

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Chapter 65

One fine morning a great excitement filled the small Polish village. In marched a group of circus performers, who set up a huge tent in the middle of the market square. People came from near and far to witness the many feats of daring. The star of the show was a tightrope artist who astounded everyone by announcing that he would walk a tightrope strung from one side of the local river to the other. This was an amazing boast, for the river ran swiftly and was hundreds of feet below the embankment. The crowd swelled on both sides of the river, and soon, with great fanfare, the small, well-trained man stepped upon the rope and started his wondrous way across. Everyone watched in silence, knowing full well the dangers involved.

In the midst of the throng stood a gutte Yid and his disciples. The Rebbe stared in deep concentration. One of his entourage gathered his courage and asked him how it was that the holy Rebbe saw fit to spend his valuable time witnessing a circus act.

The Rebbe's reply resonates with a message for every one of us. "I wanted to see how a man might cross the chasm between two heights as this man has. As I watched this trained performer I reflected that if mankind would submit their souls to such discipline as that to which this acrobat submits his body, what deep abysses we could safely cross upon the tenuous cord that is life."

Stop and ponder this story for a moment. Every one of us has to walk the tightrope that is our reality. It isn't an easy path, and we often feel as if we will totter and fall. Yet if we keep our focus, we can walk safely across to the other side. All it takes is concentration. The Rebbe Reb Bunim of Peshischa once said, "Before Moshiach will come, there will be rabbanim without Torah, chassidim without chassidus, rich men without riches, summers without heat, winters without cold, and grain stalks without grain."

This should be good news to all who are witnessing life as lived today. In today's day and age, everything is so superficial; nothing is as it seems. There are those who are titled Rabbi, but they are nothing more than unlearned, trendy youngsters with a foggy notion about our heritage. Books on "Hasidim" and "Kabbala" are available that are authored by secular "experts" in the field. No one knows who is truly wealthy because of the huge debts we all live with. The weather patterns seem to change constantly, and our staple foods are created in laboratories, without public understanding

or consent. So what is holding back our final redemption? Why has Moshiach not yet arrived?

Perhaps it is precisely because all this chaos we experience seems normal to us. Sadly, we have lost our concentration while walking through life. The Rebbe Reb Henoch of Alexander used to say, "The real exile of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt was that they had learned to endure it." So many of us go through life accepting that this madness is the only reality possible, that its pain and consequent spiritual loss is what we have to look forward to. We have stepped upon the high wire of life, we are buffeted by the ill winds, and unfortunately we have fallen into the abyss of meaninglessness. We no longer feel the loss that comes with our spiritual galus; it almost feels normal to be abnormal. The greatest tragedy is that we do lip service when speaking of our hopes for redemption, but we're missing the sincere, heartfelt hope that injects these prayers with true meaning and focus.

The truth is that every generation has faced this same dilemma. It is part of the galus trial, and our generation just experiences it in terms that are created by the times we live in. The yetzer hara wears different guises in every generation, but his wily means remain focused on the same goal.

David Hamelech knew this truth as well. He had no train to catch, no e-mails to open - his was another time, but the forces that drive us away from our roots were just as precocious then. This kapitel was composed at a time of terrible national disaster. There had been a devastating drought that had been in force for three years, and added to this was the invasion of a foreign army. David tries to refocus the hearts of his people. He reminds us from whence all good comes, and what the purpose of life should be.

Lecha dumiya tehillah..., "For You, silence is praise, G-d in Zion, and to You the vow is paid." In times of crisis, when we lose our way and our spiritual sense, the greatest prayer we can utter is one of silence. When faced with overpowering loss, words can only get in the way of what we actually want to express. Words are jewels, but they are limiting in their very uniqueness. Sometimes silence can be more expressive, because it speaks of feelings that are beyond expression.

Shome'a tefilla..., "You Who hears prayer, unto You does all flesh come." Hashem hears that silent prayer. He is the One that knows what we cannot even articulate. The material folly we see about us would all disappear without Hashem's will. Everything that lives, "all flesh," must be ultimately connected to this truth.

Ashrei tivchar usekarev..., "Fortunate is he whom You choose and bring near, that he may dwell in Your courts; may we be satisfied with the goodness of Your House and the holiness of Your Sanctuary." Amidst all the turmoil David cries out that the truly fortunate one is he that has been chosen by Hashem to follow His statutes.

I often find myself discussing worldly events with young people who are first beginning to find their place in the Torah world. You can sense the emptiness they have experienced in the secular world. It is from that quagmire that they seek refuge. Yet the sheer hollowness of a materialistic lifestyle sometimes overpowers the will to grow and find inspiration. Someone once remarked that he feels

as if his days are "shoveling smoke." It is just this despair that keeps us from remembering what we are here for. We have a role in this world, and it is to create kiddush Hashem, to bring Hashem's light into the open. The darkness is an empty façade. One spark of kedusha can make it all disappear.

Nora'os betzedek taaneinu..., "With wondrous works, through Your righteousness, You answer us, G-d of our deliverance; You are the trust of all inhabitants of the ends of the earth and of the distant seas."

There are those moments when the clouds clear and the smoke evaporates. It is in those wondrous moments, when true lucidity comes upon us, that Hashem shows us the answers to all the questions. This indeed is a "wondrous work," and in those few fleeting moments we need to focus and reinforce our trust no matter where we may be.

David then goes on to describe how the entire creation is in the hands of Hashem. From the roaring seas to the rain on the mountains, all of it is Hashem. *Veyiru yoshvei ketzavos mei'ososecha..., "Inhabitants of distant parts are awed by Your signs; with the coming and the going of the morning and evening You cause jubilation."*

This then, is the cord of life that we must walk upon - the recognition of Hashem's greatness and our need to extol it. Then and only then will the total redemption be possible, for it will bring awe to the world that will witness it and allow the redeemer, Moshiach, to have whom in fact to redeem.

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