

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

It would have been a priceless snapshot something witnessed which could be pored over for eternity. The time was somewhere in the 1960s; the place, Williamsburg, Brooklyn. A chassidic leader of thousands comes to visit the saintly Satmar Rebbe, zt"l. The two sages sit among the pushing throngs of chassidim, each one trying to hear the holy words being spoken. The Satmar Rebbe asks the crowd to leave the room. He wants to speak with his honored guest in private. The olam soon departs, and only the two tzaddikim remain. However, the door is left ajar, and some of the talmidim stand at the opening to catch a glimmer of whatever inspiration will transpire.

The visiting Rebbe turns to the aged tzaddik and asks for a blessing.

"What can I possibly offer my most honored guest?" is the humble reply.

"Dear Satmar Rebbe, I find it harder and harder to listen to all the pain people bring to me. I feel their hardships it cuts my heart and I fear that I will fall apart from tzaros Yisrael."

There is a moment of silence, then a whimper. From the room nothing can be heard except the deep crying of the two holy leaders. Each shares his burdens with the other. There is no verbal answer, only shared tears of strength for that is the only answer that can be given.

I said this was a snapshot scene, and just like any exquisite picture, it too must be studied again and again to sense its fullness. Each time you gaze at it you will discover more, for nothing is two-dimensional, especially when it comes to Yiddishe tears.

Ours is a long history written in every shade of human experience. The Jewish nation has survived what no other nation has. It has always been the role of our leaders to guide this often-wounded people through it all. The greatest gift our tzaddikim have given us is their ability to hear our pain, share in our woes, and give courage through their attentive empathy. This does not come easily. With every story told, a bit of the tzaddik's heart is slashed. The hardest task of a spiritual leader must be that of carrying the burdens of his flock.

At a lesser level, but just as vital, each family head should have some degree of this ability so that more than just the occasional scraped knee can find a healing balm.

Then there is that most difficult of all worlds the private one each of us carries within ourselves. We are all a world unto ourselves, and every one of us has the broken shards of trampled dreams that cut into our hearts when the days seem darkest. Where can we find the strength? From which river

of healing waters do our leaders sip their healing nectar?

From the very beginnings, leadership among our people was seen in terms of a caring shepherd who seeks only the good for his flock. Moshe Rabbeinu was the shepherd that sought out one small wayward lamb and then carried it back to the fold.

Time and again, leadership among our nation has been spoken about in such terms. King David was just such a shepherd, and his understanding is the gift that he left for future generations.

In this kapitel, David cries out to all those who seek Hashem in times of darkness. His words can be placed in several eras, and in fact we are told that he said them with a prophetic realization of what would befall our people in generations to come. Many explain that he had Queen Esther in mind; however, we can find ourselves in these hallowed words as well.

"For the Conductor at dawn, a mizmor song by David." Right at the beginning, this kapitel tells us where we can find help. The night of one's life always has the promise of the new day's dawning. From that point onward, we can begin to discern some hope.

We are told that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai once took his son Eliezer for a walk on the mountain peaks of the Galilee. The night and the times were the darkest Klal Yisrael had ever experienced. The darkness could be felt not only in terms of what could be seen, but in the spirit. These were the days that had witnessed the ruthless destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, and people may well have wondered if light would ever shine on Klal Yisrael again.

As Rabbi Shimon and his son gazed into the ink-black sky, they witnessed the beginnings of the day's dawn. First one dim stream of light appeared, then another. Slowly but surely, the color of the world around them changed as night turned into day.

The holy Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai turned to his worthy son and said, "This is how the geula will come. Slowly, one shard of light will creep into the dark and be followed by another, until the whole world will be suffused with Hashem's light."

The first three verses of this kapitel speak of such a feeling of loss, that there seems no way to even hope for light. *My God! My God! Why have You abandoned me? You are too far away to save me or hear my cries of distress. My God, I call out day and night, but You do not answer and do not calm me.* The verses call out our despair and soul-destroying anguish, yet in these words we discern the beginning of hope. For as children of Hashem, we still address our prayers to our one Father in Heaven. Even in the midst of our pain, we instinctively know where our salvation lies.

Yet You are holy, perpetually lauded by the Jewish people. Our whole being is built on the prayers our ancestors directed to You.

Our forefathers placed their trust in You. They placed their trust, and You saved them. It was to You they cried out and fled to safety. It was in You they placed their trust and were not humiliated. When life

throws up its difficulties, we are meant to reiterate these truths. We can accept that throughout the ages every generation has had its darkness, and as Yidden, we have always sought out Hashem and found courage.

We may feel totally unwanted and unworthy, as the verses continue, *As for me, I am a worm, not a man, subject to human scorn and an object of derision.* Compared to people who lived in previous generations, I may not even seem to be a true man, one able to be considered as having been created in Hashem's image. But if I stay focused, I will realize that despite the haze of pain, Hashem wants to rescue me despite my unworthiness as much as I want to be rescued. In fact, by committing myself to this truth, I will have started that act of rescue. Let us always remember, even in our darkest moments, that we too can say, as did David, *At birth, I was thrust upon you. From my mother's womb, You have been my God.*

The kapitel goes on to relate David's terror in stark terms: *I was poured out like water, and all my bones became disjointed. My heart melted like wax inside me.* It is as if every niche of possible pain is covered. Into those lonely recesses, David brings in light by pleading with Hashem to save him. *But You, Hashem, do not distance Yourself! May You, the source of my strength, quickly return to help me.* David never loses sight of the fact that Hashem is his only source of strength.

When rescue comes, and David is raised up high on the horns of a wild ox, he states with unequivocal gratitude, *I will speak of Your name and Your omnipotence to my brethren. I will praise You in public.*

I often find myself having to counsel young (and some not so young) people who feel lost in this secularized world where everything seems to be measured in soul-destroying terms. They can't seem to find a handle to grasp onto what will keep them afloat. I often turn to this kapitel, for it tells us that in the end, *All the gluttons will eventually bow down to God. When they are about to die, they will lower themselves in front of Him, but He will not allow their souls to live.* Those who went through life indulging themselves eventually will be forced to acknowledge Hashem, and people who lived lives of emptiness will sink to the ground in despair when they face death.

While this kapitel travels up and down the entire spectrum of life's tribulations, it ends with resounding joy. David's cries are answered, and Hashem saves him from the lion's jaw. Filled with gratitude, David declares: *Through the offspring of those who serve Him, my Master's deeds will be related to the following generation. They will come and tell of His righteousness, what He has done, to the third generation.*

Yes, my friends, we all encounter darkness, and its shades are perceived at an individual level that is unique to each of us. But if we stay the course, focusing on the miraculous richness of spirit that is our heritage, we will experience a rebirth that will declare Hashem's righteousness for those who come after us.

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