

# CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reported a new phenomenon: Starlings have begun to sing new songs – tunes picked up from the ringing melodies of cellular phones.

This statement has an element of truth that renders it too real to be fiction. Our world today has become one huge stage where everything and everyone imitates something that is itself only a manufactured imitation.

People talk and walk in the manner they perceive to be what others expect of them. They dress according to styles created by others, and they even think according to set, politically correct ways.

This globalization of the world has the ability to deaden human thought. But, you may ask, what does this have to do with us? The Torah world refuses to march to those tunes set by the secular world, so surely we are not touched by all this silliness.

This is not as simple as you may think. The human mind plays tricks on us all, and we really should take a moment just to stop and think about such matters. True, we do not run after the false imagery of the outside world, or at least not consciously, but let us not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of false security. Hashem wants us to be challenged. It is through such tension that we grow. If we are lulled into thinking that just by nodding along with all our neighbors in the Torah world we are growing, we are guilty of bearing false witness to our own souls.

The Torah starts with very deep words: "In the beginning Hashem created the heavens and the earth." The Kotzker Rebbe remarked, "Hashem created only the beginning. From that point on, it is up to man to build himself and his world."

In fact, this was the basis of the Kotzker dictum: Every one of us has to build himself and become a "something" through his own arduous work.

Many "somethings" can become a holy congregation, but many "nothings" only add up to one big nothing!

Creating a world worthy of Hashem's spirit depends on a certain degree of self-reliance. We can only start a spiritual chain reaction that will bring sparks of holiness to those around us when we are ready to accept that we have it within ourselves to do so. If we choose to just shuttle along self-righteously, we are like store-window mannequins; pretty, but not doing anything worthwhile. The world around us numbs us to our lofty potential. That's exactly where we must strive to become

more animated. Lots of times it's all too easy. You send the kids to the right schools, you daven in the right shul, and you eat, drink and dress in the right way. All is well, and you are safe.

However, how all right is it deep within your inner self? Are you activating your potential, or are you sleepwalking through the gift of life Hashem has given you? The fog that we call reality seems to keep us safe, but in reality it covers up true safety.

This is not simply a question of which degree of frumkeit one chooses. That is of secondary importance when speaking of the frontiers of one's reality. We should be aware that such questions need to be asked, and that it is the "dumming down" caused by life's treadmill that keeps us from even looking for answers.

How does one step off this treadmill? In Kotzk, the answer was that one should never be guilty of imitation, of doing things for no reason other than because others do so. Even more, don't do them just because it's what you've always done. "Don't daven today simply because you did so yesterday!"

These are powerful words that seek entry into one's inner self. Torah Yidden have it within them to find out where their neshamos are meant to be, and through Torah study they can bring their neshamos to that place. We should not be satisfied with being shleppers, carried away by herd mentality, for that is not what we were created for. Ours is not meant to be a life lived by mimicking the ring of a cellular phone.

So where to begin? How does one find space within the noise of this world? In kapitel 28 we find King David asking Hashem for release from this world's noise and friction. He requests this so he can focus his heart and mind completely on Hashem and His service. Let us look at his holy words and see how they give us a path toward finding some semblance of tranquility.

*To You, Hashem, I call. My Rock, do not be deaf to me lest You become silent to me, and I become like those who have descended into the pit.* There is only one true Rock, only one real, steady, never-changing and never-shifting reality, and that is Hashem.

This may sound like a simple fact, but it is up to us to truly absorb it. Growth comes only when we internalize ideas that are spoken about but not always lived.

David felt it clearly. "Hashem is my Rock," he proclaimed, not other people's opinions or society's whims. We too must beg Hashem to hear our real plea, the one emanating from the spark within our deepest feelings. Inside every Yid there is a small voice with the capacity to cry out to Hashem without fear of ridicule. When we are ready to articulate these truths, we realize that without spiritual vitality we are just like those who are long dead. David frames his plea with such images so that we make no mistake of what we speak of here.

*Hear the sound of my pleas when I cry out to You, when I raise my hands to Your holy Sanctuary.* The Pnei Menachem, zy"a, was known to be very demonstrative during prayer. He would caress the Aron's cover and turn and lift his hands to the heavens. His entirety appeared as one molten flurry of

body and soul. When asked why his mode of davening was so different from that of his predecessors who davened in a very constrained manner, he explained that he sacrificed his personal consideration because this generation must be allowed to see how a Yid once prayed.

Sometimes the inner self must seek release; release from the strictures of the mundane road we travel. David admits to this. He cries, he lifts up his hands and allows his whole being to become part of his supplication. We too must do everything possible to find Hashem's sanctuary, for only there will we find the peace that will allow us to discover our inner landscape.

*Do not drag me along with the evildoers and transgressors, who talk of peace with their companions though evil is in their hearts.* It's so easy to glide along with the flow and allow yourself to become robotic. David tells us that we must speak out and articulate these dangers. Don't let me be dragged along, Hashem, he pleads. Don't let me become lulled into spiritual sleep by their words of peace, for through such sleep evil comes to my soul.

*For they do not understand Hashem's deeds or His handiwork. He will destroy them and not rebuild them.* Those who sleepwalk through life cannot regard the wonders of Hashem that are apparent on a daily basis. It is their unfortunate fate that their time on this earth will come to naught spiritually, a loss that will never be rebuilt. We have only this one place to create our spiritual sanctuary. Those who allow themselves to miss the opportunity do not receive a second chance.

David then turns about with a sense of joy. *Blessed is Hashem, for He has heard the sound of my pleas. Hashem is my strength and my shield. My hearts trusts in Him. I was helped and my heart rejoiced, and with my song, I will extol Him.*

Tehillim never ceases to amaze me. King David is so human, yet his faith and trust are so beyond our mortal understanding. Humans are vulnerable. Their thoughts can fly high and then dip to depths unknown. We often run the full gamut of emotions within seconds. David is seen here crying and begging that he not fall into the grasp of indolent self-satisfaction. Yet in the same prayer, he extols Hashem for saving him from this evil. Once Hashem has heard the sound of his pleas, David feels himself immediately protected by Hashem's strength and shield. His heart finds soothing trust, and he is overjoyed. His song is one born from the immediacy of Hashem's comfort, and this in itself is the greatest praise.

The chapter ends with such strengthened hope. *Save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Care for them and elevate them forever.* David found his tranquility despite all the confusion and plotting that surrounded him. He now uses this newfound confidence to ask Hashem to deliver all the future children of Israel, the one unique nation that is Hashem's inheritance. As a dedicated shepherd, he asks Hashem not only to care for them but to elevate them physically, placing them out of harm's reach, and spiritually as well.

This is a far cry from those birds imitating the rings of our cellular phones, and it's so comforting and beautiful to know that such a reality awaits us all.

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