

# CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

We've been here before, yet it isn't too soon to visit again. After all, King David revisited situations regularly throughout his Tehillim. Circumstances that are paramount to the human condition need constant review and cry out to be seen at various levels.

Stress, heartache and worry are major factors in much of the illnesses we see today. While doctors seek cures, we know the answer won't be found in a bottle of pills. We as a society must learn to adapt a more positive attitude toward life. We need to learn to separate necessary concern from needless worry. Feelings of unease and disquiet are natural to anyone with a conscience. Each of us has a moral code of integrity we live by, and when we cross some of our own lines, it's only natural to feel guilty. This is what makes us human: we have free choice. With it, comes responsibility.

There is a point, though, when those feelings of disquiet become part of the problem rather than the beginning of solution. When our guilt stops us from positive action, it's a sign we have allowed the yetzer hara to gain the upper hand. Yes, dear friends, it's that crafty old fellow once again. His job is to rob us of our sanctity, and what better way to do so than by stirring up endless feelings of remorse that drag us down.

We have options for dealing with our mistakes. Regret for the wrongdoing, taking steps to change for the better, avoiding situations that will lead to similar mistakes all these are positive actions that will revitalize our moral senses. Wallowing in our mistakes to the point where we cannot get beyond them is not an option. So many worthy people torture themselves over past misdeeds. Their self-inflicted pain may not be physical at first, but the stress and turmoil certainly can turn it into that. More to the point, by beating yourself up, you are inflicting spiritual damage too. You are not trying to pinpoint the causes of your mistake but are looking only the symptoms.

Doing something unbecoming to our stature of bearing the "Image of Hashem" is bad enough. Worse yet is letting the distance our act created further widen the gap between our Source and us. The main job of a Torah Jew is climbing back out of the hole he's dug for himself.

The Kotzker had a fiery image for this: "If you think about your sin, you are wallowing in that sin! No matter how you handle mud, your hands will become ever more muddied!" Depression and the stress of guilt can starve us of the needed energy to do mitzvos. Instead, we should accept what we did wrong and seek positive ways of reclaiming our connection with Hashem.

A Gutta Yid once told me that he despairs for those who, on Yom Kippur, our holiest day, get so

bogged down remembering past misdeeds that they cannot rise higher than the base swamp of their lowest moments. At the time when their thoughts should be building bridges over the chasm, they are thinking instead of all their lowliest acts. The gift of Yom Kippur and teshuva in general is that we become aware of how far we have drifted, and how much our souls need Hashem's love. Getting bogged down in the nitty-gritty of our slip serves no good purpose but instead adds to the yetzer hara's package of indictment.

A chassid once asked the Rebbe Reb Bunim of Peshischa, "How can a person know when he is forgiven?" The tzaddik answered, "If you do not repeat the sin, you have been forgiven." Unless we learn to accept Hashem's forgiveness, we will be adding to the misdeed by not serving Him with wholehearted joy.

In this kapitel, we find David suffering from illness. However, he doesn't see it negatively but instead tries to turn his trial to a positive advantage.

*A mizmor song by David, a memorial.* The holy Alshich asks why David describes a chapter devoted to a record of his sins and the tribulations he suffered as a result of them, as a psalm. Instead, it should have been called a "lament." He answers that David realized his situation was due to his sins and now repented those misdeed. What could have been a song of mourning turns into a hymn of praise. This, continues the Alshich, is why it is a memorial, deserving of eternal commemoration.

*For Your arrows have pierced my soul. Your hand has fallen on my body.* David tells us that he has been stricken with Hashem's "arrows," to lance the poisoned infection caused by his wrongdoing. Arrows represent pinpoint accuracy; everything Hashem does is for the correction of our particular weaknesses and no more.

David goes on to depict his situation at its lowest ebb.

*For my mental anguish over my transgressions is a heavy burden, more than I can bear.* A gaping chasm separates me from You, Hashem, because of my foolishness. The separation has become so overwhelming that I cannot bear it. I despair.

*I am extremely confused and physically drained. I walk around depressed all day.* Night or day, it makes no difference to me. I remain dejected. Even in times meant for visions of joy, I sense only gloom.

*My Master, all my needs are before You, and I have not hidden my sighs from You.* Even in this darkness, David is aware that Hashem is with him, sharing his every groan.

David goes on to describe how everyone seems to have deserted him, friends, companions, everyone. At this low ebb, David calls out, *For I longed for You, Hashem. You will answer, my Master, my God.* David has suffered physically and emotionally; he feels abandoned by everyone around him. Yet he realizes that if he repents and truly seeks, Hashem will answer him. He will never be entirely lost.

*I will recount my transgression, anguish over my sin.* Reb Nachman translated this passage as saying: "I will tell You my transgression: It is that I anguish over my sins. My current sin is that I have not accepted forgiveness for past sins for which I have repented." These are powerful words. David sinks to the depths of despair because he did not accept Divine forgiveness.

Hashem has promised us that He will forgive His children if they repent. Rav Avraham Twerski brings the passage from Isaiah (55:7) to support this: "Let the wicked abandon his way...for Hashem is abundant in forgiveness." As Reb Bunim said, all that is necessary for forgiveness is that we abandon the way of sin.

It is not easy to change one's ways. We need so much strength just to accept how much such change is needed. If we allow stress and depression to sap us of our spiritual strength, what hope do we have? Teshuva means return, returning to the hopeful, joyful spiritual being that is alight with trust in Hashem.

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