

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Chapter 67

The elderly Yiddel came to England at the turn of the century. Things in Poland were so very difficult, and now he had arrived in this new yet decidedly different land. At the dock waited his young son. He had come to England several years before and had prospered. He now awaited his religious father with mixed emotions.

Down the gangplank came the ancient Yid, wearing his long black coat, beard, peyos and wide-rimmed black hat. The son was smooth shaven and attired in the most elegant of modern men's apparel. His waistcoat was oh so English, with a gold-chained watch and fancy top hat. "Father," the young man said, "we are living in a different world here. You can't walk around dressed like a shtetel Jew; you must blend in to be accepted." In time the old man acceded to his son's beseeching. He had them make him a perfect Seville Road tailcoat with a matching top hat. Then one day he and his son went to the barber for the final step into the melting pot. "Cut the old man's beard off, and those long side curls," ordered the son.

The barber set about his task, and as he cut the old Yid's peyos, tears ran down the elderly man's weathered cheeks. "Father, don't cry about those peyos. You had no choice now that you live in England."

The old man sobbed and moaned, "I'm not crying about the peyos, I'm crying over the fact that we English are losing the Empire."

I heard this all too typical meisela from my son, a Rav in Scotland. It typifies only too well the pull that assimilation can have on anyone. Assimilation has always been our greatest threat. We so want to be accepted by others that we are often ready to give up the very things that make us who we really are. Many Jews walk about with a sort of inferiority complex. They figure, "If nobody likes us, we must really be at fault. If only we acted a bit more in keeping with others, if only our dress, our speech, yes, even our thinking, would be more like them, we would be allowed to prosper. Is the whole world mishuga? How is it that only we know the truth?"

Well, baruch Hashem, Yidden zenen heilig! Jews are holy, and as loyal Jews we see this all as part of the trial of being a Torah Yid. We don't become enamored by the ways of a world gone crazy, nor do we lose faith in who we are. However, the great gaon and posek Harav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, was

wont to say that the words, Siz shver tzu zine a Yid, "It's hard to be a Jew," did more damage to Jews in America than almost anything else. For although we may feel strong in our ways, there are others who are vulnerable, and uppermost amongst them are our children. As part of our responsibility to them, we must edify our own belief in who we are and how we see our ultimate redemption, and we need to express this to our loved ones with sincere joy and the strength that can be garnered only through true conviction.

This necessity has not been borne of late; it has also been so. If you take the sefer Chovas Hatalmidim, "A Students Obligation," in hand, you will find just the same problems being discussed. The author was the martyred tzaddik and pedagogue, the Piaceszna Rebbe, zt"l, and he cried out to devout parents to save their children from the spiritual assimilationist swamp that was running through prewar Poland. No, unfortunately the battle to remain focused on our ultimate goals is an ongoing one.

One strand runs through every generation, and it is this that must stand as the cornerstone of any hope of success. This foundation is a total awareness and certainty that we will be saved, and that Hashem's ways lead to that redemption. Joy in Yiddishkeit and faith in tomorrow despite short-term inconveniences come from such knowledge.

Tehillim speaks of this at many levels. However, in this kapitel it is spoken with words that reach far beyond all human eloquence.

We are told that Hashem revealed this extraordinary psalm to Moshe and later to David. Both were granted a holy vision in which this kapitel was engraved on a sheet of purest gold, which was fashioned in the shape of a seven-branched menorah. It is Hashem's Hand of love reaching out with the promise of illuminated hope, a hope there for us to touch, articulate and absorb. Come read these eternal golden words and find their light.

Elokim yechaneinu vivarcheinu..., "Hashem, favor us and bless us, may He cause His countenance to shine amongst us, sela." These Heavenly words start by setting the emotional stage we are meant to be in. We realize that all blessing comes from Hashem, and we ask that His countenance, His hallmark, rest upon us. Others who see us should realize that we aspire to creating kiddush Hashem in this mundane world, and that we don't lust after material frivolity.

Ladaas baaretz darkecha..., "So that Your way becomes known on earth, and Your deliverance among all nations." We aspire to a life that will be a beacon for others, so that through our actions Hashem will become known to all. In this way the entire world will see deliverance.

Yoducha amim Elokim..., "Peoples will thank You, Hashem, all the peoples will thank You." Given that these words were Heavenly-sent, we must see them as a spiritual prescription for our well-being. One day we will see all the nations thank Hashem, and when that day comes we will realize how perfect our role in all this is.

Yismechu viranenu le'umim..., "Nations will rejoice and sing when You judge the peoples justly and lead the nations upon earth, sela." When Hashem's light will fill the earth, every nation will rejoice. Notice the verse says "will," not "if," for Hashem is telling us that this is the reality - this will be the ultimate scenario. When the nations become free from the hostile anger they carry within them, they will realize what true rejoicing is.

Yoducha amim Elokim..., "Peoples will thank You, Hashem, all the peoples will thank You." When a nation wins a war, even in victory there are mixed feelings. Many will have fallen; others are made poor. However, when the redemption comes all the peoples will thank Hashem, for they will see for the first time what real truth is. The obstructions that blinded them from this vision will be lifted, and they will sing from their hearts. *Eretz nasna yevula...*, "The earth will have yielded its produce; G-d, our G-d, will have blessed us." The "produce" of this mortal world are the children of the Torah, the Bnei Yisrael. They have been planted in every corner of the globe; they have been battered and thrown deep into the soil. Yet they grew and flowered, for "G-d, our G-d, will have blessed us." *Yevarcheinu Elokim veyiru oso kol afsei aretz...*, "Hashem will bless us, and they will fear Him; all men, even from the ends of the earth."

Here then are Hashem's words to us: He will bless us and they will fear Him. The tug of assimilation comes from despair, from a weakness in our positive self-image. Hashem sends us a message on a golden tablet; He gives it to Moshe, our greatest teacher, and to David, the singer of sweet psalms. And what is this eternal message? It is the statement that we may feel safe in His promise of ultimate light. The world will know the truth, and they will thank and praise Hashem for the fact that His chosen children kept that light despite the world's folly.

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