

# CHAPTER FORTY

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

You stare at the page, and the words are not there. They seem stuffed in your heart. You can't shift them out. The pain, the worry it doesn't give you a moment's respite.

And it shouldn't! Yidden have always held hands with disaster. Our history bristles with close calls, and those not so close. We are so small in number, yet the whole world seems to be obsessed with us. One prominent rabbi wrote that some time ago he received a Jewish yearbook that gave the census of every country and the number of Jews living there. He noticed that in China, there are one billion inhabitants and five Jews. He remarked that despite the unreasonable odds, he is certain there are people who claim that Jews run the country.

We are living through horrendous times. Jews in Eretz Yisrael are walking on hot coals, coals lit by enemies that don't seem to care for their own lives. Where can we turn? What is being asked of us? When will things get better?

World events have overtaken anyone's worst-case scenario. Who would ever have dreamed of planes crashing into the heart of American cities, piloted by crazed terrorists who spare not a thought for the thousands who will suffer by their evil? We are seeing the fruits of an unfettered hate that has no boundaries, no sense of humanity. Words cannot suffice at such a time. One sits dumbfounded, stricken silent in dismay. Thousands have lost their lives, thousands more are bereaved and ridden with despair. How many holy neshamos have departed, how many orphans are left to say Kaddish.

We are told that Moshe Rabbeinu walked through three layers of darkness when he approached Hashem on Mount Sinai. It is for this reason that we step forward with three steps before our own Shemoneh Esrei. Three levels, three tiers of gloom! Sometimes the darkness seems almost tangible. One look at the pictures of those shocked figures fleeing the Twin Towers inferno, once the pride of democracy, their faces coated with the soot of ash, their eyes widened from the terror they were living through, is enough. Witnesses speak of a darkness that descended and blocked out the sun, a darkness they felt in their nostrils. History has already recorded it as a day of tears and anguish. We weep at the shadows that are enveloping the mad world we live in.

Yet Moshe walked through all the darkness until he reached a light that shines until this very day. We must muster up the strength and fortitude of our forefathers to find Moshe's pathway. This is no easy task. Every one of us is walking around slightly edgy, somewhat anxious at what the future

might bring. We must force ourselves to seek the light. If we do not, we will be giving the haters more in the way of victory. Our souls are being asked to conquer the hate and mindless chaos; our spirits seek comfort and understanding. Let us turn to King David, for surely his wondrous words can help.

In this kapitel, we find the Sweet Singer of Israel recounting the many times Hashem saved him. He speaks of his everlasting trust, though he is aware his troubles are far from over.

*I have sought Hashem constantly, and He turned to me and heard my outcry.* David says that no matter how hard things seemed, no matter how far into the dark he wandered, Hashem listened to his plea. There are times when you feel you have been driven to the limits of Hashem's realm, that Hashem takes no notice, chas veshalom. No, says David, He is always there, always able to hear you, no matter how far away you are.

*He raised me from the turbulent pit, from the quicksand. He set my feet on a rock, firmly establishing my steps.* Even when we feel ourselves sinking in the quicksand of disaster and trapped in the pits of hate, when we cry out to Hashem, we find ourselves lifted onto a safer plain. Yidden, remember one thing! We are children of holy ancestors who lived through unspeakable terrors, yet they lived to stand on solid ground. We walk in their footsteps today. The times are calling us to tap into their wellsprings of courage.

*He put in my mouth a new song, praise to our God. Many will see and be awed, and they will trust in Hashem.* Each generation faces its own crises and tests. When we get through them and grow, the experience inspires new songs of praise for Hashem. If we sift through the debris of disaster and force ourselves to conquer despair by dint of our trust in Hashem, we open up a new avenue of kiddush Hashem in the world.

Those who live in Eretz Yisrael know this all too well. But when Yom Tov comes, they celebrate. At weddings, they still dance with joy. The zest of Torah life sheds its light in wonder.

*Fortunate is the man who has placed his trust in Hashem and has not turned to the arrogant and disappointing betrayers.* It is not a simple thing to be steadfast when those about you are slipping into falsehood. Ours is a small voice in a large world, yet it has always been that way. And always, we have been strengthened by our trust in Hashem. Those without such understanding are to be pitied, for they are lost in the quagmire that arrogance brings.

Know, dear Yid, that with these words from Tehillim you attach yourself to the chain of righteousness that has taken our people out of the pits of depravity and brought us strength.

*Then I said, "Behold! I have come!" In the Scroll of the Book, it is written about me. To fulfill Your will, my God, I desired, and Your Torah is in my innermost parts.* Rashi explains that this is referring to the moment when the Jews accepted the Torah. From that moment on, its letters became part of us. The essence of our souls wants only to fill the world with the light of Hashem. It is the laser beam of

our existence, the stuff of our identity.

*I have proclaimed Your righteousness among the myriads. Behold! My lips I will not restrain my lips from speaking. Hashem, You know that all I have done is for Your sake, not mine.* All Jews are holy; we are each made of the stuff of the Heavenly abode. When we proclaim Hashem's Oneness by our actions and deeds, we rise above the gloom of this world. When we refuse to hold back from what we know to be the truth, Hashem will comfort us with the knowledge that He knows our hearts' faithfulness.

*Your righteousness I have not concealed within my heart. Your faithfulness and deliverance I have declared. I have not hidden Your kindness and truth from the great congregation.* When the world is thrown into despair, when all those around us are questioning and asking, then we are called on to declare the Torah's eternal truths. If we do this, we ourselves will be strengthened. By articulating what our essence knows to be true, we will raise this understanding to our uppermost conscience.

The kapitel ends with words of acceptance. Life's trials are always with us: *As for me, I am poor and destitute. Think of me, my Master, my source of help and escape. You are my God do not delay.* Hashem, listen to my plea. You know who and what I am. I am weak. I need constant reminders of the truth. Only You can come to my aid. Only You can rescue me. Please, please do not delay.

May the tears of our hearts and the pain in our souls find comfort and courage, and may the day soon come when the world will be flooded with the radiance of Hashem's perfect light. Amen.

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