

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Life is funny, with all its complications and strange twists. Take friendship, for example. On the one hand, you want to find friends, people you can feel close to, people who will matter. At the same time, you are afraid to allow for such friendships, afraid that you will be let down and hurt.

This is only symptomatic of another mistrust, a mistrust within one's own heart. We are so frightened of the person who resides within us. Can we trust him? The hardest truth is knowing who we are and how we should react to the many currents that run through our minds.

The Kotzker used to say, "Don't look out beyond yourself!" This can mean that the greatest of battles is fought within the confines of one's own heart. It is here that you must decide who you are and what you want to aspire to. If you can come to some understanding of this, then you can seek out like-hearted friends. The problem is that we are dwelling amid the sound and fury of so many divergent voices that make it so difficult to see a clear path. The worst enemy we face is the internal one that drives us away from our true self.

King David had many enemies, but his worst one, the one who caused him the greatest pain, was Achitofel, his childhood friend, the one person he had trusted fully. When this close associate turned against him, he felt devastated.

This type of duplicity can be visited upon any of us in many forms. In our case, that best friend may be the one that dwells within our own minds. It is that friendly fellow who talks you into thinking all sorts of foolishness. He is the one who tells you that wrong isn't all that wrong, who works hard to convince you that since you are never going to be very righteous, why bother worrying?

You seem surprised. How did I know he is in residence within you? Simple it's because he lives within every man. He is the true enemy, the one who keeps you from growing and feeling inspired. He has many names: yetzer hara, Satan and others. It makes no difference, for the name is not the issue; it's knowing he is there and working him out of your life that counts.

Gutten Yidden used to call him the "great deceiver," and the worst pain possible is felt by those he catches with his trick of self-deception. The Lechovitzer Rebbe once defused the enticements of his yetzer hara with a derisive remark: "Hashem can never be deceived. People, too, will eventually see through the yetzer hara's deception. The only one it can succeed in deceiving over the long term is myself. What kind of victory is it to have deceived a fool?"

King David gives us the words to pray for strength to overcome this enemy: *Listen, God, to my prayer, and do not ignore my supplication.* When you are betrayed by feelings that have sullied your heartfelt desire to be close to Hashem, the greatest thing you can do is turn to Him in supplication. If you ask, He will continue to stand by you.

Listen to me and answer me. I moan and sob as I speak because of the roar of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they heap upon me accusations of wrongdoing and hate me with a vengeance. The darkness that wants to overwhelm us is not a silent enemy. It roars in our ears, seeking to drive us away from where we should be. This oppression is all-consuming, for it has taken away our will and distorts what is wicked and what is good.

My heart constricts within me, and fear of death descends upon me. Fear and trembling overcome me, and I am overwhelmed with shaking. Self-doubt is a frightful thing. I don't mean doubt concerning a particular situation; I mean self-doubt that gnaws at your understanding of who you are. We all have our moments of misgivings, but when the inner landscape is distorted by the "great deceiver," we are thrown into utter confusion.

I sat yesterday with a young person who is terribly ill. There was a crisis, and at first it seemed that he had gone. Thank God, he rallied back. Twenty minutes later we were talking. He said to me, "Rabbi, I am not frightened. I am only worried about those I will leave behind. I have come to know who I am, and I feel so close now that I can face anything."

I have seen a thing or two in my time. As a rav you get to experience life in many shades and colors, but you never get used to the power of a Yiddishe neshama, never!

And I declare, "If only I had wings like a dove, I would fly and come to rest [elsewhere]. I would wander to a distant location, spending the night in the wilderness." When the mind is at peace with itself, it is in a safe place, the kind of idyllic place one reaches only by the wings of a dove. When we are embroiled in the deceit that robs us of our sanctity, we can never feel that we are in a place where we can experience Hashem's sheltering love. And we all crave the shelter that Hashem offers, for everything else is chaos: *"I would hasten to find a refuge from the storm's gale winds."*

Destroy [them], Hashem! Sow dissent among them, for I am aware of the treachery and strife [perpetrated] in the city. The strife and chaos that we see around us has many contributing factors, among them the discomfort felt by those who are misguided by the false values foisted upon them by the "deceiver." Such people can't focus on the peaceful ways of the Torah. David is asking that all such adversaries be consumed by their own evil so that they no longer wreak havoc in the city the holy places where Hashem awaits us.

Day and night, violence and strife encircle the city walls, [spreading] crime and wrongdoing within. Corruption is within, and its streets are never free of conspiracy and deceit. When one becomes caught by inner deception, it is as if his whole being is surrounded by a wall that doesn't permit the good to enter. Within is chaos, and there seems to be nothing that can be done about it.

David goes on to describe his great friendship with Achitofel, how they walked in sweet places and shared uplifting visits to the Sanctuary. *Compliments roll off his tongue while battle is in his heart. His words, softer than butter, are actually swords.* The conspirator uses sweet, soothing words to draw you in and becomes your closest comrade. But it's all a lie a glib lie, perhaps, but a lie nonetheless. This is what hurts so much. You wanted it all to be good, you trusted, and then you were taken advantage of.

This is one of life's greatest tests, but we can gain so much from it if we grab onto our life preserver. *Cast your burden on Hashem and He will provide for you. He will never let the righteous down.*

This is the true bottom line. There are times when it all becomes so clear, and in those moments of rationality we need just give over our pain to Hashem. He will never let us down.

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