

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

When I was about six years old, I had a dream.

Don't get excited it wasn't a prophetic vision or even one particularly inspiring. It was just a dream or, more accurately, a nightmare, and it comes to mind every once in a while.

I had a fairly serious case of pneumonia, which in those days could be life threatening. I remember being given all sorts of pills and injections, and I can still see in my mind's eye how I lay in a huge bed with the family whispering all kinds of things they didn't want me to hear.

During this long illness, my dear grandmother took it on herself to become my full-time nurse. It was she who gave me my medicine, and it was her gentle hands that bathed my feverish head with alcohol compresses. A lot of water has cascaded under my life's bridge since then, so my memory might not serve me as well as it should, but one thing I remember well was "The Dream."

I wasn't sleeping very well. My difficult breathing made my nights restless. One night as I was dozing off, I thought I heard a voice. I looked up from my huge bed and saw the shadow of a big monster on the wall! Really. The thing seemed to be trying to get into my room and was making sounds that made my hair stand on end. I called out to my grandmother, "Grandma, save me!"

My poor grandmother came running into the room. "What's the matter sweetheart?" (I was a cute little kid then.)

"There's a monster trying to get into the room," I whimpered. "He's going to eat me up!"

"Don't be silly. There are no monsters outside."

What do grandmothers know about the real world, I thought and said, "Grandma, he's tall and making terrible noises. Listen!"

This went on for a time, with poor Grandma feeling like any Jewish parent: in a word, guilty. The monster, she knew, was the product of my feverish six-year-old mind, and there was no way she could persuade me I was wrong.

She turned to me and softly said, "Sweetheart, why don't you daven that the monster go away?"

That was an idea! Soon little-boy me was davening to Hashem that He take the monster away.

The prayer worked, and I soon settled down into a deep sleep. It's funny, but to this day, fifty years

later, I can still remember the growling of the monster that lurked at my sickbed door.

I share this little vignette to show how when one is anxious and frightened, one can turn to Hashem for support. This may sound simple enough, but in this tale there is a deeper dynamic.

The fact was, I prayed for the wrong thing! The cause of my monster was my illness, and I should have prayed for the fever to let up. Praying that non-existent monsters take their business elsewhere was off the mark. Nonetheless, the little six-year-old learned a lesson that would serve him in good stead for life.

We may not know what the real root of our anxiety is it may be nothing more than the concoction of a feverish mind. It makes no difference, because to the one involved it is all too real. The way we sees our situation is our reality, and it is at this level that we must cry out.

Interestingly, even when we think rationally and consider our fears with all the cool and collected thought maturity brings, we really don't fully understand the cause of our anxiety. We may say to ourselves, "This is happening because of _____, and I have nothing to worry about." Yet in the pit of our stomach, we still have that ache, and in the back of our mind, we still agonize. At such times, we must turn to the only One Who can ease our minds: Hashem!

The Rebbe Reb Bunim used to say, "When a man's heart is heavy and full of anxiety, he may lighten it through ardent prayer and belief in G-d's mercies."

That little six-year-old was given courage to overcome his monster through a child's prayer. We each experience new and different fears as we go through life, yet the remedy is the same. Turning to Hashem with a full heart and humble mind is the source of strength that is ours, and that is forever!

King David was afflicted with enormous trials. His problems were not the product of a delusional mind, but very real and life threatening. Time and again, he verbalized his fears and begged Hashem for salvation.

One may ask, "Why does David constantly turn to Hashem with words of fear and anxiety? He must have had enormous reservoirs of faith. If so, why was he so afraid?"

Perhaps this in itself caused him to pray. Though he knew Hashem's will would prevail, the fact that he felt fear was itself cause for prayer.

Let us look at this kapitl and see how David handled his feelings of disquiet.

In You, Hashem, I found protection. Let me never be ashamed. With Your righteousness, help me escape. David cries out that he find protection only in Hashem and pleads not to be ashamed by his fears. He knows he really should not be afraid, but he is only human. Let me escape these terrors of the heart, he begs, through Your righteousness.

Turn Your ear to me quickly rescue me. My cry may be so silent that it cannot be heard. I am ashamed of it myself, yet it is there. Turn Your ear, listen to my silent murmur of fear. Just knowing You are listening will quickly rescue me.

For You are my boulder and my fortress, and for Your name's sake, guide me and lead me. In my rational state, I fully accept that there is no island of safety other than You. However, human beings are not always rational, so guide me, Hashem. Lead me for the sake of Your will to become closer to You.

Take me out of this hidden snare they have placed for me, for You are my strength. The snare is the web of worry that my mind hides within me. It appears when I find myself trapped by doubt and fear. Now, at this point of desperation, hear my voice say clearly, "You are my stronghold!"

Into Your hand, I commit my spirit. You liberated me, Hashem, God of Truth. The greatest liberation is found in knowing the ultimate truth, that all reality is Hashem. If we commit ourselves to this, then we are safe.

I will rejoice and be happy for Your kindness, for You saw my suffering. You know the troubles of my soul.... True joy comes from deep within our hearts. When we give ourselves over to Hashem, we can actualize a sense of real exultation. Our hearts become free of dread, and this is real rejoicing. No other person can see the extent of our personal suffering for it is unique to our own mindset and how we view things. Only Hashem knows exactly what nibbles away at our soul.

...and You have not handed me over to the enemy but have stood me in a broad expanse. The enemies from without and within only have power over us if we don't give ourselves to Hashem. When we do, we find ourselves in a broad expanse, a place that allows our hearts and minds to broaden in understanding. *Have compassion on me, Hashem, for I am in distress. My eye, soul and innards waste away from anger.* One's whole outlook in life can become embittered when one becomes disconnected from Hashem.

The kapitel goes on to hint further of the necessity of calling out to Hashem. David reiterates in his beautiful way the essence of our understanding. Hashem is there for each and every one of us. The little boy frightened of the monsters at night has a lot in common with us so- called grown ups who are just as frightened of more mature monsters.

As the chapter ends, *May this be a source of inner strength and courage to all who long for Hashem.* We gain the inner strength and courage we so desperately seek if only we turn to Hashem. We need not fret in the darkness of our night or seek foolish nostrums. Instead, cry out to Hashem. That will give us courage!