hashem's love have been able to stand firm despite the ridicule of others.

*Hashem, save us! The King will answer us on the day we cry out to Him.* Our challenges are not yet over. There are still many problems and many people who need our support and care. However, we have learned to where we must turn. We have the right address. Hashem will always answer when we call from the depths of our hearts.

You can see why that old nigun is playing in my mind. I have been asked to attend a sheva brachos for the young couple tonight. In attendance will be the entire chevra. One learns in a kollel in London; another, a physician, was encouraged and supported by his wife to take off a year to learn in Eretz Yisrael. On and on, they all have grown. The hosts of the evening are a doctor and his wife, who teaches in a local seminary. These young people are our future, and we have much to learn from them. I will come with a dvar Torah (that's also part of what rabbis do) and perhaps, well just maybe, I'll teach them a nigun. A simple one, no real words, just "One, two, three."

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