

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

It's amazing. It truly is. We live in an age where so much information is at our fingertips, and yet we seem to know so little. With the advent of modern technology, we were told that soon the world would become one global village where information would be shared by all and the best society has to offer would be given to everyone. This hasn't happened. Instead, the mechanisms that enable everyone to reach anyone have become embedded with all the dross and corruption of society's lowest common denominator. Television spews out filth into the living rooms of the world's population, and the Internet allows for moral degenerates to talk to innocent children anywhere in the world.

The utopian idea was shattered because the engine of all this progress is fueled by greed and selfish gain. Into this volatile mix one may add the total despair of society's have-nots, those fed the images of consumer fantasy who now are enraged at being cut out of the global banquet. This rage and despair can be seen in rising crime rates and horrific stories of youngsters shooting other youth just for the gain of a cell phone.

It seems that the more we have progressed, the lower our standards have become. The Torah world looks upon all this with dismay and trepidation. We have a long history and have seen all too often what happens when a society loses its moral ground.

For any thinking Yid, one major source of wonderment within all the darkness that pervades the secular world is why the Torah message has not reached more of our brethren. We should be witnessing not hundreds of Jews returning to their roots, nor even thousands, but actually tens of thousands. It should be unheard-of for Yidden to have to go to Katmandu to perform the world's largest Pesach seder for Jewish backpackers seeking "truth" on the top of the Himalayan Mountains. It should be unthinkable that young Jewish kids born and raised in Eretz Yisrael have no idea what Shabbos is or why we wear tefillin.

This is more than just ignorance. It is an indictment against all who hold the Torah dear. If we, the Torah community, really acted as we should, if we ourselves were totally honest and committed to growing closer to Hashem, then nothing would stop every Jewish neshama, every Jewish soul, from absorbing and internalizing the Torah message.

Many of our Gedolim, our Torah leaders, have indicated that the greatest mitzva of our particular generation is outreach. This needn't mean that every one of us should run out with a Chumash in

hand and learn a shtikele Rashi with some forlorn neighbor. Not everyone is a born teacher and some are better off not even trying. No, what it means is that every one of us should live that verse in the Chumash and epitomize Rashi's thoughts.

As one who has the opportunity to meet unaffiliated Jews, I can wholeheartedly say that the greatest act of outreach is being a mensch. Many secular kids come from fine middle-class families. They know what constitutes proper behavior, and they are dismayed when we fail to act accordingly. When we show a lack of respect for others, when we speak the unspeakable about neighbors, then we push others away from their Source.

So where should we begin? How can we start to make a change? First, we must make certain that we see the outside world as the moral minefield it is. It is no use clucking, "Horrible!" when in our heart of hearts we are thinking, It really isn't all that bad. There has always been a tendency for some to envy a little that which is seen from afar as the "free life." It takes a certain amount of honesty to admit that one is envious of various aspects of the secular world. This is also part of a person's spiritual growth. By admitting to such feelings, one can begin to analyze them for what they are and, hopefully, realize the speciousness of it all.

In the fifty-third kapitel, King David turns our minds to consider the world around us and the real, inner world that is our soul. Our Sages tell us that he wrote this psalm with a prophetic vision of the destruction of the Second Temple. One of the main reasons such a disaster befell the Jewish people was that they were guilty of unwarranted hatred of each other. This was caused by jealousy and love of money.

King David writes: *The degenerate one said in his heart, "There is no God." They deal corruptly and abominably; there is no one who does good.* Despite what some of the leading lights of the secular world may say, they do not accept that there is a God. Pharaoh, too, spoke of God, but to him such talk was skewered by his own self-image. He preened and thought of himself as a god, and he accepted Hashem as just another one of his own ilk. True, he knew this Jewish God was a bit stronger than others, but all the same, he saw Hashem as just one more of a long list of idols. This can be seen in many passages in the Torah portion of Shemos.

This mind-set has bedeviled nonbelievers throughout the ages. The consumer generation wants a god that can be marketed, sold as a product and controlled by those who are running the business. Ours is a different understanding, one so far from theirs that we are not even talking the same language. And so David tells us here, "Listen! There is no good in all this razzamatazz. It is corrupt from beginning to end."

God looked from Heaven to see if there was even one of understanding, searching for God. Hashem seeks His children even in the midst of corruption and gloom. Gutte Yidden explain that Hashem wanted to free the Jews from Egypt, but the exodus had to wait until Moshe Rabbeinu had fully matured as a spiritual force. Whenever Yidden have been delivered from troubles, it has always

come about through the involvement of real humans living flesh-and-blood lives.

They have all backslid; together they became corrupt. There is no doer of good, not even one. The sweet singer paints us a desolate picture here. He shows us that in a corrupt situation all levels of society become poisoned. Together they slide down the path to depravity. Both the so-called leaders and the lowest of the low become entangled in the corruption.

Shall not the transgressors who eat My people as they eat bread and do not call on God know it? These words echo with a message especially resonant in our generation. Everywhere we turn, we are bombarded with a consumer culture. People are seen as bodies that can add to the economy by buying and falling for the media's tricks. We are seen as worthy...as long as we shop. This can certainly be described as the devouring of people as if they are nothing more than a slice of bread.

This consuming frenzy continued to escalate uncontrollably, until one sunny day eleven maniacs flew planes into skyscrapers. The terror this struck in everyone's hearts was so great and still is that we have never seen anything like it since then. This may sound too dark for some, but it is not meant to be. What David is telling us is that the salvation will come from Hashem alone: *O that out of Zion would come Israel's deliverance! When Hashem returns the captivity of His people, Yaakov will exult, Israel will rejoice.* The deliverance in the verse is mentioned in the plural. There will be a deliverance for every Yid, at each individual's level, but all from the one true Source of salvation, Hashem.

We have nothing to be jealous of. This world is only a mist that covers the reality of Hashem's glory. If we know this, truly know it in our bones, then our energy will bring others closer, and, yes, Yaakov and Yisrael will exult and rejoice throughout the world.

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