

# CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

I have a license to save lives.

No less important, while acquiring it I learned a profound lesson in life.

It happened many years ago, while I was still a bachur in yeshiva. I was considered a very good swimmer. Our yeshiva sponsored a summer camp, and one of its main features was the sparkling clean swimming pool. The problem was that none of the heimishe chevra were trained as lifeguards. The head counselors asked me to take a lifesaving course. Hopefully, I would pass the test and become officially certified.

Well, my friends, I won't bore you with the intricacies of said course, but it was a bit more than waddling about in a pool up to your knees in lukewarm water. The final exam was the highlight of all the many weeks of training. The instructor told us we would have to jump into the pool and save a drowning man in a simulated situation.

That sounded fair enough. After all, that's what we were being trained to do. The instructor added that the "victim" was himself a lifeguard who was an expert in acting as if he were actually drowning.

"Fine, bring him on," I thought in my naïve, young head.

Out of the shadows came this enormous house of a guy. This man was huge! He dived into the water and swam out to the middle of the deepest area. He then turned, and, with an acting ability worthy of stardom, proceeded to "drown."

I jumped into the water, with all the past weeks' lessons running through my feverish mind. Within seconds, I was but a foot away from this thrashing turbulent whale who was screaming for all of Brooklyn.

It was then that an unspoken but most vital fact became apparent. When someone is drowning, he becomes so panicky that he strikes out at anyone approaching. The floundering, panic-stricken victim may drag down the person who comes to the rescue. And my drowning hulk did a superb job of acting his part.

I spare you the details of that eventful swim. Suffice it to say that I did succeed in saving the fellow and soon had my very own certificate allowing me to everyone else, too.

The lesson I learned that day has stuck with me. So often people seem to become overwhelmingly

panicked by events that they lose all sense of where their salvation can be found. We thrash about drowning in our own doubts while the helping hand is but inches away. Every once in a while we need to take stock and get a grip on things.

In the hurly burly of everyday life, we tend to get all mixed up, forget what we are here for, and become chewed up by over-energized impulses. This can't be helped. Our times are so full of noise and distraction. The yetzer hara is no slouch. After all, he has been at his job for a long time. In each generation, he pounces on that era's particular weaknesses and focuses on them.

Today's generation is surrounded by noise and light. Think about it. In past times, one rose with the sun and went home at twilight. A person sat in his house with candles and soon went to bed. There was a feeling of safety in the house simply because after dark, you were home with your family in the comforting shadow of flickering candles. The streets were dark and mostly vacant. Sitting in your home, you would learn some, talk with family and think.

Today we live with twenty-four hours of non-stop light. Slowly but surely, the border between day and night has disappeared. Stores are open all the time, the streets are noisy; it's all hustle and bustle. The consumer gurus have us running at high speed, pushing us to spend, spend and spend some more. There are no quiet places. We all have phones in our pockets, beepers on our belts, and tapes blaring with loud chassidic music. We can't think, and that's just where the old Satan wants us. Our young carry an anguish that is new to us and difficult for us to relate to. It is an anguish generated by consumerism and lack of self-image.

This frightening vortex of jumbled feelings seems to go on and on. The turbulent waters threaten to engulf us, we are truly at risk of drowning, and no card-carrying lifeguard can help.

So what should we do? Where should we turn?

Kapitel 25 has some answers for us. This psalm is the first that is arranged according to the aleph-beis, the Hebrew alphabet. Perhaps if we look at its message we will understand why it is in this unique order.

*To You, Hashem, I offer my soul. My God, I have placed my trust in You. Do not let me be shamed or allow my enemies to gloat over me.* In the rush of caring for my physical needs, I stop. I stop with the willpower that is given to me through my awareness that Hashem is my G-d. With this realization, I put all my trust in Him. I don't dare trust myself, for I know how weak I am. In this moment of rationality, I pledge my trust to the only One Who can protect me.

I beg Hashem, "Please, do not let me be ashamed of my own self. I fully realize how far I have drifted, and I am red-faced with shame. Only with Your strength can I come closer and hopefully cleanse my soul. Please Hashem, help me, for I have so many enemies both the forces at work externally and those unfortunately found internally as well."

*Also, let no one who seeks You be shamed. Let those who betray the destitute be shamed.* Listen,

please, my Father in Heaven. I know I don't turn my heart to You as much as I should, but I am really hoping, and my hope is from my heart, so please don't let me be shamed.

Some explain that destitute here intones an aspect of emptiness. David prays that those who are traitors to nothingness, for no reason whatsoever, shall find shame, for nothing else can shock them into reality. There are many who have turned traitors to our heritage for no reason at all. This fact alone will be their shame.

One lesson I learned in that lifesaving course is that sometimes, when facing a panicky victim who is thrashing about, the only thing to do is to shock him into reality. However, the next verse speaks to the humble Yid who knows that all is not well. He doesn't need shock treatment like those who are beyond all thought of Hashem.

*Let me know Your attributes, Hashem. Teach me Your pathways.* Hashem, in all this rush, I forget what path I should be on. It's so easy to get lost. Please let me know with clarity where I should be. The road of Hashem is through the Torah, but deciphering the pathway that will bring me to that road needs the understanding that must be learned at the deepest of levels. Please, Hashem, give me this knowledge.

The kapitel goes on, *Instruct me in the hidden truth behind Your conduct and teach me its deeper meaning, for You are the God of my salvation.* I may very well be drowning, Hashem, but I know there is a truth, and that truth is You. Please, teach me to live continuously with the knowledge that You are Hashem.

*All Hashem's paths are kindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.* I realize, Hashem, that there are many paths that are Yours, and that in them is the fullness of kindness and truth. It's just so difficult sometimes, amid all the noise and chaos.

*Behold my affliction and my travail, and bear all my sins.* Hashem, only You realize the extent of my pain. Allow me to find the dry land of safety. Carry my sins, for they are so heavy for one so troubled. *Preserve my soul and rescue me. Let me not be ashamed, for I have taken refuge in You.* Please, Hashem, save my life. I have no other refuge and no other lifesaver other than You.

This is a powerful kapitel, and its telling point is its form. It is in the order of the aleph-beis because maybe, just maybe, when you are trapped in the vortex of the noisy whirlpool of life you have to start with a simple lifeline aleph-beis. Go on, take the line from there...make it simple....

---

Text Copyright © 2007 by **Torah.org**.