

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Every Yid is holy, and every one of us wants so very much to be good. It's just that things get in the way, and we get distracted and find ourselves lost.

The Sfas Emes tells us: "The challenge of evil is like a deep well. A man can fall into it and think he is in deep trouble. But a well can also be filled with water, and then it is a source of life. Torah is the water with which to fill the wells that come into our lives. Then, instead of pitfalls, we have wellsprings of cool, delicious water."

These words bring tremendous hope to anyone who finds himself falling into what seems to be a never-ending pit of despair. Nothing happens without a reason, and anything can be a first step toward redemption. The secret is to never lose hope and to remain focused on the good that lies within.

Prayer can awaken that good. Prayer speaks to the yearning soul that needs strengthening.

The world has built an entire society that revolves around powerful images and enormous pressures. In previous times, one's misdeeds were generally caused by mistakes made within one's own spiritual vicinity. Today the media seeks to drag us all down en masse. It is in their interest that no one think for himself and that we all become part of the consumer herd. In no previous age were the powers that control society so invested in having people obsessed with the desire to spend and consume. This makes every one of us feel insecure and somewhat deficient, for there is always more to acquire, always something we seem to lack.

Of course, the previous generations had their dangers, but I am talking about today. It isn't easy to be holy when all around us there are such enticing temptations being thrown into our faces. Gutte Yidden tell us that just as Hashem renews the creation each and every day, evil is also renewed. Although you defeated yesterday's evil, today you will struggle with a new and trickier one. But we need not despair at the same time, our abilities to overcome these dangers are also renewed.

David gives us a maskil, an instruction some hard-earned advice that all who earnestly seek to find deliverance should heed. He begins: *When the citizens of Zif came and said to Shaul, "Isn't David hiding among us?"*

Allow me to remind you of the historical background: When David escaped from Shaul, he ran and hid in the land controlled by his kinsmen, the Zifites. They dealt treacherously with him and reported

to Shaul exactly where David was, thinking they would gain honor from the king. One can only surmise how shocked and broken David was at this turn of events. Here he was, hunted from all sides, and now his own family members had betrayed him.

In his distress, David cried out to Hashem, *God, save me for the sake of Your name, and with Your power judge me.* David was saying that the very fact that such a situation could occur illustrates that the only truth to be found is from Hashem. The vindication that our hearts seek can only be given by our Creator, for His love goes beyond human frailties. *God, hear my prayer, and listen to what I say.* Here David intones two levels of approaching Hashem. First, he asks that Hashem hear those unspoken thoughts that dwell within his heart, the torment and questions that he can't even bring himself to articulate. Then he mentions the words of his lips, the spoken prayers.

Tzaddikim often speak of the power of a Yid's silent scream. Such prayers come from the deepest fountains of the heart, untouched by any sophistication. They are raw and real.

For strangers have risen against me, and tyrants seek my death. They did not consider that God is opposed to them. Even those whom David thought of as close to him had shown themselves to be strangers.

Life is so complicated. People do things for so many different reasons. There is no telling what others' reactions will be in any given situation. The Imrei Emes, zy"a, once called in a particular businessman for whom he had done a great favor. The fellow thanked the tzaddik, and then the Rebbe opened up his desk drawer and took out two small pebbles. Handing them to the businessman, he said, "The world says that if you do someone a favor, he will pay you back by throwing stones. I am giving you these small ones so that when you throw them, it won't hurt too much."

Some small-minded folk try to become great by "rising up against" others. They feel that by destroying someone else, they will be seen as bigger or more important. Such people are violent, a word which has its roots in the word violation, the destruction of another's safety.

Nothing can be more soul destroying than this. Even if Hashem's name is bantered around and there are those who are only too quick to do so one should realize that Hashem could never be found in such conspiracies. No, pain inflicted upon others has no relationship with our Creator. Even when one must take action against another person for his misdeeds, one connected to Hashem does so with understanding, not spite.

Look God helps me. God is with those who support me. When one feels lost, betrayed by those he trusted, he should not lose faith. Startling as it may seem, Hashem is with you even at your lowest ebb. Seek out those who love Torah, those who really care, for Hashem is with them and gives them insight. They are the genuine supporters of our souls. Our Torah leaders are imbued with the wisdom, the sweet waters, of Hashem, and they can lift your soul no matter how badly damaged it may seem.

He will repay in kind those who wish me evil. Destroy them with Your attribute of truth. For the Torah Yid, it is not an option to stand on the sidelines and watch someone else be destroyed. This, too, is evil, and will be repaid in kind by Hashem. For we are all capable of extending some kind of help to the beleaguered. It may be just a smile or a "good morning"; no matter how trivial, we can be helpful and give hope. Eventually, the truth will out, for Hashem's attribute of truth brooks no lies or deceit.

I will offer sacrifices to You. I will give thanks to Your name, Hashem, for it is good. From every distress, He has rescued me, and I have seen [the downfall of] my enemies with my own eyes. Let us revisit the Sfas Emes: "The reason the Jewish people are called Yehudim' is that this name comes from the word hoda'ah, thankfulness. We are constantly thanking Hashem for every favor or gift we receive from Him, big or small. Since this is so, we also always look for the good, the redemption, the light within the darkness. When we have difficulties, we need just talk it out within ourselves and seek to understand how each difficulty can become a spiritual benefit. This is the tradition of the Jewish people, who in their greatest troubles do not forget Hashem as the Source of all events."

Need anyone say more? Can one? In these troublesome times, when every day problems seem to add more and more anguish to our lives, we need just open the Tehillim and remind ourselves who we really are.

Text Copyright © 2008 by **Torah.org**.