

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

In one of his talks, the Piaseczna Rebbe made this powerful plea: "Hashem! You are so evident, yet at the same time so transcendent. Our yearning is very strong, but our capability is so weak. Hashem! Bring us closer with Your infinite power!"

These words articulate that which has broken the hearts of Yidden throughout history. We are so desperate to come closer to Hashem, yet we are fragile and collapse at the very first hurdle. We then see ourselves as perpetual losers, and ultimately we give in and lose hope. The Rebbe says in one of his essays, "Yearning is of value only if you put it into action as a driving force for reaching higher levels. Otherwise, it will tend to create within you a subtle despair. Without being aware of it, you will be feeling, 'I have been yearning for so many years and have accomplished nothing. I must have no further potential.' In the end, you will stop yearning."

This is the greatest threat to our souls. All too often we become compromised by thoughts of despair. "Who am I to think I can achieve holiness? Why fool myself? Why be a hypocrite?" This is not only a dismissal of your own potential, but a sin against the soul Hashem granted us.

A chassid once came to the Kotzker and say, "Rebbe, pray for me! I need Heavenly mercy." The tzaddik fixed him with his fiery eyes and admonished, "Are you too ill to wrap yourself in your tallis and pray for yourself?" The Kotzker wanted to see each Yid work toward igniting the Divine embers of Hashem's love within himself. Only in this way can we keep alive our soul and our innate yearning for Hashem. It was his understanding that every Yid must stay alive and awake. "Don't stop looking inside yourself!" was his motto for continuous growth.

What was true for those Yidden of old is even truer in our world today. We are living in a sophisticated world that stuffs our heads with more and more worthless spiritual junk mail. Even those who are able to keep the outside world at arms distance must admit that at many levels that world has made inroads into their environment. It is in the water we drink and the air we breathe. Yet we need not turn away in despair. Rather, we should accept our reality and work ever harder at keeping those shreds of holiness that are available vibrant and alive.

The Sfas Emes tells us, "The Jewish people have learned from their forefathers to call out to Hashem whenever they are in trouble. This readiness, the humility of helplessness, is the stance which receives an answer from our Father in Heaven." These words are remarkably heartwarming; they give us direction and hope. With these words, our weakness becomes empowering.

This kapitel is seen as an extension of the previous one. Both speak of our longing for Hashem and His redemption.

Judge me, God, and plead my cause against an unkind nation. From a deceitful and unjust man, rescue me. We are surrounded by so many nations, each one with its own self-interests. The one thing they have in common is their disregard for the Jewish people. Throughout history we have been the vulnerable ones. Each "leader" befriended us when it suited his purposes, and then cut us off just as easily. The verse uses "nation" and "man" in the singular, for when it comes to the Yidden, all nations and all men have one mindset.

Send Your light and truth. They are what will guide me and bring me to the mountain of Your sanctuary and to Your dwelling places. Despite all this hostility, we ask Hashem to send His truth. When all about you is deceit and falsehood, it can be so easy to give up. A person can take just so much before he accepts the lies, even when they are about him. It's so much easier than fighting and living on hope alone. King David speaks out against such dejection. Light is real when it illuminates truth, and that truth is only in Hashem's words. If I remain faithful to this understanding, I will eventually arrive at the holy Sanctuary that is this truth.

When one lives with this goal, he finds Hashem in many dwellings, in many places along life's path. *Then I will come to the altar of God, to God, the real source of happiness within my rejoicing, and I will praise You on the harp, God, my God.* Real joy is found while doing that which brings one closer to Hashem. We are like metal filings drawn to a magnet. Our soul feels a pull toward holiness; we so want to be part of the "altar" that is a life lived in sanctity. But just as a musician must work at his talent, so we must continuously strive toward a greater spiritual life. We've all heard how discordant a new musician sounds. Every passage grates at the ears. If he stops at this point, he will never play well. If, however, he works on his craft and never loses sight of his goals, then one day his harp will sing to perfection.

Guttes Yidden were wont to say that every Jew has his own special "song" for Hashem, a unique melody that is his alone. It needs practice to perfect. It isn't born in one moment of inspiration. Rather, it comes with a lifetime of honing in on its every nuance. "G-d, my G-d" intones a sense of finding one's own connection to Hashem.

Why are you bowed down, my soul, and why do you feel unfulfilled? Await God, for I will yet thank Him for His salvation and the light of His countenance, for He is my God. The psalmist may be telling us, "Don't be downcast, sweet soul. Don't feel you are lost. No Yid is ever lost! Have faith in Hashem, for if I work on this, my soul, I will come to thank Him with the fullness of joy that is my deliverance. The true light will be mine, and it will come through Hashem, its only source."

This kapitel is said to show our pain over the galus in which we find ourselves. It gives us answers as to how this painful exile can be drawn to a close. If we each try to perfect on our own unique "instrument" of avodas Hashem, never giving in to despair and never letting our enemies declare

victory, then we will see the rebuilding of Hashem's sanctuary, if not in its complete form, at least within our hearts.

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