

# CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

We live in miraculous times! Day by day, we see more and more young people returning to their Jewish roots. These youngsters have the ability to humble us all. Their fresh view of our lifestyle vibrates with new insight, and the manner in which they approach mitzvos adds excitement in avodas Hashem.

Yet all this comes with often-misunderstood responsibilities on the part of our community and of those entering it. It cannot be easy to move away from a lifestyle that is in synch with society; great amounts of faith and strength are required. It's easy enough for those who are raised in a Torah atmosphere to recognize the folly around us. Yet to those living outside, this folly is their reality and, often as not, the reality isn't all that bad. Those in the middle-class, educated Jewish heartlands don't feel they are at any great disadvantage. They live well, are generous to their children, and feel comfortable about who they are.

But within every Jew there is an eternal spark, the pintele Yid that flickers within. Every once in a while, this spark is kindled into a glorious flame of Torah-true Judaism. Such souls were born into spiritually trying circumstances, and their road to Hashem is a difficult one. Those privileged to have their Yiddishkeit handed to them on a silver platter should welcome them with open arms, for the last thing we need is the creation of some kind of two-tiered Judaism.

Sad to say, reality is often far from this ideal, which should give us all pause. I sometimes wonder if this is because we are so comfortable in our frumkeit that the thought of teshuva is threatening. An insecure person gains the illusion of status by feeling superior. It should be a given in any Yid's heart that no matter where he stands on the ladder of Torah commitment, he has yet to fulfill his own task. When we can admit our own shortcomings, we will not gaze on others with a jaundiced eye.

Most vital for us all is the realization that we need each other and can learn so much if we only watch and listen. Does this sound too critical? If so, there's a good reason for it.

I live in a community where we are blessed to meet many young people who are becoming Torah adherents for the first time. I hear what is said and often find myself having to defend members of the Torah community who are not as inviting as one would hope. A young person tasting his first Shabbos experience needs to see that ours is a pleasant world where the joy of living is coupled with devotion to spiritual goals.

Sometimes, we do not give these signals. Sometimes, we either feel uncomfortable with "strangers"

at the tisch, or bring up chumras (stringent interpretations of halacha) without explaining the whys and wherefores involved.

Then there is the condescension expressed by some, which leaves the newcomer feeling he will never be accepted by such lofty society.

The problem is, we aren't all that lofty at all! We have our weaknesses and, considering our starting point, these weaknesses can be quite an indictment. When we host seekers of truth, we should do so with a healthy dose of humility. It's a sure recipe for inspiration and growth.

By the way, growth is what every Jew should strive for. Stagnation in kedusha is never an option. If we stand still, resting on bygone laurels, the down escalator will carry us back down. The fire in our soul needs constant stoking; if not, it dies down and grows cold. Given the times we live in, given the enormous losses just a short time ago, our collective goal should be to create a thriving, inclusive Torah community.

When we invite those not yet committed and are challenged to explain what a Torah life can offer, we begin to focus our own hearts on such issues. We can only gain from such an experience, and children hearing their parents talk about matters that touch their identity will become closer to Yiddishkeit as well. This particular kapitel goes to the heart of this issue.

*By David, an instruction. Happy is he whose transgression is forgiven even though he sinned by trying to hide his unintentional transgression.* What a powerful statement! It's an instruction, a lesson for all to learn and internalize. When one's sins are forgiven, one is truly happy and this can only occur after we admit our wrongdoing to ourselves.

Forgiveness is no simple matter. It is a kindness from Hashem that such a remarkable dynamic even exists. We are given so much from Hashem, yet we sin. Hashem is so giving that He allows us to repent and reorder our lives. How dare we then recount the sins of others? Do we have any right to feel superior to anyone else?

*Happier still is the person to whom Hashem does not count iniquity and whose spirit is without deceit.* Rashi explains that Hashem will not count our iniquities against us if we repent honestly, with no false pretences. Is it possible to repent fully while harboring judgmental feelings about others? One who accepts his own misdeeds should obviously feel for others who are perhaps in the same situation.

*When I remained silent, my bones wasted away due to my screaming all day.* The anguish of recognizing one's sins is devastating. The true baal teshuva is literally eaten up with remorse about his own weaknesses. He certainly has no time or inclination to think of other people's failings.

*For day and night, You laid a heavy hand on me. My vitality is sapped, dry as a summer's drought - selah.* One's responsibility to one's own soul should be uppermost in one's mind. Day, when things seem perfect, and night, when one's perception of his position is in darkness it makes no difference.

We must focus on where we are and seek inspiration from others. In the day or the night of one's life, there are things that one must admit to, weaknesses that need attention, problems that must be addressed.

*I will notify You of my careless sins and not cover up my deliberate transgressions. When I said, "I will admit my deliberate sins to Hashem," You forgave my weak-spirited transgression of hiding my careless sins - selah.* When we realize our own shortcomings and try to work on ourselves, then Hashem forgives us even before we finish our confession. This is so life enhancing. If Hashem forgives us and covers up our misdeeds, shouldn't we do the same for others?

The kapitel goes on to extol the glories of repentance and tells us, *Do not be like a horse or mule that doesn't understand the bit and bridle in its mouth, which restrain it from coming too close to do damage.* Rashi explains that those who do not comprehend what Hashem wants of us are like kept animals, never able to truly come close to Hashem's essence. Yidden! We must never allow ourselves to be domesticated animals, slumping through our Torah lives without real thought. With such thinking, we can allow for others and realize that they are important for our own sake.

The kapitel continues, *Many are the sorrows of the evildoer, but one who trusts in Hashem finds kindness surrounding him.* The Kobriner Rebbe, zt"l, interpreted this as meaning: Many is a sorrow for the evildoer. When there are many Yidden, the wicked find this cause for sorrow. They don't have room for others; they can't abide giving others any space. But the Yid who truly seeks to put his trust in Hashem, sees the many as a kindness. We should find those seeking to be around us as a kindness, for it is, and we will grow through it!

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