

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

I am a collector of old sayings it's just something I do. Let me share two eye-openers with you: "Isn't it strange that you don't know what you've got until it's gone." And the other one: "Funny how the things we need the least are the things we miss the most when they're gone."

Both of these axioms are pertinent to our worldview as individuals and as a society in general. Both are important for one's well being. Our time spent in this world is a precious gift, yet we are often distracted and allow that gift to flow away like sand in an hourglass. The mind is a strange place, and often we don't even realize what kind of traffic is running through it. Every image, every word heard, goes through a filtration system created by our unique experiences. No two people think alike, and no one shares a complete understanding of someone else. We become entrapped into feeling that certain items are vital to our lives when in fact this is just a trick of the mind, a facade. With all this activity going on, often as not the really important stuff is seen as peripheral, with no account given to their substance. We lose the ability to discern what is vital. And so time ticks away and we shuffle along, enmeshed with phantoms of what we thought should have been.

A Torah lifestyle is meant to give us sensitivity. The committed Jew should understand that despite all the noise that surrounds us, there are values that are as vital as the air we breathe. At the same time, we should be aware that there are things that are not only of little consequence, but because they take up a place in the limited space of our minds, they are unfortunately detrimental. Our minds and hearts can only hold so much, and if we fill them with the illusion of our daydream desires, the truly vital segments are pushed to the side.

Obviously, in theory the Torah Jew is aware of all this, but we are mere humans and we are weak. We pray, we do mitzvos, and yet we hunger for what is not in keeping with our true goals. How many tears are shed over misbegotten ideals? How often does the heart feel constricted by a false sense of loss?

Like so many others, this kapitel speaks to us at several levels. In it we are reminded of where our vision should lie, both as a community and on a personal level. It was first said by Korach's sons, who had learned a thing or two about where life's focus should be.

My heart is moved by a noble theme: I say, "My deeds are for a king, my tongue is like a scribe's swift quill." The psalmist tells us that his work here is dedicated to the highest-ranking individual imaginable. This is understood to be the scholar who is immersed in Torah. The psalmist's tongue

becomes a tool to describe how vital that kingship of Torah is.

You are fairer than ordinary man. Grace is poured on your lips, for which God has blessed you forever. There are so many transient leaders who seem to set the goals of society. They speak in florid terms and act as if they are truly gifted. The only real human being whose speech is blessed by Hashem is the person who lives solely according to the Torah. Such individuals are all too rare, but it is to them that we should look. Their life has a true focus of what is good and positive. Their words flow with the sweet nectar of Hashem's love, and we should seek out their council. Instead, all too often we allow ourselves to look at external trappings and act negatively when it comes to setting our goals according to the understanding of daas Torah.

Gird your sword symbol of your majesty and magnificence on your thigh, O hero. We ask that the Torah scholars arm themselves with the beautiful sword Torah. In this world of murky density, it takes a sharp sword to cut through the fog of our own dismay. That sharpness should be the insights generated by the purity of talmidei chachamim.

But the source of your true magnificence is this: Succeed and ride on behalf of truth and humble justice. May your right hand teach you awesome things. We who are lost in the muddle of this false world ask that the Torah leader be successful and ride high with his knowledge of the truth. Just as one seeks a bright star in an inky sky, so too the words of the Torah should bring splendor to the eyes of all who behold her. A great scholar is always seeking to learn more, so we ask that his right hand, the scholar's strongest points, teach the awesome secrets understood only by the humble.

Your arrows are sharpened peoples will fall under you. The arrows sink into the heart of the king's enemies. Let us learn from those who first wrote these words. The children of Korach were very much involved in their father's rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. The Yalkut Shimoni tells us that once they were sitting with their father when Moshe happened to pass by. They were thrown into a quandary: Should they rise for the scholar Moshe or remain seated in deference to their father? They knew that by standing in honor of the Torah leader they would be insulting their own father, who was engaged in open rebellion against him. After a moment's hesitation, they rose to their feet. At that moment, the first sparks of teshuva entered their hearts.

The passage speaks of arrows. The scholar's weapons are the Torah insights. These come only to one who lives according to the Torah. Their sharpness guarantees their effectiveness in penetrating the listener's heart.

Your throne, judge, is forever and ever. The scepter of equity is the scepter of your kingdom. When everything around us is strewn with the throwaway ideals of this empty society, there is one thing of which we can be sure: the words and judgments of the Torah scholar are eternal. Ours is a long history, marked throughout with the names and the insights of the righteous. We speak of Moshe Rabbeinu in terms of his daily impact on our lives. We take comfort in and gain courage from the thoughts of Abaya and Rava. Their lives have never ended, because they live within the pages of all

that is holy and pure.

You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore, God your God has anointed you above and beyond your peers, with oil of rejoicing. The Torah leader loves all that is good. His every act is seen as the calming oil that spreads true understanding. His life is not wasted by the frivolity of a world steeped in waste and vanity. In him we can find real rejoicing.

The kapitel continues in this vein, extolling the grandeur of our Torah leadership. Hashem has placed within our midst such unique figures so we can see what is real and what is vaporous. We really "don't know what we have until it's gone," and it's a shame that we cry over "the loss of things we never really needed." However, we can become more decisive, more discerning, more able to determine what is true. We need but cling to the words and actions of the Torah scholars who live only for Hashem and His glory.

Peace of mind? Calm in the eye of life's storms? It's there for every one of us. We need only be humble enough to accept it.

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